



MARTIN BAROOSHIAN

ARTWORK TRUST

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Revelation (detail) by Martin Barooshian, 1960

REVELATION:

BIOMORPHIC FORM, THE GENERATIVE FIELD, AND NUCLEAR ANXIETY

Michael Russo, Curator and Trustee,
Martin Barooshian Artwork Trust

Barooshian's 1960 painting *Revelation* is one of the clearest early statements of the biomorphic generative image-system that defines his mature work. While the painting draws on the biblical *Book of Revelation*—evoking its themes of judgment, rupture, destruction, and renewal—and relates to Barooshian's own *Revelations of St. John Suite* (1952) of eight woodcuts, Barooshian rejects a literal or sequential illustration. Instead, he treats the text as a non-linear reservoir of visionary imagery, filtering and transforming it through his singular visual language charged with a wide range of synthesized transhistorical traditions. Here, organic shapes, fantastical figures, and visionary symbols collide and dissolve within an intricate field of vivid color and complex space.

The painting's title, *Revelation*, reaches past its English sense to the Greek *apokálypsis*—an unveiling, a drawing-back of the veil—and that disclosure, rather than catastrophe, is its real subject. To stand before *Revelation* is to enter an ever-shifting world of biomorphic form and dynamic color, where figures remain in permanent transit without ever arriving at a final resolution. Recognition is real but provisional. Meaning is generated through this constant exchange between form and the surrounding active space. Barooshian gives the viewer footholds, then shifts the ground beneath their feet.

Consider the painting's central form. Read one way, it is architecture, an arch holding the composition together. Read again, it is a cosmic force, an axis of descending celestial pressure. Read again, it is a female-coded, living body. Sustained looking simply keeps uncovering new possibilities, activating a primal impulse to make uncertain forms legible.

Material, image, Barooshian's identity, and the viewer's own act of engagement operate all at once. Out of that friction, the painting generates shifting narratives, layered symbols, and a range of feeling from the ecstatic to the anxious. This is what it means to call the painting generative.

This painting is unmistakably the achievement of an artist with both painting and printmaking mastery. It carries the spatial intelligence of etching, the separated registers of lithographic color, and the behavior of viscosity ink absorbed into oil. Yet the canvas inherits just as much from the grand traditions of oil painting, metabolizing a massive art-historical lineage: the visual drama of the Baroque, the dense patterned space of illuminated manuscripts, Cubist fragmentation, and Gorky's fluid, unresolved biomorphic fields. Visionary traditions from Bosch, Blake, and Redon allow the grotesque and the cosmic to coexist. From popular culture, comics and cinema add graphic compression, dramatic framing, and montage. These diverse paint, print, and pop traditions are completely broken down and remade to fit the painting's own internal logic. Barooshian did not simply copy print techniques onto a canvas. His approach was far more advanced, erasing the boundaries between disciplines entirely. He wasn't just mixing different styles; he was instinctively working in a space where rigid divisions were not useful and no longer applied.

(Continued)



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Made in 1960, *Revelation* captures the raw energy of its historical moment, channeling Cold War tensions, nuclear fears, the early Space Age, social unrest, and ecological breakdown into a volatile cosmic landscape. It turns the *Book of Revelation* into a Cold War cosmology. The viewer does not simply decode a biblical scene; they enter a simultaneous pictorial event where a world is breaking apart, coming into being, and renewing itself at once. *Revelation* becomes not an image of apocalypse followed by rebirth, but of apocalypse as the very condition through which new forms are generated.

Crucially, this system functions entirely on its own terms. A viewer can stand before *Revelation* knowing nothing of Barooshian's biography or practice, and the engine still works perfectly. The structural instability and clashing zones generate an unresolvable psychological friction from within the canvas itself. Seen this way, the painting is an autonomous machine of continuous transformation—a compact statement of a modernism of accumulation, where history and body are never stripped away but endlessly generated.

The Museum of Fine Arts' acquisition brings one of its clearest examples into public view.

An extended essay about *Revelation* is available for further exploration

Michael Russo, Trustee and Curator of the Martin Barooshian Artwork Trust, has prepared a long-form essay examining Martin Barooshian's *Revelation* (1960) as one of the earliest complete statements of the generative, cross-media visual language that would define Barooshian's mature work. Bringing together close visual analysis, archival research, technical history, and broader art-historical context, it considers how the painting's materials, imagery, structure, cultural sources, and viewer engagement operate cooperatively as a single pictorial system.

Russo's perspective is not that of an art historian or critic, but of Martin Barooshian's longtime friend, the author of his print catalogue, a lifelong student of art, and an estate trustee. Russo's insights are shaped by over twenty-five years of direct access to Barooshian and his archives. They are intended as a foundational resource and an intimate perspective.

Please contact russo@martinbarooshian.org if you would like the essay.

