

Speaking Beyond Living Room Walls: The Armenian Diaspora And Its Discontents

An informal yet informed forum

Saturday, March 8, 2008
Columbia University
555 Lerner Hall
(Near Broadway and the Campus Main Gate)
11:00 to 6:00 PM
New York City

Speakers List Will Be Announced Shortly

Fifteen years after the breakup of communism and despite the restrictions within post soviet-colonial reality, a number of Armenia's artists, writers, academics, and activists are attempting to articulate critical positions on issues ranging from subjectivity to neo-liberalism, dead art, bio-politics and the public sphere. These processes entail the questioning or deconstructing of former ideologies that have defined and redefined the Soviet-Armenian subject and/or citizen for nearly a century. They also include carving new spaces to mediate change. While some argue that not much is 'post' in post-soviet Armenia, others explore alternative paradigms that are suspicious of the re-emergence of homogenous identity constructions as illustrated by "One Nation, One Culture" banners that mark the country's rural and urban landscapes.

Where are the counterparts of such critical debates among Diaspora Armenians as they relate to the post Cold War transnational subject and within the hyphenated-spaces of East /West and North/South?

Might Armenia's isolation and the Diaspora's insularity have something in common? What contributes to the estrangement of the Diaspora from other cultures, mainstream or marginal? What helps unite them with others? How does this transnational moment of globalization challenge former, more classic, definitions of Diaspora? What is at risk when preservationist strategies fail, or survival mantras get exhausted? Who gains from monolithic or fixed identities? Can community institutions better integrate diversity and cultural hybridity? Is socio-political fragmentation a viable alternative to cultural stagnation? Why isn't the Armenian cultural elite better informed? What is 'post' about the post-Ottoman Armenian mindset? How can we undo the fire-wall that the Armenian Diaspora has erected around itself? How can emergent 'community' voices help forge new forms of public spaces, including cyber ones? To borrow a term from Americanist David Kazanjian, how do we map out the '*culs-de-sac*' of dominant narratives and put forth emancipatory possibilities?

This forum attempts to migrate topics listed below from domestic or private spaces to the public sphere and open up a discussion that will hopefully begin to decipher long-held assumptions, perceptions, myths and stereotypes about the Armenian Diaspora, both from within and without.

- 1) Media Beyond Entertainment, Mediocrity and Censorship**
- 2) Institution Building, Democracy and Accountability**
- 3) Armenian Studies, Historical Revisionism and Genocide Politics**
- 4) New Economies Same Old Players:
Yo, will we ever have an art center in America? We've been here a hundred years!**
- 5) Feminism, Gender Relations and Sexuality**
- 6) Agency and the Diasporic Subject/Citizen in the 21st Century:
From Conformity to Empowerment**
- 7) Owning an Armenian Passport: A Luxury or Necessity?**
- 8) Locating the 'Experimental' and/or Critical Thought in Artistic and Curatorial Practice, Art Education, Relation of Politics to Art and Representation etc.**

The event is sponsored by the Columbia University's Armenian Students Association. The forum is initiated and organized by Neery Melkonian with Silva Ajemian, Hrayr Anmahouni, Razmig Aslanian, Christopher Atamian, Arda Berberian, David Kazanjian, Lori Khrimian, Anoosh Tertsakian and Meldia Yesayan.

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Or by calling: 212, 842-4868.

Kindly circulate, thank you and hope to see you on March 8th!!