

Portraits of Armenians from Bourj Hammoud

An urban reportage filled with humanity by the Lebanese-Armenian Ariane Delacampagne

Ariane Delacampagne is a Lebanese-Armenian photographer who lives in the United States. She has just released her third book, *Portraits of Survival*, devoted to the Armenians of Bourj Hammoud. An encounter a few years ago triggered her desire to further explore her Armenian roots. "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. I then returned to Lebanon in search of these survivors to create a memory project," recalls Delacampagne, whose maiden name is Ateshian. Upon her arrival, she discovered the neighborhood of Bourj Hammoud, a northeastern suburb of Beirut. Fleeing the genocide, thousands of Armenians settled in this marshland in the late 1920s, living in tents and sheds. Eventually these makeshift shelters evolved into small buildings, with trade workshops and stores on the ground floor. "At a time when the face of Beirut was changing – large reconstruction projects were sapping its soul – I discovered Bourj Hammoud, which still had a human dimension, an authenticity that was lacking elsewhere," Delacampagne explains. So she began photographing these Armenians in their daily lives from a systematic standpoint: general black and white portraits where the ambiance is as important as the person who invariably stares into the camera, as if to suspend time.

But the shots aren't nostalgic. On the contrary, the photographer offers a current portrayal of this changing city. A biographical caption accompanies each portrait, each a story that together form the larger history of Armenians in Lebanon. "Aside from their purely esthetic interest, these photographs – emerging from years of on-the-ground documenting, a project that could only work because of the photographer's personal knowledge of the language and Armenian culture – form an exceptional account of this moving, melancholic world, likely bound to disappear," stated a few years ago Delacampagne's now deceased husband.

Claire Barbuti

[caption] In his store on place Debbas, in the heart of old Beirut, Yervant Hawanian paints legendary Arab singers, Hollywood stars and political leaders from memory.

Portraits of Survival: The Armenians of Bourj Hammoud, by Ariane Delacampagne

Somogy – Éd. d'art, 25€