

December 13, 2008



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Red threads ,Installation, Adaptable (9 m x 4 m) ,Stichframes, wooll and cotton, 2007.

## Studio visit: Silvana Der-Meguerditchian

“Uncovering the (Armenian) past, building the future”



by Christopher Atamian

*Naming suffering, exalting it, dissecting it into its smallest components – that is doubtless a way to curb mourning.*

—Julia Kristeva

Silvana Der-Meguerditchian has been building bridges and linking worlds for the better part of 20 years, since she moved to Berlin from her native Buenos Aires in the late 1980s, acting on an early attraction to Russian constructivism and the Bauhaus. Her art attempts to link not only near and far, but past and present as well, calling on what she has termed a “mnemotechnique,” a play on the Greek word for memory. This is especially evident when the artist examines topics relating to her family history, such as her grandmother’s experiences during and after the Armenian Genocide.

Self-taught, Der-Meguerditchian didn’t attend art school, but instead befriended a coterie of intellectuals that include curator **Barbara Höffer**, philosopher **Marc Wrasse**, and sociologist and writer **Estela Shindel**. Der-Meguerditchian holds a Ph.D. in translation from Humboldt University and credits reading **Kristeva**, **Agamben**, and **Derrida** with providing her with a theoretical grounding that influenced



conexion 3, Socket, 10 cm x 10 cm x 3,5 cm, Silk, felt and virgin wool, 2007 .

her later work as an artist. Trauma, loss, the play of language and difference – all themes present in post-structuralist theory – hold an important place in her work as well.

As is evident in the interview that she recently granted Luciana Aghazarian in *Diario Armenia* (see translation on p. C4), Der-Meguerditchian incorporates issues relating to Armenian identity directly into her work and into the exhibits that she curates. In 2007, she demonstrated that she also has a good deal of chutzpah. Not satisfied that the official Armenian pavilion at the Venice

Biennale reflected the scope and depth of Armenian artists within and outside Armenia, Der-Meguerditchian organized the first ever “Off-Pavilion” – an alternate exhibit of Armenian artists that ran simultaneously to the last Biennale, making clear that the current generation of Armenian artists and cultural workers could take matters into their own hands. Titled “Under Construction: Talking about Identities in the Armenian Transnation,” it brought together Der-Meguerditchian, **Emily Artinian**, **Achot Achot**, **Andrew Demirjian**, **Dahlia Elsayed**, **Archi Galentz**, and

**Sophia Gasparian** in a rich dialogue. The ensuing underconstructionhome.net, a “construction platform for Armenian artists,” is the first attempt to create a virtual meeting place for diaspora, Armenian, and non-Armenian cultural workers. The site thankfully bypasses nationalistic, religious, political, and tribal affiliations.

Der-Meguerditchian’s work itself is as varied as it is fascinating, encompassing different media and theoretical considerations. In her two 2007 installations, “Sockets” and “Red Threads,” she continues her earlier work with textiles. In “Sockets,” electrical sockets made of felt, wood, and silk hang from a wall, while in “Red Threads” thick woven tubes jut out of the wall in large clumps: “My socket work came after working with rugs,” the artist says. “I wanted to make the idea of ‘connecting’ more abstract.”

The use of threading and felt recalls the work of **Annette Messager**, particularly her 1995 MoMA exhibit, where body parts, spider webs, and other objects assembled in cloth hung from wall and ceiling. Der-Meguerditchian’s cloth creations also seem to beg a feminist interpretation, recalling as they do traditional women’s work (as seamstresses and knitters), though Der-Meguerditchian is quick to disavow such simplistic links. “Of course, the principle of the ‘hole’ and the ‘line’ invite sexual interpretations, but my intention is not in the least bit erotic,” she says. “It has more to do with the principle of life, with paring things down to their most elemental, basic components. I’m also conscious of the fact that my work with textiles and thread exposes it to associations with femininity and the traditional role of the woman, but that’s not my intention.”

Der-Meguerditchian’s 2007 “Spread but Together,” a multipart installation, consists of photographs of Armenian inscriptions taken in the diaspora in both Armenian and Latin scripts. Many



## Studio visit: Silvina Der-Meguerditchian

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of the inscriptions are from Armenian-owned businesses such as the Librairie Samuelian in Paris's Latin Quarter. The small round pictures (25 cm in diameter) are transferred onto fabric and provide bird's-eye glimpses that recall close-ups in film.

Der-Meguerditchian's "Berlin-Kreuzberg" (also from 2007) again combines the two media – photography and fabric – by using digital images transferred onto traditional German fabrics in embroidery frames: "This work is a wish," comments Der-Meguerditchian, "something that I am also trying to build with 'underconstruction,' namely the ideal state that I imagine Armenians to exist in – i.e., connected through our artistic and visual interests, as well as through our childhood experiences. I am thinking of the fragrances, for example, emanating from our mothers' and grandmothers' kitchens. Every fragrance, even if it belongs to the same bouquet, possesses a different character. . . . Of course, as Armenians I think that we all share a strong feeling of being lost, of not having the whole picture, which is both painful and liberating."

Der-Meguerditchian links her work directly to her cultural heritage and history: "My work with knotting and fabric," she says, "is a cultural legacy from my grandmother. I grew up with her and my parents and I used to sleep in her bed until I was seven years old. She was an orphan who suffered through the deportations and her identity was very influenced by that. My grandfather was a photographer and musician."

In 2008, Der-Meguerditchian organized a unique exhibit, "A(r)mar Armenia," at the Armenian Cultural Center in Buenos Aires. The title of the show



conexion 4: Socket, 30 cm diameter, Felt and textile, 2007

plays on the two Spanish verbs amar and armar, which signify to love and to build, respectively, hence giving us the two simultaneous titles "To Love Armenia" and "To Build Armenia." Der-Meguerditchian brought together six artists from around the world – **Achot Achot, Tina Bastajian, Jean Marie Casbarian, Archi Galentz, Kariné Matsakian, and Gariné Torossian** – who joined her for the show. They exhibited both new and old works, including Torossian's powerful "Girl from Mush," in which she narrates what Armenian identity represents for her over filmed stills of iconic Armenian images

(Paradjanov, Mount Ararat, etc.) as she edits them together.

