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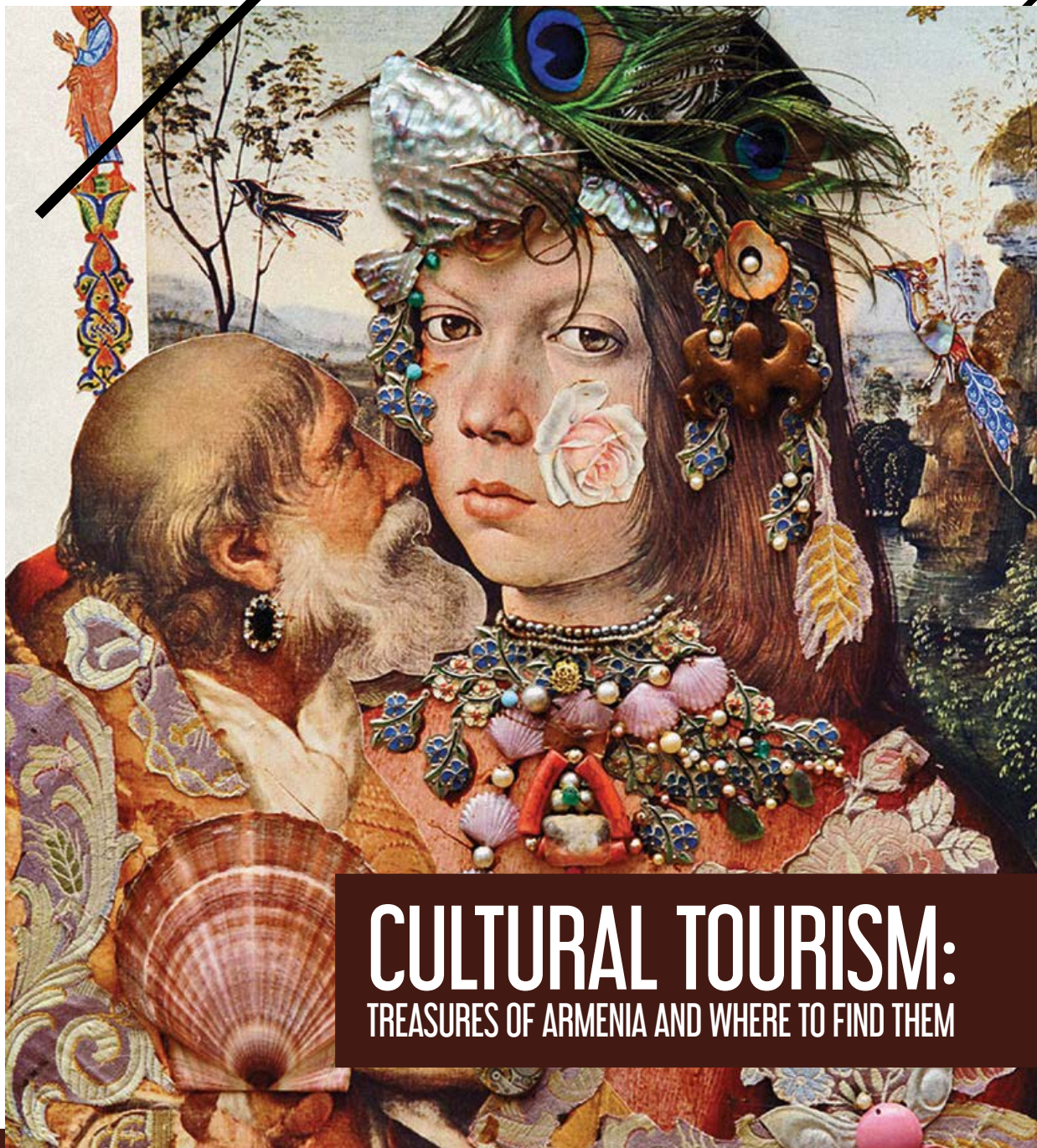
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CULTURAL TOURISM:
TREASURES OF ARMENIA AND WHERE TO FIND THEM



MUSCARI
Caring for Land, People & Culture

Gyumri Ceramics

Inspired by the know-how of the Armenian potters of Kütahya

The prestigious galleries such as “Galerie de la Tour” in Lyon in 2016 and “Galerie de Gourney” in Paris in 2017 held exhibition-sales of unique pieces of ceramics made by the craftsmen of Gyumri using the know-how of Armenian potters from Kütahya, a major center of ceramic production in the Ottoman Empire during XVI-XIX centuries.

The exhibitions were initiated by Muscari, an association for the promotion of Armenian and French cultural heritages, and its president Manoug Pamokdjian.

The events were organized as part of the global project aimed at the promotion of the economic and artistic prowess of Gyumri, initiated by Antonio Montalto, Honorary Consul of Italy in Gyumri, and the Pamokdjian family.

The Muscari association plans to establish several Houses of Armenia (les Maisons d’Arménie), centers for the distribution and promotion of Armenian crafts across France and other European countries.

In addition to the unique nature of the presented items, the goal of the exhibitions is to use art as a way of reviving Gyumri, a city devastated by a powerful earthquake in 1988 as well as continued economic crisis.

The exhibition will also take place in other prestigious locations in France followed by a tour in various European cities throughout 2018-2019.

These events are supported by Muscari association, Family Care and Friends of Gyumri foundations.



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Համարը լույս է տեսել
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ZARUHI BATOYAN:

“We must talk about equal opportunities”

Our interviewee is Zaruhi Batoyan, the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs of RA. We talked to her about the journey from an activist to the only female minister in the current Armenian cabinet, as well as about her operations in the social affairs framework

INTERVIEW : ARSHAK TOVMASYAN / PHOTO : MINISTRY OF LABOR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS OF RA



Mrs. Batoqan, you started as an activist, took part in the Velvet revolution, and today, you are a minister, one of the youngest and the only woman in the cabinet. Some people refuse to leave their homes; meanwhile, you became a minister. Where do you get this strength from?

— If you imply my physical disability, considering it as an obstacle on my way, I have to say that there are many people who overcome various difficulties, become highly qualified professionals, and of course, there are many individuals who do not leave their homes, as they face many artificial barriers that have to be eliminated. Unfortunately, there aren't many success stories, but I believe that I'm not the only one and I know a number of people who have managed to overcome these barriers.

The physical disability can stop a person if there are many external obstacles because the only thing which limits us is the environment, and in the opposite, the same environment can encourage our self-expression, help us find ourselves to have a contribution to this or that field. I'm lucky as I have a very supportive family and, also, all the spheres that I've entered created favorable conditions for my advancement.

Can we hope that very soon the life quality of people with disabilities in Armenia will improve?

— I work towards that direction. To create conditions for everyone, despite their gender, physical abilities, and other circumstances, to provide them with decent life in Armenia. There is a lack of minimum conditions, a legislative gap and services. So, I work on this issue using the experience I've gained during the many years of work for the solution of this problem. Today, I try to turn that experience into policies and exact steps. I hope that I will have my contribution. Of course, I cannot do it by myself, but I will put all the efforts for the benefit of the situation.

What should we do to increase the number of women ministers?

— First, there's a need for vivid examples. We must talk a lot about equal opportunities and encourage girls and young women. There's a need for reform in our education system in a way so there are no limitations and stereotypes. Do not give the roles in advance that, for example, women should get married, take care of the children and spend most of the time in the kitchen; meanwhile, men should go into politics, work and sustain the family. Also, we need to stop enforcing specific roles at an early age and do everything we can to help women develop, work and express themselves. I want to highlight the role of men in this process; as they say, women empowerment is beneficial not only for the women themselves but also for the whole society.

THE PHYSICAL DISABILITY CAN STOP A PERSON IF THERE ARE MANY EXTERNAL OBSTACLES BECAUSE THE ONLY THING WHICH LIMITS US IS THE ENVIRONMENT

You were the editor of disabilityinfo.am and in addition to your experience, it also enabled you to address these issues with a systematic approach.

— For many years, I have worked as an editor at "Sunflower" children's magazine in the "Bridge of Hope" organization. Later on, I became the head of the union of legal entities "National Alliance for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" and in the same period, my colleagues and I established the Disability Info NGO, with a website, operating as a news outlet, shedding light on the politics of the country. Here we tried to understand the level of integrity of the political processes of the country, whether the policies, initiatives and strategic decisions take into account the interests of people with disabilities. So, yes, the website helped to form an approach towards the issue, to carry out different relevant researches and collect data.

Moreover, I'm very happy and proud that I stand at the foundation of this organization, and even today, the NGO (now called "Disability and Integrative Development") and the website remain one of the best advocates of the human rights and integrative development of the people with disabilities.

You also have a literary past, but as I noticed you have stopped writing poetry since 2016. Don't you miss it?

— These days I try to write, sometimes and I really do miss it. I've published only one book, which I consider as a work of a beginner. However, writing is more of a view towards life for me, i.e., it's a way of thinking and a state of mind. I write from time to time, but I wouldn't call it poetry.

Getting back to your operations as a minister. What are the most severe challenges the ministry faces today?

— It's useless to say that there are many challenges as we work with the most vulnerable part of the society. First of all, we need to carry out some serious operations to accurately define the right target groups of the people and families who need the support, who appeared in the support system accidentally or in any other way. We have an objective to take people out of the institutions and ensure their prosperous life and integration within the communities. We have an important issue with the employment field, with the labor law and work realization. We have the problem of protecting people subjected to violence and preventing violence as well. Another challenge is the protection of children's rights, the child adoption law. ➤

But what's important to note is that all our programs, policies and initiatives must be based on the human rights, and we must provide the right conditions, as people have the issue of practicing their fundamental rights; to live in a family, work and live a decent life.

Let's go into the details of some of these issues. I liked the potential program of eliminating the orphanages. But it sounds too utopian, doesn't it?

— I think that at the initial stage one should look at all the programs and initiatives with a utopian view, as a dream and vision of what kind of country, what kind of Armenia we want to have. After which, of course, exact steps should be defined. I don't consider this program unrealistic at all; on the contrary, I believe that we have serious potential, and cultural, human and financial resources to organize the life, politics, and conditions in the country in a way so that children remain in their families. No child should get into an orphanage due to health issues. No person should be isolated because he/she has this or that problem and has no access to the support services. No family should get separated from their child, thinking that it's the best option for him/her and that they cannot provide their child with a decent life as they have no support. So, we have to address all these issues and I think that if we manage to create the minimum conditions, we will succeed. We have the experience of an NGO – exclusively on a voluntary basis, only via creating a network of human resources, which has managed to keep over 170 children in their families for 2-3 years. They supported the families so that they wouldn't hand over their children to the orphanages. I am talking about "Bari Mama" NGO. If this organization, via the help of the citizens and individual donors managed to do that, the government and the ministry can do it, too. We just have to take the success case and turn it into a systematic solution. I believe we will achieve our goal.



NO FAMILY SHOULD GET SEPARATED FROM THEIR CHILD, THINKING THAT IT'S THE BEST OPTION FOR HIM/HER AND THAT THEY CANNOT PROVIDE THEIR CHILD WITH A DECENT LIFE AS THEY HAVE NO SUPPORT

There are examples of other countries, where the solution to this issue followed the same path. However, when taking a more in-depth look at the experience of the states, there are many failures, for example, with the reintegration of those children when they turn 18. In Armenia, we have the same issue in the orphanages, especially for the girls. Did you think about it? Are there any solutions?

— The programs should be intended to help not only at the financial level. First of all, we have to prevent the child from getting into the orphanage by supporting the family. If the child eventually gets into the orphanage, it is not the end as well. If he/she cannot return to his/her biological parents, we can organize the adoption of the child or the residence in a foster family. There are many options for the child to live in a family and receive

warmth and love. However, in case all the above-mentioned options don't work, we still have the opportunity to prepare the child in the orphanage to the life outside of its walls, to provide the child with quality education, assist in the choice of the professional path, so that after leaving the orphanage the person doesn't face immediate difficulties. The programs should assist their stakeholders not only financially, by providing housing options, etc., but they should provide psychological support, help them find themselves in professional life. There are many ways to support these children, but unfortunately, I must admit that all these options are practiced in Armenia quite rarely. Success cases are very few, While systematic approach is the key to victory. Again, I must refer to the example of the

NGOs who have had success cases and have previously managed to accomplish this task in Armenia, even in the conditions we have.

On the one hand we are talking about such positive processes, but on the other hand, we have the issue with the expropriation of kindergartens. As a parent, I'm very concerned about this issue.

— I'm not aware of this issue as it's in the domain of the municipality, but here I would like to emphasize the issue of integrative approach in the kindergartens, as unfortunately, they are not available and accessible for every child but it would be easier to organize the integrative processes there, rather than in schools. The kindergartens are another way to keep the child in the family. During the meetings, one of the orphanage directors mentioned that vulnerable families usually hand over their children to the orphanages at the age of 0-3 years. To my question as to what the reason was behind that tendency, the director said that after the 3rd year the child can go to a kindergarten, so it becomes easier for the parents to take care of the baby. Therefore, kindergartens are another option of keeping the child in the family but the integrative process there should be accurately organized. There shouldn't be a separate group for the children with disabilities in which case the children rarely interact with one another and only meet when going for a walk. The groups should be integrative, and if there's a need for an additional specialist, we should provide one, and it doesn't require significant financial investments.

Today, we have kindergartens both paid and free of charge, and the same is with the schools. I hope we won't follow the path of having paid high quality kindergartens and schools and low quality public institutions. The integrative education adds up to that issue. Do you see a problem here? Don't you think that we are going in that direction?

— Not sure if the integrative education has something to do with that. However, we have the international practice of both public and private schools, and I think we must invest enough resources to provide a high quality education. Today, most of the schools in Armenia are public, and there are very few private ones, and the students in the universities are the graduates of these public schools. There's the advantage of additional classes, but of course, the education sphere needs serious improvements. I might sound pessimistic saying that this process is inevitable as the private schools are different and it is by inviting various professionals that those schools manage to ensure high quality. They also manage to pay high salaries to those specialists, meanwhile the public schools have a specific budget and payment standards. In this sense, they will distinguish from one another. But I wouldn't say that we face huge risks as the majority of the schools are public and our social conditions are in a state that will last for a long time. The question here is a little bit different. The education attracts not only with its information and knowledge provided but also with the methodology, which is very important. Moreover, it is possible to ensure the attractiveness of education without any expensive reforms, with interactive methods, with the inclusion of innovative approaches. All this can help us have maximum results with minimum expenses.

After the revolution, people asked one another when the pensions would be raised. I want to talk about the vulnerable groups, about the pensioners, and to understand the vision of our country and the ministry. How do they envision the improvement of the life quality of those people?

— Actually, the pension has slightly increased since January the 1st and I must mention that today the pensions in Armenia, and in the world, in general, are intended to satisfy the minimal needs of the person.

Unfortunately, in Armenia the pension doesn't match the actual income of the person and here the accumulative pension can be helpful, which in the future will ensure the decent retirement of the elderly people. However, today, I think that everyone understands the situation and that the solution depends on many factors. The Labor and Social Affairs Ministry is not the only responsible here. Yes, we make suggestions, and we will continue proposing an increase in pensions, but this issue also depends on the economic welfare of the country, on the minimizing of corruption risks and the improvement in targeting. However, here I would like to mention something which might not be directly connected to the financial resources but remains quite essential. I'm talking about the capability of listening to people and of understanding their needs. We receive many request letters from people who ask for meetings. From my experience, most of them just need to be heard; when you reply to their request with care, and it might sound sentimental, but yes, the letter can make the citizen feel that you care about their issue, you might not be able to provide an immediate solution to it, but they feel that you accommodate them because people need to be heard and need a respectful and caring attitude towards their issue. This is the minimum we can give, and from my experience, it changes a lot. From the other side, I think that another way of solving the problem is the accessibility of the information. Most of the time the citizens are simply unaware of the initiatives by the ministries and other governmental bodies. There are many good ideas and projects which can benefit the citizens, but they don't know about them, and the institutions fail to provide accurate information to the society. Here we also have some important task, and it's not a coincidence that we emphasize the provision of the information and try to fill in this informative gap via the social media and meetings. ♦

MIKAYEL ZOLYAN:

“We are not looking for dramatic re-alignments”

We talked about New Armenia’s foreign policy with Mikayel Zolyan, in the past a well-known political commentator, today member of the standing committee on Foreign Relations of the National Assembly of Armenia, representing “My Step” faction of the parliament. Mikayel Zolyan answers Regional Post’s questions on how Armenia’s new government is going to build its relations with the world: neighbours, Russia, EU, USA, and others.

INTERVIEW : ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN



is to pursue a foreign policy that is in the interests of all Armenian citizens. This makes our position stronger and allows us to have a sincere discussion on all issues with all our partners, whether in the West, in the East, in the North or in the South. At the same time, the new government has said on numerous occasions that we are not looking for dramatic re-alignments in our foreign policy, we are going to continue to work with our partners, and to honor our commitments. The same applies to Armenia’s participation in international organizations and integration projects.

Critics say that Armenia has lost its importance for Russia, though PM Pashinyan already had several meetings with Vladimir Putin and says that nothing’s changed. Where are we now in this relationship?

— Armenia’s relationship with Russia is very important. It is based on the interests of both countries. Armenia needs Russia and Russia needs Armenia. So, it is my firm belief that whoever is at the helm in Moscow or in Yerevan, our cooperation will continue. It is our approach is that our relations should be based on mutual respect for each others’ interests and each others’ sovereignty, and that means that if there are any issues that need to be discussed, they need to be discussed openly and sincerely,

What is new government’s main course in foreign affairs? Does Armenia go West, or stays close to Russia, or tries something else?

— I think the very question that you are asking reflects a pattern of thinking about foreign affairs that we are trying to overcome. The question is not whether we want to have a pro-Russian or a pro-Western orientation. Our foreign policy can have only one orientation: it has to be pro-Armenian, or to use a better

word, Armenia-centered. I know it sounds like a banality, nobody in their right mind would dispute that Armenia’s foreign policy should be Armenia-centered. But it’s one thing to announce that, it is another thing to implement that principle in real life. This government, unlike the previous ones, has no problem of legitimacy inside the country, it has no links with shady characters inside and outside Armenia, no business interests in foreign countries, so its sole priority



^ Nikol Pashinyan and Vladimir Putin

> Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Munich



with no taboo topics. I believe that ultimately this approach will earn us more respect in the eyes of the decision-makers in Moscow, and help to make our relations stronger. Our cooperation with Russia is developing not only on the level of two-sided relations, but also within structures of regional integration, such as EAEU.

Recently there have been several reports in pro-Kremlin Russian media against the new Armenian government. Do you think it's some kind of a signal or it doesn't mean anything?

— Russia is a big country, and its government system is quite complicated, so there can be some forces in Russia that do not want to see the friendship between Moscow and Yerevan develop further. Thus, there are different lobbyist groups that are trying to poison the relationship between Russia and the New Armenia, and some of these groups can be quite powerful. Time after time, we see how influence of such groups produces media attacks against Armenia. However, as the development of Armenia-Russia relations shows, the higher level decision-making in Moscow is not affected by these attacks. So, responding emotionally to such media attacks would only help those who stand behind them. At the same time, maybe we should be more active in working with both the

Russian government and the Russian society, to present an adequate and truthful image of Armenia's policies.

An important part of Armenia's foreign affairs is a Karabakh conflict. What are the main principles that the new government adopted? Is NKR going to return as a party in the negotiation process?

— Our approach to the Karabakh issue is based on several principles. As Pashinyan has said, any resolution of the conflict should be acceptable to the societies of Armenia, Artsakh and Azerbaijan. This again may seem somewhat obvious, yet so far no leader involved in the negotiations had articulated this thesis (and Azerbaijani side has still failed to articulate this thesis as well). Another principle that we are putting forward, is that Armenia will not negotiate under threat. In the past Azerbaijani side has been using the threat of use of force, as well various provocations and incidents on the line of contact in Artsakh and on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, as a political tool. We have clearly indicated that this is unacceptable. We also believe, that before we talk about any substantial breakthrough, we need to change the atmosphere around the conflict, we should exclude hate speech, ethnic hatred, militarist propaganda coming from all sides of the conflict. Finally, we believe that all sides of the con-

flict need to have a seat at the table, which means that Artsakh should return to the negotiations process.

When talking about pro-Western vector, people usually mean the United States. Is Trump's USA a good partner for Armenia?

— Armenia-USA relations have traditionally been warm and friendly. USA has helped Armenia a lot, starting from the first days of independence, not to mention earlier period. American Armenian community is a bridge that brings the two countries together. Today USA is going through a period of re-appraisal of its foreign policy, and its relations with many of its vital partners are going through significant transformations. Against this background, we can say that USA-Armenia relations can be characterized as constructive and stable, and continuity in these relations is not under threat. Obviously, there are some issues which Yerevan and Washington see differently, for example when it comes to the sanctions against Iran, or Armenia's humanitarian mission in Syria, but, just as in case with all other partners, open and sincere discussion of such issues ultimately only makes the relationship stronger.

Many Armenians are waiting impatiently for visa-free regime with Europe, and it looks like it's getting more realistic after the revolution and democratic changes... >

➤ Nikol Pashinyan holds informal meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Mamouka Bakhtadze

— I don't think our perspective on the relationship with Europe should be limited to the visa free regime. Visa free regime is one of our goals and it remains a high priority, but it is a part of a bigger picture. The revolution of 2018 showed that values that are usually called European, such as democracy, human rights and social justice, are close to the heart of the majority of Armenians. We are doing our best to build a state and society that would be based on these values, and it is natural that we expect Europe's appreciation and help in this difficult process. At the same time, we believe that values should not be linked to geopolitics. As we have been saying both in Brussels and in Moscow, our friendship with EU is not directed against Russia, and vice versa. So far, Armenia has been able to maintain a close relationship with both Brussels and Moscow, in spite of all the complications in the relations between these two actors, and we hope that it will stay that way. We should also not forget two-sided relations with specific EU countries, and these relations also have a great potential.



Iran is considered to be a good ally for Armenia, at the same time Islamic republic is also quite close to Azerbaijan. What are Pashinyan's ideas about it? What did his latest visit to Iran give?

— Iran is our friend, neighbor and partner. In general, the new government is working on creating closer relations with its immediate neighbors. The Armenia-Turkey border remains closed, so relations with Iran and Georgia acquire strategic importance. As with other countries, we have outlined that our relations with Iran are not aimed at any third countries, and also that our relations with third countries cannot be aimed against Iran.

Iran's policies in the region have also been based on careful appreciation of the delicate balance in the region, and respect for Armenia's interests. Iran has been a stabilizing force in the South Caucasus in general, and when it comes to Karabakh conflict in particular. At the same time, we still have not fully realized our potential for economic cooperation with Iran and we need to do that. The same goes for Georgia. Armenia and Georgia have had a mutually beneficial relationship, based on respect and understanding, but we still have to realize our full potential, especially when it comes to economics.

Relations with Georgia were always officially warm, but also envious from both sides, and from time to time some local conflicts even took place. What is going to happen in that direction?

— Relations with immediate neighbors, Georgia and Iran are a priority for this government. Our firm belief is that whatever the complexities of geopolitics, our relations with our immediate neighbors and friends are a priority, and I am glad that the Georgian side looks at our relations in the same way. Armenia and Georgia have a history of close ties and friendship that is literally thousands of years old, and today we are cooperating in many spheres, but there is still much more we can do. Take for example



the communications: some of the roads (on both sides of the border) are in bad conditions, the train and bus connections between Yerevan and Tbilisi could be improved, to put it mildly. The new government has plans to fix this, and there is also willingness to cooperate from the Georgian side. There is also a large Armenian community in Georgia, which should serve as a bridge between the two countries. Besides, Georgia has a valuable experience of reform, successfully combating government inefficiency and corruption, and this is an experience, from which we can learn a lot.

