

## Portraits of Survival: The Armenians of Bourj Hammoud

The intense and tender eye of photographer Ariane Delacampagne in *Portraits of Survival: The Armenians of Bourj Hammoud*\*

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November 1, 2014

A hardcover for an opus that serves both as a gallery of portraits since the Armenian genocide and as a depiction of the soul of a neighborhood that has earned its stripes through constant work.

Far from all civil upheaval and conflict, devoted to its creativity and the art of business, with a thriving market that takes care of all the needs and cravings of its clientele, Bourj Hammoud today is a stroller's paradise. Lively avenues and back streets where hunting for, rummaging through and discovering all kinds of goods, clothing and food, decor and accessories of all kinds, bring joy. The joy of contemporary window displays and stands stuffed with the best of products. In 1920, here stood a camp for Armenian survivors who transformed the area into a reputable neighborhood. These men and women were the master designers. In more than one domain.

And it is these people - beyond the bustle of the street and the gleam of the shop fronts and stands - that Ariane Delacampagne's camera and words begin to explore. She captures them in photos and texts to reveal a certain Armenian character of the Diaspora. Together they yield *Portraits of Survival: The Armenians of Bourj Hammoud*, a remarkable bilingual French-English publication, with a preface by Levon Nordiguan (159 pages, Somogy Éditions d'Art).

In this flourishing mix of modern business and traditional trade, the Armenians, young and old, illustrious (for example the artists Guvder and Torossian) and unknown by the general public, pose in front of the flash of a photographer who herself has Armenian roots. Her long quest has given a face, gaze, silhouette and profile, a tangible image to all those who built and maintained this lively area through the years.

In these workshops overrun with disparate objects, in front of workbenches loaded with sundry and unimaginable items, between a profession's dust and décor, in this setting of their daily working life, all these men and women, with names like

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\* 5 pm Signing tonight, at Librairie Antoine, 5pm.

Varujan, Krikor, Vahan, Mano, Ara, Talar, Shushan, Araz, Lorig and Arpine, candidly face the camera's eye with simplicity and love of life.

What remains is a testimony of great beauty and strength. Whether young or old, born before 1930, there is something moving about reading these faces where wrinkles and harmony of features speak at length about the painful history of the survivors and of generations rising from adversity.

In addition to the draw of a vibrant account, modest and without pathos, one finds the essence and determined strength of a people. As well as their incomparable sense of dignity, their joy at work and the secret vitality of their skills. After looking through these pages, you cannot help but see Bourj Hammoud in a new light.

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