In her own entry, "La búsqueda de un refugio" ("In Search of a Refuge"), Der-Meguerditchian interviews the historian **Vahé Tachjian**, and, using pictures from orphanages from 1918–1925, uncovers an important part of Armenian history, namely the experience of orphans who survived the Armenian Genocide and founded Armenian communities around the world, including in Buenos Aires. Der-Meguerditchian relates that most people reacted positively to the exhibit, though one man remarked that she was exhibiting at the

"Tashnag center," which surprised the artist, who has no notion whatsoever of political affiliations. Ironically, the comment paralleled a similar experience that her grandfather, kanun player Avedis Tobjian, had in the 1960s. Tobjian was accused of having communist sympathies for playing at the Marash coffeehouse in Buenos Aires and was actually assaulted by the Argentine police. Der-Meguerditchian's entire oeuvre attempts to bypass these types of issues and take Armenian identity beyond politics, toward a more productive sphere, one that is more liberating for artist and viewer alike. ■

## Isabel Bayrakdarian nominated for Grammy award

Armenian-Canadian star soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian has been nominated for a Grammy award in the Best Classical Vocal Performance category for her CD, *Gomidas Songs*, featuring the music of Armenia's national composer, Gomidas Vartabed.

On *Gomidas Songs*, Isabel Bayrakdarian's first album for Nonesuch Records and the very first recording of Gomidas music on a major international label, the Armenian-Canadian soprano examines the legacy of Gomidas Vardabet (born Soghomon Soghomonian, Keotahia, Ottoman Empire, 1869), a well-traveled composer who made it his life's work to seek out, transcribe, and re-interpret the ancient liturgy, songs, lullabies, hymns, and folk dances of his Armenian homeland. All twenty songs in the album have been masterfully arranged and orchestrated by scholar and pianist Serouj Kradjian, Bayrakdarian's concert partner and husband – who also plays on the record. The album was recorded at the Aram Khachaturian Philharmonic Hall in Yerevan, Ar-



Isabel Bayrakdarian.

menia, with the Chamber Players of the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Eduard Topchjan.

The *New York Times* calls the new CD "irresistible . . . what may be the best shot Gomidas has had to shine for the Western classical music world" in 100 years. A major North American tour by Bayrakdarian in October 2008, featured the music of Gomidas (Komitas), with concerts in Toronto, San Francisco, Orange County, Los Angeles, Vancouver, Boston, and New York's Carnegie Hall. The *Boston Globe* wrote about the tour: "Bayrakdarian achieved riveting purity with ravishing performances of the Gomidas songs".

Bayrakdarian, who was born in Lebanon to Armenian parents, first performed Gomidas's music as part of the score to Canadian-Armenian director Atom Egoyan's 2002 *Ararat* – a multilayered drama about contemporary filmmakers attempting to dramatize and come to terms with the Armenian Genocide of 1915, which left Gomidas emotionally devastated and put an end to his life as a composer.

Isabel Bayrakdarian is highly regard-

ed for her opera performances, on stage and on record – particularly as Cleopatra in Handel's *Giulio Cesare* and in Mozart works like *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*. Her voice, says *Time*, "combines lyricism with remarkable dramatic instincts," and the *Chicago Tribune* praised her "full, gleaming soprano and fine musical intelligence." Bayrakdarian made her Metropolitan Opera debut in William Bolcom's *A View from the Bridge*.

*Gomidas Songs* contains love songs, devotional songs, evocations of nature, children's songs, lamentations, and comic songs.

Atom Egoyan contributes liner notes to the album package, illustrating the importance of Bayrakdarian's undertaking: "The strength of any culture resides in its ability to preserve, cherish, reinvent, and grow. This was the gift that Gomidas gave to his people, and this is the gift which Isabel has revealed and brought to the world." ■

connect:

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# interview

## A(r)mar Armenia: To build Armenia, to love Armenia

A conversation  
with **Silvina Der-Meguerditchian**

by **Luciana Aghazarian**

The following interview originally appeared in Spanish in *Diario Armenia* as a way of introducing “A(r)mar Armenia” (Spanish for “To Build/Love Armenia”), an exhibit of video art by Armenian artists that took place at the Armenian Cultural Center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, curated by Silvina Der-Meguerditchian. The interview was translated from Spanish by **Christopher Atamian**.

“A(r)mar Armenia:” an original presentation of ideas and documentaries that evoke the memory of Armenia. The participating artists draw their inspiration from the memories, desires, and dreams of Armenian-Genocide survivors, as well as from those who have experienced a real, concrete place called Armenia – the one that existed behind the Iron Curtain. Each artist has different questions and concerns, but each one evokes the same desire to reconstruct a fragmented land. Seven authors who exhibit their work in their own, individual way thanks to Silvina Der-Meguerditchian’s original curatorial vision.

Destiny called a 20-year-old Argentine-Armenian by the name of Silvina Der-Meguerditchian in 1988 and told her pull up roots and move to Berlin. It’s there, in the German capital, that the young artist built a successful career. After several false starts, she became a translator at Humboldt University and also developed a passion for art, a vocation which eventually won out. Today, married and mother to one son, she shows her work around the world.

Transgressive and provocative, Der-Meguerditchian proposes to reconstruct identity and enrich her ancestral culture by way of modern technology. She plans to conquer the young generation of Armenians while touching the hearts of the older generations.

**Luciana Aghazarian:** Your work always seems to be about reconstructing Armenian identity. How do you compile your information? I know that one of your documentaries consists of an interview with the historian **Vahe Tachjian**.

**Silvina Der-Meguerditchian:** A lot of it fell into my lap when my paternal grandmother died. One day I received a suitcase full of papers, documents, and photographs and I almost had a heart attack, because it was such an invaluable treasure. By using this new information, I was able to follow my family’s trail a bit and I found out things that I didn’t understand very well or whose logic wasn’t clear. After that, I began to read some history. And that’s when I realized everything that had happened to them. Some people simplify history too much. That’s too bad because the young generation is intelligent enough to understand history well.

**LA:** What is video art?

**SDM:** It’s a way of creating and expressing oneself in a way that is more



Digital images, transfer on traditional German fabrics, embroidery frames. Berlin-Kreuzberg. 2007



Silvina Der-Meguerditchian.

or less modern, contemporary. Its roots lie in the 70s and 80s, when access to technology became easier. A language of video art started to develop, using digital technology. Unfortunately, anything really modern in the arts is more or less absent from the Armenian community, so for Armenians this is a novelty, but really it’s pretty commonplace today. It does represent a different vision: it uses the quotidian, the everyday, to put forth new ideas and points of view. Perhaps things like paintings – which are more tangible – are more direct.