Armenia's membership to the Eurasian Union is mainly considered as a part of Armenian-Russian relations, but there are, obviously, other countries in the union. How would you describe Armenia's role in it?

— Our approach to the Eurasian Union, as well as other integration structures in the former USSR, is based on the realization that these structures have a great potential. EAEU is a huge market and it can be a great boost for Armenia's economy. At the same time, unfortunately, the EAEU is still far from realizing its full potential, except for Russia, the economic links between these countries are quite weak. Take for example airplane flights, there are very few flights from Yerevan to other EAEU countries, most of the communication goes through Moscow. As to the CSTO, it is important in terms of Armenia's security, however, unfortunately, not all of its members are equally committed to making CSTO an efficient organization, which requires taking each others' interests into account and, for example, refraining from selling weapons to a country that is in conflict with a CSTO member. However, we believe that these are all issues that can be resolved, the important thing is not to shy away from discussing these issues, but to have a sincere and constructive discussion.

Relations with other countries, visa decisions. It was much discussed that citizens of India can



^ Heads of EEU member states



> Angela Merkel in Yerevan's Tumo center

enter Armenia without visa. Why India? How is the process going on?

— Obviously, our relations with the world are not limited to the directions with the countries that we've discussed. China is becoming an important player in our region and Armenia has played a special attention to the relations with Beijing. India is another rising global giant, and we see a lot of potential in our relations with India. As to the issue of "Indian migration" into Armenia, it has been blown out of proportion. Yes, we do have some Indians who have come to Armenia to work and to live and we welcome them. At the same time, migration should be well-regulated, otherwise it would create problems both for the migrants and the host country. In any case, we need to understand, that if we want Armenia to be a developed country,

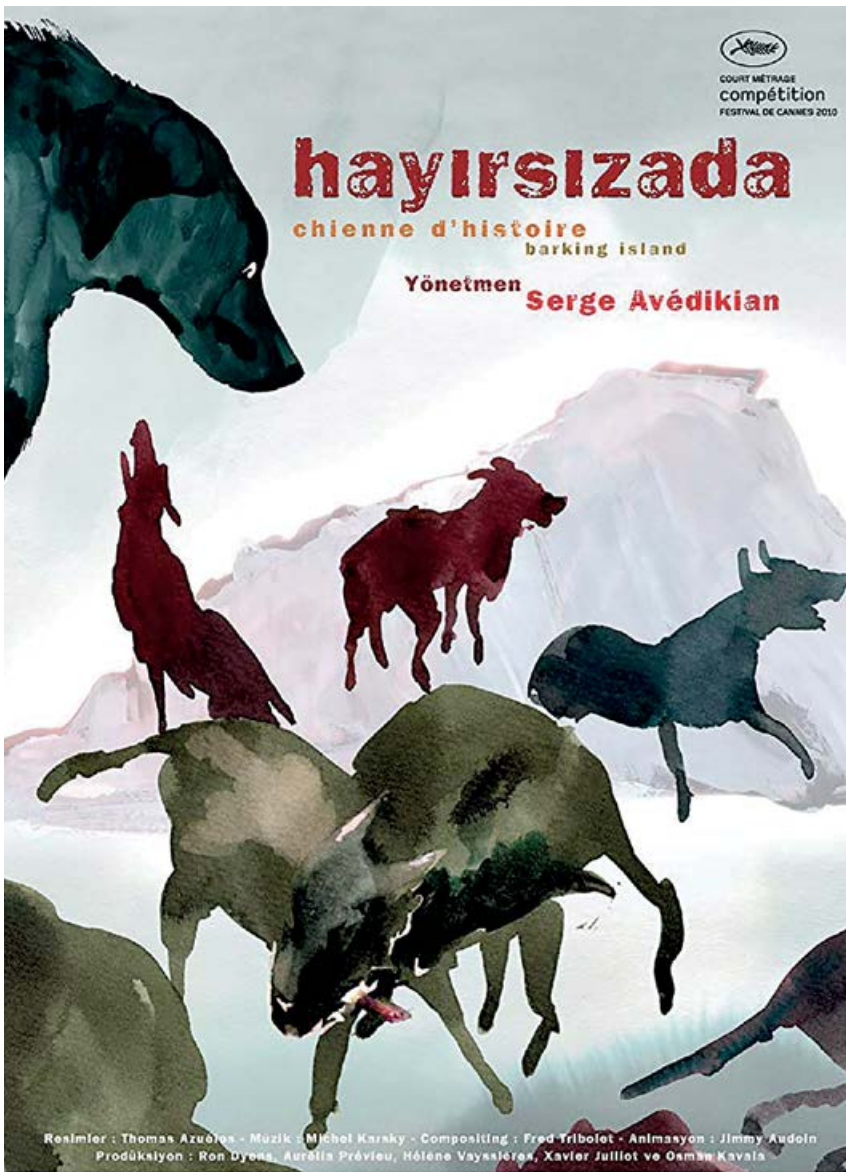
we need to be ready to accept a certain level of migration and multiculturalism. And so far, based on what I've seen, most Indians in Armenia have been able to integrate well, learning the Armenian language and respecting the local traditions. We also need to develop our relations with other parts of the world. Middle East remains a high priority, especially given the current instability in the region. Thanks to the Armenian Diaspora communities, we do have some important links to Latin American countries, Canada, Australia, but we could still do more. Also, Africa has so far been a relatively blank spot for Armenian diplomacy and there are plans to address this vacuum. In general, I would say that New Armenia is a country that is open to the world, and at the same time is conscious and proud of its heritage and identity. ♦

SERGE AVEDIKIAN:

“It doesn’t matter if it’s an animation or not”

French-Armenian actor, writer and filmmaker Serge Avedikian has won the Palme D’Or award of the Cannes film festival in shorts competition for his animation film “Barking Island” about the events that took place in Turkey in 1915. ReAnimania festival’s head Vrej Kassouny talked to him about “Barking Island” and animation in general.

INTERVIEW : VREJ KASSOUNY



What makes you turn to animation from time to time? It must be quite different experience from live action?

— It’s simply the shape and the theme of the discussed plots, you should be able to find ways to tell difficult stories. Next, the style of the film naturally plays a big role in the act of choosing, and it doesn’t matter if it’s an animation or not.

Would you consider to make a movie, where we can see both, animated characters and live action actors next to each other?

— In my next film “The last round in Istanbul”, a unique method will be used. That is, there will be induced characters, in other words – involved in the archives.

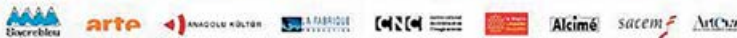
That is to say, the performance will hugely depend on the archive material that I’ll use and the natural pieces that will determine the performance. So it’s not a use of animation, but of an approach, which isn’t that far from animation.

Which one is more difficult, working with live actor or with animation character and animator?

— I think it’s equally difficult to work with actors because there is a human factor, the management of the group, the set with the actors.

But in animation we spend more time on the work, which is more detailed, precise, even less instinctive, I would say, less intuitive than with actors on a set.

Realisier : Thomas Azuóles - Müzik : Michel Karaky - Compositing : Fred Tribolet - Anımsayon : Jimmy Audoin
Produksiyon : Ron Djens, Aurélie Prévieu, Héliane Vayssières, Xavier Julliot ve Osman Kavala



Why stop-motion animation? Have you ever thought about making an animated film in other technique?

— I didn't use that technique very often for animation films, since I've been making way more traditional animation. That is to say, I was more involved in minimalistic animation, trying to respect the unique type of the painting. That is more important for me – the visualization, the visual imagination, of course, sometimes with far more difficult movements.

What was your first reaction when you did hear about Wes's Isle of Dogs?

— I knew immediately, that the original idea for Wes's film was the same as in the "Exile of the city dogs to a desert island". That's it. I wanted to see that film. And then I just saw the critical comments on my behalf, and also I heard on the radio, as if I did a comparing. It was them who had compared and pointed out the link between the two movies. At that point I hadn't done anything yet.



I hadn't seen the film back then. When I watched the film, I saw that the original idea was the same, but Wes's film referred to something completely different. It is a feature film, a weave of imagination, a happening in Japan, a prediction. So for me, there wasn't such a close and strong connection.

Did you contact him?

— Yes, I immediately contacted him. I found his email address, and asked him whether he had watched my film.

He answered that he hadn't. And so I sent him the film.

Did you two had any conflict on that? Did that cause any kind of disagreement between you two?

— No we didn't have any kind of conflict, for we both understood very well, that this wasn't a plagiarism or whatever it's called. And that artists are completely free to be inspired by the same plots and tell those plots in different ways. And I even find it very good, because it allows some individuals to think about the exile of the dogs in a different way. There was no misunderstanding. We were in contact, Wes and I, we had long conversations. But there was not any kind of misunderstanding. I'd like to repeat once again, that we the artists need to be free, to be inspired by the ideas that live in us. And we can treat them anyway we like.

Do you have any ideas for future animated projects?

— At the moment, I have no script for an animated film, but in any case if I were to make an animated film, it'd be a short and not a feature one, because the plots I choose are very dense. That is why I make animations. Currently, I've got 2 films, not with a classical approach, but rather with actors, with a performance based on archived images as I've already said. And the next film I've finished recently is more classic, different from animation approaches. ◆



◀ Serge Avedikian in Cannes film festival



EU/ AGBU/ AUA:

We need to raise
the standards

“Civil society is the backbone of any country and currently it takes over the political and social landscape of Armenia. Thus, to have a prosperous country we must work on the development of the non-profit sector but with systematic and institutional approach,” says Talar Kazanjian, the Executive Director of Armenian Benevolent Union.

Following this idea, in December 2018, for the first time in Armenia a Non-Profit Management Certified program was introduced as a result of the flourishing cooperation between AGBU’s EU funded Bridge for CSOs project and the Extensions Office of the American University of Armenia. The program is designed for senior and mid-level managers of non-profit organizations with an aim to up-armor its beneficiaries with the basic skills needed to succeed in the NGO sector. Regional Post talked with the great minds behind this project including Sergey Tantushyan, the Head of AUA Admissions, Talar Kazanjian, the Executive Director of AGBU, and several NGO representatives who went through this enlightening experience during the prototyping phase.

TEXT : MARGARIT MIRZOYAN / PHOTO : AGBU

>
Talar Kazanjian, the Executive
Director of AGBU

The Non-Profit Management Certified program is quite innovative in terms of its set up and structure as it didn’t follow the usual way of designing an educational program. “Before testing the course in practice, together with AGBU team, we implemented market assessments, held discussions with the NGO representatives, carried out surveys and focus groups. Then we adjusted the overall concept of the program to the identified market and capacity building needs,” says Mr. Tantushyan. When the initial teaching staff was defined, they prepared syllabuses for corresponding classes and

∨
Sergey Tantushyan, the
Head of AUA Admissions



designed Teaching Notes for each class, including recommendations, lineups for the course and topics. The overall process and designing the Teaching Notes in particular, was not only an advanced outlook but it also ensured the sustainability of the program, as even if the faculty changed, the course would go in due course. After all the preparatory works, the first prototyping phase was organized for the NGO representatives who received grants from AGBU's EU funded Bridge for CSOs project. After tailoring the program based on their feedback, the second phase of prototyping took place in Vanadzor, to give the program a regional scale.

The pilot version of the program had general courses such as Project Management, Marketing, Fundraising, Communications, IT and English for NGOs. It also had narrower classes such as Politics in the 21st century and HR for NGOs. There were overall 13 courses and the program took around 26-30 weeks. To become a certified non-profit manager accredited by the American University of Armenia one needed to take at least 6 courses.

Now, the pilot phase is over, and the program has its first graduates. For the participants this project became a platform for discovering their capabilities as well as finding out about the details and nuances that need to be taken into account. "There is a huge number of small trainings and workshops, but we want a systematic development of the civil society with an integration of the institutional and educational components. For example, in the IT sphere, if you don't have the corresponding specialization, you cannot work in there, the same should be for the NGO sector. We need to raise the standards!" says Ms Kazanjian.

Further the program will go into free float as an eligible certified program open for interested applicants. Everyone who works in the sphere or envisions his career path in NGO sector can apply for the program; the only restriction is to have a bachelor's degree. ♦



◀ The signing of the contract to launch the programme

QUOTES

SYUNE GHAZARYAN DOG'S PLACE NGO

The NGO sector in Armenia still needs development and this program is an irreplaceable chance for this progress. Besides the very professional teaching staff, the group of participants is also picked up very well. As a result, several corporations among us emerged.

ANUSH ZEYNALYAN, ARMENIA ART FOUNDATION NGO

Before coming to Armenia, I had never worked in NGO sector and here when I entered the sphere, I had a lot of questions. I used to do some things intuitively or use google but this program filled in the gaps that I had and provided me with all the necessary tools.

MARINA PARAZYAN, SOURCE FOUNDATION

The participation in this program was a very important experience for me. I received information and skills that are essential for someone who manages an NGO, starting from English and Project management in all its dimensions, ending with the right ways of cooperating with the Government and holding the accountability to the granting organizations.

TARON GRIGORYAN, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMMUNITY NGO

In the life of every person, there comes a time when one needs to improve his/her skills and knowledge as new tools and approaches emerge in the world every day. This program was a great opportunity to update and upgrade our knowledge on different aspects of our work, starting from legal questions ending with internal communications. The overall process was perfectly organized, and the staff was very responsive to our requests.





Bridge for CSOs:

Bridging and empowering stories

Every great initiative once was a dream lucky enough to receive support and have someone to stand for it. Bridge for CSOs programme became this support for numerous projects, creating a “bridge” between great ideas and the Armenian diaspora all around the world.

TEXT : MARGARIT MIRZOYAN



This EU-funded three-year programme was launched in 2016 and is implemented by Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and Eurasian Partnership Foundation. The core idea behind its operations is to empower the civil society in Armenia via strengthening their capacities and providing means for their further development and sustainability. AGBU is the largest network connecting the diaspora with Armenia, so the next important aspect of the programme is to bring the large impact of the Armenians abroad to their homeland.

The Bridge for CSOs has several components including the pro-bono consulting by leading specialists from diaspora to local CSO managers, Goodwill Ambassador Initiative for promoting and supporting these CSOs, and the educational component, in the face of Nonprofit Management Certified programme, designed to enhance the professional knowledge among civil society representatives. The revamped www.Together4Armenia.am website was launched in the frame of this project, acting as a platform connecting local projects with high-level professionals from all around the world. Another important component of the project is the grant provision for social enterprises and civil society related initiatives. Half of the funded projects focuses on social entrepreneurship and the other half – on social innovation. The concept of social entrepreneurship is quite new in our reality, however in the period when



Clean Goris NGO's
“From Plastic to
Plastic” project

A ceremony at
“Tonir Wedding
Village”

the civil society becomes one of the most important pieces of the Armenian puzzle, the programme will strive to turn into a platform for the further development of this trend in the country. Here are some of the prominent stories funded by the Bridge for CSOs programme which turned into real success cases.

“TONIR WEDDING VILLAGE” IMPLEMENTED BY CAROTA NGO

Songs, games, dances, traditional food and massive celebrations for “7 days and 7 nights”. Located in the small Vaghatin village in the mountainous region of Syunik, Tonir Wedding Village aims to bring these fascinating ceremonies and rituals of Armenian weddings back to our reality. Sirarpi and Hayk – the founders of the project, wanted to have a traditional Armenian wedding but they couldn't find an agency to help them with this extraordinary request.

However, they rolled up their sleeves and decided to organize their dream wedding by their own means. It took them around two years to find the location, examine the field and have various meetings with ethnographers and other relevant specialists. Eventually, they ended up having a very beautiful 3-day wedding for 300 people – everyone dressed up in an Armenian taraz, playing Armenian traditional wedding games – with all the corresponding rituals, food, and other experiences. Their wedding turned into a real fairy tale and the organizers decided to continue the project and bring this fairy tale into the lives of other loving couples. In 2018, the NGO received funding from the Bride of CSOs programme for further development of their project. Part of the funding is to be allocated to revive around 30 traditional Armenian tarazes. The project will have a full branding, a catalog of services and a website

➤ Support to special children by
“Social Project for Special Children”

will be launched in the near future. The team also got a chance to participate in a world-famous Exotic Wedding Planning Conference in Italy, which enabled them to become a part of this huge network of wedding planners, get acquainted with the giants of the field, and introduce Armenia to them.

“FROM PLASTIC TO PLASTIC” IMPLEMENTED BY CLEAN GORIS NGO

Goris city located near Vararak River, just like any city in the world – is liable to various pollutions and at some point, the plastic waste has become a major issue in the city. In 2017, a group of community activists established the Clean Goris nonprofit organization. The initiative had a goal to contribute to the solution of environmental issues in the Syunik region, to collect plastic waste and recycle it to create new products. The NGO also understood the importance of educating the younger generation in order to instill love towards nature and for that purpose they organized various initiatives for children. To address the issue of plastic waste more globally, the NGO established a social enterprise – From Plastic to Plastic, where they recycle the waste and create new plastic bags. The workers at the production site are people living in poverty, which automatically provide a solution to another social problem in the city – the lack of job opportunities. The NGO also addresses the issue of unemployment by purchasing plastic waste from these people. In 2018, the NGO received funding in the frame of Bridge for CSOs programme. The major part of these resources went on the purchase of new equipment, delivering it to the production site at Goris and training their employees. The new equipment enabled the NGO to produce 5 types of cellophane in different colors and with various prints: for example, the logo of the purchasing company. Overall, the production doubled allowing them to purchase more plastic waste from vulnerable families. The organization bought around 1500 kg mixed and ordinary plastic waste from 46 families



in previous months. Additionally, a one-day workshop was organized on the topic of what is a plastic waste in Goris and in nearby areas in order to raise awareness about the importance of such a project. The social enterprise has also provided bags and stationery for children from several families in Goris and a competition was organized on the topic of nature for local school children.

“SOCIAL PROJECT FOR SPECIAL CHILDREN” IMPLEMENTED BY SOURCE FOUNDATION

Being a mother of a special child herself, Marina Parazyan – the founder of Source foundation could clearly understand the challenges of children with disabilities and their parents and decided to establish a foundation which would support those special children and their families in their hard journey. Since the days of its establishment, the foundation has implemented a large number of projects all around the country. Starting from rebuilding institutions and adjusting them to the needs of children with disabilities and ending with organizing various therapies for those children or training individual tutors who can accompany them even at home. The diligent work of the foundation initiated a huge trust towards their activities and many leading institutions provided them with the means to implement their mission. In 2017, the foundation decided to go one step further and establish “The Source House” development and day care center. Today the center provides skill development,

rehabilitation and care services to over 100 children with moderate to severe disabilities. Later that year, the social project of the Source Foundation was launched with the establishment of sewing manufactory. Here, the mothers of children attending the center are taught how to sew and prepare special adaptations for the right positioning and fixation of the child’s limbs, head and neck. Besides the production of the necessary physiotherapeutic furniture, they also create specialized soft furniture for the exercises and everyday use at the center. Those colorful products are distributed in various centers around the country working with children with special needs. Some parts of the items are allocated to the children who stay at home due to their severe conditions. The center also established a furniture manufactory, where the fathers of those children work to create all the necessary items adjusted to the needs of children with special needs. When the foundation became a sub-grantee of the Bridge for CSOs programme, it enabled them to enter a new level and enhance the quality of their production. They purchased two brand new machine tools for wood. In addition, Mrs. Parazyan participated in the nonprofit management certified programme established by the mutual efforts of the AUA Extensions and the Bridge for CSOs programme. This opportunity allowed her to make the purpose and steps of her project more concrete and to enhance her skills as a manager. ♦

BARI TNAK

KINDNESS TAKING OVER ARMENIA

In January of 2019, Bari Tnak inclusive center opened its doors, setting the start of an unprecedented approach to children with special needs and their families in Armenia.

TEXT : MARGARIT MIRZOYAN / PHOTO : BARI TNAK ARCHIVE

The story of Bari Tnak (“Kind House”) started with a little boy who was born with a physical disability. Having no idea of how to provide their child with decent care, his parents decided to leave him in the hospital. The story was streamed via news and in the same evening, a group of women came to the hospital to offer their help to the child and his family. They managed to return the child to his biological family providing them with both material and psychological support. These women decided to continue their path and eventually Bari Mama (“Kind Mama”) charitable organization was established by Marina Adulyan, aimed at preventing the abandonment

of newborn children with disabilities. The organization has an inclusive approach which covers both parents and children, also assists the process of integration of those children into their families and society in general. As a result of their devoted work, 107 children have remained in their families. Today, the initial team has over 15 members, there is a Board of Trustees including healthy lifestyle activist and DJ Arusik Mkrtchyan and businesswoman, philanthropist Gayane Poghosyan. There are also 8000 volunteer mothers who participate in the events and assist the initiative. Everyone volunteers with warmth and kindness as the only income for their work. At the beginning of 2019, the project found its logical continuation in the face of the newly established Bari Tnak inclusive center, which embodies the whole vision of Bari Mama NGO.

The center operates in several directions. First, it offers various therapies for children with disabilities who reside in the orphanages, gives them a place to stay after they reach the age when they are to leave the orphanage, helps them find a job and provides them with a “survival kit” as they enter the adult life. The center also organizes special training for the parents, teaching them how to take care of their child who has a physical or mental disability. Finally, the center provides



temporary asylum to mothers who have children with special needs but refuse to hand them over to the orphanage under the pressure of their families and as a result leave their homes. Bari Tnak also offers all possible support to such families and children, including psychological help, rehabilitation care, provision with all the necessary products and providing legal assistance with zero charges.

“We don’t only aim to provide them with shelter and support, we want to change the overall perception of these people and help them become full members of the society,” says Arusik Mkrtchyan, the board member of the NGO.

At the initial stage, the Public Diplomacy charitable organization assisted the NGO in the purchase of the site for the center, and many celebrities joined the project making the story vocal around the public. The center also received support from AGBU in the frame of Bridg4CSOs EU-funded program for non-profits. The System of a Down’s Serj Tankian and his wife Angela continuously support the project, the singer even put his drum set at an auction for this purpose. Many companies provide products or discounts for their services. Last year, the NGO initiated over 50 events to raise money for the center and their beneficiaries. At the beginning of the construction phase, they announced a “Give One Stone” campaign which initiated a large-scale activity within the society at which people continuously presented them with stones for the building. The plan of the building was voluntarily created by Narek Sargsyan Studio, and the design of the internal space and the overall look of the building was brought to life by Soghomonyan Architects Studio. Currently, Bari Tnak has one main building and the second one is under construction. The first one includes an event platform, areas for the rehabilitation therapies and rooms for the mothers who stay in the center. With the support of the Tankian family, the second building will be ready this year. It will have 18 bedrooms to host about 36 young people with disabilities. The second building will also include a social café-bakery and several workshop studios which the organizers hope to turn into a business project in order to sustain the Bari Tnak with their resources.

“One of our greatest goals is to be able to sustain our center by our own means and we want to help our beneficiaries to do the same with their lives,” says the founder of the NGO, Marina Adulyan.

As the bakery and workshops aren’t ready yet, the financial sustainability of Bari Tnak is mainly ensured via crowdfunding, creative events and campaigns, private and charitable organizations, individual entrepreneurs, and philanthropists. However, the business plan is developed in a way that in several years the center will be able to cover all its costs. Another financial resource is the event zone of the center open for everyone and all the income the center obtains from the platform is directly allocated to the further development of the project.

