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Somber Artwork of the Passion

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Somber Artwork of the Passion

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Thursday April 14, 2022

By Melanie Fields

Roman Turovsky is an artist, painter, photographer and video-installation artist, as well as a lutenist-composer who was born in Kyiv, Ukraine, in 1961. He studied art under his father, Mikhail Turovsky, also a well-known painter. His family emigrated to New York City in 1979 for creative freedom not granted under the USSR, and many of Turovsky's paintings reflect the personal and collective turmoil that his family endured as refugees and immigrants. Among these are his series on the Passion of Christ.

Turovsky's subject matter takes on a strong structural form and has been likened to dynamic cubism. On his paintings, he said in a [2014 interview with D. Dominick Lombardi](#):

Their mood is dark. I've always believed that my purpose as an artist (or any artist's, for that matter) is to remind the viewer that life and its pleasures are finite. Thus, I transmit this sense of foreboding that inhabits the figurative world for me. ... Both my wife and I grew up with heavy stories of wartime hardship and outright tragedy. The ferry that carried my father's family across the Dnieper [river] narrowly escaped a hit in the bombing raid that destroyed the neighboring barge full of refugees — the river was covered with bodies and body parts. In addition, those family members that didn't make that ferry perished in the Babi Yar massacre.

Both my wife's families and mine have suffered greatly in the upheavals of the 20th century. The repeated dispossession, narrow escapes from major World War II atrocities, Stalin-era prisons and internal exile that befell our respective families have caused us both to develop a marked preference for Zen furnishings. The less you own, the easier it is to run and start anew elsewhere. The genetic memory of a refugee, if you will, on top of a genuine immigrant experience — consequently, I prefer to be pleasantly surprised that things turn out much better than expected, to dire disappointments in great expectations.

When asked what Turovsky hopes to convey with his figures, he responded: "Timeless vulnerability, a sense of loss that is the spine of all art — be that the loss of paradise, innocence, faith, hope, love, life. We may be bold and defiant in the face of that, but the eventual resignation is inexorable. This cycle may be repeated more than once in one's lifetime, so there in fact is no beginning and no end to this. Hence I'm concerned with what is in between."

The Passion of Christ

The Marian Library holds eight of Turovsky's paintings. Below are five from his series on the Passion of Christ. We invite you to contemplate these somber compositions as you ponder the meaning of Good Friday. You may also consider adding the [Stabat Mater](#) to your prayerful reflection.