



In the Studio with Val Zavala: Ara Oshagan and Levon Parian

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WELL, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA IS HOME TO ROUGHLY A HALF MILLION ARMENIANS. THEY ARE THE LARGEST COMMUNITY OUTSIDE THE REPUBLIC ITSELF. FEW MEMBERS OF THAT COMMUNITY HAVE NOT BEEN TOUCHED BY THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE THAT TOOK PLACE OVER 85 YEARS AGO. WE SEE HOW TWO LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHERS ARE TRYING TO RAISE AWARENESS OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE, IN TONIGHT'S PEOPLE, PLACES & THINGS.

BETWEEN 1915 AND 1922, THE OTTOMAN TURKS ORDERED THE EXECUTIONS OF ONE AND A HALF MILLION ARMENIANS. WE SHOULD NOTE THAT THE CURRENT TURKISH GOVERNMENT STILL DENIES THAT THE TURKS WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLING. HERE WITH MORE ARE THE PHOTOGRAPHERS OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE AWARENESS PROJECT, ARA OSHAGAN AND LEVON PARIAN. THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR JOINING US. YOU DECIDED TO TAKE ON THIS PROJECT. WHY?

ARA OSHAGAN>> BECAUSE WE WANTED TO DO SOMETHING TO SOMEHOW ARTISTICALLY REFLECT UPON THE GENOCIDE. EVEN THOUGH WE'RE THREE GENERATIONS REMOVED FROM THE ACTUAL FACT, IT IS STILL VERY MUCH PART OF OUR COMMUNITY AND PART OF OUR CONSCIOUSNESS.

VAL>> PLUS THE FACT OF THREE GENERATIONS. IF YOU WAITED MUCH LONGER, A LOT OF THESE SURVIVORS WOULD NOT BE HERE RIGHT NOW.

ARA OSHAGAN>> YEAH, EXACTLY. WE'VE REACHED, IN MEAN, IN THE LAST FEW YEARS ALREADY, MANY OF THE SURVIVORS PHOTOGRAPHED HAVE ALREADY PASSED ON.

VAL>> REALLY? WELL, SINCE PHOTOGRAPHY IS YOUR MEDIUM, LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR WORK. WHY DON'T YOU TELL US WHAT WE'RE SEEING? BEAUTIFUL PORTRAIT HERE.

ARA OSHAGAN>> THIS IS [SION ABAJIAN] WHO IS A SURVIVOR FROM [MARASH]. NOT ONLY DO WE TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS, WE ALSO DO INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS SO THAT OUR EXHIBITS ARE PHOTOGRAPHS AND THEIR STORIES.

VAL>> NOW WHAT IS THIS TECHNIQUE? THE FACE ABOVE AND THE HANDS SEPARATE?

LEVON PARIAN>> WE BASICALLY WANTED TO SHOW THE INTENSITY OF THE FACE BY USING THE BLACK BACKGROUND TO REPRESENT THE DEATH THAT THESE PEOPLE EXPERIENCED AND ALSO THE LIGHT IS WHAT THEY CAME OUT OF TO SURVIVE. THE TWO PHOTOS HELP US SEE THE INTENSITY OF THE HANDS.

YOU SEE IN THIS PICTURE THERE ARE TATTOOS ON THE MAN'S HAND AND HE HAD TO GO THROUGH QUITE AN EXPERIENCE OF HAVING HIS HANDS TATTOOED AND HIS BODY TATTOOED DURING THE GENOCIDE. THESE ARE MOSTLY YOUNG PEOPLE WE ARE PHOTOGRAPHING NOW. TO BE ALIVE FROM THAT PERIOD, THEY HAD TO BE ANYWHERE FROM EIGHT TO FIFTEEN YEARS OLD. WE'RE ACTUALLY HEARING THE STORIES OF PEOPLE WHO WERE VERY YOUNG.

VAL>> AND THEY MANAGED TO SURVIVE. LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT SOME MORE IMAGES THAT YOU'VE BROUGHT. BEAUTIFUL PICTURE.

ARA OSHAGAN>> WE ARE, OF COURSE, A CHRISTIAN RACE AND A CHRISTIAN PEOPLE, AND THE BIBLE IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR HERITAGE.

VAL>> AND IN ADDITION TO THE PHOTOGRAPHS, YOU ACTUALLY CHRONICLE THE STORIES?

LEVON PARIAN>> YES.

ARA OSHAGAN>> YES, WE HAVE A PROJECT WHICH WE ESTABLISHED IN 1996. WE HAVE ANYWHERE FROM TEN TO FIFTEEN PEOPLE DO INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS ALSO.

LEVON PARIAN>> THIS IS AN INTERESTING STORY, EXCUSE ME. THIS GENTLEMAN HERE WAS ABOUT SIX OR SEVEN YEARS OLD AND HE WAS THROWN INTO A PILE OF YOUNG CHILDREN WHICH WERE BAYONETED AND SWORDED TO DEATH AND HE SURVIVED BECAUSE HE KEPT HIS MOUTH SHUT WHEN A BAYONET HIT HIS CHEEK. IN THIS PICTURE, YOU CAN SEE HE IS RE-EXPERIENCING THAT MOMENT.

ARA OSHAGAN>> HE WAS IN THE CENTER OF THAT PILE, ACTUALLY. THAT'S WHY HE SURVIVED, VERY LUCKILY.

VAL>> YOU TOOK THE PHOTOS SEPARATELY? ARE THESE INDIVIDUAL PHOTOS OR DID YOU WORK TOGETHER ON THIS?

LEVON PARIAN>> WE WORKED VERY CLOSELY TOGETHER. IN FACT, WHAT WE DO IS BASICALLY HAND THE CAMERA BACK AND FORTH AND SHOOT —

VAL>> — THAT'S UNUSUAL BECAUSE YOU'D THINK PHOTOGRAPHERS WANT IT TO BE THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL WORK.

LEVON PARIAN>> YES. WELL, PART OF THIS IS BECAUSE WE SET ASIDE OUR EGOS AND WE BASICALLY SAID, HEY, YOU KNOW, THIS IS FOR THE COMMUNITY. WE HAVE TO DO THIS FOR THE COMMUNITY —

ARA OSHAGAN>> — WE EACH BRING SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT TO THE PHOTOGRAPHING PROCESS, SO WE ARE ABLE TO SET UP A SHOT, HAND THE CAMERA OVER AND CHANGE IT AND TRY SOMETHING ELSE. WE PLAY OUR ENERGIES OFF OF EACH OTHER AND I THINK WE PRODUCED MUCH MORE INTERESTING PHOTOS THAN IF ONLY ONE PERSON DID IT...