On the governmental level, the NGO and Bari Tnak center cooperate with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Bari Tnak received a donation from the cabinet of the President Armen



Sargsyan, and recently, the First Lady Nune Sargsyan visited the center. However, the company doesn’t receive constant official support from the government, and the primary sources of financial stability remain the same.

It’s important to note that the initiative doesn’t provide direct finance to the families that have children with special needs. They aim to help them make their own efforts to establish themselves, get a specialization and learn to sustain their families by their own means. In this way, the mothers and young people with disabilities receive an opportunity to work, learn new skills and realize their potential. The team may provide them with food, pay their communal fees if there is an extreme need, but they strive to teach them to get out of their situation by themselves and be autonomous. Another important point is that the initiative doesn’t illustrate these people from the vulnerability perspective but presents them in a positive light. For the future, the founders and organizers of the center have a quite impressive goal; to eliminate the need for orphanages in Armenia, to provide the children with disabilities above the orphanage age with job opportunities and to attach them with someone who would care for them – a family or at least a mentor. Bari Tnak will become an integrative daytime center where they can provide care for children with disabilities who happily live in their own families. ♦

ASHXATANQ N1: “FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL”

Corporate Social Responsibility has been a part of LaGalleria Boutique’s initiatives for quite some time. No surprise “For the benefit of all” is one of the company’s mottos. Regional Post talked with Zarah Badalyan, Director of Communications at LaGalleria, about the importance of CSR.

INTERVIEW : MARGARIT MIRZOYAN

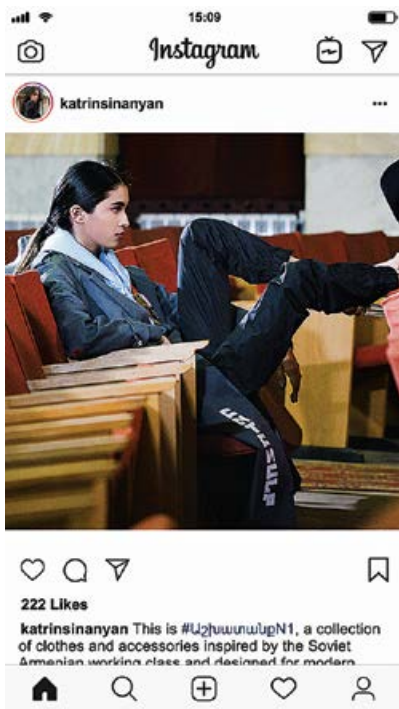
LaGalleria has been serving Armenian customers for a while. At what point did you make the CSR an integral part of the brand and why do you consider important to support the emerging Armenian designers and projects?

— Indeed, LaGalleria has been operating for almost 11 years in high end retail market in Armenia. I can proudly say that since the opening, our com-



pany has shown a commitment to support various initiatives, such as assisting artists and institutions in different disciplines of visual arts. Corporate Social Responsibility is the intersection of business with the society. And we’ve realized early on that these two sides – business and public – are not only equal, but identical. The project “LaGalleria and Ramblikoshe” is a bold example of a successful dialogue between Graphics Designers/Artists Arakelyan, Khoren Matevosyan, Areg Movsisyan and LaGalleria that took place in 2017. Another success story is the project “In cooperation with Armenian artists”, in which all of the profits went to digitalizing paintings of National Gallery of RA.

What is LGL3 Social Responsibility platform and how does it function?



— LGLR3 is a platform, inspired by young people which is designed to cultivate new cultural aesthetics in local and international scopes.

What about “Ashxatanq N1” project? Could you share more about its core vision and overall implementation process.

— “Ashxatanq N1” Clothing and Accessories Collection was inspired by the Soviet Armenian working class. LaGalleria, TUMO Studios and Fashion Designer Victor Nouman partnered together to create this collection. Profits from the Collection have been directed toward scaling up the TUMO Studios, a not-for-profit educational program. I’d like to use this opportunity to say special thanks to Tumo Studios young designers Mariam Emeksizian, Lily Mehrabian, Muradyan Varditer, Elen Azatian, Argishti Antonyan, Armine Sahakyan, Christine Hambardzumyan, Lusine Mardanyan, Sonya Avagian for their collaboration and creative support.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IS THE INTERSECTION OF BUSINESS WITH THE SOCIETY. AND WE’VE REALIZED EARLY ON THAT THESE TWO SIDES – BUSINESS AND PUBLIC – ARE NOT ONLY EQUAL, BUT ALSO IDENTICAL

What is your outlook from the Social Responsibility perspective? Do you have any upcoming projects and collaborations in mind?

— We have a number of CSR ideas and projects at LGLR3. There is one in the pipeline I’d like to share. In collaboration with the Armenian Fashion and Design Chamber Armenian young designers will create t-shirts and hoodies in the frames of “Fashion Armenia Yerevan 2019”. They will visit Artsakh and get their impressions by creating

Artsakh-inspired prints and sketches. We must implement our best to provide as many platforms for self-expression as possible for our young people. At the same time, we must do our best for them to better know their homeland. Armenia, Artsakh and the Diaspora have an incredible potential. However, on the way to converting that potential into a business initiative, business environment should demonstrate its support too. We are ready to do that, and we take that responsibility seriously. ♦

OPEN LETTER FROM PHILIP MORRIS INTERNATIONAL CEO ANDRÉ CALANTZOPOULOS



Dear Global Leadership Community,

As the CEO of Philip Morris International (PMI), I'm often asked why we do not stop selling cigarettes. Perhaps this is the wrong question. The right question might be: "When will people stop buying cigarettes?"

Today, consumer demand for cigarettes remains. Even with increasing prevention and cessation efforts worldwide, there are more than 1 billion people who smoke cigarettes. And according to the World Health Organization, there will still be more than 1 billion people who smoke in 2025. These people are your constituents, your neighbors and, perhaps, your friends and family. We have to look at alternative solutions for each and every one of these individuals.

That's why at PMI we are committed to creating a smoke-free future. It's a transformative vision, one that will change society: A future that does not include cigarettes. And we want to get there as quickly as possible.

Our ambition is to convince all adult smokers who would otherwise continue smoking cigarettes to switch to scientifically substantiated smoke-free products, which are a much better alternative for them. We have invested more than \$4.5 billion USD in research, development and production to provide adult smokers with better options. Behind this investment, and every advancement at PMI, is robust science. We are harnessing recent breakthroughs in technology to develop smoke-free alternatives to cigarettes that are much less harmful than continued smoking.

Yes, in an ideal world, all smokers should quit tobacco and nicotine consumption completely. This is the lowest-risk scenario compared with cigarette smoking.

But we don't live in a world where this can or will happen automatically – or even anytime soon.

Those who are suspicious of our intentions, who block progress without taking time to understand the science and the size of the public health opportunity, do smokers a great disservice. As we drive toward a future that is smoke-free, these detractors have become disablers of public health solutions. They are blocking change, and many smokers are being denied these alternatives.

What is more important: helping smokers or hating us? Frankly, I don't think it's reasonable to essentially condemn a population to only smoke cigarettes when there are better alternatives to smoking available. Can you imagine the criticism I would face if, years from now, it was discovered that we had better options to offer people that smoke but left them in the laboratory?

That's why I'm appealing for collaborative action. For consideration and a willingness of governments, regulators, NGOs and individuals to consider the scientific assessment of and evidence for alternative products. To be open to new concepts, conversation and change.

Consider this: In the few short years since we have commercialized smoke-free alternatives, millions of men and women have switched to products that are a better choice than continuing to smoke. By working together, through innovative products that meet the different needs of adult smokers, along with forward-thinking regulators and public health officials, we can speed up the progress to a smoke-free future. A future that will create a better world for the more than 1 billion adult smokers – and the people who care about them.

This is why we are dedicated to rigorous science and innovation that can lead to a better future.

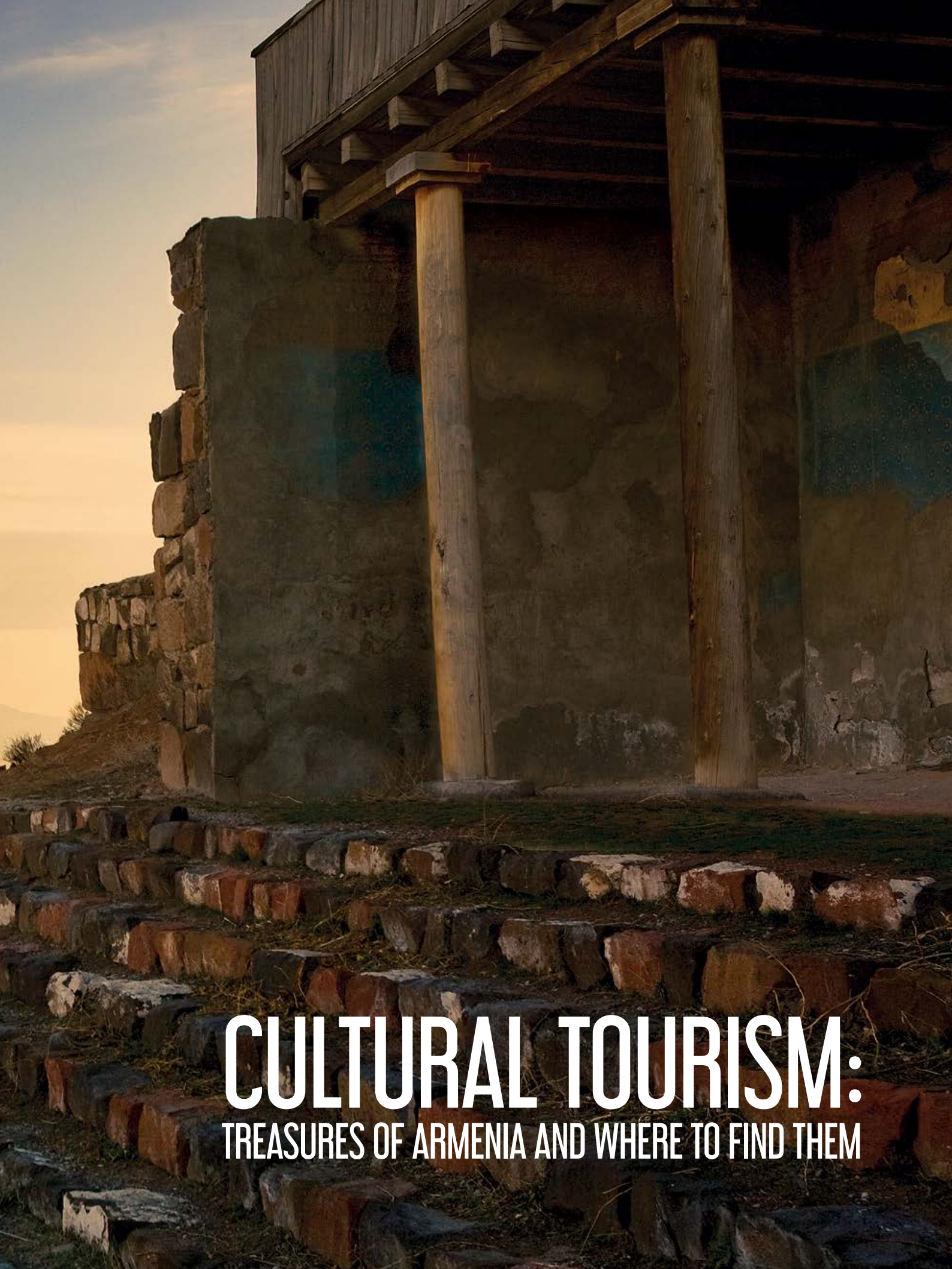
This is why we must continue to call for an open dialogue across all sectors and of all points of view, including those who disagree with us.

This is why we hope that as you read this now, you will look objectively at what we're trying to achieve and join the debate for change.

This is our why.

ANDRÉ CALANTZOPOULOS
Chief Executive Officer
Philip Morris International





CULTURAL TOURISM:

TREASURES OF ARMENIA AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

TURNING ARMENIAN HOSPITALITY INTO A BUSINESS PLAN

The Armenian hospitality is the visit card of the country for the tourists all around the world. UNDP Integrated Rural Tourism Development (IRTD) project launched in 2016, aims to turn this typical Armenian trait of character into an income generating opportunity, to boost the tourism in the rural areas of Armenia with all the benefits directed to the communities. The project is financed by the Russian Federation and implemented in close partnership with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures of RA. Starting from 2016, 90 initiatives have been implemented in more than 60 villages all over Armenia. Dmitry Mariqasin, the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Armenia, talked with Regional Post about the key points of the project and about his personal bond with Armenia.

INTERVIEW : MARGARIT MIRZOYAN / PHOTO : UNDP IN ARMENIA

Mr. Mariqasin, why does Armenia need IRTD?

— Right now, tourism in Armenia is booming. There's 20 percent uptake in tourism every year. These are very encouraging figures, and we hope that Armenia will be the next big destination in the Transcaucasus and yet, a question remains, how much of this windfall of revenue remains in the country, specifically, in the rural areas. The way the tourism industry is structured, there are standardized projects, there are tour operators, and there's a tendency for most of the funds to bypass the communities. So, our product is unique as it's about creating a long term, sustainable link between the rural population and tourism. IRTD is probably the only tourism project in Armenia that is not about tourism but is about the communities, people and their incomes. We look at tourism from the viewpoint of reducing poverty in Armenia, making sure that people living in remote villages can have a dignified life, that the young people from these villages don't leave the country and that there's maximum output from tourism for the local population. That's why we understood that we must go not with the log frame of what we think would be good ideas for



tourism, but listen to what people are ready to do and invest in those who take leadership. Also, we have to work very closely with the tourism industry and that's a very unique feature of the project as it has established a network of 60 or more tour operators and every single product that we've designed that benefits the rural communities is actually created together with the tourism industry representatives.

You also work very closely with several government entities...

— Yes, at least with four of them. Our main partner is the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures, the State Tourism Committee under the Ministry of Economy, the Marzpetarans and the local communities. Each time we initiate something in a village, these are the four government stakeholders we work with. So, it's not about tourism, it's about local economic development.

What are the results you want to see when the project ends?

— Our goal is to have 50 or 60 sustainably managed rural tourism destinations in Armenia, completely new locations on the map that didn't exist three years ago. Each point must be owned and led by the locals, it must leave most of the income in the village, become popular among the tour operators and perceived by the government as a great initiative they want to invest in more. So, we want every single point on the map to be on the top wish list for the tour operators in Armenia. Our vision is to have tourism as a part of other local economic development projects that we're implementing today or will launch in the future. We really see the potential of linking, for example, agriculture and tourism, environmental protection and tourism, etc. We'd like to view tourism as a component of many other important industries.

What was the feedback of people from local communities to the already ongoing projects?

— Look, whenever I go to visit the project sites, I see everybody smile, because you know, the "big boss is coming", but I believe that these smiles are sincere as I can see that we've really changed their lives. We take before and after photos at each project sight, and they really speak for themselves. Either there's been nothing before, which was the case for supporting the rafting initiative on the River Debed, in Lori, or there was something, which wasn't attractive to the tourists or didn't allow to generate enough revenue. So, I think when they say "thank you" to the UNDP, to the Russian Federation, they are sincere. I also can see the "Oh, I can do this" effect. They think, "My neighbor did it, I also can do it and I want to be successful, too." Eventually, we do everything via

want some experience, it's not there. I like mentioning the example of our newly opened Gastro Yard in Poqr Vedi, which is right next to the Khor Virap. It turns out that Poqr Vedi has the top tourism destination next to it, whereas it doesn't really benefit from it. So, the idea is very simple; to find places that are convenient for people to stop, where they can be greeted by an Armenian family and have lunch or dinner in a beautiful setting – in a courtyard with a view, and most importantly taste some excellent Armenian food and wine, but made in a way that would feel comfortable for a foreign tourist. There must be a toilet, the quality of the food must be on top, and the host must be able to accommodate both big and small groups. That's the concept.

B **EING A FOREIGNER MYSELF, WHILE TRAVELING AROUND THE COUNTRY** **I VERY OFTEN FIND MYSELF WISHING TO HAVE SOME ARMENIAN** **HOME FOOD WHICH IS AMAZING**

co-financing from the community and people. We don't just bring humanitarian aid but discuss and design it with them, and they co-finance it. When people put their own money into something, usually, it means they need it, because otherwise they might choose to invest their resources into something else.

What about the Gastro Yards concept? How did those ideas get generated and where can the tourists find and experience it?

— The concept is simple, beautiful and, I think, very needed in Armenia. Being a foreigner myself, while traveling around the country I very often find myself wishing to have some Armenian home food which is amazing. But the options available to you in the rural areas are usually quite limited. There are a few well-known restaurants, which are certainly nice and worth checking out, but if you wish something different or cozier or special and if you

How many Yards are there going to be?

— We've already launched four Gastro Yards and now we've started the competition for 26 more. There will be a total of 30 Gastro Yards, which means that as you travel around Armenia, you can always choose to eat in a family house and pay for the dinner, knowing that this money will benefit the community. You need to book in advance, because if you show up at someone's door with 5 people, they might not be ready to receive you. So, it's not a restaurant and we're not competing with them. This is a new niche for people that are not in restaurant business, but who would just like to receive guests. There will be a centralized website, where you can find all this information, indicating which Gastro Yard offers which service. For example, in Poqr Vedi, people can do some painting and have a dolma master-class. In Areni, the guest can learn how to make Armenian barbecue

and lavash and see how the wine is being made. So, in each location there will be something special. I know that the one in Ashtarak is completely booked until the end of June. Tour operators love this product, because they always want to add something special. When the tourists come to Armenia, and the tour manager brings them to a restaurant where ten other buses are waiting, the visitors don't feel them special, but when they appear in somebody's family house, they do. You are the only one there, as if you're visiting friends and it feels very special and it costs less. So, this is a good deal for tourists, operators and for the families.

You mentioned a competition. So, to have their own Gastro Yard, the families need to apply for it?

— Yes, exactly. According to Arman Valesyan, the manager of our tourism programs, for 26 spots we've already received 130 applications. The criteria are quite strict, for example, the applicant should have lived in the community for at least 3 years, be already operating something like a home restaurant or bed & breakfast, or have all the necessary conditions to run something like that even if in need of renovation, design or business planning support. In some cases, all we need to do is help them organize the business aspect, but in some cases, the whole space is in need of extensive renovation.

We know that very soon new community-based hotels will be ready. How was the idea generated and what are the benefits of such hotels?

— Again, we're not competing with the existing accommodations but rather creating a new niche of hotels that are located at remote spots which are too far or hard to reach. Gastro Yards are already located next to existing tourism destinations, and we are deepening the impact of tourism flow on the community, so that more income can stay in the community if the tourists go there. As to community hotels, we tried to bring completely new destinations,

such as Ditavan or Chinchin in Tavush marz, or Kalavan in Gegharkunik marz. They are hard to get to and the roads are quite bad, but because of that these locations are not very crowded, and you can enjoy pristine nature. I hope you will find time to visit for example Chinchin, and if you do, you will never forget this place. We want the hotels to be owned by the community, but we understand that the communities are unable to manage them, because managing a hotel is a professional business. We are creating a model, where the community owns the hotel, but hires a professional company to run it and the revenue is shared. In each case we're renovating an existing building, so we're not building new structures, we're taking old,

— It works because of the people. Armenians are very entrepreneurial, there are a lot of good ideas. What often lacks is the infrastructure to support these ideas, getting from idea to a business project, but once you have enough number of people to generate an actual functioning business out of the good idea, then there's the snowball effect. It also works because, in my view, Armenia is still undiscovered as a tourism destination, a so-called hidden gem. It really must be presented to the world and it has a huge potential to grow tourism which is sustainable, benefiting the communities, responsible for the environment and built on the premise of enjoying its nature, history, traditions while being respectful towards them. Plus, I think that it works

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT, THE ABILITY OF THE ARMENIAN NATION TO RESHAPE WHAT IS AROUND THEM IS AMAZING AND IT NEEDS TO BE NURTURED

usually historical buildings, reinforcing them, because the tourists usually appreciate a touch of history, not just a newly constructed building. In Ditavan, we are fully renovating the building; it will have a beautiful yard, a reception and a cafe. In Chinchin we're renovating the central spot, where there's a reception, a cafe, an exhibition and concert space, but the actual hotel rooms will be either at residents' houses or there will be newly constructed small houses. So, people will stay in decentralized hotels, but come to the center for breakfast. The hotels will be quite small, so we hope they will be booked out for the entire season. When saying we, we mean the industry, the government and other stakeholders.

Various types of initiatives are implemented in all parts of Armenia. Why do you think that this format suits the Armenian reality best, namely, the community hotels, Gastro Yards and other initiatives within the project?

in Armenia, because of the very strong leadership of the government. They are really focused on promoting tourism and we feel great support. We think this is a great momentum for the tourism to develop but our focus remains the same – how to create income for the rural population so they can live with dignity, can invest their income into the education of their children, improve healthcare and living conditions.

In your opinion, what are the most unique tourism services Armenia can offer?

— I qualify Armenia as the most ancient startup nation in the world, startup from the point of view of doing new things. The entrepreneurial spirit, the ability of Armenians to reshape what is around them is amazing and it needs to be nurtured. I myself was grown up in a big city and, like many other tourists, often look for quiet spaces that are not contaminated, places where you can

enjoy simple pleasures. Every nation is hospitable, but in Armenia there's no overdrive of hospitality, you are not being overly praised. Too much can be artificial, in Armenia it's natural and that's what matters. Armenia has very pristine and cozy locations, it has a potential of positioning itself as a green destination, and it really has a mesmerizing nature spots, combined with ancient churches, tasty food and traditions that still need to be discovered. For example, the Lori region has an interesting tradition of storytelling with some native music and we created the Fairy Tale House that brings back the tradition, and most importantly, we talked to local kids to relearn the songs and tales that were lost in the village, and now they've become the carriers of these traditions.

What are your favorite spots in Armenia that you think every traveller should visit too?

— There's a cliff in Chinchin, I can totally imagine spending the whole afternoon there with friends, especially if I know I can stay in a decentralized hotel there. Just driving in the heels of Tavush is amazing, when you exit the tunnel and suddenly find yourself in a "Caucasian Switzerland". Halidzor village (Syunik Marz) with its hotel made of "bochkas" [barrels – ed.]. I always make sure choosing the "bochka" looking up from the cliff. Of the historical cultural sights, my favorite is Noravank (Vayots Dzor Marz). I think it's stunningly beautiful... All these places will remain in my memory. And I hope many others can be there too. Armenia is easy to reach, once you've figured out how to find a cheap ticket. I think the Aviation Committee is working on this. Once this is fixed, a flow of tourists is sure to come to the country. A lot of Russian tourists visit the country, because it's affordable, there's no need for a visa, but after they arrive, you must be able to offer them something which will catch their attention. For the first visit it's easy, even for the second one it may be easy, but for them to come for the third time, you need to offer them something special. ♦



STONE LAKE NATURE PARK, TAVUSH MARZ

Stone Lake is a human made lake, which is located on the slope of the village Hovk. Jirayr Meliksetyan had a dream to build a human made lake in Hovk and one day decided to realize his lifetime dream. It took him 10 years to achieve his goal. Today his son Mher is continuing his father's legacy. He made Qari Lich a very attractive tourist destination, where people can camp, go fishing and taste wonderful food.



FAIRY TALE HOUSE, V. PAMBAK, LORI MARZ

It's a real place out of space and time: a real fairy tale house. Here you can try Armenian traditional dishes and enjoy folk concerts. Here guests can enjoy Armenian authentic food and beverage, folk concerts and puppet shows.



