

Ara Oshagan

Words from the Curator

Ara Oshagan documents how everyday people make with the afterlives of displacement and diasporic living, playfully reconfiguring images to nuance “*place*” beyond borders.

Oshagan's works speak to diasporic presence. His art is a testament to world-making as intertwined with longing, belonging, and full of possibility. Taking us from Shushi to Beirut to Los Angeles, he shows us “*place*” is ever contested, constructed, and changing across diasporic terrain. *When we are uprooted, what can it look like to reimagine our roots?*

In *That You May Return* (2023), Oshagan layers his own diasporic images on Hmayil scrolls with talismanic care. In *Traces of Identity (2000-2010)*, he draws on the texture of place as “*lived space*”;¹ his stills in motion of Armenians in LA provoke our reading of everyday lives as cultural text. Oshagan's process paints him as a cultural vessel, where through creative engagement, he articulates and processes identity in multiplicity—*his diasporic state of living*.

In *The Beirut Memory Project (2018-2021)*, his work is reminiscent of displacement as not only leaving but also being left behind;² embedding colorful pasts in a monochrome present, he nods to multigenerational layers of recurrence. *displaced (2014-2018)* portrays the realities of “*everyday displacement*”³ and the resilience that arises in these spaces. Here, Oshagan grapples with the complexities of return—*what it means to experience firsthand and witness*. His witnessing is a constant and continuous positioning within his worlds and his works, defining agents and mediators of observation.

By “disrupting” images to repair and entangling memory with reconstruction, Oshagan shows how displacement and diasporic processes are affectual encounters⁴ laden with inarticulable sentiments better depicted than described.

There is presence in his compositions, tension in his images, and meaning in between; for Oshagan, remembering these spaces is tempered by his photographs.

In this way, he is a *bricoleur*,⁵ fashioning assemblages from “*living experiences of diaspora*”⁶ at hand. His intervention is conspicuous, echoing his signature way of seeing. It is constructive, waiting for elements to speak beyond what is “there.” His work shapes him as it shapes itself.

For Oshagan, *being human is being and making here*.

¹Mark Davidson, “Displacement, Space and Dwelling: Placing Gentrification Debate,” *Ethics, Place, and Environment* 12, no. 2 (June 2009): 219–34, 225.

²Sara Safransky, “Rethinking Land Struggle in the Postindustrial City,” *Antipode* 49, no. 4 (September 2017): 1079–1100, 1089.

³Filip Stabrowski, “New-Build Gentrification and the Everyday Displacement of Polish Immigrant Tenants in Greenpoint, Brooklyn,” *Antipode* 46, no. 3 (January 17, 2014): 794–815, 796.

⁴Chiara Valli, “A Sense of Displacement: Long-time Residents’ Feelings of Displacement in Gentrifying Bushwick, New York,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39, no. 6 (November 2015): 1191–1208, 1192.

⁵Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jeffrey Mehlman, and John Harold Leavitt, *Wild Thought: A New Translation of La Pensée Sauvage* (The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 20.

⁶Susan P. Pattie, “Longing and Belonging: Issues of Homeland in Armenian Diaspora,” *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 22, no. 2 (November 1999): 80–92, 88.

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