ReflectSpace Gallery

NONLINEAR HISTORIES
TRANSGENERATIONAL MEMORY OF TRAUMA
MARCH 17 - MAY 6, 2018
Downtown Central Library
222 E. Harvard St.
Glendale, CA 91205
Mon-Thurs 9 am - 10 pm
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ReflectSpace Gallery

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TRANSGENERATIONAL MEMORY OF TRAUMA
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AN EXHIBITION THAT EXPLORES THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF INHERITED MEMORY OF TRAUMA OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE BY SUCCEEDING SECOND, THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATIONS

CURATED BY
ARA AND ANAHID OSHAGAN
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ARTISTS
JEAN MARIE CASBARIAN
EILEEN CLAVELOUX
SILVINA DER MEGUERDITCHIAN
DIDEM ERK
HRAYR EULMESSEKIAN
HRAIR SARKISSIAN
HARRY VORPERIAN
ReflectSpace Gallery at Downtown Central hosts Nonlinear Histories: Transgenerational Memory of Trauma, an exhibition that explores the poetics and politics of inherited memory of trauma of the Armenian Genocide by succeeding second, third and fourth generations. Revolving around the idea of postmemory, a concept developed by renowned literary and cultural critic Marianne Hirsch, Nonlinear Histories probes memories and narratives transmitted in the wake of Catastrophe: the process of the individual and collective ownership of trauma, and the confluence of personal, national and cultural memories.

Artists in exhibition include Jean Marie Casbarian, Eileen Claveloux, Didem Erk, Hrayr Eulmessekian, Silvina Der Meguerditchian, Hrair Sarkissian and Harry Vorperian. Nonlinear Histories is co-curated by Ara and Anahid Oshagan and Isin Onol.

Nonlinear Histories in ReflectSpace Gallery opens on March 17 and run until May 6, 2018. The opening reception is on Saturday March 17 from 5 – 8 pm, with a lecture by Dr. Marianne Hirsch at 7 pm entitled “Forty Days and More: Connective Histories.”
Dr. Marianne Hirsch is a William Peterfield Trent Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. Her critically acclaimed work combines feminist theory with memory studies, particularly the transmission of memories of violence across generations.

Silvina Der Meguerditchian’s installation, “Treasures”, builds on an object inherited from her maternal great-grandmother and Genocide survivor Hripsime: a hand-written notebook of 350 folk health remedies. The installation consists of the 130 page archival notebook itself and objects that relate her great-grandmother’s recipes to ancient medical manuscripts and encyclopedias, “putting her ... back into the line of History, into the tradition of healers from Cilicia.” (Marianne Hirsch). For Nonlinear Histories, Silvina re-configures and re-imagines “Treasures” which was part of “Armenity” exhibition in the Armenian pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2015 that won the “Golden Lion” prize.

London-based photographer and artist Hrair Sarkissian displays images from his series “Unexposed” which were also part of “Armenity” at the Venice Biennale. The series deals with descendants of Armenians who converted to Islam to escape the Armenian genocide. Today, having rediscovered their roots, and reconverted to Christianity, they are forced to conceal their newfound Armenian identity. Not accepted by Turkish society and not fully part of the Armenian community, they remain invisible.

New York based artist Jean Marie Casbarian sources the sparse archive of her grandmother, Margaret Jurigian, in an attempt to “re-member” and imagine a life that was never fully realized. Working with little more than a few photographs and sketchy anecdotes passed down from generations, Casbarian, writing under the guise of Margaret, narrates Margaret’s life through real and fictitious journal entries, images, texts and public archives.
The resulting juxtaposed text and image cross the boundaries of truth and daydream.

Sourcing the needlework of his grandmother Lily, Los Angeles artist, Harry Vorperian brings “Liliy’s Garden” to multiple spaces in the Downtown Library. Composed of concrete and steel oversized flowers, the public art installation evokes ancient forms from the Armenian region of Marash in a contemporary context. Lily Vorperian is an NEA Lifetime Achievement Honoree.

Istanbul-based artist Didem Erk addresses her relationship to trauma, memory and archive as a process that can never come to completion. She presents her works as archeological objects under glass that cannot be accessed: official and oral history are intertwined and inseparable.

Hrayr Eulmessekian, Los Angeles-based conceptual artist, will present work from an ongoing series “On Deep Background” that started in 1997. “On Background” is reminiscent of the first Beirut downtown reconstruction attempt of sandblasting grime and soot off of buildings and patching up bullet holes. “On Background” is a futile attempt to retouch what lies underneath and what the stressed metal betrays.

