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Les Arméniens de Bourj Hammoud: État des Lieux

Photographs by Ariane Delacampagne at the Centre Culturel Français

At the CCF, the Mission Culturelle Française has organized an exhibition of black and white photographs entitled “Les Arméniens de Bourj Hammoud: État des Lieux,” by Ariane Delacampagne.

Delacampagne is particularly interested in this Beirut neighborhood, packed with remembrances and nostalgia, the living memory of experiences - past and present - that belong to a people in refuge for almost one hundred years. Victims of a genocide, they were forced to leave their country in order to flee death. This is a population that desperately grasps hold of its roots.

Armed with her camera, this artist-photographer crosses Bourj Hammoud, capturing the soul and spirit of the people and place with her lens. The images are moving and impressive. They clearly show how mastering technique has yielded a wide variety of “intended” images and a diversity of interpretations of her subjects, in black and white, close up and in perspective.

The elements that compose the photographs express, through their own pictorial structure, an entirely distinctive atmosphere as well as a personal impression, granting each image its particular character. Some of the images take on even more value through the framing and by drawing attention to unlikely qualities in the shot –for example, certain softened or accentuated contrasts of light and shadow.

Works that are remarkable for their documentary value

Ariane Delacampagne photographs leave some margin for interpretation, which led her to a specific visual language. The art of photography has often obliged her to turn back to the conventional challenges of artistic creation. Her work stems from intuition and science. Her goal is not simply to depict reality, but to situate it in unusual dimensions so as to intensify the meaning of each detail and the message of the composition as a whole. Everywhere, accent is placed on the importance of a personal vision and above all shows how it is possible to interpret and communicate a feeling with the aid of the staging of the image, and to transform reality, at times banal, into visual art.

The exhibition gives the viewer a visual tour of Bourj Hammoud. It is remarkable for its documentary value and, through image, reveals this neighborhood and its urban spaces, with its specific cachet. One is rather receptive to the manner in which the principle motif finds its place, in its environment, by bringing about the desired ambiance. To achieve it, the dominant elements of the subject had to be accentuated,

giving each the importance it needed in the frame, so as to give the image a particular character. Curious and striving for perfection, Delacampagne wanted to bring everything into the art of photography: form, space, sensitivity, dynamism and stability. She was able to make each of her photographs into a concrete world. Her art is interested in the laws, relationships, rhythms, and essence of the elements as well as their structure, the readability of the images and their message.

The particular interest of this series of photographs can be explained by their power to evoke – better than words can – the specific character, spirit and magic of the site.