**LA:** Is video a way of bringing art to the masses? An attempt to reach young people?

**SDM:** It may be a good way to reach the young, yes, but artists don’t make videos for this reason or with that goal in mind. All of the participants in “A(r)mar Armenia” are animated by a spirit that goes beyond mere geography. We’re trying to create some-

thing that will last and that enriches “at the same time as” it does other things. It means that we are thinking of enlarging the landscape that maps our identities rather than making it smaller. As I grew up in the Armenian community, this element was completely absent: there were no artists that I wanted to emulate. I think that the Armenian communities around the world are obsessed with the idea of preserving, preserving, preserving at all costs.

**LA:** Where do you think this mentality comes from and why is it so prevalent?

**SDM:** What is lacking in the Armenian diaspora is the understanding that art isn’t a hobby, and that for there to be artists who can spend time creating truly professional art – and not coffee-table art that only people within the community see – you have to create professionals and you have to believe in them for them and their art to exist.

There also exists a mentality which says that one must send all one’s money to Armenia, thinking that this will be one’s salvation. “As long as

Armenia exists,” this type of mentality goes, “we will continue to exist; we will not become extinct.” But they are forgetting that the diaspora is not 90 years old (i.e., it didn’t begin in 1915), but rather many centuries old. It’s also an extremely rich culture, but it’s a culture that must be cultivated as well. That includes, for example, beautiful illuminated manuscripts that were produced in times of peace. There was an Armenian kingdom but it was not on Armenia’s historical territory. Those works of art were produced in the diaspora! The first Armenian newspaper was printed in the diaspora, in Madras. Which means: diaspora culture is extremely rich, but it has to be modernized and brought up to date because we can’t continue to operate along paradigms that are hundreds of years old – it’s impossible. If we continue this way, then the diaspora will simply die.

**LA:** How do we give the room and the power to young generations to make decisions?

**SDM:** The problem is that until Armenia fully recovers from the past 80 years, this attitude and situation will continue to exist. And if the Armenian community doesn’t generate any real interest or give young diaspora-Armenians any role models to identify with, then they won’t continue to be attached to their Armenian identity. The bottom line is pretty simple: young people have to think that by being Armenian they end up ahead of the game, not behind it.

Young people should realize, for example, that speaking a foreign language – in this case Armenian – allows them to travel around the world and to

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# interview

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communicate with other people. It also makes it much easier for them to learn a third or a fourth language as well.

In addition, they need to understand what it means to speak Armenian: it means to enjoy the beauty and poetry of the language itself. What is missing with Armenian today, however, is precisely the poetry of the language, the ability to truly communicate in it and to enjoy doing so. We've lost this ability. There are projects in the United States whose goal is to solve this problem, but the organizations that have resources are run by very old, conservative people who are easily shocked or turned off and who don't provide any support to the youth. But suppose for a minute that [we fail to cultivate the youth and] the next generation doesn't send more money to Armenia, and in the end we will lose the diaspora and the Republic of Armenia will lose our help.

The point, however, is that we can do positive things: of course it's very difficult on a political level, waiting for Turkey to recognize the Armenian Genocide, but what we can do in the meantime is to combat what is known as the "white genocide" that people are talking about, i.e., a cultural genocide, and who better to do that but cultural workers? I'm not talking about entertainment, mind you, but about real culture. And this type of person

– that is to say, someone who rolls up his sleeves and gets down to business and says, "We're going to support serious projects" – simply don't exist in the Armenian community. They waste all their time fighting about internal political issues and that, of course, doesn't help matters.

**LA:** What do you think "A(r)mar Armenia" can do to create change?

**SDM:** First of all, I hope that the exhibit moves people. And then I hope that through the language of art we may work through some of these issues that are so problematic and unconstructive. That's the goal of art. I have no illusions about being able to change everybody's mentality. If I can connect with even a few people, then that would already be wonderful.

**LA:** When did you start using new media techniques in your work?

**SDM:** I worked for a long time with the theme of memory and it so happened that in 2004 I went to Armenia with the conscious goal of continuing to learn about myself and my identity. And I was terribly disappointed. What I was looking for didn't exist in Armenia. The world that our grandparents came from is in the Middle East and Turkey, not present-day Armenia. On top of this, you have to add the fact that in the past 90 years, diaspora-Armenians and those living in Armenia have had very different experiences, so that in the end our desire to find in today's Hayastantsis

the Armenian who is missing in us cannot be satisfied.

Hayastantsis lived in Armenia for the past 90 years: they were born there, so they ask different questions. Those Armenians lived in a real geography, while ours was imaginary, with everything that entails. They are living in a post-Soviet country, and they have other worries. And so I said to myself, "I will never find what I'm looking for in Armenia, so I will have to create it myself." I came to a fork in the road: either it stops here or else I create my own way of being Armenian, in a healthy and sane context. I create something that is not subordinated or doesn't answer to any political party, but rather is made up of people who want to exchange ideas and create good things. That's why I created the platform called underconstruction-home.net, so that artists – Armenians and non-Armenians – can communicate on a daily basis.

**LA:** Is it hard for you to explain or defend your art in different communities around the world?

**SDM:** The truth is that I can't believe how easy it was to come here to the Armenian Cultural Association, to speak to Jorge [Vartparonian] by phone from Berlin and that he liked my proposal so much. I am extremely grateful to him. It's a fascinating joint effort that we are undertaking. That being said, "A(r)mar Armenia" deals with some very difficult topics: I ask where our grandpar-

ents came from and what happened to them when they were orphaned. Some grandmothers, for example, were forced to work in warehouses. This may shock some people, but it's the truth.

To understand where one comes from, you have to dig and take a hard look. I keep repeating that this lack of openness to the new has something to do with the fact that we're a community of orphans and that these orphans lost so much that they cling desperately to what they were able to save.

But this can't continue, that the first thing we think of doing when we settle somewhere is to build an Armenian school and a church: that's all well and good, but we have to be able to create something else, so that people on the outside can be interested in our culture as well. Otherwise what does it mean to be Armenian? Why do we still want to identify with "this ancient people?" It's true, we are an ancient people and that's wonderful, but if we are going to survive, then we have to widen our horizons and turn up the volume a bit. At one point in history, for example, we were true innovators. We were the first people to accept Christianity as a state religion. Look how original that was at the time! Why is it that we don't discover and use that creative part of ourselves anymore? That creativity is buried deep in our spirit and doesn't come to the surface. The ability to bring forth that innovative energy is what's missing in us today. 𐌌

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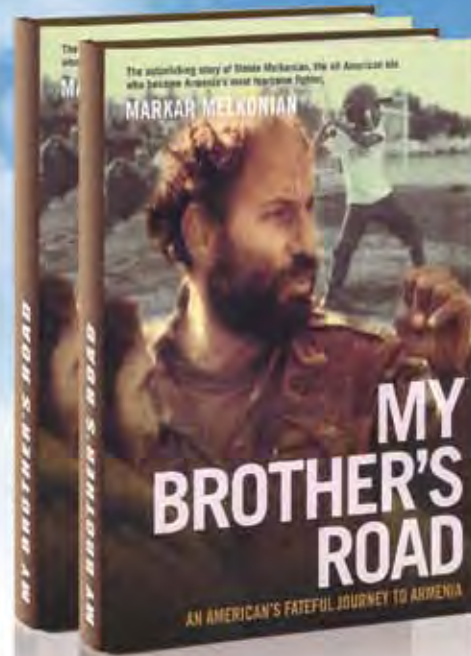
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## Photographs “Defining Place” are on exhibit in L.A.