MIKAYELIAN CHEESE CELLAR, ARTSVAKAR, GEGHARQUNIK MARZ

Mikayelian Family Farm was established in 2012 in Artsvakar district, Gegharkunik province. Farm is engaged in livestock breeding, milk production, milk processing, and particularly in cheese production. They produce wine-cheese, cognac-cheese, horats (which is a typical Armenian cheese) and parmesan-type, hard texture cheese. The farm has a spacious and comfortable space.



YEGANYAN'S GASTRO YARD, ASHTARAK, ARAGATSOTN MARZ

Yeganyan's Gastro Yard is a unique authentically designed touristic destination established in 1930th. Here you can enjoy Armenian home-made Wine, traditional food and have a personal guide who will tell you everything you are curious to know.

“ARMENIA’S FESTIVALS HAVE A LOT TO OFFER BOTH LOCALS AND TOURISTS”

During the few last years dozens of different festivals – musical, food, wine and many more – appeared in Armenia. It has become a new trend to celebrate the best that the country has to offer. In 2017 the FestivAr Association of Armenian Festivals was founded by a group of festival organizers to coordinate, promote, and support the sustainable development of festivals in Armenia. Today, FestivAr’s 19 members are responsible for 26 festivals across the country. Regional Post talked to Association’s Executive Director Lucineh Kassarian about the importance of these festivals both for locals and tourists.

INTERVIEW : ARSHAK TOVMASYAN
PHOTO : HRANT SAHAKYAN, MY ARMENIA PROGRAM

Wine festival, Dolma festival, Gata festival... It seems like a new trend to have festivals on every national thing we have. Where do these all come from?

— For centuries, festivals have been an integral part of human civilization and celebration around the globe. The trends you’re seeing in Armenia are global – in the last 30 years the number of festivals worldwide has increased dramatically. Festivals, especially those with a cultural or religious purpose, are increasingly seen as a way to bring people together from various socio-economic, geographic, ideological and religious backgrounds. Perhaps most importantly, they exude a sense of fun and relaxation, offering time for socializing with friends and family – so direly



needed in this age of the “rat race” and what seems to be increasing scarcity of family time.

Festivals play a pivotal role in bringing together both local and visiting audiences, creating new opportunities both for the tourism sector and cultural exchange. Of course, with the new trends and marketing capacities, a large number of artificially-designed festivals has been created, which by no means minimizes the significance of celebrations, but instead enriches the experience around a specific regional fete or a dish uniquely significant for the location or a country in general. I see no harm in, for example, a beard festival (yes, it is a real thing, celebrated in a number of countries!), if it brings people together around joy, food, music, and most importantly, for accepting and embracing differences. By the way, it is estimated that there are about 200,000 festivals in Japan, so with our 40+ festivals we still have a long way to go!

Such festivals usually are made more for tourists than locals. Is that so in Armenia?

— Traditionally festivals were organized around local traditions and celebrations. With the tremendous growth of

social media, word has gone around about specific festivals, and visitors share their experiences, thus creating a “tourism niche” for others to make specific efforts to attend a uniquely-celebrated festival far from home, mostly to be exposed and enjoy the distinctively different cultural heritage on offer. For example, there is a growing trend worldwide to attend certain globally-recognized festivals, some of which are sold out within hours of their opening time. Some examples include Carnival in Brazil, Burning Man and Coachella in the US, Holi in India, Oktoberfest in Germany, Lantern and Dragonboat Festivals in China, and Sakura Matsui in Japan. While a handful of Armenian festivals like the Areni Wine Fest, Tolma Fest, and Yerevan Color Run have been internationally-recognized and are growing their attendee numbers, they are still largely a local affair.

FESTIVALS PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN **CREATING NEW** **OPPORTUNITIES** BOTH FOR THE TOURISM SECTOR AND CUL- TURAL EXCHANGE



What do these festival tend to show to foreigners and to locals?

— Whether you are into enjoying regional specialties, century-old traditions, arts and crafts, cuisine or an adventurous lifestyle, Armenia’s festivals have a lot to offer both locals and tourists. Each festival is unique, presenting a niche – for example, you surely have your favorite tolma recipe, but at the Tolma Festival you can taste both traditional tolma and completely new concoctions reviving forgotten and rare recipes. Yerevan Wine Days brings the spirit of spring, the buzz of Armenia’s burgeoning wine sector and sense of urban community on wine-infused Saryan street. Visitors can try an array of delectable street food and various libations and listen to live jazz and DJs throughout the two days of the event. One of the most prominent festivals, Areni Wine Fest, already almost a decade old, takes place during harvest season in one of the biggest wine regions of Armenia. Thousands of people attend each year, trying both local and



internationally-acclaimed wines around the location where the world's oldest winery and wine production were discovered. HayBuis Festival transports you to Yenokavan, Tavush region, where you learn about Armenia's local herbs and methodology of herb usage, including culinary and medical purposes, while enjoying herbal tea parties, exploring the biodiversity of the forest and participating in cooking classes. Here in the forested hillsides of Yenokavan you can also enjoy Yell Extreme Fest, with activities such as paragliding, mountain biking, horseback riding and ziplining. The EcoTourism Festival brings eco-travelers together in Yeghegis, Vayots Dzor, to share yoga, mountain climbing, stargazing and camping, cycling and more. There is no shortage of music festivals, discovering new names and enjoying already beloved groups, gathering around campfires to create new and showcase famous old songs. Sail of Hope International Bard Festival, Sevan International Music Festival, the new conceptual Urvakan Festival for urban studies, advanced music and visual

arts, the already treasured Gutan Folk Songs and Dance Festival, and the new Armenia International Tango Festival, which is hosting a large number of international guests not only to enjoy milonga and other attractive events around Yerevan, but also takes the visitors around Armenia throughout their week-long stay to enjoy the nature, culture, food and hospitality of our country. Armenia's sweets and fruits are also well-represented – with the Raspberry Festival in Ashotavan, Honey and Berry Festival in Berd, Mulberry Festival in Goris, and the newly introduced Blueberry Festival in Margahovit, to be complimentary with the Gata Festival, where, together with delicious pastries, folk dances and songs, world's largest gata is baked. You can enjoy strolling around the beautiful Swan Lake in Yerevan, and participate in the Tea and Coffee Festival, sampling well-known and new brands, and enjoying coffee and herbal concoctions transporting you to the foothills of the mountains where these herbs come from, or participate in the exciting and vibrant Yerevan Color Festival. Want more



traditional dishes, cooking and baking, dances and games and celebration of barbecue or potato harvest? Try Mets Pur in Gavar, or Khorovats Festival in Akhtala. Next February the Snowman Festival invites its guests to Jermuk to participate in creative snow art com-

Armenian Festival Calendar 2019



<p>MAY 3-4 Yerevan Wine Days <i>Yerevan</i></p> <p>MAY 3-5 Urvakan Festival <i>Yerevan</i></p> <p>MAY 19 Tolma Festival <i>Around Zvartnots Temple</i></p> <p>JUNE 1 Yerevan Gastro Day <i>Yerevan</i></p> <p>JUNE 15 Color Festival Yerevan <i>Yerevan</i></p> <p>JUNE 21-30 Armenia Tango Festival <i>Yerevan, Tsakhdzror</i></p>	<p>JUNE 29 Haybuis Festival <i>Yenokavan</i></p> <p>JULY 6 Mulberry Festival <i>Goris</i></p> <p>JULY 13-14 Ecotourism Festival <i>Yeghegis</i></p> <p>JULY 19-21 Sail of Hope Bard Festival <i>Sevan, Dilijan</i></p> <p>JULY 20 Blueberry Festival <i>Margahovit</i></p>	<p>JULY 27 Raspberry Festival <i>Ashotavan</i></p> <p>JULY 27-28 Yell Extreme Festival <i>Yenokavan</i></p> <p>AUGUST 3-4 Sevan Int'l Music Festival <i>Sevan</i></p> <p>AUGUST 10-11 Honey and Berry Festival <i>Berd</i></p> <p>AUGUST 18 Khorovats Festival <i>Akhtala</i></p>	<p>AUGUST 23 Gutan Folk Song/Dance Fest <i>Yerevan</i></p> <p>SEPTEMBER 7 Arts and Crafts Festival <i>Dilijan</i></p> <p>SEPTEMBER 14 Yerevan Music Night <i>Yerevan</i></p> <p>SEPTEMBER 20-22 Crossroad of Peace Festival <i>Byurakan, Gyumri, Ashtarak, Yerevan</i></p> <p>SEPTEMBER 21 Gata Festival <i>Khachik</i></p>	<p>SEPTEMBER 27-28 Tea and Coffee Festival <i>Yerevan</i></p> <p>SEPTEMBER 28 Mets Poor Festival <i>Gavar</i></p> <p>SEPTEMBER 29 1000 Years Village Life <i>Pshatavan</i></p> <p>OCTOBER 5 Areni Wine Festival <i>Areni</i></p> <p>FEBRUARY 15-16, 2020 Snowman Festival <i>Jermuk</i></p>
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www.festivar.am

petition, build snowmen and other figures, and enjoy local folk music and dances around bonfires. And of course, a number of folk festivals, such as 1000 Years of Village Life, the Arts and Crafts Festival, Crossroad of Peace, and others, will show you how to celebrate and experience real cultural revival with Armenia's oldest traditions.

Why did the festivals gather together into the FestivAr? What is the organization's main goal?

— In 2017 a group of festival organizers came together and founded FestivAr – Association of Armenian Festivals, to coordinate, promote and support the sustainable development of festivals in Armenia. Within a year about 25 festivals across the country were under the FestivAr umbrella. Sharing resources, experiences, practices and solutions brings these members together to support the expansion of this exciting growing sector in cultural heritage and tourism. FestivAr was founded with the support of the My Armenia Program, a cultural heritage tourism program funded by USAID and implemented by the Smithsonian Institution. We are working closely with the UNDP and the State Tourism Agency to ensure that the essential assessment is done and necessary equipment is provided for shared use for all the member festivals. We are always in search of partners which have similar goals – rural development, revival of heritage, components of environmental and cultural education, and youth empowerment. Our member-festival number is growing rapidly, and our goal is to have all the festivals conducted in the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh included in FestivAr.

Many of the festivals are already established and known, but still, what are the challenges? What should be improved?

— Whether you ask an already reputable and well-known festival or a newly established one, the first and foremost concern is always funding. As mentioned above, most festivals, especially



FESTIVALS, IN PARALLEL TO PRESERVING CULTURAL WEALTH, ARE ALSO TOOLS FOR PROMOTING TOURISM AND BOOSTING LOCAL OR REGIONAL ECONOMY

in Armenia, are not state funded (or very minimally funded), which by no means can ensure the sustainable growth of an annual event. There are grants which several festivals apply to, but mostly these are based on individual, corporate or in-kind donations. One thing is certain – there is no shortage of cultural or historic material to present. Here in Armenia we have an incredible wealth and abundance of traditions that can be shared and exposed to visitors for the next 100 years to come. Other challenges, especially for festivals in the rural areas, can be lack of local infrastructure, dire road settings, absence or minimal public transportation, and insufficient infrastructure conditions (no electricity or water and sewage capacity). The problems are numerous and it will take ample time to improve these conditions, which is directly correlated with the economic development and improvement of rural and remote areas of Armenia. Having said this, it is very important to conduct an even larger number of festivals outside of urban areas, for the same exact reason, and to trigger decentralization and faster development of these milieus.

What are economic realities of those festivals? Is it possible for the festivals to be self-sustainable and even turn a profit?

— Local festivals, in parallel to preserving cultural wealth, are also tools for promoting tourism and boosting local or regional economy. While the majority of the festivals are not yet sustainable, they are still happening on an annual basis, thanks to the dedication and tireless efforts of the organizers and volunteers. Having organized a festival myself, I can assure you that it's like birthing a start-up and fighting for each donation and investment, with fierceness and determination. Each partner is a doorway to a better event. Each new unfunded idea will scare and excite equally. You want to have a festival that grows each year not only by number of participants and visitors, but by the level of progress and impact it has for locals and visitors alike. I am not yet aware of a festival that turns a profit – which means there is significant room for innovation and growth.

What is your favorite festival and why?

— It would be unfair to handpick one. Each festival has its colors and tastes (no pun). We should celebrate life, every single day we live. It's a gift we should cherish, like a beautiful smile that radiates energy, a sweet comment, a sincere thank-you, or a kind gesture. Festival days are like celebrating those gifts – kind of the icing on the cake.

What festival is missing?

— Of course, there are other festivals happening in Armenia and Artsakh – we welcome them all, and are looking forward to seeing them join our FestivAr family too. And of course, we welcome you all to enjoy the festivities with us! ♦

TEN YEARS AND COUNTING

A decade ago, one of Yerevan's architectural landmarks, Cascade, finally became something more than just a huge stairway to Zejtoun district. It was renovated and inhabited by the pieces of contemporary art. The initiator of the project was American-Armenian businessman and philanthropist Gerard Cafesjian. It is called Cafesjian Center for the Arts now. Regional Post talked to the Center's head, Vahagn Marabyan, about the things that have taken place recently, and those that are on their way.



INTERVIEW : DIANA MARTIROSYAN / PHOTO : CCA

Mr. Marabyan, ten years: Is it a lot, or is it just the beginning?

— Well, during all those ten years, we have organized and hosted 60 exhibitions, 48 educational programs which included 1100 meetings and 52,000 participants, approximately. I think it's quite a lot, isn't it? But we are going to host many educational and cultural events, which will increase the number of our activities. So, on one hand it's a lot, on the other hand it's just the beginning.

What is happening in the Center right now?

— This year, Cafesjian Center for the Arts is celebrating its tenth anniversary, so all the events and exhibitions are likely to be pointing to that event. The year started with a big event dedicated to Hovhannes Tumanyan's 150 anniversary, during which we handed out special fairy tale books to 62 libraries in the city as a result of our educa-



tional program. Also, we opened an exhibition "The History of Cascade" devoted, exclusively, to the prehistory and the background of The Cascade Complex, starting from the 60s. Besides, we have various musical events, both classical and contemporary, which we organize every week advised by our musical board, public museum days, also a significant cooperation between our Center and other museums in the city, which results in attendance increase. Therefore, the program is quite heavy and eventful, plays a prominent role in the urbanistic and cultural life of Yerevan, and not only.

Why do you think Cafesjian Center for the Arts is so important for Yerevan and Armenia? What makes it special?

— It's because this kind and type of museum is open and attractive for tourists, which makes the space unique not only for the country, but also for the region. Not every capital in the world has three Fernando Botero sculptures in just one garden: in the past years, we had no opportunity to possess or to see international and worldwide modern art pieces in this volume. This kind of experience affects and influences the mode of life of the citizens; the art is out of the box, it's closer, more accessible. It's the achievement of the city life to have and present to the world the art pieces of distinguished, remarkable and prominent modern artists, and to keep them in this way. The most popular mention in the international press is the visibility



CAFESJIAN CENTER FOR THE ARTS

The Cafesjian Center for the Arts is dedicated to bringing the best of contemporary art to Armenia and presenting the best of Armenian culture to the world. Inspired by the vision of its founder, Gerard L. Cafesjian, the Center offers a wide variety of exhibitions, including a selection of important works from the Gerard L. Cafesjian Collection of contemporary art. Having celebrated its grand opening in November 2009, CCA continues to exhibit unique works of modern and contemporary art and offers a diverse program of lectures, films, concerts, and numerous educational initiatives for adults and children. Over one million people have visited the Center annually since its opening.



of our Center, it's openness and hospitality. Tourists need not only the visual part of the museums, they also want to reach its content, and the museums are the exact places and institutions that can show both the ethnic and the cultural side of the country you visit.

Museums are also educational places...

— It's true. If years ago there was a stereotype that museums are not linked to schools and we had to connect to the

City Hall and various ministries and ask them to inform educational establishments, nowadays the city and regional schools book tours 1-2 months in advance, because it is not possible to organize those tours without booking them and it's not just us involved, all the museums around the world participate in educational activities. I can officially declare that there's a change in the situation; museum education is highly appreciated and important both for teachers and students.

What is the biggest problem in this field that needs to be changed in the first place?

— Now, we have some brand-style museums, they are popular and well known, but anyway, if we talk about museum sphere in the country, there is a visibility issue. We have many remarkable art pieces we ought to present in a more attractive way, therefore there is plenty of work to be done both for those museums and for the ministries, as well as for other state institutions of the country. There is a need to organize mutual partnerships to present it in the best way for both the citizens of Armenia and the visitors. I know that schools usually organize visits to many house museums of renowned writers, musicians and artists; it's included in their school program. But this is not enough. Treasures of our local museums are worthy of being presented in a more attractive and well-promoted way, so there is a mutual interest for the museums and the government.



What is going to happen in the Center in the future?

— We are rather open to any kind of cooperation, and are very interested in high quality modern art events – the genre is not very essential – even in electronic music events, like the one, we know, is going to be held in the Palace of Versailles. As a museum, our main task is to present modern art events to our Armenian audience. ♦



GEVORG ORBELYAN:

“WE NEED A MUSEUM OF LOVE”

To understand the importance of the role of museums in Armenia and to summarize the urgent problems of the field, we talked to Gevorg Orbelyan, museum expert and head of Tourism unit at the Yerevan municipality.

INTERVIEW : AMALIE KHACHATRYAN



What is the mission of museums?

— Museums are considered a unique visiting card for any country. There are currently a couple of challenges and threats connected with economic, demographic and ecological crisis that museums face. However, we have enhanced our chances for global cooperation through digitization and modern technologies.

Many say that today everything could be found on the Internet. But what about the museum atmosphere? The museum-visitor connection is very essential; visitors can see and sometimes touch the works and feel the aroma of the place.

Who is visiting museums in Armenia today?

— Sadly, Armenia does not have the culture of volunteering. In many countries, retired people volunteer in museums, organize various interactive events and enjoy their work. We lack also the culture of visiting museums with families; such visits are very rare.

Schoolchildren go to museums because these visits are included in their curriculum, while for the young people the museum projects are incomplete. If students do not get an internship at museums, they are not eager to visit those cultural places.

What special offers do we have for the youth? For example, in many countries, students have a free entrance to public museums, even to Paris national museums such as the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay, which are free for all persons under 26 from the European Union.

In Armenia, the prices of museums vary depending on the segment of visitors; there are discounts for schoolchildren, students etc. I do believe that even if museums were free for youngsters, the latter would still not visit museums.

We need to attract students, hence the service model should be interesting for them. Young people can

>
Hi-tech in Japanese museum



SCHOOLCHILDREN GO TO MUSEUMS BECAUSE THESE VISITS ARE INCLUDED IN THEIR CURRICULUM, WHILE FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE THE MUSEUM PROJECTS ARE INCOMPLETE

celebrate special events in certain museums. It has become quite popular to organize wedding photo shoots in museums. I myself did so for my wedding. Of course, culture experts do not approve of this practice, but it might promote family visits to museums, because young couples might start visiting museums with their children. Holidays can be celebrated there, too. Celebrations of such holidays as the Eve of Great Lent – a day to enjoy delicious ethnic dishes spirited with national songs and dances, and the Harissa Day are often organized at the Perch Proshyan House Museum. Such events attract both local peo-

ple and tourists. Museums are very important for locals, but tourists are the target group. We also visit many museums while we travel. My friends always ask me to recommend them other museums besides the most famous ones.

Museum diversity is vital: a chocolate museum, beer or water museum, sex museum, even museums of toilets exist in the world. You can start a museum or an exhibition of anything and attract people.

We mostly focus on presenting our huge heritage, meanwhile lacking tourist attractions. Even a museum of illusions can attract not only tourists but local youngsters as well. >

➤ Children museum
in Japan

— Well, there is The Little Einstein Science Museum (a private one) in Armenia which can also be considered interactive; it offers a lot of educational programs for children. And a Chocolate museum has recently opened in Aragatsotn province. But it goes without saying, we lack those attractions and this is what we need to improve. There are many cases when those types of museums make cities and countries a tourist attraction. Such museums do not specifically need to be connected to our traditions and history.

What exactly would you suggest?

— In my opinion, a museum of love might work well for Armenia. We could present not only love stories from our history, but also exhibitions concerning our love-related holidays. This could be a great idea. There were some suggestions on establishing a City Life museum, which could display works revealing Armenians' everyday life. We could exhibit



A MUSEUM OF LOVE MIGHT WORK WELL FOR ARMENIA. WE COULD PRESENT NOT ONLY LOVE STORIES FROM OUR HISTORY, BUT ALSO EXHIBITIONS CONCERNING OUR LOVE-RELATED HOLIDAYS



them with audio and visual effects: women washing carpets outside their houses or neighbors drinking coffee together...

I would also love to have a wax museum in Armenia: for instance, Madame Tussaud's is a major tourist attraction in many countries. There is also a Museum of Tolerance in Moscow, which is thought to be the largest Jewish museum in the world.

By the way, the Armenian American Museum will open soon for the Armenian community in Glendale. The museum will be a center for Armenian Americans to discover their roots and for people of diverse backgrounds to discover cross-cultural connections.

Are museums in Armenia attracting tourists?

— 15 years ago, my answer would be NO, but in recent years the government of Armenia has intended to enhance the role of museums and many of them have been restored. There is an interactive map equipped with light and sound effects at the Yerevan History museum for easier acquaintance with the old and new city history. An example of the usage of new technologies is the 3D hologram which can be seen in the Hovhannes Tumanyan Museum, as well as in the Alexander Spendiaryan House Museum, the Aram Khachaturyan Museum etc. Armenian museums have even started to compete and to pay attention to the website branding and social activity.

In Japan, there is a museum of trains which might seem uninteresting at first sight, but the exhibitions are presented there in a way that enable you to discover everything related to train history. There are even games which when playing you can feel as if you are driving the train. Inside the museum, people can also enjoy their time in a cafe or spend time buying souvenirs from the gift shops.

We don't have the practice of having cafes inside the museum building. In many famous museums of the world, cafes are even nicer and more attractive places to visit than the museums themselves.

— In the world, when museum workers notice a drop in attendance, they open modern designer cafes to attract visitors. The government funding for museums is very small, so they cannot keep up with the times. Some private museums have tackled this problem on their own. Museums should not be perceived only as those



quiet places where nothing happens, and nothing can be touched. Museums should be active, alive and noisy. Most of Armenian museums do not have their own souvenir shops. It is an issue that should be considered. Tourists who visit museums, sometimes choose not to leave the building and have a rest at a café inside the building and enjoy a cup of coffee or water. It is a global issue that should be raised for discussion.

What are the key problems of museums in Armenia and which of them are the most urgent?

— Firstly, museums need to have financial stability to implement different projects. Since they have a direct connection with tourism, the government support is vital for this sphere. If tourists want to watch a performance, they can hardly find performance in English, but museum exhibitions always have brief information in English

and Russian. Museums are a step ahead of theatres.

Secondly, we need more friendly employees in the museums so the visitors are eager to come back again; it should feel like rereading a good book. Audio guides could be a great solution if there was enough funding. However, human connection is the most important, so we need to have a qualified and friendly staff.

Thirdly, although many museums are active on social websites and they run their websites quite productively, still, I would like to see them more active and available for direct communication with visitors. Museums also need to cooperate with each other, as quite often tourists cannot visit some of the museums because while one of them is open, the other is closed. It would be better if they operated on the same days.

Fourthly, and lastly, a law on tourism is needed, like the law on libraries or import and export of cultural property. ♦

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

Every year, on one of the days in May, tens of thousands of Armenians spend the day in museums till late at night. And, for the workers of the museums, it's probably the most loaded day of the year. This year, on the following day of this international event, we visited several museums to talk with the security guards about the usual, not crowded days.

