"RIGHT NOW IN ARMENIA"

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Category: Opinions

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TORONTO, Oct. 20 – An art activism installation, by United Armenian Council of Ontario, took place at Union Station. *Right Now in Armenia* is the vision of Toronto-based artist Mariam Mughdusyan, who incorporated tactile, visual, and auditory elements into a wholly immersive experience. Laundry: wooden poles threaded with clotheslines were held by participants, while others hung up clothes from laundry baskets. Participants also stood in silent protest, with some signs reading, "Indigenous people have a right to their land", "Hospitals are being bombed", and "Recognize Artsakh". The sombre notes of Armenian music, some played by live musicians from different backgrounds, imbued the jarring scene with an intense emotionality.

Set against a backdrop of iconic Toronto landmarks – the CN Tower and the Beaux-Arts façade of Union Station – the installation brought the realities of wartime violence to Canadians. Many passersby were clearly affected by the multi-sensory installation, and stopped in their tracks, some asking questions, murmuring condolences, or simply touching their hearts in a gesture of support and shared grief.

The violence currently taking place in the South Caucasus has displaced nearly the entire population of Artsakh with tragic and devastating results. Continuous shelling on civilian areas means that some 100,000 residents (40,000 of whom are children) are left without basic necessities. Banned cluster munitions have been deliberately used to target schools, hospitals, residential buildings, and churches. For Armenians worldwide, the war over Artsakh echoes as an eerie reminder of the violence endured by recent ancestors in the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

Hanging laundry was chosen as a symbol by the artist due to its cultural importance within the South

Caucasus. In Artsakh and Armenia, drying clothes fluttering on lines adorn the yards of cities and villages alike. The fall of the Soviet Union had a crippling effect on the economy of post-Soviet states; while it seems outdated to Canadian residents, clotheslines with pulley systems connect to apartment windows everywhere from Yerevan to Stepanakert. Like so many multicoloured flags, laundry hangs above the heads of children playing in the Soviet-style yards, criss-crossing from one family to another. “It is a symbol of the household,” said Mariam Mughdusyan. To the women of the war-torn area, there is a correct manner of hanging laundry – sorted by function, colour, and generation – and full clothes lines represent a busy household. “When the laundry is out unchanged for days, it means that no one is home.”

In Toronto, clothes of every size, colour, and gender were painted in red blood colour and hung up, representing the scope of the innocents affected by war. The installation included musicians and multidisciplinary artists from various backgrounds, who performed traditional songs amidst these grim reminders of wartime reality. Each musician or artist marked the beginning of their performance by hanging up a piece of laundry, in solidarity with the civilians of Artsakh.

The effect was resounding, and the meaning clear: art is not constrained by boundaries or nationalities, and we form kinship through co-existence, shared trauma, and support. Though the war we mourn is happening across the world, our humanity binds us, and it is through art and emotional expression that we share a universal language. The pain of Artsakh is borne by us all.

There are no comments yet.