

## **Art, Memory, and the Armenian Genocide**

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Part of our understanding of the past is achieved through a mixture of historical research and the mediums of popular knowledge: film, art, literature including novels and poetry.

In the case of the Armenian genocide the visual record has come down to the current generation in several ways. A photographic record exists, not as “complete” as one compared to the Holocaust, but sufficient to document the mass killings of the Armenians. The most famous archive was created by Armin Wegner, a medic in the German army based in the Ottoman Empire. Wegner later wrote a letter to Hitler on behalf of the Jews, an inspiring act of protest that connects the two genocides.

Shortly after the genocide, some silent films were produced, such as “Ravaged Armenia,” which caused some public disturbances in the USA when it was shown because of its graphic depictions. The “Schindler’s List” of the Armenian Genocide was never made. That film would have been one based on Franz Werfel’s “Forty Days of Musa Dagh.” However, Turkish government pressure during the 1930s forced MGM to shelve the project. The film has yet to be made. By contrast, Atom Egoyan’s “Ararat,” while it dealt with the Armenian genocide and inter-generational memory, was overly intellectual, which limited its public appeal. Recently, Canadian filmmaker Araz Artinian has made an interesting “third generation” film entitled “The Genocide in Me.”

Armenian issues have appeared in art and monuments. Many monuments to the Armenian “massacres” or “genocide” exist in European and American cities, as well as in Armenia itself. A paradox is that Turkey has erected a reverse monument in Iğdir, Turkey, which includes a museum dedicated to “one million Turks” who allegedly were victims of Armenian treachery. Since the 1960s, more and more Armenian second generation artists have begun to work out traumatic and emotional issues connected with the Armenian genocide. Such artists can already be found on the University of Minnesota CHGS website: Robert Barsamian installation art, Apo Torosyan’s art and films, an exhibition that was made in New York at the Anthropology Museum in Queens, “Armenia: Memories from my Home,” and a visual catalogue from the exhibition, “Inheritance: Art and Images Beyond a Silenced Genocide.” The CHGS website also contains digitized testimonies by members of the Armenian second generation as well as television productions made for Twin Cities Public Television in Minnesota.

"Art, Memory, and the Armenian Genocide" is a research project that explores the problems of representation through visual imagery and also seeks to present artistic works to the broader public, especially through the website of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies.