

4-20-2021

## The True Potential of Rabo Karabekian

Sofia Barlas

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/digressions>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Barlas, Sofia (2021) "The True Potential of Rabo Karabekian," *Digressions: Literary & Art Journal*: Vol. 18 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/digressions/vol18/iss2/2>

This Special Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the Digressions at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digressions: Literary & Art Journal by an authorized editor of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

# THE TRUE POTENTIAL OF RABO KARABEKIAN SOFIA BARLAS

*The following piece describes the final episode of Rabo revealing to Circe what he has been hiding in the potato barn. It highlights the initial reveal, as well as Circe's reaction to the painting and how it affects her and her views of Rabo. The piece is told from the perspective of Circe Berman as she has finally observed a mastery of art by Rabo Karabekian that could be loved by many.*

My God I have finally done it. I have finally convinced this old man to show me the one thing I have been begging him for.

Ok. I may have been a bit harsh by telling him I will remember him as a coward when I leave if he didn't show me what was inside the potato barn. But he needed that push clearly! Me accusing him of being a coward, which he has clearly been many times, is the only thing that got him to build up the courage to finally show me.

You know after all this time I have spent with him I didn't truly understand his potential. Of course, I always knew he was this artist who had been scarred by war. But was his art really any good? Did it ever display true passion or something that was relevant to our time? I haven't seen a piece of art by Rabo Karabekian that actually showed something that mattered. Even if Rabo doesn't think so, I do know art, and I do know what the public will respond to. I am Polly Madison for God's sake!

After reminding Rabo that he has been behaving like a child, he finally took me to see what was inside the potato barn. I admit that I am having many emotions right now. And no, I do not want Rabo to see me vulnerable or the slightest bit excited. I am always very harsh and stern with Rabo and now when he is finally giving me what I want, I will now show any sign of weakness! But let me tell you, not only was I in awe, I was also petrified.

This painting is HUGE! There are eight panels of primed and stretched canvas placed side-by-side, each panel eight feet-by-eight feet. They form a continuous surface sixty-four feet long. The panel is held upright by two-by-fours that run like a fence down the middle of the potato barn. The picture also features a famous paint; Windsor Blue Number Seventeen.

Walking into the barn, I didn't know the painting's exact dimensions. But I gasped in wonderment at the size and magnificence of it. When Rabo asked me what I thought it was, I honestly thought it was a giant fence, with every square inch of it encrusted with the most beautiful gems and diamonds. Then Rabo took my hand and led me to the middle of the painting. There I opened my eyes and thought I was standing on the rim of a magnificent valley. I wasn't sure where this valley was, but it was bright green in color and there were many people below the rim. There was at least a thousand people that I could see at this point. The largest person was about the size of a cigarette and the smallest was about the size of a flyspeck. I saw some farmers, soldiers, wounded people; all things I was dying to ask Rabo about.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"We are where the sun came up the day the Second World War ended in Europe," said Rabo.

"Are you in there?" I asked.

Rabo then pointed to himself at the bottom of the painting. He was the largest figure, the cigarette. The crack between the fourth and fifth panels ran up his spine and parted his hair. There was also a man clinging to his leg in the figure. He seemed to be looking at Rabo in astonishment as if he was God. Which, now, after seeing this painting, I could see how young men and women would look up to Rabo's work. Contrary to an admirer, though, that man clinging to his leg was a man dying of pneumonia who couldn't see Rabo. He was asking Rabo if they were home and Rabo comforted him saying "yes, yes, we're home."

After I pointed to the man in the odd-looking suit and the others around him, I realized many of these characters were men. Where are all the women? Please tell me Rabo's final painting didn't completely miss the importance of including women, the other half of the human race!

Rabo corrected me. Half of the people in the concentration camps and asylums were women. The problem was that they didn't look like women anymore. So where were the healthy women? Surely, women can be displayed as broken in addition to being displayed as strong, beautiful, and vibrant. Rabo answered these questions when he showed me the extreme right of the painting that contained many healthy-looking women.

The painting reminded me of the museum of natural history! There were so many different kinds of people, so many different stories

that corresponded to each person. It really showed me how no person is alike and how everyone copes with their lives in different ways. Perhaps I misjudged Rabo all along. Perhaps he was more intelligent and sophisticated than I had thought.

I asked Rabo what the title of the painting was.

“Now it’s the Women’s Turn,” he replied.

This old man has truly grown. I always thought he didn’t understand women or how they felt. But maybe, just maybe, he has experienced an awakening and can now acknowledge our hardships in a male dominated world.

When I pointed to a fat woman lying in the corner of the painting, Rabo told me she was an old queen of the gypsies who was in fact dead.

“Why is she the only fat person?” I asked.

“Dying is the only way to get fat in Happy Valley,” said Rabo.

Mystified by this particular gypsy in the painting, I shared with Rabo a legend of the gypsies. The legend stated that the gypsies stole the nails from the Roman soldiers who were about to crucify Jesus. Jesus had to wait until the soldiers sent for new nails. The legend says that for their deed, God gave the Gypsies permission to steal all they could. Even if this wasn’t the story of the particular Gypsy in Rabo’s painting, he let me interpret it that way. He gave me complete freedom in my interpretation of each person.

I could not be any prouder of Rabo. This is a man I will know and love forever and future generations to come will finally understand him through his work. It may have taken a long time for me to realize this, but Rabo Karabekian and I have a friendship that I will always cherish.