

ARTS MAGAZINE

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Concordia College's OSilas Gallery with Serdar Arat: 'Departing Skies' (1987-2017)

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Serdar Arat, 'Departing Skies' (2004), acrylic on wood, 20 x 47 x 2".

I believe the first time I had the opportunity to write about the work of Serdar Arat was in 1999. I was with The New York Times a little over a year back then when and I discovered this little gem of an exhibition program in the lower level of the Concordia College's library. At that time, I wrote his painting was "somewhere between peaceful and puzzling." I saw his work as representations of "tomorrow's vistas", and in fact, one of the works in that exhibition, his hauntingly beautiful *The Island* (1998), which is an homage to *Isle of the Dead* (1880) by Arnold Böcklin, has another, even more recent and beautiful version in *Shadow of the Island* (2011) in this wonderful exhibition titled *Departing Skies: Serdar Arat 1987-2017*.

Today, the second floor of Concordia College's Library features the OSilas Gallery, a vast improvement from the early days of their exhibition program, which is where you will find their current aforementioned exhibition. The literal and figurative centerpiece of *Departing Skies* is *Fallen* (2013-17), *below*, a powerful mixed media sculptural work that spans 26 feet of floor space. It tells many tales of lost ancient civilizations, the very history that resides in our collective unconscious as much as it marks our DNA, which can breed visual and intellectual elements that occasionally emerge in the hearts and minds of our most creative and probing thinkers.



Serdar Arat, *Fallen* (2013-17), cast bronze, ceramic, oxidized copper, mixed media, 32 x 312".

This feeling of looking back may stem from the artist's personal history as he was born and educated in one of our planet's most ancient lands, Turkey. His contrasting history half's of his life can also be seen as complementary as his experiences here in the U.S. have crystallized and opened him up to some pretty powerful revelations. This mental back and forth between the ancients and current day has spawned in Arat a future vision, perhaps thousand of years in the future, as one might look back at sights of risen seas, fresh wastelands and broken skies. Luckily, the optimism in Serdar's choice of vibrant colors and gentle, sweeping lines softens the blow allowing us to enter into the conversation begun in his studio.



For Piranesi (2013), acrylic on wood, 30 x 16 x 5”.

Aside from a handful of works on paper, all of the paintings here are dimensional—reliefs of a sort—achieved with thick paint, sculptural elements and shaped, sometimes convex canvases. For instance, in *For Piranesi* (2013), we see a multitude of overtly dimensional space created in a number of ways including bits of wood and thickly applied heavy-body acrylic paint. In doing this, Arat pulls the thoughts of the viewer into the composition as we examine the projecting forms and receding colors. As with all of Arat's work, they reveal something of a dreamscape, a world where buoyancy is the norm and the sensation of touch is seen and not felt.

Like *For Piranesi*, Arat creates *Where I lose Landscapes* (2017), a whirlwind of tunnels, trestles, a spiral stair and something between piano keys and rail road ties that he masterfully controls the dynamics of the space, the wisps of movement, the implied equilibrium and the flight of the form that would make any Futurist envious.



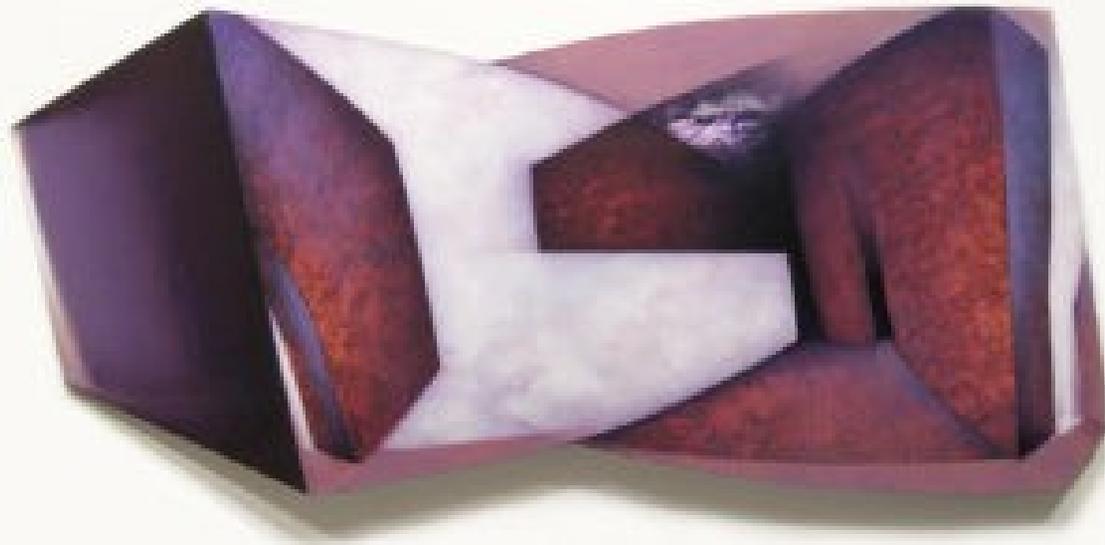
Where I lose Landscapes (2017), acrylic on wood, 30 x 53 x 3 ½”.

Heroe's Return (2017), one of the many works here that incorporates a soffit vent in the composition, could be viewed as either a fortified dwelling or even a highly stylized personal mask as I once again think of the remnants of a future dystopia. In its design, the sweeping spatial relationships that speak of Cubism or Futurism suggest abrupt movement and multi-dimensional space and time.



Heroe's Return (2017), acrylic, metal and paper on wood, 33 x 20 x 3”.

To my mind, *Rift* (2013) is a classic Arat. Its contrasting, M. C. Escher-like narrative, stucco texture and challenging palette creates a lasting visceral effect that is thoroughly engaging and equally perplexing. On the other hand, Arat has the ability to be rather straightforward by bringing incredible power and emotion with color and what looks like the sonic waves of a nuclear explosion in *Departing Skies* (2004) (*see image, above*). Here, we see a shift, a shedding of one reality to the next as time is recorded like the fallen segment of a growing shell and one world is destroyed and another begins.



Rift (2013), acrylic on canvas and wood, 33 x 75 x 2".

The large, mixed media work on paper *How Exotic is the Echo of a Distant Scream* (2005) fills one wall of the gallery. The haunting hollows accompanied by a tank-like cannon; the warm colors and the segmented space all create an odd rhythm that suggests calamity, while the repeated semi-circular shapes throughout suggest relative hope in numbers. Common pain or loss often breeds unity and incites change. Perhaps in all his works the artist is saying that history does not have to repeat and we all just might find common ground.



How Exotic is the Echo of a Distant Scream (2005), acrylic, watercolor and pencil on paper, 44 x 144".

By D. Dominick Lombardi, Contributing Editor

Departing Skies: Serdar Arat 1987-2017, on display through April 21, 2018, at the OSilas Gallery, Concordia College, Bronxville, NY.