A new exhibition features works by five cutting-edge artists

by Ramela Abbamontian

ATWATER VILLAGE, Calif. – Photography continues to function as a key medium for Armenian artists to explore their worlds, identities, and the ways in which they define their milieus.

The works of five photographers, among them **Ara Oshagan** and **Gilda Davidian**, are showcased in “Defining Place,” an exhibition at the Center for Experimental Art and Architecture (CEAA), running through December 15.

Part of the CEAA’s Guest Curator series, “Defining Place” is curated by **Tamar Salibian**. Born and raised in the United States, Salibian comes from an artistic family that includes Hagop Oshagan (her great-grandfather), Vahe Oshagan (her great-uncle), a father who was a composer, and a mother who is an English professor and writer. “My childhood home was often buzzing with discussion about art and creativity. It was vibrant and gave me a sense for art early on,” Salibian recalled.

Those formative years of artistic influence eventually translated into Salibian’s educational pursuits. She majored in photography at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, earning her bachelor of fine arts in 1998. She later earned a master’s in film from the California Institute of the Arts (2004) and, as her thesis film, made *Beautiful Armenians*, a documentary exploring issues of “family history, memory, and identity.” She is a doctoral candidate in Claremont Graduate University’s Media Studies/Cultural Studies program. “Defining Place” is Salibian’s first curatorial project and draws on issues examined throughout her graduate career.

How is identity defined in relation to a place? What types of places are created? How are these places constructed as they transform into abodes of ideas? These are some of the questions explored by the photographers in the “Defining Place” exhibition.

### Constructing identities

One of the featured photographers is Ara Oshagan, who is best known for his “Traces of Identity” series, which documents Armenians in Los Angeles as they construct their diasporic identities. In this particular exhibition, however, he presents three large (4 x 6 foot) prints from “Juvies,” a series documenting high-risk juvenile offenders in Southern California’s state prisons.

“With the ‘Traces of Identity’ series, it’s the idea of us trying to find a place that’s ours,” Oshagan said. “With the ‘Juvies’ series, it’s the flip side: the place is confining them; the place is forced on them.” This notion is what drew Salibian to Oshagan’s works. She explained, “I thought the work was so poignant: that these kids have a home in a prison; that’s where they live. I liked how Ara explored that idea in his work.”

In the photograph “Liz, 20 years old,

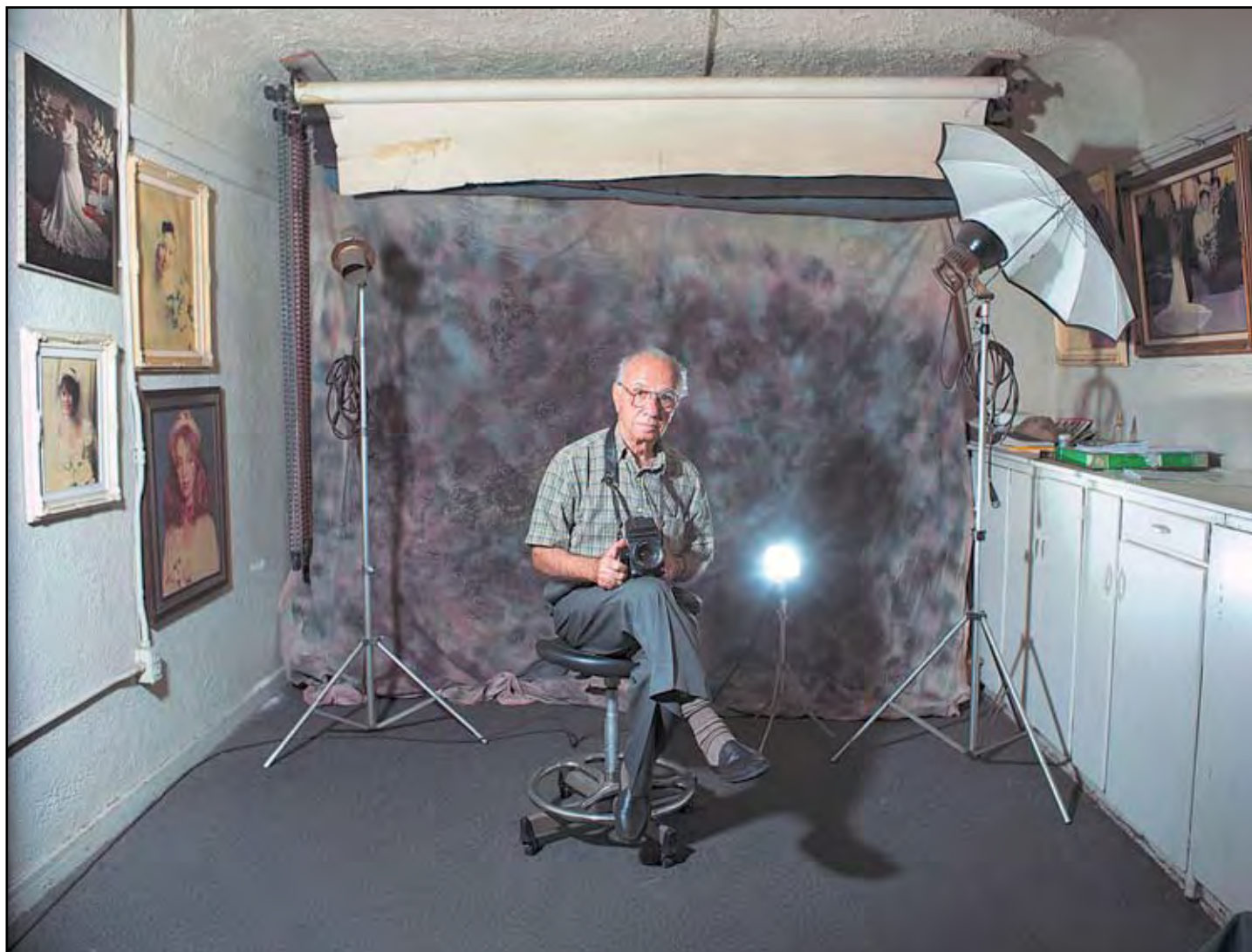


Photo Aram by Gilda Davidian.