TEXT / PHOTO : BIAINA MAHARI,
FIRST PUBLISHED IN "YEREVAN" CITY MAGAZINE #26, 2014



GEOLOGICAL MUSEUM | MARTIN
I'd been working at the geological institute since 1981, and several years ago I moved here, to the museum. The nights are quiet, the museum is very interesting... It houses such lovely stones, even a meteorite. There's even a mammoth, a mammoth's puppy to be exact, a Leninakantsi: it was found in Gyumri. They say it was 4-5 years old.



YERVAND KOCHAR MUSEUM | ADMINISTRATION

Since 1998, we have no security guards. We've taken up new technologies and at night the museum's left all alone with the security system.

THE SERGEI PARAJANOV HOUSE MUSEUM | BABKEN

I wouldn't say it's an exciting job: you're on your own the whole night, not a single bud to talk to. Also, I don't have any favorite exhibit in the museum, I don't much understand Parajanov's works...

It seems like it must be really scary here at night, and in fact, at the beginning, there were so many different noises the whole night – banging, crashing, dripping... I was thinking, "Who's there? What are they doing?" Then, little by little I got used to them, I learnt where they came from, and I got over the fright. All in all, nights are normally quiet.

Couples often come to that small street in front of us, and in the summers, it turns into a lovers' street. Soon, as days get warmer, they'll be there. Also, we have an orchard. That's a pity our apricot tree may not yield this year. Its apricot's very tasty; the cherry tree may, but not the apricot tree, for sure.





THE HOVHANNES TUMANYAN HOUSE MUSEUM | SERGEI

I've been working here since 1981. I quit in 1985, but in 1993 was called back. In the 1980s, Tumanyan's daughter was still living here with her family, in the two rooms over there which were closed to visitors. They always invited me to tea at 7. Very interesting people came to visit them, artists, architects, painters ... They were talking, and I was sitting quietly and listening. They said, "There can't be a New Year without you", and we always met the New Year together. But, to be honest, even though I've been working here for so many years, I'm not properly familiar with the exhibits. In the museum I love my room best. Nothing's better.



THE AVETIK ISAHAKYAN HOUSE MUSEUM | GNUSH

It's been 15 years since I've worked here as a security guard. The nights are quiet. My mother-in-law lives two houses away from here, so everybody here knows me. My favorite place in the museum is the garden. It's very nice, and the air is clean... It's a pity that this year the whole crop and the flowers were lost because of the heavy snow. Last year, there were so many cherries the workers were taking home in buckets, but this year, even the lilac didn't bloom...

It's so good being alone here at night: you can think in the quiet and eat or watch TV whenever you wish. You're the boss of your own head and day... Rather night, not day.



THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART | SERGEI

Our place is a bit like a hole in the wall, there are constant fights around us and we're always worried someone's gonna break a window. Also, the neighbors above us constantly leak water, so we always walk around at night, so we can protect the pictures in case they suddenly leak water again.

It was at the beginning that I was very excited, I was walking around, looking at the pictures. Now, I've seen a lot and already know all of them. I love Hakob Hakobyan's paintings, Minas', and Elibekyan's.

MUST-VISIT MUSEUMS OF ARMENIA

There more than 140 museums of different subjects and sizes in Armenia. Regional Post selected 12 of them, that should definitely be in your must-visit list.

TEXT : MARGARITA MIRZOYAN



NATIONAL ART GALLERY / HISTORY MUSEUM OF ARMENIA

Republic Square, Hanrapetutyan Sq., 4 Building, Yerevan Armenia

The most recognizable building in the Republic Square hosts two quite prominent museums; National Art Gallery and History Museum of Armenia. Previously, the building hosted a public library and a concert hall. It also served as a shelter for the orphans who were forced to escape Western Armenia in the period of Armenian Genocide.

The National Art Gallery is among the largest museums in the Caucasus, established back in 1921 by order of the Soviet Armenian Government, as an Art Department (one of the five departments) of the State Museum. The first director of the museum was world famous Armenian painter Martiros Saryan. The gallery has fifty-six halls, exhibiting a large number of artworks by Armenian, Russian and European artists. The works of Aivazovsky, Sureniants, Saryan, Chagall Donatello, Rodin, Kandinsky, and Serov are presented in the numerous halls of the museum, providing an insight to the history of decorative applied art and national fine art from ancient times till present moment.

On the two lower floors of the building, the Historical Museum of Armenia is located. The museum presents objects of material culture, found on the territory of Armenia and relating to periods from the Stone Age to the end of the XIX century. The museum was established in 1920 based on the collections of Armenian Ethnographical Association of the Caucasus, the Ejmiatsin Matenadaran, the Nor Nakhijevan Museum of Armenian Antiquities, the Museum of Antiquities of Ani, and the Vagharshapat Repository of Ancient Manuscripts.

The Museum exhibits over 400,000 items of national heritage from the spheres of archeology, ethnography, numismatics. Originally named the Ethnographic-Anthropological Museum-Library, the History Museum continuously replenishes its collections via purchases and findings in ancient settlements in the territory of Armenia.





MARTIRO SARYAN HOUSE - MUSEUM

Saryan 3 street, Yerevan Armenia

The house-museum of famous Armenian painter Martiros Saryan is another key spot in the Yerevan. The museum was established in 1967 during life of the artist by the order of the Armenian government. The author lived and worked in this mansion from 1932 to 1972. During that period three storey gallery was designed by Mark Grigorian near his house and the museum was created. The house of the artist is one of the projects of Alexander Tamanian, an eminent Armenian architect, and resembles the initial style of "Yerevanian" architecture.

The permanent exposition located on the three floors has over 300 works and leads the visitor from the early years of the author to his last days in chronological order. The collection also includes famous works from Saryan family collection. The artist's studio, where the author worked up to his last days is open for the visitors as well. During the years of its existence, the museum was supervised by many prominent artists. From 2004, the director of the museum is the Saryan's granddaughter Rouzan Saryan. The exposition represents the variations of Saryan's art, the mastery of bright and colorful landscape, unique portraits, the portrayal of festive life, book illustrations, and theatrical-decorative paintings. The core of the museum's collections are the 50 works which the author donated to the gallery.

Today, the museum has quite progressive objectives, such as creating a digital database of the author's works and spreading the words about him all around the world. There are many memoirs and letters stored in the museum that were recently exposed to the press. The museum also organizes educational events and chamber music concerts for school children, youth and elderly people to get them acquainted with the colorful world and vision of Martiros Saryan. >



SERGEY PARADJANOV MUSEUM

Dzoragugh 1st St, Yerevan, Armenia

A cozy old-Yerevan style house in the heart of the city is home to the Sergey Paradjanov's Museum since 1988. "Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors", "The Color of Pomegranate" ("Sayat-Nova"), "The Legend of Suramskaya Fortress", and "Ashik-Kerib". These are the masterpiece films which brought worldwide fame to Sergey Paradzhanov (Sargis Paradzhanants, 1924-1990). His applied art compositions are another dimension of his self-expression on the motives of Armenian, Oriental and European Art.

Assemblages, flat and volumetric collages, drawings, dolls, sketches for films, all these items are stored at his house-museum in Yerevan. A part of them was created while the artist was in prison, suspended from making films for over 15 years. The unique collection manages to convey Paradjanov's original character, talent and humor while illustrating the difficulties faced by artists, filmmakers, and writers living under the Soviet regime. Paradjanov himself showed the other side of Armenian culture and his house-museum embodies him and his vision quite perfectly. More than 600 works by S. Paradzhanov, as well as his personal belongings and furniture from his Tbilisi house are presented in the museum. The gallery also holds numerous letters and writing of the artists as well as letters by A. Tarkovsky, L. Brik, Y. Nikulin, V. Katanyan and other cultural figures.

The museum uses artistic and exhibition principles of S. Paradjanov himself thus clearly conveys they spirit and character of the later. For 27 years, the museum organized 64 exhibitions in 30 countries, keeping the the name of the artist vocal around the globe.





MATENADARAN MUSEUM – INSTITUTE

53 Mashtots Avenue, Yerevan

The house of the ancient manuscripts, Matenadaran was established in 1959. The Edjmiatsin's Monastery manuscripts have become the basis of the collection of the center. The oldest specimen, related to the invention of Armenian alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots, dates back to the 5 AD.

The Museum – Institute exhibits numerous samples of old Armenian writings and miniatures, around 23,000 manuscripts, documentaries, antique books, precious compositions from all around the world. There are also works of ancient and medieval Armenian historians, writers, philosophers, mathematicians, geographers, doctors. More than 2000 documents from the assemblage are in Russian, Hebrew, Latin, Arabic, Syrian, Greek, Japanese, Persian, and other languages. Some of these documents aren't preserved in their original language but the Armenian translations are kept in the collection.

The Matenadaran collection is a valuable scientific and historical base for studying the history and culture of Armenia, as well as the neighboring nations in the Caucasus and elsewhere. Initially, Matenadaran had only one hall, but currently, there are over 15 halls separated thematically. There's a hall dedicated to Artsakh's manuscripts, Nor Jugha writings, eastern manuscripts, medieval medicine, ancient maps, and archive documents. The center also has the so-called virtual hall, where films and images related to the manuscripts are presented continuously.

In 2010, the second building was constructed, where the scientific departments were moved, and the main building was mainly allocated to the exhibition halls, as well as the offices, labs and strategic libraries. The building itself has the spirit of traditional Armenian architecture of the XII-XIII centuries. In front of the building, there is a monument to Mesrop Mashtots – the founder of the Armenian alphabet, as well as other prominent thinkers of ancient Armenia, such as Movses Khorenatsi, Anania Shirakatsi, Mkhitar Gosh, Toros Roslin, Frick, Grigor Tatevatsi



THE GALLERY OF MARIAM AND YERANUHI ASLAMAZYAN SISTERS

242 Abovyan St, Gyumri

The Museum of Aslamazyan sisters was established in 1987 when Mariam and Yeranuhi Aslamazyan's decided to present around 620 of their original works to their hometown Gyumri. Located in the center of the city, today, the gallery is an art museum which exhibits paintings, graphics, and ceramics created by the Aslamazyan sisters. After the Gyumri Earthquake in 1988, the gallery building, served as a shelter for the homeless people and only got reopened in 2004.

The gallery is old Gyumri-styled two-story building. The works of Yeranuhi Aslamazyan are exhibited on the first floor, and the works of Mariam Aslamazyan on the second one.

Yeranuhi and Mariam, who received their education in Leningrad Institute of Arts were not only artists but also active public figures. During the Great Patriotic War, Yeranuhi Aslamazyan actively worked to provide people with responsive art to distract them from the horrors of those times. Today, some of her works are displayed in the State Tretyakov Gallery. Mariam, on her turn, was highly appreciated not only for her paintings but for the unique ceramic plates in colorful and warm themes. Some works of Mariam Aslamazyan are also in the State Tretyakov Gallery, including "Armenian Still Life" and "Red Cactus Flower".

What's interesting is that one can see and feel literally everything in her works, Armenian motives but at the same time African elements. Both sister's traveled the world and expressed everything they've witnessed in their art and brought it to the city of Gyumri.

The Aslamazyan sisters, their works and the establishment of a separate museum was a key point which changed the attitude towards gender equality in that period in Armenia, distinguishing the critical role of female artists of that epoch. The visitors and locals consider the museum as the most colorful one in the city.





DZITOGHTSYAN MUSEUM OF NATIONAL ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN LIFE

Haghtanak 47, Gyumri

The stylish red tuff house with a massive wooden veranda of Dzitoghtsyan family was built in 1872 by four brothers who migrated from the Western Armenian village of Dzitogh to the city of Alexandropol, today's Gyumri. Even though the locals call it Dzitoghcoc House, the only connection with the Dzitoghtsyan family that remained is the building, an old image of Petros Dzitoghtsyan and his wife, who actually owned the mansion, and the photo album which belonged to their daughter.

The Dzitoghtsyan family, established in the early 19th century has quickly become the visit card of Gyumri. The museum exhibits various items and elements of the daily urban life of Gyumri, as well as conveys the overall local cultural, religious and architectural peculiarities of the city, from the 19th century up to the 1920s. During the Soviet era, the Dzitoghtsyan family mansion was the only museum to present the daily life of the cities in the union.

During the Gyumri Earthquake in 1988, the museum was inhabited by the locals however, never stopped its operation. In that times of hardship visiting exhibitions took place at the free rooms of the building, which helped to activate the social and cultural life a little bit. The museum was officially reopened in 1997 and actively operated since then.

Besides the old style items exhibited in the halls, there's a 3D "map" portrayal of the actual Gyumri in 1880, implemented in old-fashioned style showing the everyday life and people living in the city. The curators restored the the typical house interiors of old Gyumri and presented the arts and crafts of the city hundred years ago.

SERGEY MERKUROV'S HOUSE-MUSEUM

47 Haghtanak str., Gyumri

The house of famous sculptor Sergei Merkurov is another exciting sight when visiting Gyumri.

The prominent artists well known to the world for his sculptures and masks, captured many famous soviet figures and is an author to around 300 masks. He turned the techniques of creating death masks into a high art.

The masks of 59 politicians and public figures are exhibited in the museum, including the original death mask of Lenin. His artworks traveled around the globe and were exhibited in New York, Paris, Moscow and elsewhere. The author lived in many countries and sharpened his skills in the studio of famous sculptor Adolf Meyer, who later on suggested him to continue his education in Europe.

Merkurov was born in Gyumri and had a Greek-Armenian origin. Later on he lived for several years in Tbilisi, and continued his education, learning the art of sculpture in Ukraine, Germany and Switzerland. During his exceptional lifetime, the artist got acquainted with Soviet leaders and many prominent artists around the globe. In the period of his stay in Paris, Merkurov got acquainted with such as famous sculptors as Rodin and Meunier.

The Merkurov's house-museum was established in Gyumri in 1984 in his family's residency. In addition to the unprecedented collection and internal design, the house and its surroundings have a very spectacular interior.

Before his death, Merkurov gifted the house to the city, with only one precondition, that the house will serve to the art purposes. The home was damaged during the 1988 earthquake but was rebuilt in 2003. >





VANADZOR MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

52 Tigran Mets Ave, Vanadzor

Vanadzor Museum of Fine Arts (complete name, Vanadzor City Museum of Fine Arts after Carlos Abovyan) was founded in 1974 as a branch of the National Gallery of Armenia and was rebuilt as an independent museum in 1979. The museum is situated in the “heart” of Lori, thus represents one of the most important cultural bodies in the region.

The first collection of the museum has been formed from the works of the National Gallery and mainly displayed Armenian art of the 20th century. However, during the following years, the collection was replenished with the works of contemporary artists. Currently, the museum mainly presents paintings, graphics, sculptures, decorative and applied art samples.

Located on the road to such popular sights as the Haghpat and Sanain monasteries, Vanadzor Museum of Fine Arts museum is considered as one of the most prominent cultural centers in Lori. The museum the exhibits around 2,000 collections of paintings, sculptures, publications and other pieces of decorative art created by many Russian, European and Armenian, especially Lori artists.

The visitors can get familiarized with various works of Armenian culture and art, including landscape paintings, works of female artists, portraits of remarkable Armenians and other exhibits representing the Armenian history. Every year more than ten special exhibitions and more than twenty public events are organized in the museum.

JERMUK GALLERY OF WATERS

Jermuk 3701

The Waters Gallery in Jermuk doesn't fit into the classic idea behind the words museum, however, the “exhibits” presented in the gallery illustrate the culturally and socially important aspects of Jermuk city.

The museum itself represents several pipes, coming out from the walls. The well-known fresh and mineral waters flow from them into special stone urns. The water temperature for each tube is different, and it's engraved at the corresponding wall so that the visitors know what type of water they are drinking and what's its temperature.

There are around five types of mineral water exhibited in the gallery, and each one has a different temperature from 30 to 53 degrees – the farther from the source, the colder is the water. Mineral waters in Jermuk are known to the world as healing and able to cure serious diseases.

The gallery area is very similar to the ancient Greek structures – arches, columns, water flowing from the taps in the huge jugs. All these creates a small antique mood in Jermuk. The spot of all these “water” exponents, Jermuk Water gallery remains one of the central sightseeing location and the most popular place among the tourists.





THE GEOLOGICAL MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY OF DILIJAN

28 Mqasnikyan St, Dilijan

The Regional Museum and Art Gallery is a monument of local history and art in Dilijan, Armenia. The museum was opened in 1950 by a teacher Yeghishe Hovsepyan. It provides a comprehensive view of the history of Dilijan, the historical development of the local people, their lifestyle, culture monuments, and historical and geographical conditions.

The art gallery was established in 1958. Initially, all the items were collected in the town library. The former building of the museum was built in 1926 as a hotel, later was used as a hospital and afterward again was turned into a hotel. However, the building underwent reconstruction to host the Geological Museum and Art Gallery of Dilijan. The old building of the museum was demolished, and during five years, the new building of the museum was built. The official opening of the whole museum was held only in 2010.

Around 5000 archeological, ethnographic and artistic exhibits are kept in Dilijan's Geological Museum-Gallery. Around 700 applied art pieces and graphic works, various painting, sculptures, silver pieces, coins, and ancient literature pieces. There are also rare paintings in the museum of such artists as Hovhannes Aivazovsky ("Christ with His Pupils at Sea" and "Hurricane in the Sea"), Vardges Surenyants, Panos Terlemezian, Martiros Saryan, Roquel Kent, Eduard Shahin, Lagorio and Groziz, as well as paintings by European painters of the 16th and 18th centuries. Of particular interest are the items at the archeology section, found near the town of Dilijan and belonging to the late Bronze and early Iron ages. The variety of exhibits in the museum creates an authentic mood in the center of Dilijan.

EJMIACIN GANDZATUN

Mother See of Holy Ejmiadzin

The religious center of Armenia, Ejmiatsin, is known to the world not only for its numerous churches but also Treasury Museum after Alec and Marie Manoogian, opened in 1982. The museum was brought to life by the initiative of Catholicos of All Armenians Vazgen I and the philanthropist A. Manoukian. In this two-story structure, there are not only the museum samples of the Armenian Church but also the library of Garegin I Catholicos. The museum is a striking example of the classic Armenian architecture's novel and unique lines. The architect is Baghdasar Arzumanyan.

The samples exhibited in the Treasury have been brought to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin from different Armenian communities, including a wide geographical area. In the treasury, there are many valuable items: church and sanctuary samples, cups, altar curtains, relics, dresses, chandeliers, crosses, antique Armenian carpets, clay vessels, and wooden engravings.

The most valuable exhibits of the treasury are the manuscripts with their unique miniatures and delicately embroidered covers. Here is also the collection of paintings with the image of St. Mariam, which has been created in different periods in historical Armenia. >



GENOCIDE MUSEUM-INSTITUTE

The Armenian Genocide Museum was established in 1995, 80 years after the tragic event which changed the direction of Armenian history. The museum is located on a hill, with its main exhibition area under the ground which is associated with a burial place and draws direct connection with the consequences of Armenian Genocide. The roof of the building provides a beautiful view of the Ararat valley and Yerevan city as the embodiments of the bright future of the Armenian nation. The museum exhibits the history of Armenian Genocide presenting documents, books, pictures related to the matter. The items and pieces are presented in various formats, both print and multimedia versions.

On the 12 walls of the inner courtyard the words of Henry Morgenthau, Anatol Franc, Fridtjof Nansen, Jak de Morgan, Valery Bryusov, Faye El Ghuseyn are engraved about the horrors faced by the Armenian people. The 45-meter square map of Western Armenia is located on one of the walls, where the places of massacres and deportations are marked. The content of the museum exhibits, textbooks and explanations are based on scientific progress in recent years in the field of genocide science particularly in Armenia. The staff of the Museum Institute compiled all the findings in Armenian, English and Russian languages, which makes it widely accessible for all the visitors. ♦





YEREVAN



YEREVAN



GYUMRI



THE ROOMS ARE FLEXIBLE WITH THE SET UP AND CAN BE RENTED AS SINGLE, DOUBLE/TWIN, TRIPLE AND IN SOME CASES AS QUAD.

ALL ROOMS HAVE EN SUITE BATHS, CLIMATE CONTROL, WIFI AND SATELLITE TV.

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WANDERS AND WONDERS IN ARMENIA'S REGIONAL MUSEUMS

Curator Nairi Khatchadourian tells about her experience working in several regional museums far from Yerevan and explains what are the main challenges that need to overcome.

TEXT AND PHOTO : NAIRI KHATCHADOURIAN

▼
A five-faced basalt stela,
Goris Local Lore Museum



As part of the cultural fabric of our society, museums constantly need to open themselves to the idea of change and serve as active change makers. Museums' relationships to their communities, and to society as a whole, and their ability to link the past with the present, especially in this time of rapid change, will determine what they are in the future. Parallel to the worldwide trend to make culture more accessible and inclusive to all through multidisciplinary programming, new models of access and use of digital collections and accommodations made for audiences with disabilities (cognitive, sensory, and physical), museums are decentralizing and extending their reach – from cities to regional branches, and to international outposts – to contribute to local community development, economic sustainability, and cultural dissemination. When mapping Armenia's museums, one understands that among the 124 public museums operating in the country, more than half are in the regions (55 are in Yerevan and the remaining 69 in the regions, of which 19 are branch museums; the complete)¹. Alas, many regional museums have stagnated and are kept as repositories of historic treasures and cultural memory. Repositioning and reactivating collections, reviewing the curatorial narratives and creating different ways for the visitors to connect with histories, people, and objects of the past are some of the many challenges museums are facing in maintaining relevance and creating deeper, long-lasting connections with today's audiences. Moreover, museums have the urge to adopt short and long-term strategies to increase community engagement and to rethink their traditional business model (at odds with the economic realities of our times), while continuing to collect, preserve, and interpret changing cultural landscapes. There is no doubt that Armenia's regional museums have the potential to thrive both nationwide and on a more global scale.

¹ A complete list of Armenia's museums can be found in the guidebook "The Museums of Armenia and Artsakh" published in 2016 by ICOM Armenia and the Ministry of Culture (eds: M. Mkrtchyan, V. Zakaryan, A. Avagyan). Yet some new museums have opened since 2016.

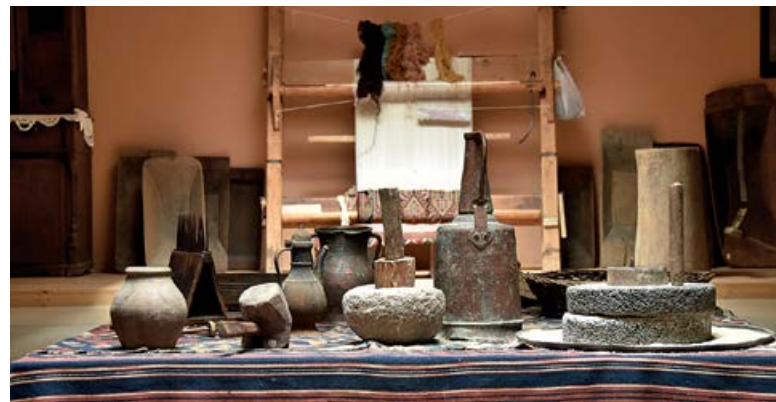


◀ Aksel Bakunts
House-Museum, Syunik

▼ Dilijan Local Lore Museum
and Gallery

Since the end of 2015, a number of Armenia's regional museums have been included in the "My Armenia" Program (MAP) of cultural heritage tourism funded by USAID and implemented by the Smithsonian Institution, in order to strengthen their capacities and develop best practices, which could drive sustainable growth both in the museums and in their communities². The program is providing strategic guidance through specialized trainings, one-on-one operational and organizational mentorship programs, and targeted assistance to improve collection stewardship, community engagement, and integration in the tourism value chain.