Eileen Claveloux’s “The Naming” is a personal film reflecting on her family and the direct and indirect impact of the trauma of the Armenian Genocide on her generation.
“Urgently and passionately, those of us working on memory and transmission have argued over the ethics and the aesthetics of remembrance in the aftermath of catastrophe. How, in our present, do we regard and recall what Susan Sontag (2003) has so powerfully described as the “pain of others?” What do we owe the victims? How can we best carry their stories forward without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them? How are we implicated in the aftermath of crimes we did not ourselves witness?”

To remember what a previous generation was perhaps eager to forget, to grasp a collective experience before it fades away and to re-establish the reality of stories and memories whose carriers have long passed away: How to relate to the inheritance of the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of previous generations with “a repertoire of embodied knowledge”? These are challenging, yet inevitable questions that are left to the consecutive generations after a collective experience of a Catastrophe, specially when the memories are silenced.

The term “transgenerational memory” implies the personal, systematic
and diligent research done by the generation of postmemory, to address and reflect on the traumatic experiences of their parents and grandparents. It stand in opposition to “motivated forgetting”—a term widely used in psycho-analysis that refers to the intentional and unintentional forgetting of traumatic experiences. While “motivated forgetting” generates silence “transgenerational memory” focus on breaking that silence through artistic expression and efforts to relate to a dark past.

In the context of the Great Catastrophe, the Genocide committed against the Armenians in 1915, the works in Nonlinear Histories approach collective trauma from the perspective of a generation that merely has access to mediated and incomplete images, stories and memories of a previous generation. The artistic positions in Nonlinear Histories address the impossible yet inevitable challenges that come with exploring the poetics and politics of (post)memory of trauma: its individual and collective ownership, and the collision of personal, national and cultural memories.

As the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren of both victims and perpetrators as well the witnesses, struggle to understand and assimilate their present through the past, the works in Nonlinear Histories envision a future that is not merely determined by a traumatic past, but sustained by relentless questioning and efforts to imagine all human possibilities.

ARTISTS
From “The Daybooks of Margaret Jurigian”, archival pigment print, 2015
Jean Marie Casbarian was born to an Armenian father and a German mother on a military weapons testing ground in Aberdeen, Maryland. Her nomadic lifestyle has led her through various lives in the U.S. including Chicago, California, Colorado, Massachusetts and New York. She received her MFA from Milton Avery School of Art at Bard College in New York in the year 2000 where she focused on interdisciplinary installation practices and incorporates photography, film and video projections, sound, sculpture and performance into her artworks.

Along with exhibiting her works throughout the United States, Europe, Central America and Asia, she has received a number of awards and artist residencies including a Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Process Space Grant, a Research/Studio Art Associate with Five-Colleges, Inc., Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation nomination, The LaNapoule Foundation Grant in LaNapoule, France, the Chicago Artist’s Assistance Project Grant, and an Associateship with The Rocky Mountain Women’s Institute. As an educator, Jean-Marie currently teaches and advises graduate students at Transart Institute, a low-residency MFA program based in Berlin and New York City and is also a faculty member with the ICP-Bard MFA program and the General Studies Program at the International Center of Photography in New York City. She has taught in the film and photography departments at Hampshire College and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Jean Marie currently lives and works in New York City.
New York based artist Jean Marie Casbarian sources the sparse archive of her grandmother, Margaret Jurigian, in an attempt to “re-member” and imagine a life that was never fully realized. Working with little more than a few photographs and sketchy anecdotes passed down from generations, Casbarian, writing under the guise of Margaret, narrates Margaret’s life through real and fictitious journal entries, images, texts and public archives. The resulting juxtaposed text and image cross the boundaries of truth and daydream.
Eileen Claveloux holds an M.F.A. in Computer, Design & Photography from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, a B.F.A. from the University of the Arts in Painting, as well as a M.Ed. degree from Westfield State University. She has lectured at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her work has been shown throughout the US and in Germany, Armenia, Cameroon and Romania. She completed an Artists’ Union/Nkraichneri Miootyun Residency in Yerevan, Armenia where her work was shown in an exhibition commemorating the 90th anniversary of the genocide. Her artwork is in the permanent collection of the Yerevan Museum of Modern Art, as well as in private and corporate collections. She has also co-curated ‘Cost of Production’ and ‘Klaus Postler’ at Hampden Gallery at the University of Massachusetts with Anne Laprade Seuthe.

Her work primarily focuses on memory, post memory and history in relation to the Armenian genocide. Her project “The Naming” is a video about her family’s silence surrounding the genocide and how that silence has affected later generations. It received a nomination for Best Documentary at the ARPA International Film Festival in Hollywood, California. Her book, “The Naming” with a foreword by James E. Young, was published in 2002. A current project, “Diasporan Portraits”, was exhibited at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in November, 2016.
THE NAMING, 28 minutes, 2000. The video is an investigation into family and public history, particularly the silenced history of the Armenian Genocide and how it has affected my family members.
The artist is the granddaughter of Armenian immigrants to Argentina, since 1988 she lives in Berlin. Her artistic work deal with issues related to the burden of national identity, the role of minorities in the society and the potential of an space “in between”.