From the “Priori” series by Benjamin Donaldson.

State Prison, 2001,” the main subject has been pushed up to the compositional surface, thereby creating close contact with the viewer. With hands covering her face, it appears as if Liz attempts to come to terms with the vast space – or preferably, place – behind her. In another instance, the subject Mayra’s countenance subtly peers out from behind a window, a feature that serves to somewhat isolate her within a certain place. These images might also suggest the remorse the juvenile offenders experienced, which is something Oshagan noticed as he documented their lives.

Oshagan aims to compile his photographs, as well as the stories of his subjects, into a book. (The project is undertaken in collaboration with Leslie Neal of Chance Films, who created a docu-

mentary of the same name). Oshagan’s past endeavors include “The Genocide Project” (with photographer **Levon Parian**) and photographs of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Gilda Davidian is the other Armenian artist in the show. Born and raised in Pasadena, California, Davidian received her bachelor’s in photography and media from the California Institute of the Arts (2006). Davidian is “interested in using photography to explore ideas involving home, familial relationships, and the process of forming identity through the act of portraiture.” Her photographs at the exhibition are culled from her “Portrait Studio” series, in which she documents Armenian studio photographers in their Glendale or Pasadena studios.

Davidian explains that she was first

inspired to pursue this series upon walking into a studio and feeling as if she had stepped into “a time capsule – a combination of people and places.”

She reflected: “The images I have in this exhibition are multilayered in that they can be viewed as documentations of physical spaces, or of transitional space in time, or as a testament to a time past. I am interested in the space in which these three notions collide and represent themselves through the images displayed.”

Of the four photographs on display, two feature Armenian photographers, both male, humbly but proudly photographed in their studios – places that have come to bear the semblance of home, replete with antique-looking furniture and framed pictures. Salibian was drawn to this feature of Davidian’s works. “I loved that her images give such a strong sense of these gentlemen’s work spaces, which are almost like a kind of home,” she said.

Davidian, as both an Armenian and a photographer herself, is emotionally connected to this project – and herein lies a commitment to preserve part of her history. “The portrait studios and photographers I am documenting are part of a longstanding tradition of portrait photography that has been present in our culture for many years,” she explained, in an allusion to Armenian portrait photographers in the Ottoman Empire and the modern Middle East. Sadly, however, this is “a studio practice that is close to extinction,” she noted.

The other photographers in the show further develop the concept of place. **Paul Typaldos**, for example, a Greek-American photographer and filmmaker from New York City, photographs Cuba for his “ATOMICO” series. “His photos



# exhibit



Edo Art 1 by Gilda Davidian.



Mayra through the Window by Ara Oshagan.



Liz in the Yard by Ara Oshagan.



Revolucion by Paul Typaldos.

of Cuba were of this parallel between the vibrancy of culture and the decay of the landscape," said Salibian. **Jean Murchanian**, a doctoral candidate in art history at UCLA, observed that some of Typaldos' photographs recall **Giorgio de Chirico's** paintings with their "sense of mystery, desperation, but also life."

**Benjamin Donaldson**, with his "Piori" series, documents the living quar-

ters of priests, places that challenge viewers' expectations because they offer a behind-the-scenes look at the places where priests spend a majority of their time.

**Michael Cappabianca's** images of what appear to be desolate landscapes, or even urbanscapes, evoke a certain kind of presence even in the absence. Commenting on his works, Salibian said,

"the images spoke to me about memory, more than anything else. He has a sense for a place after it has been abandoned that gives it an eerie, beautiful quality."

## Notes on the medium

In our image-laden society, photography is very accessible and communicable. Yet, not only do different people experience photographs differently, but there appear to be two levels to the viewer's interaction with a certain photograph.

Here, Salibian drew on the theorist Roland Barthes to articulate these encounters. During the gallery talk at the exhibition's opening reception, Salibian briefly expounded on Barthes' ideas: "There is the initial sense, called the studium, of 'where was that taken, who's in the picture,' which we see all the time with snapshots, news photos, pretty much anything," she said. "But then there's punctum: a detail that will catch your eye, something that you can't quite put your finger on, but you feel an instinctual sort of pull toward it. It's different for each person."

Salibian was primarily drawn to the numerous details in the exhibition's photographs, a sentiment that was echoed by many visitors to the show. Photographer **Sara Anjargolian** observed that

though the spaces documented appear to be rather sparse and represented in wide shots, there was nonetheless a great deal of information that the photographs conveyed, "quite a few specific details about a certain place."

## Encouraging dialogue

Salibian intentionally set out to put together a show that merged the works of Armenians with those of non-Armenians. "We all have similar problems, joys, strengths, and beautiful history/folklore which can benefit one another if only there were more discussion and dialogue," she commented.

Salibian continued: "It is my hope that this show – and future shows at the CEAA – help to promote an already budding interest in the arts among young Armenians. We have such a vast cultural and creative landscape on which to build. It shouldn't be wasted, but it also needs to grow and to go beyond the conventional notions of what being Armenian stands for."

Davidian agreed that bringing together ethnically diverse artists is important. "I think it's a positive experience to have Armenian and non-Armenian artists exhibit together because it creates a greater dialogue and opens us up to different perspectives that can strengthen our understanding of what it means to be Armenian today," she said.

"I was actually surprised to hear from many young Armenians that they loved the mixture of artwork by Armenian and non-Armenian artists," Salibian stated. "To coexist with individuals who don't share the same exact background is not necessarily a sacrifice of our own identity. I like how many of our guests understood that."

Actor **Alex Kalognomos** said the show was "very important" and noted that displaying the works of Armenians alongside those of non-Armenians represented an effort by the newer generation of Armenian artists to integrate into the mainstream.

## Exhibition format

The exhibition's format itself is designed to encourage dialogue. Salibian limited the show to five artists because she "wanted each artist to have his/her own 'space' within the gallery" – an appropriate decision about an exhibition concerned with constructing a specific type of place.

Salibian intentionally varied the sizes of the works and kept them unframed. In keeping with CEAA founder **Vasken Brudian's** mission "of promoting dialogue and discourse through the gallery," Salibian said, "the way the images in this show are presented without the barriers may make the works more approachable, both literally and intellectually." ■■■

"Defining Place" will be on display until December 15, 2008.