Among MAP's beneficiary museums are a number of history museums operating in the regions which display very valuable archaeological and ethnographic collections – mesmerizing both for the local and the international visitor. Moreover, in the regions, the visitor has the opportunity to experience those museums and see the collection objects closer to the context in which they were originally found, created, or used. Some of the pieces standing out from the Syunik and Vayots Dzor regions, for example, are anthropomorphic and animal sculptures as old as the 2nd millennium BC. A five-faced basalt stela on display at the Goris Local Lore Museum (height: 76 cm), discovered in a necropolis in Harjis village about 20 km outside of Goris, is a one-of-a-kind artefact dated to the early Middle Iron Age. As a rather well-preserved archaeological artefact, the idol has five flat faces, a wide neck, blind holes for the eyes, a grooved line for the mouth, and eyebrow ridges going through the nose. According to scholars, the stela's original placement should have been in the center of a structure, most likely a sanctuary. A great number of anthropomorphic sculptures representing persons, ancestors or deities, from the same era and in the same local style, can be found in the Kapan Local Lore Muse-



um, a private collection in Goris, and scattered around Harjis village. The sculptures are either heads from statues, larger sculptures with ornaments scrupulously carved on the body, or cylindrical stelae, the latter being a transformation of phallic statues. The Goris Local Lore Museum, with its stunning five-faced idol, could expand its exposure by building strong partnerships with the three above-mentioned sites (museum/private collection/village). Those partnerships could increase the Museum's social capital by conveying the message that the people who live in Syunik region have an important story to preserve and to share regarding their heritage of a very unique local style of sculpture.

Moreover, the collections of the Goris Local Lore Museum and the Yeghegnadzor Regional Museum hold magnificent samples of Urartian metalworking and pottery making. A bronze lion figurine weighing 6 kg from the 7th century BC, excavated in 1961 in the Kapan region, is a jewel from the Urartian culture

² To learn more about My Armenia and the beneficiary regional museums, please see the program's website: <https://myarmenia.si.edu/en/>



that any museum would dream of displaying in its permanent exhibition. Another unique animal-shaped artefact, dated from the 8th-6th centuries BCE, is the bear-shaped ritual vessel accidentally found in Areni village in the Vayots Dzor region during a construction project in 1981. Hollow on the inside, with holes on the neck and the nose to pour liquid (presumably wine), such animal-shaped clay vessels were used during ritual ceremonies. The museum, a 20-minute ride from Areni and in the heart of the old winery heritage region, could foster community-based activities with the participation of community members and reinvent itself as a contemporary cultural hub. The more museums participate in a dialogue with their communities, the more they will achieve sustainability.

Numerous fine arts galleries operate in the regions as well. One of the most active galleries among them is Gyumri's Gallery of Mariam and Eranuhi Aslamazyan Sisters housed in a former 19th-century home of an affluent merchant family. The two-storey gallery is preserving and displaying both of the sisters' large collection of paintings and graphic works. These talented world traveler artists left a striking imprint on Armenian art of the 20th century and bolstered the role of female artist in the patriarchal Soviet-Armenian society. Both sisters also created stunning modern glazed ceramic pieces, which played an important role in the development of ceramic art in the Soviet Union. Finally, Armenia's regions are home to the birthplaces of many great Armenian writers, whose houses have turned into memorial house museums. MAP collaborates closely with the Aksel Bakunts House Museum and the Hovhannes Toumanian House Museum, in Goris and Dsegh respectively. Aksel Bakunts is widely known for his collection of short stories with hauntingly beautiful imagery. He has also authored a number of film scripts produced by Hyefilm in the 1930s. Fond of wild flowers and in awe of the majestic mountains of the region of Zangezur, Aksel Bakunts worked as an agronomist and also practiced photography – a medium in practice in the city of Goris at that time. Unfortunately, accused of alienation by the socialist society, he was arrested and executed as a victim of the Stalinist terror at the young age of 38. These biographical elements could become the point of departure for a new inter-

disciplinary narrative, one that would engage history, literature, botanic studies, photography and film studies. Last but not least, it's needless to outline the richness of Toumanian's multifaceted heritage and the potential role his House Museum should have both in the Lori region and in Armenia. To this day, the museum centers on the author's daily life in Dsegh, rather than being collection-centered. By unlocking the potential of Toumanian's literary work – from his fairy tales to his novels and poems – the museum could become a performing arts platform celebrating language and imagination and imparting a new appreciation of Toumanian's creative output. The entire complex would be surrounded by enchanted gardens capturing the spirit of both Toumanian and Dsegh of course. Perhaps, Toumanian's House Museum could be reimaged in a similar spirit to the Hans Christian Andersen Fairy-tale House Museum in the Danish city of Odense – part of a Denmark-wide initiative to expand the country's cultural heritage tourism offer?

Just as historic and ethnographic collections need renewed narratives, artists' house museums and galleries have the chance to become new laboratories engaged with different publics to constantly build a new collection out of the old collection. Museums have to create and maintain a dialogue with the contemporary world and give a contemporary presence to the stories and objects of the past. To liberate themselves from rigid institutional paradigms and from a linear presentation of history, the museums should create organic relationships with artists, curators, scholars, writers, architects, designers, musicians, and more. In this manner, fieldwork and production will take place inside the museum. Hence, the museum will reinvent itself as an open laboratory, a place for critical thought and education, scholarly studies, and contemporary artistic practice, in other words, a public site fostering cross-fertilization. Both as wanderspaces and wonderspaces, Armenia's regional museums offer a rich collection of historical testimonies and tangible heritage. Along the line of "displaying the depths of our humanity" stated by Orhan Pamuk in his museum "manifesto", the future of tradition lies on the possibility to trigger creative reactions, bring forth soulful emotions and thoughts, and humanize the museum encounter. ♦



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SERGEI PARAJANOV:

Temporarily rejected, permanently alive

Earlier this year, the world celebrated the 95th anniversary of Sergei Parajanov, one of the greatest Armenian filmmakers, an artist who lived and worked in different parts of the Soviet Union and became a legend during his own lifetime. Today, his House Museum is a must-visit location in Yerevan, and in other parts of the world people are still watching his films and looking at his artworks. But do we really understand him? Program director of Golden Apricot Yerevan International Film Festival Karen Avetisyan tries to explain Parajanov's phenomena.

TEXT : KAREN AVETISYAN / PHOTO : PARAJANOV HOUSE MUSEUM, WIKIPEDIA





“500 visitors daily and 45 000 in 3 months”, – summarized the museum management, wanting to share hastily the enviable numbers after finishing up the visitor count.

March 17 saw the conclusion of the Parajanov with Sargis exhibition in Istanbul's Pera Museum: 40 screens, 76 works – collages, photographs, mosaics, storyboards, costumes, which traveled from Yerevan's Parajanov Museum to Istanbul on the eve of Sergei Parajanov's 95th anniversary, thus bringing to life the largest Parajanov exhibition of the last 30 years outside Armenia.

Aside its artistic value, the exhibition was also significant in the historical – political context of near total absence of diplomatic relations and historic animosity between Armenia and Turkey. The cultural dialogue is living its separate life, guided by its obsession of mutual understanding, which is more unappeasable and impatient, than the patient, cautious and prudent steps of the governments. Thus, the cultural Istanbul is also consistent with its treatment of the artist, who back in 1989, exactly 30 years ago, received the Istanbul International Film Festival Jury Prize for his film “Ashik-Kerib”.

THE CULTURAL DIALOGUE IS LIVING ITS SEPARATE LIFE, GUIDED BY ITS OBSESSION OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING, WHICH IS MORE UNAPPEASABLE AND IMPATIENT, THAN THE GOVERNMENTS

Just two months before the exhibition in Istanbul, the same consistency and admiration was expressed by another festival in another city close to Parajanov – Rotterdam. Thanks to the efforts of the local festival, the Armenian National Film Center, and film restoration expert Daniel Bird, “The Temple of Cinema: Sayat Nova Outtakes” exhibition was implemented, where the unused restored footage of the film “Color of Pomegranates (Sayat Nova)” was presented through installations. The same Rotterdam, where years ago Parajanov was venerated with the inclusion of his name in the “20 filmmakers of future cinema” list alongside David Lynch, Peter Greenaway, Martin Scorsese and other great directors. The very same Scorsese, who assumed the restoration of “Sayat Nova” and, while presenting the film in Toronto International Film Festival, said: “You are going to witness images and visions “pretty much unlike anything in cinema history”. The name of the program “Temple of Cinema” is a reference to another great master – Jean-Luc Godard, who famously said, “In the Temple of Cinema there are images, light, and reality. Sergei Parajanov was the master of that temple”. >





And just two months before Rotterdam, Berlin's Arsenal cinema organized the exhibition of Parajanov's artworks and a large retrospective consisting of 10 films, while two years before Berlin another Arsenal – Kiev's Mystetsky, had carried out another big exhibition dedicated to the film with which 50 years earlier Parajanov had entered the world cinema temple – "Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors". Along with understanding the context of "parajanovesque" time and space, reevaluating his heritage and introducing it to younger generations, the exhibition's main goal was to put forth a big and ambitious question: "Who are we, Ukrainians"? Once again, the search for the self, the source and national identity had made Parajanov the addressee of these intricate and sacral questions.

In 1961, famed American literary critic Wayne C. Booth coined the term "unreliable narrator", which in literature was used to indicate Faulkner's, Akutagawa's, Palahniuk's and others' characters who violate the unwritten agreement between the author and the reader (or viewer) about presenting reality. Parajanov himself was some "unreliable narrator" who was reshaping reality and adapting it to his own vision, which for him was truer and more reliable than any historic document. For him, the myth itself was a document, regardless of whether it was a folklore, a fairy tale, historic review or something born in his own head.

Myths of all types were fated to become "documents" in Parajanov's ethnographic gallery. And that documentary status conveyed such clear and impeccable reliability that even today Parajanov is often viewed as a compass in the search for the national genome, ethnic code and even national idea. However, Parajanov had neither a God, nor national affiliation, nor a Motherland in the sense that these terms are widely understood. His national was above-national, while his affiliation was oriental cosmopolitan.

Though it was Parajanov with his "unreliable" storytelling that managed to create films directly intertwined with the issue of identity for Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, in which one can hear Ukrainian and its Hutsul dialect, Armenian, Georgian, Russian, and Turkish, in a unique way his films are viewed in the context of "national cinema" in the above-mentioned countries up to nowadays.

It seems that he was right about saying: "If I end up in Africa, I will probably make the best film about some African tribe and tell them things about themselves they themselves didn't even know".

It is both natural and a bit paradoxical that while being so international, he continues to be misunderstood. Namely, *The Color of Pomegranates* – the epitome of Parajanov's aesthetics, made the director the pride of Armenia, but at the same



“ F I END UP IN AFRICA, I WILL PROBABLY MAKE THE BEST FILM ABOUT SOME AFRICAN TRIBE AND TELL THEM THINGS ABOUT THEMSELVES THEY THEMSELVES DIDN'T EVEN KNOW”

time it remains the most complex, uninterpretable and indigestible film for Armenians.

An ambivalent process took place as a result – Parajanov was rejected and sanctified at the same time. A key function in the mutual understanding between the saint and us, mortals, is carried out by Yerevan’s Sergei Parajanov Museum. However, although it has a leading position in the number of visitors, it doesn’t make the digestion process easier, instead acting more as a spectacle space and unique vault and treasury, which the whole world uses today in an attempt to make Parajanov a topical point in the contemporary art discourse by bending and analyzing and approaching him from various angles. And because of this international approach, the two Armenian film geniuses, Parajanov and Peleshyan, are successfully and harmoniously finding their place in the colorful palette of contemporary art mainly abroad.

And that process has started long ago – in the hot times of pop art and video art, when one could notice various Parajanov references, homages (at times – rip-offs) not only in the films of Derek Jarman, Mohsen Mackmalbaf or Emir Kusturica, but also Madonna’s “Bedtime Story”, REM’s “Losing My Religion” and Deep Forest’s “Sweet Lullaby” music videos.

The process goes on as researchers continue to find endless direct or unconscious references, for instance, in David Bowie’s “Black Star” and in the first season of the cult TV series “True Detective”,



while world-famous avant-garde electronic musician Nicolas Jaar records an alternative score for “The Color of Pomegranates”.

So, who is Parajanov today, if not a true modern multimedia artist – mostly uninterpretable but, nonetheless, through sheer magnetism assembling around him a dense mass of people in museums in Istanbul, Berlin, Rotterdam or Yerevan, just as throughout his life he did in his house in Kiev or Tbilisi: a man, who spent his whole life turning myths into documents. He himself has become a myth, which continues to give life to new “documents” on and on – magnificent and impressive as the ones mentioned above, or modest and transient as the one you just read. ♦



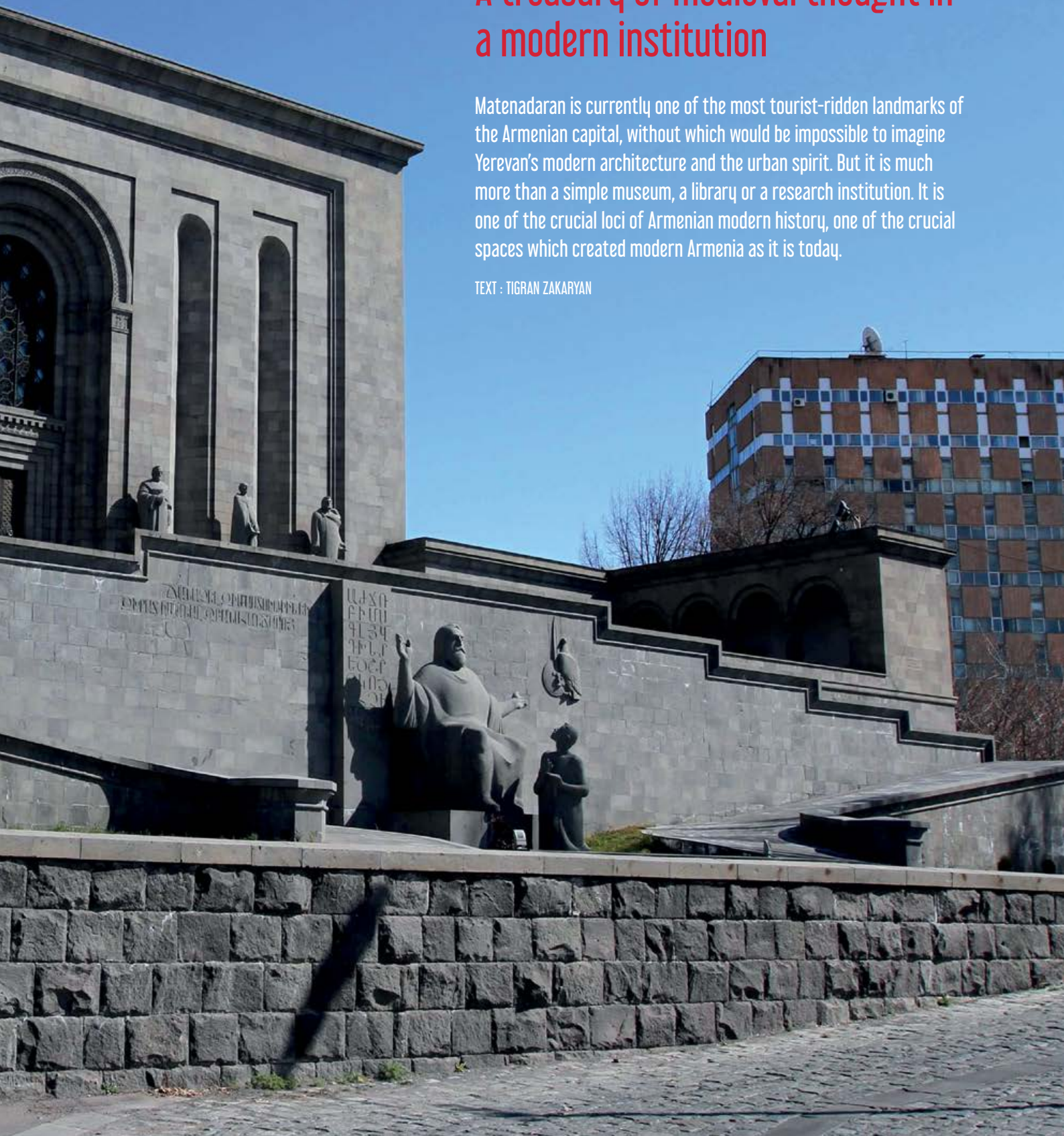


MATENADARAN:

A treasury of medieval thought in a modern institution

Matenadaran is currently one of the most tourist-ridden landmarks of the Armenian capital, without which would be impossible to imagine Yerevan's modern architecture and the urban spirit. But it is much more than a simple museum, a library or a research institution. It is one of the crucial loci of Armenian modern history, one of the crucial spaces which created modern Armenia as it is today.

TEXT : TIGRAN ZAKARYAN



BECOMING MATENADARAN WITH CAPITAL M

The word itself means a library in classical Armenian. Long before becoming Matenadaran with capital M, smaller matenadaran existed in medieval and subsequent periods in almost every monastery across Armenia. The biggest one however, of course, was that of the Cathedral Church of St. Ejmiatsin, the main church of Armenian Gregorian Christianity.

Matenadaran as a separate entity started its life with the advent of the Soviet power, which by one of its first decrees issued in December 1920 announced nationalization of St. Ejmiatsin's assets, including the typography, museum and a library of old manuscripts.

A first institution, which was created for the preservation and research of old manuscripts, a forerunner of today's Matenadaran, was founded in 1921 under the name of Culture-Historical Institute. For a long time it did not have its separate building until late 1930's when a group of Armenian intellectuals supported by the government of Soviet Armenia petitioned to allocate a special building for it.

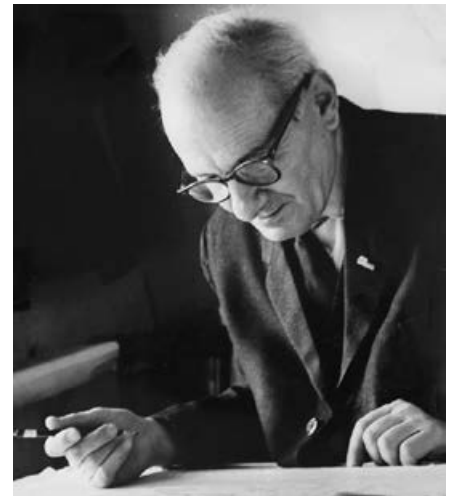
These were years when Stalinist ideology to some degree favored local socialist brands of nationalisms, provided that they could ultimately serve the aims of Moscow. It was decided that Matenadaran could not be in any way an obstacle to Moscow's plan and that it deserved support.

Ultimately, in 1939 architect Mark Grigoryan was commissioned by the Ministry of Education to design a special building for Matenadaran. Planning of the building started only as late as in 1943. It is interesting to note that other important events in cultural and intellectual life of Armenia happened in those years; for instance, shooting of historical film "Davit Bek" (1944) and opening of the Armenian Academy of Science (1943), happened simultaneously with it during a temporary encouragement of local nationalism for the sake of mobilizing forces against Nazi Germany and its allies.

Before starting his planning Grigoryan made an extensive research of traditional Armenian architecture travelling to Haghpat, nahin and Odzun monasteries in the north as well as to Tatev monastery. In search for authentic solutions for the façade of the building he also researched Toros Toromanyan's archive with the kind



^ Matenadaran with Stalin's monument on the background, 1950's



> Architect Mark Grigoryan

assistance of his daughter. The archive included Toromanyan's earlier research in Armenia's medieval capital of Ani, which proved to be instrumental for Grigoryan's aim. It is interesting to know that the original plans drawn were not found until long after his death when Grigoryan's grandson, Mark Grigoryan, discovered them.

Initially there was much criticism against the plan, both for its extensive use of medieval architecture elements as well as for its position and location from the main avenue of Yerevan – then called Stalin Avenue (later Lenin Avenue, and now Mashtots Avenue). Ultimately the plan was approved without any major changes and this was a unique case. There were even rumors that Anastas Mikoyan's intervention played a role in that turn of events. Due to the post-war shortage of funds it took more than a decade to construct the building of Matenadaran. Matenadaran started its activities in the new building after the completion of its construction in 1957.

BESTS OF THE BESTS

It is interesting that in the construction of Matenadaran an age-old tradition of at least 19th century of Yerevan architecture was observed. Normally the stone for constructing the walls was volcanic tuff, which was abundantly available under the ground in the current city center. The difference here was that that the ground layer under Matenadaran was basalt, which became a handy material for the construction of the massive building.

The story of the façade decorated with sculptures of Armenian medieval prominent intellec-



◀ One of the main exhibition halls

INITIALLY THERE WAS MUCH CRITICISM AGAINST THE PLAN, BOTH FOR ITS EXTENSIVE USE OF MEDIEVAL ARCHITECTURE ELEMENTS AS WELL AS FOR ITS POSITION AND LOCATION



◀ Matenadaran's woodcrafted main door

tuals is no less interesting. It was decided to erect the sculpture of Mesrop Mashtots, the author of the Armenian alphabet, at the main entrance of the building. There were different versions of it and the one by sculptor Ara Sargsyan featuring Mashtots side by side with Sahak Partev, Catholicos of Armenians in early 5th century, was the most likely candidate to be approved. However the soviet authorities refused to support the project which would glorify a religious leader. Ara Sargsyan, in his turn, refused to modify the composition and it was ultimately rejected. The composition nevertheless was implemented after Armenia became independent in 2002 and is currently placed at the entrance to the main building of the Yerevan State University.

Instead of Sargsyan's ensemble, another, no less interesting composition came into life. It was offered by sculptor Ghukas Chubaryan featuring Mashtots holding a tablet with letters invented



Pages from some of the prominent medieval manuscripts held in Matenadaran

COLLECTION

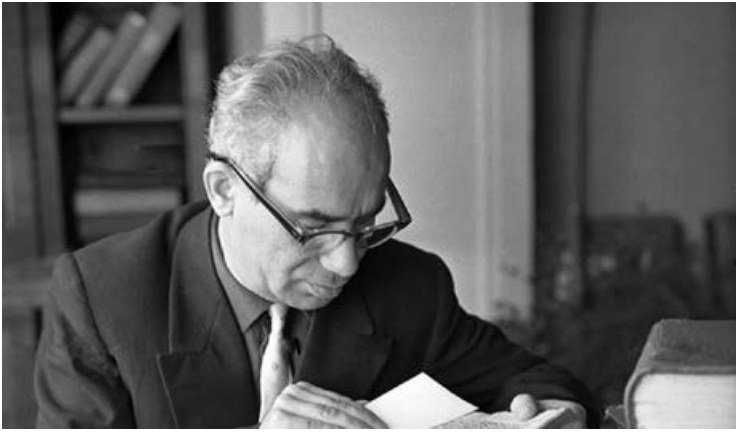
Currently there are about 23,000 manuscripts in Matenadaran's collection, and about 300,000 documents. Among them are over 17,000 Armenian fully preserved manuscripts, others include manuscripts (full or partially preserved) on other languages (Latin, Arabic, Persian, Russian, French, Greek, etc).

Among the most significant manuscripts of the Matenadaran are the Lazarian Gospel (9th century), the Echmiadzin Gospel (10th century) and the Mughni Gospel (11th century). The first, so called because it was brought from the Lazarian Institute, is from 887 and is one of the Matenadaran's oldest complete volumes. The Echmiadzin Gospel, dated 989, has a 6th-century, probably Byzantine, carved ivory cover. The Cilician illuminated manuscripts by Toros Roslin (13th century) and Sargis Pitsak (14th century), two prominent masters, are also held with high esteem.

