

Culture

Photographs

Ariane Delacampagne: a look at history

By Colette Khalaf

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“Les Arméniens de Bourj Hammoud: État des Lieux,” is a series of black and white photographs on view at the CCF exhibition gallery until April 29 and attests to the just and authentic eye of photographer Ariane Delacampagne.

It has now been five years that she has been combing the streets of Bourj Hammoud. Five years that she has set out to meet unknown people, knocking on their doors, entering their private space (nothing illegal), exposing their wounds, their worries and their questions. With modesty and complete respect (“I’ve never taken photos secretly,” she states), Ariane Delacampagne, a photographer with Armenian roots, born in Lebanon, but working in New York for twenty-five years, has humbly made herself witness to a human microcosm.

In addition to publishing two photography books – *Here be Dragons: a Fantastic Bestiary*, in 2003, and *Visages et Voix Flamenco* in 2007 - the artist has participated in several group exhibitions and solo shows, notably in New York and Seville.

At the origin of this long-term project, which the photographer began a few years ago, was an encounter that triggered an entire process: “In New York, I met a very old woman, a survivor of the genocide. I was interested in her face and character, and I photographed her,” says Delacampagne, “I therefore decided to return to Lebanon in search of these survivors and to create a memory project.” Ariane Delacampagne learned to discover the neighborhood called Bourj Hammoud. She set out to explore every nook of this mythical and historical place - because it is there that the survivors of the genocide came to take refuge and build their shelters and homes - “which is what gave this neighborhood profound unity and a very great sense of belonging,” the photographer adds. But beyond the historical aspect, there was the human side that intrigued the photographer. How its people experienced solitude, the departure of their children, the dislocation of families, and furthermore, the extinction of small trades and the destruction of their homes in the name of building modern buildings. These are the questions raised by this urban “reportage,” which in turn also addresses old age.

Combing the streets

After identifying several subjects, Delacampagne enters into relationships that she later forever captures with her lens. "I talk to them at length before photographing them, always in a context they know well, their house or their work." "I've never gone through organizations," she adds, "but it is thanks to them that I learned about the existence of Sanjak," the historic camp soon destined to be destroyed. While the black and white and the head-on stares of the subjects are deliberate, the photographer specifies that these are not nostalgic images, not even a pilgrimage. "It's my own perspective, with my baggage and my culture, that I bring to these places and these contexts, which I never seek to change."

Both in the places evoking great solitude (home for the elderly) and the boutiques and workshops of artists (painters and sculptors), artisans (ecclesiastical tailor, shoe salesman, technician and others), one finds lace, icons and religious imagery that are purely Armenian. A joyous jumble that candidly illustrates its characters.

And behind the wrinkles, the wizened hands, the slight smiles and stares, it is a chapter in history that is told.