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Homenetmen Glendale Ararat Chapter
Cultural Division

Get to Know...

Volume 3, Issue 10

October 2010



ARSHILE GORKY

April 15, 1904 – July 21, 1948

Arshile Gorky, born Vostanik Adoyan, was an Armenian-American painter who had a seminal influence on Abstract Expressionism. Gorky's contributions to American and world art are difficult to overestimate.

Gorky was born in the village of Khorgom, situated on the shores of Lake Van. It is not known exactly when he was born: it was sometime between 1902 and 1905. (In later years Gorky was vague about even the date of his birth, changing it from year to year.) In 1910 his father immigrated to America to avoid the draft, leaving his family behind in the town of Van. Gorky fled Van in 1915 during the Armenian Genocide and escaped with his mother and his three sisters into Russian-controlled territory. In the aftermath of the genocide, Gorky's mother died of starvation in

Yerevan in 1919. Gorky was reunited with his father when he arrived in America in 1920, aged 16, but they never grew close. At age 31, Gorky married.

In 1922, Gorky enrolled in the New School of Design in Boston, eventually becoming a part-time instructor. During the early 1920s he was influenced by impressionism, although later in the decade he produced works that were more postimpressionist. During this time he was living in New York and was influenced by Paul Cezanne. He also accepted a teaching position at the Grand Central School of Art. In 1927, Gorky met Ethel Kremer Schwabacher and developed

a life lasting friendship. Schwabacher was his first biographer. Gorky's later years were filled with immense pain and heartbreak. His studio barn burned down, he underwent a colostomy for cancer, his neck was broken and his painting arm temporarily paralyzed in a car accident, and his wife of seven years left him, taking their children with her. Gorky hanged himself in Sherman, Connecticut, in 1948, at the age of 44.

He is buried in North Cemetery in Sherman, Connecticut. His daughter, the painter Maro Gorky, married Matthew Spender, son of the British writer Sir Stephen Spender.

In June 2005, the family of the artist established the Arshile Gorky Foundation, a non-profit corporation formed to further the public's appreciation and understanding of the life and artistic achievements of Arshile Gorky.