The biggest manuscript in the collection is Msho Charyntir (1200-1202) with 601 pages and weight of 28 kg, while the smallest is 15th century Holiday Calendar ("Tonatsuyts") – 104 pages and 19 grams.



Museum's collection is over 20000 manuscripts



^
Levon Khachikyan



<
In Matenadaran's
laboratory



^
Sen Arevshatyan

WITH ITS LABORATORIES, RESTORATION AND RESEARCH FACILITIES MATENADARAN WAS AT THAT TIME THE MOST TECHNICALLY ADVANCED INSTITUTION OF ITS TYPE

by him and his famous disciple Koryun, kneeling before his teacher.

Another sculpture by Chubaryan on the outer wall of the Matenadaran has its own story. It is the sculpture of Mkhitar Gosh, the author of a medieval code of laws, which was of unique importance to Chubaryan. The thing is that due to missing any real images of the medieval Armenian lawyer Chubaryan had to use his imagination. Chubaryan's father, Grigor Chubarov, an Armenian lawyer, who had a most prominent role in the shaping of the first constitution of Soviet Armenia in 1922 and later being subject to Stalinist repressions spending there almost two decades served him as a prototype for his sculpture.

Anush Chubaryan, sculptor Chubaryan's daughter recalled that her father found it very symbolic that when in 1962 Stalin's huge sculpture was being removed in Yerevan the same time the gypsum version of Mkhitar Gosh was being placed near Matenadaran.

TURNING LIBRARY INTO RESEARCH INSTITUTION

Matenadaran as an academic institution was active even before the completion of the building. In 1954 Levon Khachikyan (1918-1982), a prominent historian and philologist, was appointed its director, who spared no efforts to promote Matenadaran's activities.

With its laboratories, reading halls, book depositories, exposition rooms, restoration and research facilities Matenadaran was at that time the most technically advanced institution of its type. With the personnel trained in Leningrad, Armenian specialists engaged in conservation and restoration of old manuscripts. A top expert in ancient Armenian manuscripts and highly knowledgeable researcher in different sources, Khachikyan stood at the core of elaborating development strategies of the institution. He also assisted to the establishment of a new generation of conservation and restoration specialists as well as scholars in old manuscripts. Under the guidance of Khachikyan Matenadaran turned from a library into a truly unique research institution with international fame.

Khachikyan was sometimes bold in his ambitions relating to Matenadaran. He offered the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow to nominate the institution for becoming a "first-class" one (this implied more financing etc. For comparison, it is worthwhile to recall that the

renowned Hermitage in Leningrad then was only second-class institution) and oddly enough, he was successful.

Usually old and ancient manuscripts are kept in museums or special sections of libraries, but not in specialized institutions. Matenadaran was one of those rare cases when the research institution and museum were concentrated in the same place.

With years the flow of tourists to Matenadaran increased greatly, and it gradually became a leading tourist attraction in Yerevan. However in order to increase the visiting space, halls designed for research and conservation were used.

The need to have a new building became very urgent and it was designed in the late years of Soviet Union. In 1986 architect Artur Meschyan



was commissioned to plan an additional building for Matenadaran. The plan was approved and construction started in 1987, however shortly after it stopped in 1988.

The construction did not resume until 2009 and was completed by 2011. The newer building of the Matenadaran is four times bigger than the older one, however thanks to unique architectural solutions by Meschyan it is practically invisible from the main entrance and does not in any way disrupt the original architectural integrity of the complex. The new building was constructed partly on the solid rock of the hill behind it, and is used entirely for the research purpose.

The arches along the building make it look smaller and less solid than it actually is, for the purpose of not shifting the accent from the main building of the complex.

TREASURES OF MATENADARAN

Apart from being a library, a research institution, a museum, an architectural monument (by the way, listed in the UNESCO's Memory of the World list since 1997) or a tourist attraction, Matenadaran is also a place with high symbolic value.

Since the national awakening in 1988 Matenadaran served as one of the focal points of Armenian nascent political thought and democracy and at times, when the Freedom Square was blocked by soviet troops, Matenadaran's sizeable front yard hosted large rallies of protest. It was probably no coincidence that Levon Ter-Petrosyan, a senior researcher at Matenadaran, became a leader of the popular movement and independent Armenia's first president.

Matenadaran is also a depository of yet another important symbol of the modern Armenian statehood, the oldest complete manuscript book kept

^
IX century Bible
from Nor Jugha



^ VII century Bible

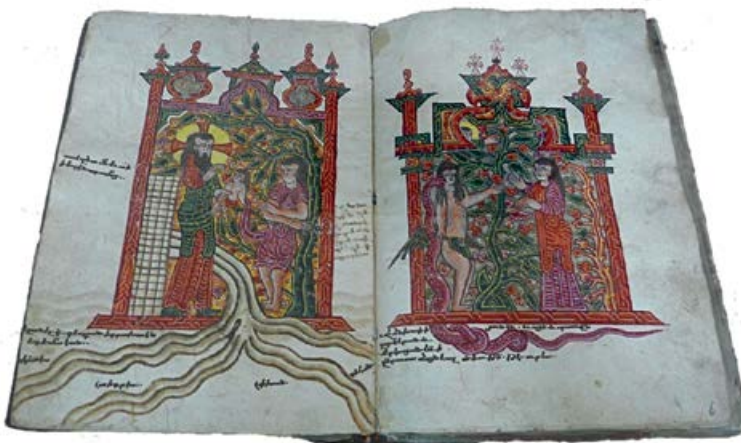
in Matenadaran, which is a gospel of 7th century, saved and renamed "Vehamor" ("of Catholicos' mother"). This book leaves the building walls only during the official swearing-in ceremony, when an Armenian president elect pronounces oath laying his hand on the book. This book is only one among over 20,000 manuscripts, which are currently available in Matenadaran. Most of them are in Armenian, however there is a considerable quantity

of old manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman, Syriac, Greek, Latin, Old Georgian, Kipchak and other languages conserved there. Some of them are unique sources of regional and world history. In some cases Armenian translations of foreign authors turn out to be the only surviving copies of their actual writings, thus making those manuscripts kept in Matenadaran of unique value. Matenadaran is currently a thriving institution, which is engaged in a wide scope of international cooperation. The areas of cooperation include not only joint research of written materials but also preservation of old manuscripts, a special skills in which Matenadaran has reached excellence. It is no wonder that the task of renovating some old manuscripts damaged during the recent upheavals in



SINCE THE NATIONAL AWAKENING IN 1988 **MATENADARAN** SERVED AS ONE OF THE FOCAL POINTS OF ARMENIAN NASCENT POLITICAL THOUGHT AND DEMOCRACY

the Middle East as well as training specialists from those countries will be entrusted to Matenadaran. It would be a mistake to assume that Matenadaran contains only old gospels and chronicles. The information contained in old books can be quite relevant for modern times. Some of them contain recipes of medicines, beverages, special types of food as well as dyes used in miniatures and illuminations. These can be used for the purpose of restoration as well as for sheer interest and even in modern pharmaceuticals. Beverages extracted or brewed in accordance with medieval recipes, restored at Matenadaran are quite palatable to modern visitors who can buy them there. Matenadaran has still a lot to research and preserve. Modern technologies can only help to discover its riches and display them from new and sometimes unexpected angles. Matenadaran is undoubtedly a treasury of Armenian culture and a landmark of Yerevan, spreading vibes of peace and intercultural cooperation first of all in science and arts, reminding of old-age ties that existed throughout the region and well beyond. ♦



#KONDGALLERY

In 2018, a part of Yerevan's historical Kond district was turned into an open air street-art gallery. We talked about this amazing art project with its author Sergey Navasardyan (aka yerevantropics).



TEXT : ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN / PHOTO : SERGEY NAVASARDYAN



In August 2018, on the wall next to the gas station behind Saryan str. post-office, from where the most mysterious part of Yerevan – the legendary Kond starts, a strange image emerged overnight; triangles resembling the peaks of Ararat, a palm tree, a flaming bottle: “Molotov’s cocktail.” People, who are aware of the creative activities in Yerevan, immediately knew the handwriting of yerevantropics, but none was aware of the Yerevan tropics in Kond. Graffiti have very hard fate across the world, even if they are authored by Banksy, and innovations here, moreover, if

they are ungrounded, are not welcomed. Kond has its own rules.

Vandalism was vandalized, but partially: Ararat was not touched, and “Molotov” was covered. The graffiti author Sergey Navasardyan, the very same yerevantropics, made up his mind to just go and socialize with the locals. It worked, and the image was partially restored and was even completed: now, in the top corner it reads, “street art gallery”. From here on, one of the weirdest projects of contemporary art in Yerevan was launched.

“Usually, when I look for a wall to paint on, and when I find it, I let my feelings and thoughts inspired by the environment guide me. The long wall in Frik street was always on my way, and I was looking at it every time I passed it, and something was being cooked.” Sergey says, “I painted. After a while, I saw the part of it where I had painted “Molotov” was covered with white. I realized I needed some socializing. So, I came, introduced myself, told them what I did, and why I did what I did. I told them I wanted to have Kond as an environment change its essence. As a result, people in the Church neighborhood received me warmly. Thanks.”

> Sergey Navasardyan, aka yerevantropics



Kond Gallery started from a graffiti near the gas station





Truely, they now know Sergey here; the elderly men stand in the shade for hours and look, as he creates a new work of art with a respirator drawn on his face, and with his hands already colored with paint shaking the paint cylinder to create a new work on the wall. Sometimes, people approach, give some advice, like: “Draw another line here, let them become even triangles”. Sergey remembers the challenges: ““What’s your gain then?” is my favorite question. They ask me, “You buy the paint yourself, don’t you?” “Yeah!” “You do it yourself, don’t you? You spend your time, don’t you? Why, then?” My gain is the development of art and giving a new essence to Kond as a neighborhood. >



> Artwork by Lamb



< Artwork by Sneksy



^ Artwork by Feoflip in frames of Yerevan Urban Fest



^ Artwork by Bulky_Savage



Street art is, somehow, about a different kind of gain. Giving a new essence to a neighborhood with vague future through art is already a great accomplishment”.

On the blue gate, paintings emerge that have little in common with yerevantropics’ style. From another corner, a beautiful little ornamental hedgehog is greeting us. Here, Sergey’s narrative reaches the point where other artists are joining him. And, not only graffiti artists; these are the photographer Karen Mirzoyan’s photos pinned on one of the walls.

So, what is #kondgallery for its creator?
“The #kondgallery is a call for all creators to come together and create an open art, available to everyone. That’s the reason I am not alone creating in Kond. Karen Mirzoyan joined me, so did Lamb from Tiflis, and Ossy – a Finnish artist. There are a lot of different artists interested in #kondgallery, I am expecting many of them this year, and the interest is growing day by day”.

➤
Photographs by
Karen Mirzoyan



Obviously, international involvement brings international attention to Yerevan, making the city’s pin more visible on the map, and as a result tourist interest is growing. I ask:

“Were there state support, wouldn’t the officials interfere with the project through state intervention? Graffiti in the frames of state order sounds a bit weird, and, usually, it’s similarly weirdly looked at (Yerevan has had that experience). Sergei partly agrees, but he gives an example. If the state or the municipality covered technical costs, but did not interfere with the concept, that would be ideal. I can’t but agree. ♦

CULTURE + INNOVATION

Today higher technologies are the language and medium of the new generation, with a transformative effect on almost every sphere.

To discuss the cases of its influence on culture, education, and the museums, in particular, we talked to Arman Atoyan, the Co-founder of Arloopa, IT company specialized in the creation of AR and VR products.

INTERVIEW : MARGARITA MIRZOYAN
PHOTO : ARLOOPA



Your company was always engaged in cultural and educational projects. Usually IT companies have a different purpose, more “technical.” Why did you choose to “invest” in culture?

— Art is the most beautiful manifestation of humanity, which is proven by the monuments and artworks from previous centuries, that is still important to this day. In all times, every groundbreaking innovation and event was written down by people. Starting from the first men who drew on the walls of the caves, ancient Egyptians who wrote on the papyrus, later followed by the invention of canvas, paper, typing machines, and, finally, the emergence of cinematography. The formats were different but, in all centuries, people continually “recorded” the important aspects of their life.

Today, the “tech revolution” is on the rise and it dictates its own rules. A new format has emerged, and people who make art in digital space are the same fantastic artists who brought novelties in the previous centuries. The Da Vinci of today can be the senior engineer at Apple, who works on AR Glasses. So, we cannot say that the ancient cultures are replaced by something new. It's

just the format and the representation that has changed. As the innovative technologies are integrated into our lives, it's interesting to see that the same way as the laptop took the place of papyrus, likewise the format is offered by this century. Martiros Saryan of today would make art in VR and we would be able to get immersed into Saryan's Armenia.

For us it's interesting to work with artists, museums and art in general, as even though the format has changed the content has remained the same. Actually, these format “revolutions” were always implemented by artists, so we want to collaborate with them as we understand that they are the creators of the content, while our mission is to help them modify their art to the “high tech” requirements of the modern era.

Of course, IT solution on its own is not enough to attract the viewer, but we provide technical support to the artists to make their art relevant. The “technical person” might not be able to draw a painting but he might be the one to create the best paints for the artists. Thus, we partner up with them, provide them with all the necessary tools.

>
Arman Atoyán

Recently, you have actively cooperated with museums; the projects with Saroqan Museum, Khachaturyan Museum. Why are museums of such particular interest to you?

— We always say that Armenia has a very rich heritage and history. The museums are the places where people can witness all that. But the promotion of the museums is not very active and there's a lack of digital representation for the foreigners to see the great Armenian artists and their artworks. But today, we live in an era where we can promote them via innovative technolo-



A NEW FORMAT HAS EMERGED, AND PEOPLE WHO MAKE ART IN DIGITAL SPACE ARE THE SAME FANTASTIC ARTISTS WHO BROUGHT NOVELTIES IN THE PREVIOUS CENTURIES



gies and make our art vocal around the world. We can fascinate people who visit museums in Armenia via integrating innovative solutions and surprise them with our advanced approaches. We want the progressive initiatives in Armenia to become an example for the foreign companies and partners, which will bring a wave of interest to our country. For example, the case of Aram Khachaturian Museum, the promotional video went viral with positive feedback from across the world. We know that in several years people will come to the museums with new gadgets, so the museums should go in hand with the digitalized world to keep attracting people. One thing remains the same, people come to the museums to get spiritual food, and the deeper the experience, the higher the guarantee is that the number of visitors will increase.

How innovative technologies and museums, and art, in general, can collaborate without disturbing each other. Where is the thin line?

— I don't think that art will be harmed, or people will stop visiting museums. For example, the modern movie director will create a VR movie, making the experience more immersive, and it's normal. No one will blame the director



◀ High-tech in Saroyan House, Fresno

During the 5 years of its existence, Arloopa was actively engaged in the initiatives which brought together tech and art. The company is behind the fascinating AR experience at the William Saroyan Museum in Fresno (US) and at the Tumanyan's Museum in Yerevan. The VR experience of Van Gogh's room, which enables the users to enter the room and feel the author's spirit inside. Recently, Arloopa team brought to life famous Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian's graffiti next to his museum. The company has many educational and cultural initiatives and projects on the go, which are a central direction in the overall practice.

▶ Aram Khachaturian's street art was augmented by Arloopa recently



▲ Presenting the application at the expo

for not using the old methods of filmmaking. Innovative technologies cannot replace the art or the museum experience itself. IT solutions just help to cut the gap between the artwork and the humans.

Like Arloopa's Room of Van Gogh...

— Exactly, it just got 10.000 million views on Facebook. But it doesn't keep you away from visiting the museum to see the original, quite the opposite, it awakens your interest and motivates you. Digital copies will never replace the originals.

Do you think that the tandem of culture and IT, let's take the example of museums, can become a success case for the promotion of Armenia at a larger scale?

— Yes, definitely, but there's still a long way to go. There are several global problems. First of all, for a lot of people, this type of initiative remains unusual and weird. The second problem is that there are many museums that want to integrate such approaches in their practice, but they cannot make it due to the lack of resources. But to make the museums more attractive for the younger generations, the museums need to advance technologically. Just imagine, the visitor goes to Erebuni museum and sees only the fragments of the great fortress, but the experience could be more impressive if the person put on VR glasses and appeared in that era and saw the real beauty of the castle. Definitely, people would pay for it. But there's a communication problem with the society. There's a need for

> Augmented reality in Smithsonian Museum

people willing to invest in these ideas, there's a need to engage the government in this kind of projects. Recently, we'd had another collaboration with the Museum of Russian Art in Armenia. We created the AR version of Mikhail Vrubel's "The Demon and Angel with Tamara's Soul", but this is just one painting from the thousands which we could have "brought to life". Today, innovative technologies bring depth to the artworks in the museums, with a key mission to bring the younger generations to the museums. If we communicate with them with the technologies they know and through the same medium, the message will be well received and interpreted correctly.

What are your predictions, how do you see the culture+tech collaboration in the future?

— This kind of initiatives is quite popular abroad, as their museums have certain budgets to implement creative ideas. For Armenia, I would want the government and opinion leaders to



TODAY, INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES BRING DEPTH TO THE ARTWORKS IN THE MUSEUMS, WITH A KEY MISSION TO BRING THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS TO THE MUSEUMS



acknowledge that there's a need for such projects, to bring modern experience to the museums in order to keep and increase the interest. Currently, most of the projects we have implemented are based on private and our personal investments but this won't work in a long-term perspective. A year ago, we created the VR version of Sargis Muradyan's painting "The Last Night /Komitas" to present at the National Gallery. However, we thought we could make it available not only at one location but we could have it spread all over the world so that everyone would be able to try out. Thus we ended up creating also the AR version of the painting. It can become a huge promotional step, as it enables anyone to get acquainted with the Armenian Art through AR portals from all around the world. ♦

THE ARMENIAN MUSEUMS ABROAD

The Armenian diaspora has always made a lot of efforts to preserve the Armenian culture and heritage outside of their homeland and make foreigners feel a part of that experience. They always stuck to the mission of raising awareness about our cultural and literary patrimony. The Museums and Cultural centers built all over the world many centuries ago or recently, from Fresno to Singapore contributed greatly to that mission. Here is a selection of the best Armenian museums abroad that are worth visiting.

TEXT : VIKTORIA MURADYAN



WILLIAM SAROYAN MUSEUM, FRESNO, USA

On William Saroyan's 110th birthday the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and playwright's memory was honored with a meaningful gift. The house, where he lived during the last 17 years of his life, opened to the public on August 31st, 2018 as an interactive museum honoring his legacy and works, as well as the Armenian Community of Fresno. The Armenian-based Renaissance Cultural and Intellectual Foundation acquired the house in the writer's hometown Fresno in 2015 and undertook the renovation works.

As the great writer himself, the museum is also non-conventional, more experiential. The museum doesn't exhibit a lot of Saroyan's personal items. Instead, the visitors are able to get engaged with the artworks displayed to have a more profound experience and to have a closer look at Saroyan's lifestyle. In the house-museum, the visitors can see Saroyan's hologram standing by his typewriter, his desk setup, as well as an extensive collection of photos, videos, drawings, posters and interviews. In order to give a comprehensive representation of the author's multidimensional talent, a digital archive was created in frames of the project, including Saroyan's memorabilia, photographs, paintings, graphics, movies and audio recordings. This is the only museum in the world dedicated to the author's memory and the first one in the region with its high-tech format. Hopefully, the museum will become a center for Saroyan studies.

Entry to the museum is by reservation, and free of charge.

MEKHITARIST MONASTERY MANUSCRIPTS LIBRARY, VIENNA AND VENICE

The Monastery of the Mekhitarist Congregation on the Saint Lazzaro island in Venice was founded in 1717. At the beginning of the 19th century, the members of the Congregation moved to Vienna from Venice and eventually founded the Vienna Mekhitarist Monastery in 1810. The Vienna Monastery became one of the most prominent Armenian cultural centers in the world. The collection of the Vienna Monastery library includes a collection of more than 10,000 Armenian coins, a considerable collection of paintings, more than 2800 manuscripts. Moreover, it is also a home for over 170,000 volumes of print exemplaires, newspapers and magazines, both old and new. The Monastery in Vienna and in Venice became cultural centers of a great significance not only for the Armenians but also for the whole European continent. Unfortunately, the print house of the Vienna Monastery, which published books in 41 languages for two centuries, is closed now, but the visitors can still enjoy the Congregation's rich collection of books.



MUSÉE ARMÉNIEN DE FRANCE, PARIS

The Armenian Museum in Paris was inaugurated in 1953 by Nourhan Fringhian in the building of the Hotel d'Ennery. It was created with an aim to keep the memory of the Armenians of the Diaspora. The museum closed in 1996, because the building wasn't meeting the necessary security standards. Since then, the wonderful collection of the museum has been packed in cartons without any exact perspective of being exhibited again. Although the authorities promised to re-open the museum after the renovations in May 2012, they didn't keep their promise. The proposal to partially move the Museum collection to Marseille was refused by the Armenian side. The museum administration will agree to move the collection only entirely and permanently.

The collection of the museum consists of 1200 objects transferred to the Foundation by the descendants of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. These objects illustrate 3000 years of our history. The rich collections include archeological artefacts, series of ancient coins, tissues, ceramics, luxury objects, ornaments, costumes, sculptures and much more. Nowadays, the only option to partially view the museum's collection is to visit their website, which presents around 500 objects from different eras. Some of the exhibits were presented also in Louvre. A petition was initiated to save the museum and it has already gained more than 10,000 signatures. But the future of one of the oldest Armenian museums in the world still stays vague and uncertain. ➤





ARMENIAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM OF AMERICA (ALMA), WATERTOWN, USA

The story of the ALMA begins in 1971. Back then, it was just a community of Armenian educators, professionals and businessmen, who started to collect Armenian books and artifacts in a church house in Belmont, Massachusetts. The collection grew rapidly and in 1985, the Armenian Museum of America officially opened its doors to the public. At first, it occupied the basement of the First Armenian Church of Belmont, but in 1988 the founders of the museum purchased and then renovated the current building in Watertown. Watertown is considered as the “Little Armenia” for generations of Armenians living on the American continent. The current museum has four floors and represents a vast set of artefacts covering 3000 years of the Armenian history and culture.

The museum’s collection includes over 5000 ancient coins, 3000 textiles, religious and ceramic artifacts and a library. Hence, ALMA positions itself not as a still warehouse of artifacts and books, but a living place for the Armenian community and for people of all ethnic backgrounds to come together and to discover Armenia’s culture, history and art. It also intends to host education tours and live music events. In 2018, a new gallery called Armenia: art, culture, eternity was presented to the public illustrating Armenia’s linguistic and religious origins with 50 new objects. The Museum collection also includes an extensive compilation of photos portraying the 20th century taken by Yousuf Karsh. The admission of the museum varies from \$5 to \$15, but it is free for children and for the museum members.





THE ARMENIAN MUSEUM OF MOSCOW, RUSSIA

The Armenian Museum of Moscow and culture of the nations opened in 2015 on the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide. It is a museum dedicated to the Armenian history, culture and religion and is the biggest Armenian interactive museum abroad. Located on the territory of the Moscow Church complex of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the North – East of Moscow, the museum covers an area of 1600 square meters. It has 9 expositions, 8 of which are represented through the new and modern technologies. The interactive format of the museum enables visitors to have an immersive experience and understand better the expositions, as well as the whole concept of the museum. Alongside the interactive part, the museum also exhibits documents, household items, posters, ads, photos and other artifacts from the early 20th century, as well as from 0 AD to 1000 AD. The collections include paintings and sculptures, the world's largest oil painting of Mount Ararat, a big section of the library within the Museum and a section for Armenian iconography. Moreover, it presents a digital database for all the Armenian churches in Russia. The museum also provides space for conferences, presentations, round tables, and has his own cinema with 50 seats.