Der-Meguerditchian is interested in the impact of migration in the urban texture and its consequences. Reconstruction of the past and the building of archives are a red thread in her artistic research.

Her work is multidisciplinary and uses different medias. Since 2010 she is artistic director of Houshamadyan (www.houshamadyan.org), a project to reconstruct Ottoman Armenian town and village life. In 2014/15 she was awarded with a fellowship at the Kulturakademie Tarabya, a residency program of the German Foreign Ministry and the Goethe Institute in Istanbul. Further she participated in “Armenity”, the Pavilion awarded with the Golden Lion at the 56. Venice Biennial for the best national participation. Her work has been shown in many exhibitions around the world, including, among others, Germany, Argentina, USA and Turkey. Her last initiated and coordinated collective project “Grandchildren, new geographies of belonging” (DEPO Cultural Center- Istanbul) was supported by the Goethe Institut and the German Foreign Ministry in 2015. Her last art documentary “The Wishing Tree” will be shown in April 2018 at “Portable homelands” a section of the exhibition “Hello world, revising a collection” at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin.
"Treasures", installation details, 2015
Manuscript, collages, digital images and small glass bottles
Variable dimensions
The multi-dimensional artistic projects of Silvina Der-Merguerditchian use hybrid archival media to recall a catastrophe that occurred long before she was born in a diasporic community in Argentina, and to reconstruct the lives that were destroyed.

The installation builds on an astounding object she inherited from her maternal great-grandmother Hripsime, a hand-written notebook of 350 folk health remedies, written in Armenian script in Turkish language. Hripsime, a genocide survivor who immigrated to Argentina with her son, Silvina’s grandfather, wrote the book in Córdoba in 1943. The installation consists of the 130pp. archival notebook itself, and of objects that are building on the archive – the ingredients of these recipes, Anatolian plants, small sacks full of seeds and other healing substances, as well as the chemical formulas by which they might be assembled and do the work of healing. Photographs of Hripsime and her family are there, amidst images of well-known Armenian doctors and healers. The artist relates her great-grandmother’s recipes to medical manuscripts and encyclopedias dating back as far as the Middle Ages, pharmacology textbooks, and other manuscripts from San Lazzaro’s impressive archives “putting her ... back into the line of History, into the tradition of healers from Cilicia.” (Marianne Hirsch)
Hrayr Anmahouni Eulmessekian (b. 1958, Beirut) is a graduate of Nichan Palandjian Djemaran. He attended the Academie Libanaise des Beaux Arts for two years. In 1984, leaving behind the ravages of the first ten years of the civil war, he moved to San Francisco and received his BFA and MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute. Considered a post-disciplinary artist often making ephemeral works, he employs varied media, such as film, video, sound, silkscreen, photography, and painting, to interrogate the nature of representation, subjectivity, language, identity and history as constructs. His works have been exhibited, screened or broadcast in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, New York, Yerevan, Art Dubai, Sharjah Biennial’s global gathering, “The March Meeting”, Pratt Manhattan. A founding member of the San Francisco Armenian Film Festival, he serves on its curatorial team. Notable interview in Prof. Marc Nichanian’s GAM Review #6. Hrayr lives and works in Los Angeles.

“On Background” is part of an ongoing series called “On Deep Background” that I started in 1997. It is reminiscent of the first Beirut downtown reconstruction attempt to sandblast the grime and soot off of buildings and patch up the bullet holes. My process entails photoshopping the bullet holes in the pictures taken of a firing range located in San Francisco, whose owner happened to be a US Marines captain who had survived the Marine barracks explosions in Beirut. A futile attempt to retouch what lies underneath and what the stressed metal betrays.
Didem Erk was born in Istanbul in 1986. After graduating from the Department of Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design at Sabancı University in 2009, she completed her master’s degree at her alma mater. In 2012, she had her first solo exhibition titled “IFEELIAMEATINGMEMORIES / SANKIANILARIYIYORUM” at the Fassart Gallery of Sabancı University in Istanbul. Erk has participated in many group exhibitions in Turkey and abroad. She has received many awards for her work. In 2013, her work “I wish I could not be traced in the archives” (Sirkiran / Secret Decipherer / Mistiko Spastis) was exhibited at the 13th Istanbul Biennial. Erk currently lives and works in Istanbul and Datça.
In order to remember,
we sometimes in need of forgetting.
Maybe, there is no history now
There is no sea there is no shore
There should be a way,
Sinking Sand
There I release my hands
To see what comes next to each other
A map of impressions, reflections
There is a specific page from the book called “Two Close Peoples, Two Distant Neighbours” by Hrant Dink.
it is sewed, it is covered, it is chewed, it is read
Several actions are in need of urgency.
We are here Ahparig
is in mirror- writing with all its knots and intertwined threads
letters with no sender, receiver and address
Archival threads, different newspapers, different dates, an endless sentence
A home with crutch
No windows to breathe
History, paranoia, trauma
to breathe
To conserve the impossible
book pages are preserved
with saliva
unlearn me
till it makes sense
“Sinking Sand”, installation details, 2018
Mixed media, video, Variable dimensions
“Unexposed”, Archival Inkjet Print, 2012
Hrair Sarkissian is a photographer. Born and raised in Damascus, he earned his foundational training at his father’s photographic studio, where he spent all his childhood vacations and where he worked full-time for twelve years after high school. In 2010 he completed a BFA in Photography at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam. He lives and works in London since 2011.