Gallery hours are by appointment only.

Exhibition curator Tamar Salibian will deliver a second gallery talk on Sunday, December 14, at 2:00 p.m.

Center for Experimental Art and Architecture, 3191 Casitas Avenue, Suite 138, Los Angeles, CA 90039

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1-818-551-9386



## Mariam Matossian sings songs of perseverance

Her modern renditions of Armenian folk classics have been nominated for prestigious awards



by Karin Saghdejian

VANCOUVER – I first heard Mariam Matossian on CBC Radio, when an old Armenian melody and the accompanying velvety voice suddenly filled the airwaves and pinned me in my car seat. The sweet folk song “Garod” carried me away, “to the place where my mother lies awake... to smell the blossoms... and feel the wind kiss my cheek again.”

I waited for the song to end to learn the name of the new voice which had brought me to tears and which, surprisingly, had made it to the Canadian national broadcast.

Since the release of her first album, *Far From Home* (2004), followed by *In the Light* (2007), Vancouverite Matossian has been captivating audiences in Canada and the United States with her fresh renditions of Armenian folk songs.

Partnering with talented Canadian musicians from the world-music and jazz scenes, and with a multi-instrumentalist producer, **Adam Popowitz**, Matossian reinterprets our traditional songs in her own modern style, breathing new life into them.

Matossian’s voice has been described as “angelic,” “pure,” “unforced,” and “innocent.” Her unique sound has earned her rave reviews, from both Canadian and Armenian musical circles. This fall she was nominated for two Canadian Folk Music Awards (Best Traditional Album of the Year and Best Emerging Artist of the Year) as well as a Western Canadian Music Award for Outstanding World Music Recording of the Year – for *In the Light*.

Just recently, Matossian performed at the Canadian Folk Music Gala, in St. John’s, Newfoundland.

### A message of hope

It is a breakthrough for an Armenian singer to be nominated for a music award in Canada – even more so for an Armenian folk album.

Asked what the nominations mean to her, Matossian says, “In terms of my career, this is another level of support from my mentors – people that I

Right: Mariam Matossian’s photo from her 2006 album. Below: Mariam Matossian and Gord Grdina performing at the Canadian Folk Music Awards on Nov 23, 2008.



look up to in the field of music.” And in terms of Armenian folk songs, “this is one way for more people to know about our cultural history and to learn about who we are.”

Matossian always dreamt about using her music as a vehicle to promote the story of her people: the Armenian

culture and the resilience of her people. “There’s great joy and pain inherent in so many of our folk songs,” she says. “One song celebrates the beauty of Armenia or the tantalizing effect of falling in love, another song compares the intense pain of being separated from the homeland to the pain of being separated from one’s beloved.”

As a child, Matossian was consumed by the enormous suffering undergone by her grandparents, but at the same time inspired by the joy and hope they had in life. They were orphaned during the Genocide of 1915 and years later had met and got married in Aleppo, Syria. Her grandmother always sang and her grandfather played percussion in a band.

Matossian never knew her grandmother, but was taught her songs by her mother, who used to be the choirmaster at the local Armenian Saturday school.

“I am the product of this story, a grandchild, and here I’m singing their songs to a new audience, to people who have never even heard about the Genocide,” she says. “To me these songs represent hope. Their resilient, hopeful spirit is one that we need today.”

### Sharing the story

Matossian began performing professionally in 2004, after a visit to Armenia crystallized her deep feelings about the impact of music and its ability to nurture hope. While in the homeland, where she volunteered to work with orphans, she discovered the healing power of music that the children experienced.

Working with them reminded her of the plight of her own grandparents, who were deported during the Genocide and ended up in an orphanage. “It came full circle for me,” she wrote in *World Pulse* magazine’s January 2008 issue. “I knew I could use my music to share my grandmother’s story and link it to these children’s stories.”

Back in Vancouver, her classical-music coach referred her to one of Canada’s most promising producers, Adam Popowitz, whose work encompasses urban folk, jazz, and Latin music. With an eclectic band composed of Popowitz himself (guitars, mandolin), and other renowned Canadian musicians

Continued on page C11

### Southern California concert with Gor Mkhitarian

On Thursday, December 18, at 8 p.m., Mariam Matossian will appear in her first-ever Southern California concert, performing with Gor Mkhitarian – doors open at 7.

The event, presented by In His Shoes and celebrating the release of Mkhitarian’s latest album, *The Spirit*, will take place at Zipper Concert Hall at the Colburn School (200 South Grand Avenue, Los Angeles).

For tickets, go to [itsmyseat.com](http://itsmyseat.com) or call (626) 275-AMEN.





# Hilton

## Los Angeles/Universal City



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**Holiday Luncheon Buffet**

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**"Seafood & Prime Rib Holiday Christmas Buffet"**

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**"Abalone, Prime Rib & Lobster Holiday Brunch"**