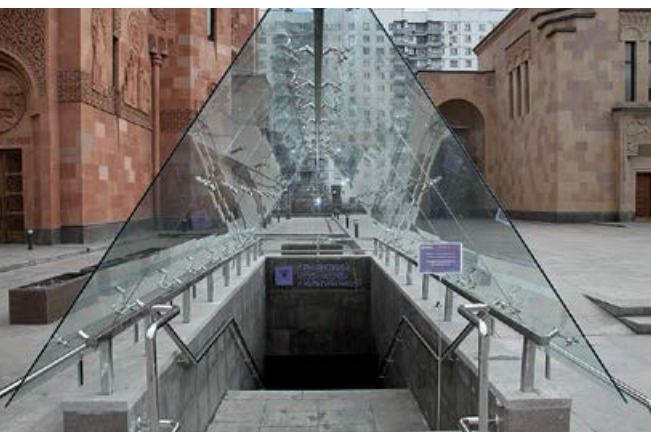
The library's all items are open to the public use. The library's collection has a large list of historical documents that are somehow related to the Armenian history in Russia. On the weekends, the museum becomes a religious and cultural education center for the Armenian children in Russia.



ARMENIAN MUSEUM SINGAPORE, SINGAPORE

Asia's first ever Armenian Museum opened last year in Singapore. The discussions to create a museum started back in 2005. But the small Armenian community of Singapore was focused on the maintenance of the 180-year-old Armenian Apostolic Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator, which was declared a national monument in 1973. It is the oldest Armenian church in Southeast Asia. There are already several Armenian Museums and Centers in Singapore including the Peranakan Museum, Baba House, Malay Heritage Centre. But the new museum will mark the importance of the Armenian community in Singapore through the presentation of literary and religious exhibits, as well as paintings of "Armenian Streets" across the globe.

The organizers also plan to present the chronological timeline telling the Armenian community's history in Singapore. The collection of the exhibits is still in process. According to some sources, the project costs \$1.2 million and is realized in cooperation with the National Heritage Board. ♦



CRIME AGAINST EVERYONE: “The worst cultural genocide of the 21st century”

On February 2019, researchers Simon Maghakyan and Sarah Pickman published a report on the destruction of tens of thousands of medieval Armenian monuments in Azerbaijan. 89 medieval churches, 5,840 intricate cross-stones, and 22,000 tombstones are said to be destroyed by the Azerbaijani government. The original investigation in Hyperallergic art media outlet was followed by another article in The Guardian, which triggered international reaction. Regional Post spoke to Simon Maghakyan about the investigation.

INTERVIEW : KARINA GHAZARYAN



The Guardian article initiated considerable media coverage of the topic, as well as reaction from general public. Where did it all start from? How did you become interested in this matter?

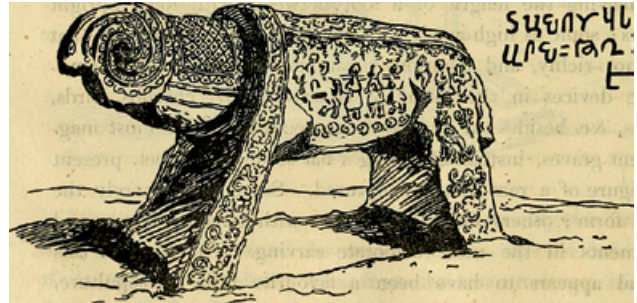
— I have worked on this topic for over a decade now. I was a student in political science when I found out that the largest Armenian cemetery in the world, Djulfa (or Jugha in Armenian), had just been destroyed. I was shocked and I thought that the video footage was not enough for the international community to at least criticize that act of destruction.

I had heard of that cemetery from my father who visited it during Soviet times. I grew up with stories of Djulfa, and I decided to raise awareness about the crime happening there. This effort resulted in a film that I made with Sarah Pickman in 2006. I also launched a website djulfa.com. I was working at Amnesty International as a pro bono specialist on the Caucasus, through which I got to know American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Together with them, we were able to document the destruction of Djulfa by satellite imagery. Another major achievement was an article in 2007 in *History Today* which was widely cited in academic circles.

How did this investigation start?

— I realized I was myself in a denial about the extent to which the Armenian heritage of Nakhichevan had been destroyed. I thought maybe they had left something here and there. But the more I looked into it, the more I realized that this was an unparalleled cultural genocide. Any trace of an entire civilization had been eradicated; nothing like that had happened in our lifetime. So, on Armenian Christmas in January 2018, I was having a hard time falling asleep because I felt like this story was going to be ignored. So, I decided to conduct a major investi-

> Several ram stones were standing in the cemetery



gation that would show the outcome of this destruction and tell the story in a comprehensive manner.

You are also a part of Hay Dat Armenian lobby group. Do you think this affected the investigation and also made you vulnerable to criticism for being bias?

— Anyone who reads it can see that it is written not by activists but by scholars. Sarah Pickman, a Yale University PhD candidate, and I had many peer reviewers including Thomas de Waal, who is considered the most objective and knowledgeable scholar of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. We also had an anonymous Azerbaijani reviewer on

board to be sure that this was not going to be criticized as an activist piece. Furthermore, Netherlands-based independent Azerbaijani historian and human rights defender Arif Yunus cooperated with us.

So, the article does not have a black and white perspective; it provides as much context about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as possible.

What was the reaction from Azerbaijani state officials and media?

— Official Azerbaijan seems to be in a state of shock: for weeks they were completely silent, and then on Twitter the Consulate General of Azerbaijan

in Los Angeles started responding to many tweets from the readers of the investigation. Azerbaijan's response on Twitter was "whataboutism" concerning the supposed vandalism against Azerbaijani monuments in Karabakh.

The Azerbaijani government also has a person named Peter Tase, who either writes an article for them, or just signs anything that they write. Supposedly, Tase is a resident in the US state of Wisconsin. He wrote a very aggressive piece about it in the Nakhichevan government official periodical. His article contained many insults (like fascist propaganda, fake news, fabrication, etc.) but it did not question the investigation itself. The only criticism was that we did not use the official toponyms, but we actually had used both historic Armenian names and current official Azerbaijani names. Years ago, the official Baku said those were Caucasian Albanian monuments.

▼
Azerbaijani soldiers destroying the tombstones, 2005



But now, when all the Christian heritage is eradicated, they just say those monuments never existed.

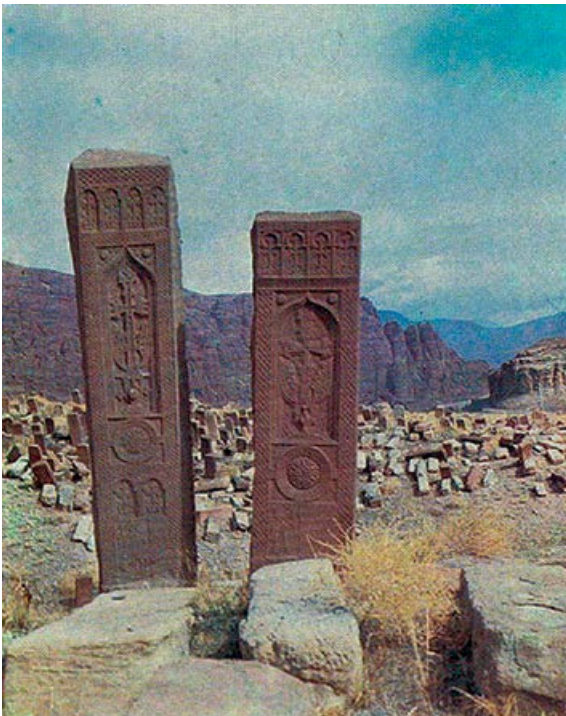
Was there any reaction on non-official level?

— On Azerbaijani side, there were many private reactions from very significant individuals, but I don't want to endanger their well-being by giving you details. These individuals – and I am sure many more – were devastated by the destruction in Nakhichevan, and the

investigation gave them the same sense of satisfaction that the truth about the destruction was finally told in a comprehensive and contextualized method.

Khachkars are protected by UNESCO. What feedback did the organization give to the report?

— They had known about the destruction of Djulfa long before, perhaps not to this extent. And I had told them about the investigation ahead of time, they knew it was coming up,





and when it was published I send it to them and got a short note of thanking for having shared the information. I have sent them a list of recommendations which I think UNESCO should do, including the canceling of upcoming World Heritage Committee session which is to be held in Baku in early July. At the very least, they have acknowledged it. However, I don't have much hope regarding UNESCO, I really don't think they are going to do much unless the Armenian government brings this up at every international gathering on culture heritage.

Do you think the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage should have any importance for Azerbaijan?

— Our article has finally taken out this topic from a “he said/she said” dialogue. Until now, Azerbaijan has been able to, sort of, portrait reports of this destruction as just tit for tat. Now we proved that this is an international crime that has been committed by the government against the very monuments they were supposed to protect and in an area that was never a war zone. Armenians are not the only ones that have been impacted by this: heritage belongs to everyone, not to one ethnic group or culture. We should

^ Cemetery in 1980's



have deep knowledge and objective information about past and present, and that information should be transferred to others: it is good for democracy, it is good for tourism. Besides, I think Armenians have always felt that their monuments are targeted by Azerbaijan, and unfortunately, Azerbaijan has confirmed the worst fears that Armenians have had. And this action has made the long-term peace much harder. But in the investigation we made sure not to blame the entire Azerbaijan or Azerbaijani people

for this destruction. We want to highlight that there are two Azerbaijanians: the Azerbaijan of Aliyev family and the Azerbaijan of Akram Aylisli, who loved, adored Armenian monuments probably as much as any Armenian. By telling this story of devastation people like Akram Aylisli can find a common pain from the destruction of the cultural heritage. Instead of using this to boost our own anger we should try to understand that this is a crime that was committed against everyone, including Azerbaijani people. ♦

ONCE UPON A TIME IN NURSULTAN

On March 19th, one year before the end of his term, the officially proclaimed “Leader of the Kazakh Nation” and their president for three decades, Nursultan Nazarbayev resigned. The news came as a surprise to most regional and international analysts and politicians. And while everybody was wondering who was going to replace him, he made it clear that the speaker of the Senate and his close ally, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, will act as the head of state until new elections are held next year. Hence, can we truly expect a fresh wave of changes in Kazakhstan soon, or is this just a staged transmission of power?

TEXT : VIKTORIA MURADYAN



NURSULTAN ABISHEVICH NAZARBAYEV

Born: 6 July 1940, Kazakhstan, U.S.S.R.
Education: Technical school in Dniprodzerzhynsk (Ukraine), Technical school of the Karaganda Metallurgical Combine (Kazakhstan), Higher Party School (Moscow)
Party: Nur Otan
In office: 24 April 1990 – 19 March 2019
Wife: Sara Nazarbayeva
Children: 3 daughters (Dariga, Dinara and Aliya Nazarbayeva)



THE LAST SOVIET-ERA LEADER

Although his resignation was quite surprising not only for the region, but also for the world, the reasons behind it are quite understandable. During the last three decades Nazarbayev proved himself as a true diplomat who merited respect of the many world powers in spite of the fact that he was an authoritarian leader. At the age of 78, he was the last Soviet-era president who was still in power. The only way to organize a successful transition of his legacy to his loyalists or family members was to step aside now. He preferred not to repeat the fate of another Soviet-era leader, the president of the Uzbekistan Islam Karimov. After Karimov died in 2016 while still being at office, the Uzbeks jailed his allies.

➤ Nazarbayev with other heads of EEU

▼ Kazakhstan's capital Nursultan, formerly known as Astana



Tigran Akopyan



FOR THE KAZAKH PEOPLE, WHO HAVE HAD THE SAME RULER FOR AROUND THREE DECADES, **ANY CHANGE IN THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE, EVEN THE SMALLEST ONE, IS CONSIDERED AS POSITIVE**

For Nazarbayev, being remembered as a president who stepped aside on time (more or less) adds more credit to his international reputation and to the success of his successor. For the Kazakh people, who have had the same ruler for around three decades, any change in the political landscape, even the smallest one, is considered as positive.

Another reason behind his resignation is the fact, that the country's GDP has been shrinking since 2013. It is still struggling from the fall of the oil prices in 2014 and from the wave of sanctions against his principal trade partner, Russia. These developments caused people to complain about poor social services and low living standards. Nazarbayev fired his entire Cabinet calling them a group of "cowards" earlier in February because of the inability to address social problems. His government was working on policies to raise public-sector employees' salaries. But that, of course, couldn't be enough to recover the economy.

After all, he preferred to be remembered as a President who boosted the Kazakh economy and not the one who failed it. ➤

NAZARBAYEV'S LEGACY IN KAZAKHSTAN

The one-time steel worker and Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic leader since 1989 preserved his power when Kazakhstan declared its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Kazakhstan was the largest republic in USSR after Russia. It has rich resources and possesses key nuclear sites. Since then, the country has made a huge economic jump which brought with it the status of the strongest Central Asian country. The international image of the country suggests that Kazakhstan is a stable, predictable and wealthy state.

Since the independence of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev managed to attract investments worth billions of dollars from foreign energy companies and multiplied the outcome of the country's oil industry. Another important implemented measure offered by Nazarbayev was the demographic policy after the collapse of the USSR. The national immigration policy intended to call back ethnic Kazakhs inhabiting abroad. As a result, the number of ethnic Russians living in the North after the collapse of the Soviet Union has greatly fallen, while the number of mostly Muslim ethnic Kazakhs has grown. Consequently, the country has become much more nationalistic. The change of the capital city from Almaty to Astana (that was renamed Nursultan after his resignation) in 1997 was also a part of the well-thought and provident regional strategy.

Compared to the other Central Asian leaders, he was able to perfectly balance his foreign policy channeling Russia, China and the West. Nazarbayev was able to implement profitable trade deals with India, Pakistan, Egypt, Azerbaijan, Japan and even the European Union (\$28.6 billion during January-September 2018). In general, the country has a very strong pro-free trade attitude and uses the platform of the EEU in his negotiations. Meanwhile, Russia and China continue to remain as the key trade partners of Kazakhstan.

But while focusing hugely on the economic growth, Nazarbayev has "forgotten" to develop democratic governance. None of the Kazakh elections have ever been considered as free and fair by the international community and observers, as usually Nazarbayev won with nearly 100 percent of the people's vote. He has never actually had credible political opponents, mainly because he used to jail them and the media representatives, who criticized his authoritarian regime. The level of corruption in the country was usually very high. Moreover, the international community has also blamed him for fostering the personality cult.



^ Nazarbayev with Mikhail Gorbachev, late 1980's

NURSULTAN IN THE WORLD

Kazakhstan, Central Asia's largest country is at the crossroad of the Russian, Chinese, European and even the American interests. Nazarbayev made Kazakhstan the country, that almost every world power wants to have ties to. While interacting with politically and economically rivaling countries, Kazakhstan builds its relations with every partner separately. That is, indeed, the key to their effective positioning.

Nazarbayev's success outside of Kazakhstan is highly correlated with the factor, that he has had a control in all domains of his country's life. While his eldest daughter was his biggest support in the Senate, his other daughter, Dinara, alongside with her husband, controls the country's biggest lender Halyk Bank.

^ Former president's daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva





WHILE HIS ELDEST DAUGHTER WAS HIS **BIGGEST SUPPORT IN THE SENATE, HIS OTHER DAUGHTER, DINARA, ALONG-SIDE WITH HER HUSBAND, CONTROLS THE COUNTRY'S BIGGEST LENDER HALYK BANK**

▼ Vladimir Putin and Nursultan Nazarbayev watched new Russian-Kazakh film "Panfilov's Twenty-Eight Guardsmen"



◀ With Donald Trump in Washington

WHAT DOES HIS RESIGNATION MEAN FOR THE REGION?

Although there were some signs indicating the possible resignation earlier this year, no one could see this coming so soon. And while this decision puts an end to a very special era in the region, which is the era of the Soviet-time leaders, it is some kind of a red flag to Russia, where Putin's power stays incontestable for 20 years. The region has been recently undergoing a lot of Western influence and simultaneously strengthening its ties with China. In 2017, Nazarbayev changed the official script of the Kazakh language from Cyrillic to Latin, which provoked the fury of some Russian officials. China has been viewing Kazakhstan as a key player in the One Belt, One Road global infrastructure program, which is considered as the New Silk Road. Kazakhstan is also an important ally of the United States in its anti-terrorism combat in the Central Asia. During 2005 and 2018, American companies owned a 13 percent share in the foreign investments in Kazakhstan. For now, one thing is clear: Kazakhstan will continue to follow the same course to protect its well-established status in the region and the world. As the statement published on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website says, "Kazakhstan will preserve the peaceful foreign political course based on the principles of multivectorness, balance and pragmatism". ➤



ARMENIAN – KAZAKH RELATIONS

The diplomatic relations between Armenia and Kazakhstan started in August 1992, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Armenia has an Embassy in Almaty and Yerevan hosts the Embassy of Kazakhstan. Two countries share partnership in 3 international and regional organizations including CSTO, OSCE and the post-Soviet CIS. The Armenian community living in Kazakhstan reaches up to 25,000 people.

But the relations haven't always been smooth, especially after Armenia joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the CSTO. During the pre-accession negotiations, president Nazarbayev insisted that Armenia join the union with the UN-recognized borders "not to provoke the Comrade in Baku", meaning the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. After the arrest of the Secretary General of the CSTO Gen. Yuri Khachaturov, which happened after the Velvet Revolution in Armenia and Serj Sargsyan's resignation, Kazakhstan and Belarus started to promote pro-Azerbaijani Gen. Stanislav Zas's candidacy as the new Secretary General, neglecting Armenian efforts to keep the presidency until the end of the term. Fortunately, earlier this year, the CSTO decided to suspend the appointment of the new Secretary General until the end of 2020.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, that Kazakhstan is a part of, has released a statement labeling Armenia as an "aggressor". It is not even surprising to recall, that Kazakhstan, alongside with Belarus, has been constantly promoting Azerbaijan's membership in the EEU despite the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

^ Armenia's prime-minister Nikol Pashinyan and Nazarbayev



> Nazarbayev and Serzh Sargsyan

In addition to that, one of the largest air companies in Kazakhstan, SCAT Airlines suspended the Astana-Yerevan-Astana direct flights (operating since May 2017) from January 15 until May 15, 2019. Meanwhile, there has been no official clarification from the Kazakh side on this occasion. Although Armenians tend to consider Kazakhstan as a "strategic partner", it is clear that the strongest link between the countries is the trade, and not the security priorities or the shared vision of the region. Mainly thanks to the EEU, in 2018, the trade between Armenia and Kazakhstan was around 12 million USD, which was 50 percent higher than in 2017, and it is expected to grow in future. Furthermore, Kazakhstan remains a major market for Armenian jewelers and agricultural products.



◀ Baykon Cosmo-
drome in Kazakhstan

KASSYM-JOMART TOKAYEV

Born 17 May 1953.

In 1970, Tokayev joined the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. In his fifth year, he was sent to training courses at the Soviet embassy in China for six months. Upon graduation from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in 1975, Tokayev joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR and was posted to the Soviet Embassy in Singapore. In 1992, Tokayev was appointed as a Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In 1993, he became First Deputy Foreign Minister and in 1994 he was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. In March 1999, he was promoted to the post of Deputy Prime Minister. In October 1999, with the endorsement of the Parliament, he was appointed Prime Minister by Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Tokayev held the post of Foreign Minister for ten years (1994–1999, 2002–2007). On 19 March 2019, President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev announced his resignation. According to the Constitution of Kazakhstan, in case of early termination of powers, the Speaker of the Senate becomes President until the next election. On 20 March 2019, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev officially took office as President.

KAZAKHSTAN, ALONGSIDE WITH BELARUS, HAS BEEN **CONSTANTLY PROMOTING AZERBAIJAN'S MEMBERSHIP** IN THE EEU DESPITE THE ONGOING NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

▶ Kassym-Jomart
Tokayev



WHAT'S NEXT FOR KAZAKHSTAN?

In spite of his resignation, he will continue to carry on positions as the President of his party Nur Otan and the head of the country's Security Council. After the speaker of the Senate Kassym-Jomart Tokayev became the interim president of the country, the eldest of Nazarbayev's three daughters, Dariga, replaced Tokayev in the Senate. Dariga Nazarbayeva was the former head of the Kazakh Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Defense and Security. Being the second in the hierarchy to govern the country, the former Senator Dariga most probably at a certain point will take on the lead of the country to continue his father's legacy. In this case, Kazakhstan will become the second Post-soviet country (after Azerbaijan) to have a dynastic governance. ♦

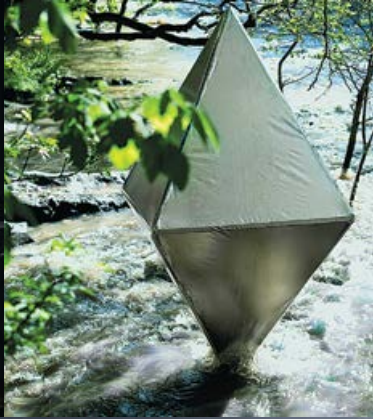


URVAKAN

At the beginning of May Yerevan's Children Railway hosted Urvakan fest, one of a kind art and music event with a huge line-up of musicians and artists. Urvakan festival's music program blended together ongoing projects of more than 80 artists from 22 countries, highlighting current trends in sonic arts, contemporary electronic, instrumental, avant pop, and club music. The festival also aimed to spark exchanges between local musicians and established artists, curators, and independent music industry professionals from around the world. Because of all this, Urvakan became an effective platform representing some of the best talents across the genres, styles, and scenes of Armenia as well as ex-USSR and Middle Eastern countries whose distinctive voices are still being excluded from the global music scenarios.

PHOTO : URVAKAN, BIAYNA MAHARI





YEREVAN WINE DAYS

Once again Armenia celebrated the Renaissance of the Armenian wine making: for two days Yerevan Wine Days took place on capital's Sarqan and Moskovyan streets. Winemakers from Armenian and Artsakh presented about 200 sorts of wine; restaurants and cafes introduced specialties of Armenian and international cuisines, and all this accompanied with the high-quality live music.

PHOTO : EVENTTOURA





ARMENIA ART FAIR

The opening ceremony of the second annual Armenia Art Fair took place in Yerevan Expo Center on May 31. 35 galleries and curators exhibited contemporary artists from Armenia, Iran, Belarus, Ukraine, Israel, USA, Spain and UK during the four days of the fair. From May 25 to June 2 Art Week was first introduced, a new format which stands for series of discussions on the topics of new art markets, the connection between art and new technologies, art and data.



^
The team
behind Art Fair





^ Founders of AAF Zara Ouzounian and Nina Festekjian



^ Know Waste project by Eiva Arts Foundation



^ Foreign Affairs minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan with wife



^ Almost 3,000 visitors attended the fair





Areni-1 shoe

A unique artifact found in 2008, a 5,500-year-old leather shoe – the oldest piece of leather footwear in the world known to contemporary researchers – is one of the finest exhibits of the History Museum of Armenia.

Shoe was found in excellent condition in the Areni-1 cave located in the Vayots Dzor province of Armenia. The discovery was made by an international team led by Boris Gasparyan, an archaeologist from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia (co-directors of the project are Ron Pinhasi from University College Cork in Ireland, and Gregory Areshian from UCLA).



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