“I use photography as a way to tell stories that are not immediately visible on the surface. Employing traditional documentary techniques and using a 4×5 analogue camera, my photographic series consist of austere, large-scale images. The constancy and beauty of the settings, however, are at odds with the socio-historical realities that they conceal.

Photography is my tool to search for answers related to my personal memories and background, and I use this subjectivity as a way to navigate larger stories that official histories are unable or unwilling to tell. I try to engage the viewer into a more profound reading of what lies behind the surface of the image, thereby re-evaluating larger historical or social narratives. Once people become aware of the invisible elements behind my work, the physicality of the image is almost destroyed. The architecture and surroundings of the execution squares are no more than a backdrop when you see the bodies hanging in your mind; the faces upon which the zebiba is imprinted are no longer individuals; the still darkness of the libraries becomes loaded once you realize what historical complexities these archives cover.”
“Unexposed”, Archival Inkjet Print, 2012
Hrair Sarkissian’s work explores different positions on migration, persecution and displacement. The series ‘Unexposed’ deals with descendants of Armenians who converted to Islam to escape the genocide that took place in the Ottoman Empire in 1915. Today, having rediscovered their roots, and reconverted into Christianity, these descendants of Armenians are forced to conceal their newfound Armenian-ness. Unaccepted by Turkish society and not fully part of the Armenian community, they are invisible.
Harry Vorperian (b. 1960), migrated from Beirut and settled in Los Angeles in 1976. After graduating H.M. Ferrahian H.S., he attended CSUN and received a bachelor’s degree in arts. Since 1984, he has owned and operated design studios, and also worked as a freelance designer, specializing in brand development. In 1987, he opened Holly Street Gallery in Old Town Pasadena to promote young upcoming Armenian artists.

Since the mid 1980’s, he has participated in group and solo art exhibitions. In 2011 he founded the Shushi Art Project, which in October 2012 held its first event, a contemporary art festival, in Shushi, Artsakh. This unique project brought together 20 artists with diverse backgrounds from the US, Europe, Armenia and Artsakh. In 2015, Harry co-curated life100, an art exhibition honoring the 100 year anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, that included the art of post-Genocide artists of Armenian descent with pieces ranging from the early 20th century through the present time. Harry's notable solo exhibitions include, “The I” (AT1 Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, November 2010), and “Lily's Garden” (Tufenkian Fine Arts Gallery, Glendale, CA, May 2016). Since his teen years, he has been active in the Armenian community. Harry lives and works in Los Angeles.
“Lily Mami”, Acrylic on digital print, 2016
"Lily's Garden", Concrete, aluminum, stainless steel, 2016
Some of my most vivid and treasured memories of childhood are of a “movable studio” that graced the dining room of our family home. I remember coming home from school and seeing the same spread on the dining table, day in and day out. Across a large piece of black velvet would be sprawled red, green, purple, yellow, and blue cotton threads, pieces of white wax sticks, handmade rulers, and paper cutouts of various designs. These were some of my grandmother’s tools. Mami, better known as Lily Kambourian Vorperian, was a master Marash needleworker who had elevated her craft to a distinct art form. Her intricate designs and color combinations were breathtaking. And while her creations were based on the dauntingly elaborate technique of the Marash needlework tradition, she constantly pushed the envelope in terms of design vocabulary, early on achieving a signature style. Mami’s colorful, large-scale wall tapestries adorned our walls, while her throw pillows, tablecloths, and bed covers were spread all over the house. It felt like living in some magical flower field somewhere in the Netherlands — or, indeed, Marash, the perennial source of my grandmother’s leaps of imagination.
The Glendale Library Foundation believes in expanding knowledge, exploring opportunities, and enriching lives through an outstanding public library.

The Glendale Library Foundation was established in 2014 in response to a bequest from the estate of Robert Seiden. Committed to enhancing the Glendale Library’s benefits to the community, the Foundation seeks additional donations to support equipment, programs, and special staffing needs in the ReflectSpace gallery and the Library’s other inspiring spaces.

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