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15 December		16 December		17 December		18 December		19 December		20 December		21 December	
MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY	
EST	PST												
10:00 PM	1:00 AM	Bernard Show	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	Bernard Show	
11:00 PM	2:00 AM	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Century	
12:00 AM	3:00 AM	Fathers & Sons	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	Armenia Diaspora	
1:00 AM	4:00 AM	Snakes & Lizards (Serial)	Snakes & Lizards (Serial)	Snakes & Lizards (Serial)	Snakes & Lizards (Serial)	Snakes & Lizards (Serial)	Snakes & Lizards (Serial)	Snakes & Lizards (Serial)	Snakes & Lizards (Serial)	Snakes & Lizards (Serial)	Snakes & Lizards (Serial)	Snakes & Lizards (Serial)	
2:00 AM	5:00 AM	A Drop of Honey	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	A Drop of Honey
2:30 AM	5:30 AM	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	
3:00 AM	6:00 AM	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Discovery
3:30 AM	6:30 AM	Mult	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Century
4:00 AM	7:00 AM	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	Armenia Diaspora
4:30 AM	7:30 AM	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Fathers & Sons
5:00 AM	8:00 AM	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	News
5:30 AM	8:30 AM	Directions With Rafi Manoukian	Bari Louys Hayer	Bari Louys Hayer	Bari Louys Hayer	Bari Louys Hayer	Bari Louys Hayer	Bari Louys Hayer	Bari Louys Hayer	Bari Louys Hayer	Bari Louys Hayer	Bari Louys Hayer	Century
6:00 AM	9:00 AM	Bari Louys Hayer	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Armenia Diaspora
7:00 AM	10:00 AM	Bari Aravod	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	Fathers & Sons
8:00 AM	11:00 AM	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	Armenian Teletime
8:30 AM	11:30 AM	News	Snakes & Lizards	Snakes & Lizards	Snakes & Lizards	Snakes & Lizards	Snakes & Lizards	Snakes & Lizards	Snakes & Lizards	Snakes & Lizards	Snakes & Lizards	Snakes & Lizards	Armenian Movie
9:00 AM	12:00 PM	A Drop of Honey	Serial	Serial	Serial	Serial	Serial	Serial	Serial	Serial	Serial	Serial	Yere 1 (ye:re:van)
9:30 AM	12:30 PM	Snakes & Lizards Serial	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Cool Program
10:00 AM	01:00 PM	Tele Kitchen	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	Snakes & Lizards Serial
11:00 AM	02:00 PM	Mult	YO YO	YO YO	YO YO	YO YO	YO YO	YO YO	YO YO	YO YO	YO YO	YO YO	TV Duel
12:00 PM	03:00 PM	YO YO	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Neighbours (Serial)	Love E Lee
12:30 PM	03:30 PM	Neighbours (Serial)	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	A Drop Of Honey
01:00 PM	04:00 PM	News	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	desangoun
02:00 PM	05:00 PM	CLONE (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Bernard Show
03:00 PM	06:00 PM	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Live From America	Blef
04:00 PM	07:00 PM	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	Discovery
05:00 PM	08:00 PM	News	Gyanki Keene - Serial	Gyanki Keene - Serial	Gyanki Keene - Serial	Gyanki Keene - Serial	Gyanki Keene - Serial	Gyanki Keene - Serial	Gyanki Keene - Serial	Gyanki Keene - Serial	Gyanki Keene - Serial	Gyanki Keene - Serial	Century
06:00 PM	09:00 PM	News	Tonight Show	Tonight Show	Tonight Show	Tonight Show	Tonight Show	Tonight Show	Tonight Show	Tonight Show	Tonight Show	Tonight Show	Armenia Diaspora
06:30 PM	09:30 PM	Gyanki Keene - Serial	With Hovo	With Hovo	With Hovo	With Hovo	With Hovo	With Hovo	With Hovo	With Hovo	With Hovo	With Hovo	My Big, Fat
07:00 PM	10:00 PM	Tonight Show With Hovo	11 - Serial	11 - Serial	11 - Serial	11 - Serial	11 - Serial	11 - Serial	11 - Serial	11 - Serial	11 - Serial	11 - Serial	Armenian Wedding
07:30 PM	10:30 PM	11 - Serial	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	Directions With Rafi
08:00 PM	11:00 PM	News	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Manoukian
08:30 PM	11:30 PM	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	When Stars Are Dancing
09:00 PM	12:00 AM	Partamian	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CUBE

## New book digs deep into history of West Bengal's Armenians

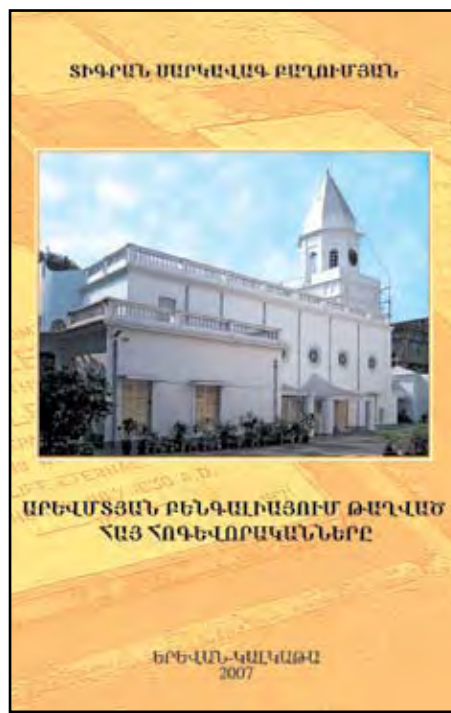
### Celebrating the 300th anniversary of the Indian-Armenian community



by Nyree Abrahamian



Left: Deacon Tigran Baghumian. Right: Cover of *Armenian Clergymen Buried in West Bengal* by Deacon Baghumian.



YEREVAN – Since the 300th anniversary celebration of Holy Nazareth Armenian Church in Kolkata (see *Armenian Reporter*, November 22, 2008) just a few weeks ago, Armenians all over the world have been reading, learning, and talking about the fascinating history of Armenians in India.

Armenians arrived in the region now known as West Bengal in the early 1600s, some 60 years before the British became established traders there. Despite their small numbers, Armenians thrived in colonial India well into the 19th century, undertaking construction projects and running trading companies, shipping lines, coal mines, and hotels.

Their rich and relatively unknown history is now coming to light as a result of the recent festivities. In addition to the 300th anniversary celebration, Armenian churches in India have undergone major renovations, and Catholicos **Karekin II** reconsecrated the church in Chennai (formerly Madras), which had fallen into disrepair and was all but abandoned. Hundreds of pilgrims from around the world came to be a part of the historic event.

Whereas the recent revitalization of Armenian churches in India has sparked renewed interest in the country's Arme-

nian community, Deacon **Tigran Baghumian** has been poring over the history of Indian-Armenians for years.

In 2005, Baghumian was appointed by Karekin II as the administrator of the Armenian Philanthropic Academy of Kolkata and the deacon in charge of all Armenian churches in India. The deacon spent three years in India trying to revive the school and the community. In addition to performing his administrative duties, Baghumian managed to pursue a project that was near and dear to his heart, a true labor of love: he researched and wrote a book about Armenian religious and community leaders who served and were buried in India. His study, published in Armenian, is titled *Armenian Clergymen Buried in West Bengal*.

Baghumian spent a great deal of his time in India in the graveyards of Armenian churches, painstakingly cleaning gravestones and photographing them,

going through church registries, and researching the lives he uncovered, one by one.

It may strike one as odd that someone would dedicate so much time (and an entire book) to the study of long-forgotten gravestones and documents, but Baghumian's work is truly commendable when we consider the instrumental role that the Armenian church and its clergy have played in the creation and burgeoning of India's Armenian community.

"It was with great pity that I noticed that neither Indian-Armenians nor the students of the Philanthropic Academy – who walk over these gravestones every time they go to church – know who are buried in the Armenian cemeteries," says the young deacon. "Many of them don't even know the history of the Indian-Armenian community. So, as a young member of the Brotherhood of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, I considered it my sacred duty

to photograph, catalog, and decode the records inscribed on the gravestones of our clergymen, while also trying to find additional information about them and their service. . . . The aim of my study is to save the names of those brave pastors from falling into oblivion."

