

Fresno Art Museum show marks 100th anniversary of Armenian Genocide

By Ron
Orozco



A bronze piece by Arminee Shishmanian depicts William Saroyan reading while sitting on a tree stump. The tree supports a bike Saroyan was known for riding all over town. Shishmanian, who lives and works in Fresno, creates a wide range of art, including watercolor, acrylic, oil paintings, pastels and bronze sculpture.

ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — THE FRESNO BEE | [Buy Photo](#)

- Art preview

“1915-2015: Tradition, Legacy, Culture”, at [Fresno Art Museum](#), 2233 N. First St. The show opens Jan. 23 with a reception at 5:30 p.m. and continues through April 26. Admission to the opening reception is \$10 for non-museum members and free for members. Admission during normal museum hours — 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays — is \$5 for non-members and free for members. Details: (559) 441-4221 or www.agcfresno.org

- Armenian Genocide Centennial Fresno Committee events
 - Feb. 21, 2 p.m., Armenian Cultural Day, Fresno Art Museum.
 - March 18, 10:30 a.m., San Joaquin Valley Town Hall lecture series, “Man’s Inhumanity to Man: The Last Hundred Years, Saroyan Theatre, 700 M St.
 - April 9, 10, 17 and 18, 7:30 p.m.; April 12 and 19, 2 p.m., “Nine Armenians,” a play by Leslie Ayvazian, Fresno Art Museum’s Bonner Auditorium.
 - April 23, 5 p.m., Requiem Service, Ararat Cemetery’s Memorial of the Unknown Armenian Martyr, 1925 W. Belmont Ave.
 - April 24, 9 a.m., Flag Raising Ceremony, Fresno City Hall, 2600 Fresno St.
 - April 24, time to be announced, Monument Unveiling, Fresno State Maple Mall.
 - April 24, 7 p.m., Traditional Community Commemoration, St. Paul Armenian Apostolic Church, 430 S. First St., and Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church, 3767 N. First St.
 - April 25, 7:30 p.m., Fresno Philharmonic Concert, “Witness & Rebirth: An Armenian Journey,” Saroyan Theatre.

For a complete listing of events, go to: www.agcfresno.org

An exhibit featuring artwork by Armenian artists to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide will be on display in four galleries at Fresno Art Museum.

The show — “1915-2015: Tradition, Legacy, Culture” — opens Friday, Jan. 23, with a reception at 5:30 p.m. and continues through April 26.

It is one of the first events of many planned by the Armenian Genocide Centennial Fresno Committee, which seeks to raise awareness about the Armenian Genocide of 1915 when 1.5 million Armenians were killed by the Ottoman Turkish government and to inspire people to overcome adversity through the stories of its survivors.

The exhibition features some of the most prominent Armenian artists of the last century — John Altoon, Varujan Boghosian, Charles Garabedian, Arshile Gorky, Khachik Khachatouryan and Rueben Nakian — as well as artists with a local connection — Ara Dolarian, Ed Marouk, Varaz Samuelian, Arminee Shishmanian and, of course, William Saroyan. Some pieces are on loan from various art galleries and personal collections throughout the country.

“The art is to celebrate the rich culture of the Armenian artists,” says Joyce Kierejczyk, guest curator and committee member. “Even though we have survived a genocide, they have been allowed to create art and keep cultures alive through art.”

Regina Peters, another committee member, says the show is important to the community: “It’s world-class art being brought into the community to see, experience and educate.”

Here are 10 things to see and do at the exhibit:

- **Bronze sculpture of Saroyan**

In a window display, the piece by Shishmanian depicts Saroyan reading while sitting on a tree stump. The tree also supports a bike that Saroyan was known for riding all over town. It was Shishmanian’s tribute to Saroyan on his 100th birthday. He was born on Aug. 31, 1908. Shishmanian, who lives and works in Fresno, creates a wide range of art, including watercolor, acrylic, oil paintings, pastels and bronze sculpture.

- **“Genocide” assemblage by Boghosian**

The surrealism of Boghosian’s assemblage features children’s blocks in the colors of the national flag of Armenia — red, blue and orange — and in different formations. One block bears the weight of a grape-picking knife. The blocks and knife are “found objects” that Boghosian uses in the assemblage. Kierejczyk believes the piece shows “things that shouldn’t have happened” and the blocks represent “building new life.”

- **A bronze sculpture by Marouk**

The piece stands about 15-inches tall, depicting a man with a hand on the shoulder of a younger man in handcuffs. Peters believes the man is offering counsel to a person being taken away. “It’s a very moving piece,” she says. “At first, I didn’t see the handcuffs.” Marouk is a former Fresno attorney who took up art later in life. His commissions include busts done for the Robert Coyle Federal Courthouse, the Fifth District Court of Appeals, the San Joaquin School of Law and the Fresno County Law Library.

- **Samuelian’s portrait of wife Anna**

Known for bold colors and strong forms, Samuelian painted his wife in a style he wouldn’t normally paint. “The eyes are compelling,” Kierejczyk says. “She has a story to tell. When you look at her, you can see how he loved her and how she loved him.” Samuelian’s work is all around Fresno, including the large bronze sculpture of Armenian legendary figure David of Sassoon on horseback wielding a sword at Fresno County Courthouse Park and the bust of Saroyan at Fresno Convention Center.

- **Saroyan’s drawings**

Saroyan is known as the Pulitzer Prize-winning writer. Many people don’t realize he was also an artist. His paintings are lyrical, free explorations of color and line. Saroyan said, “I began to make drawings again ... because my son was making them. ... Most of the drawings are made so swiftly as to seem to have been instantaneous.” Peters says, “Children are taught in a traditional way to draw. This will open to the contemporary drawing. He was consistent with the style.”

- **Sculptures of succulents by Khachatouryan**

He is known for contemporary expressions of his bronze and stainless steel sculptures. He also has employed experimental/multimedia, glass, interactive, mosaics and murals. Kierejczyk says she appreciates looking at the world of succulents through the artist’s eyes. “They are artists taking something so rough and prickly and making it into beautiful sculptures,” she says. “It is how he has taken art form to bronze and stainless steel.”

- **Altoon’s “Untitled”**

He is known for his abstract and figurative work and adeptly executed line, color and subject matter. “Untitled” was recently exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Today, so many can also view Altoon’s work on their smartphones, but to see “Untitled” in person is a rare treat. “It comes to life 100 times when you see it in person,” Peters says.

- **Gorky’s collection**

Gorky and his family were witnesses of the Armenian Genocide, resulting in his mother’s death from starvation in 1919. In 1940s New York, he participated in the avante-garde abstract art movement. He developed his own style and moved into his own passionate, personal language of visual expression, which was informed by the suffering and loss he experienced in his own life.

- **Listen to “Come On-a My House”**

A recording of the song performed by Rosemary Clooney will be played during the show — near the pieces on and by Saroyan. The song was written by Ross Bagdasarian and his cousin, Saroyan, in the summer of 1939 while driving across New Mexico. The melody is based on an Armenian folk song. It was released by Clooney on her album by the same title on June 6, 1951. The song launched Clooney's career.

- **Meet Joan Quinn**

She is an art collector who has loaned pieces by Garabedian, known for classic imagery in his bold paintings, and Altoon, including his "Untitled" piece. She will be available to meet people at the reception Jan. 23.

Contact Ron Orozco: rorozco@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6304 or [@ronorozco_bee](https://twitter.com/ronorozco_bee) on Twitter.

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