Baghumian did not limit his research to clergymen. He also uncovered graves of other members of the Indian-Armenian community, resurrecting their stories, shedding light on the way of life of Indian-Armenians through the centuries and their role in Indian society. For example, one of the graves he highlights in the book belongs to an Armenian woman named Rezabeebeh. Dating back to 1630, it's the oldest Christian grave in West Bengal. "We have to understand that the Armenian historical graves are not only a part of our national history, but also an inseparable part of Indian history," the deacon says.

Baghumian's dedication to his work and his passion for rediscovering, acknowledging, and respecting the Armenian past is apparent in his writing. He says he is sad to see that of the few Indian-Armenians who remain in India, most don't speak Armenian and are disconnected from their heritage. It is against this backdrop that Baghumian has carried out his work. As a result, he has succeeded, in his own way, to bring many of the Indian-Armenian community's stories back to life.

"When, in the last century, the famous Indian-Armenian historian Mesrobp Jacob Seth was writing about the Armenians of India, many people were laughing at him," he says. "However, today it is impossible to imagine Indian-Armenian history without his vital work." Baghumian hopes that his research, too, will be valued in the future as a key un-locking some of the treasures of the Armenian past.



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# Satellite Broadcast Program Grid

## 15 - 21 December



15 December		16 December		17 December		18 December		19 December		20 December		21 December	
MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY	
EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST
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21:20	0:20	21:20	0:20	21:20	0:20	21:20	0:20	21:20	0:20	21:20	0:20	21:20	0:20
23:00	2:00	23:00	2:00	23:00	2:00	23:00	2:00	23:00	2:00	23:00	2:00	23:00	2:00
23:30	2:30	23:30	2:30	23:30	2:30	23:30	2:30	23:30	2:30	23:30	2:30	23:30	2:30
0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00	0:00	3:00
0:25	3:25	0:25	3:25	0:25	3:25	0:25	3:25	0:25	3:25	0:25	3:25	0:25	3:25
0:50	3:50	0:50	3:50	0:50	3:50	0:50	3:50	0:50	3:50	0:50	3:50	0:50	3:50
1:10	4:10	1:10	4:10	1:05	4:05	1:05	4:05	1:15	4:15	1:15	4:15	1:15	4:15
1:25	4:25	1:25	4:25	1:25	4:25	1:25	4:25	1:35	4:35	1:35	4:35	1:35	4:35
1:45	4:45	1:45	4:45	1:45	4:45	1:45	4:45	2:00	5:00	2:00	5:00	2:00	5:00
2:10	5:10	2:10	5:10	2:10	5:10	2:10	5:10	2:10	5:10	2:10	5:10	2:10	5:10
2:50	5:50	2:50	5:50	2:50	5:50	2:50	5:50	2:50	5:50	2:50	5:50	2:50	5:50
3:35	6:35	3:35	6:35	3:35	6:35	3:35	6:35	3:35	6:35	3:35	6:35	3:35	6:35
4:00	7:00	4:00	7:00	4:00	7:00	4:00	7:00	4:00	7:00	4:00	7:00	4:00	7:00

## Mariam Matossian: songs of perseverance and renewal

Continued from page C8

including **Elliot Polsky** (percussion), **Gord Grdina** (oud), **Jesse Zubot** (violin), and **Laurence Mollerup** (acoustic bass), Matossian released her first album, *Far from Home*, a collection of songs of longing for the homeland.

Before any Armenians knew about it, the album began having airplay on Canada's national radio station. Soon it was named one of the Top-25 Essential Albums of the Year by the Echoes radio program (based in the United States).

Matossian admits North Americans were the first to embrace her music. "I remember the first emails I received from people," she says. "It amazed me that they did not speak the language but felt a deep connection to the music, to the arrangements, and to my voice."

What is it in her voice that draws non-Armenians? On stage, Matossian is a storyteller and a singer. "They [audiences] tell me that they love the vulnerability of the music, the innocence of it, the unfamiliar rhythms, and the story," she says.

During the Canadian Folk Music Awards gala, while Matossian sang one

of her own creations, "Narineh," the story of a girl who went missing in Iraq, the theater became completely quiet. "I could feel it," she recalls. "It was an intense moment. People came up to me afterwards and told me they were crying throughout my performance."

"I feel a deep connection to my audience and I hope they sense that," Matossian continues. "I don't want to be on stage separated from everyone, singing for them and then disappearing into a dressing room. I think it's all about connecting with listeners."

### A unique voice

"Being born and growing up in Canada, I have had all sorts of influences, from listening to classical to jazz to world to even some pop music," Matossian says, referring to her eclectic style. Fusing her intimate voice with an exotic band has resulted in a modern interpretation of our traditional folk songs, incidentally making them more appealing to contemporary Armenian musicians such as **Gor Mkhitarian** and **John Berberian**.

"Matossian has made the wise decision to work with multi-instrumentalist and

producer Adam Popowitz in creating a dreamlike and very contemporary sound," comments **Raffi Meneshian**, founder of the independent music label Pomegranate Music, on her website. "Classical songs such as 'Shogher Jan' and 'Hayastani Aghchigner' are turned upside down with the Popowitz guitar and mandolin arrangements, giving Matossian room to wander and breathe new life into songs recorded countless times before."

Another influence Matossian cherishes is that of Armenian liturgy. "I love our liturgy, the long phrases – the complexity and simplicity is inherent in each phrase," she says. "I love to sing that way: without being limited by a strict time signature."

In this, she has found a perfect match in Popowitz. "Adam let me just have fun in the studio and be creative," she says. "He and I both wanted a sound that was a fusion of traditional and modern. We wanted to retain the original beauty of the traditional songs while making them our own."

The resulting work has earned Matossian both wide popularity and critical acclaim. "Mariam's singing shifts you

out of the ordinary and into the realm of pure experience," comments CBC Radio producer Michael Juk on her website. "There's a kind of 'ear cleaning' that happens. Sounds, words, gestures become more vivid than you remember."

After a performance during Genocide Awareness Week in Oregon, in April 2007, an audience member approached the founder of the event, **Sarah Stark**, saying: "Judging by [Matossian's] voice, I believe it must have been the Armenians who taught the angels to sing."

### The story continues

Aside from its musical merit, Matossian's voice tells us a story of perseverance and renewal.

"If they [my grandparents] were still here with us, they'd be thrilled that the Armenian songs that brought them much joy during extreme hardship are being embraced by North Americans," she says. "In essence, the story of our people goes on... The story didn't end with the horrors of 1915."

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