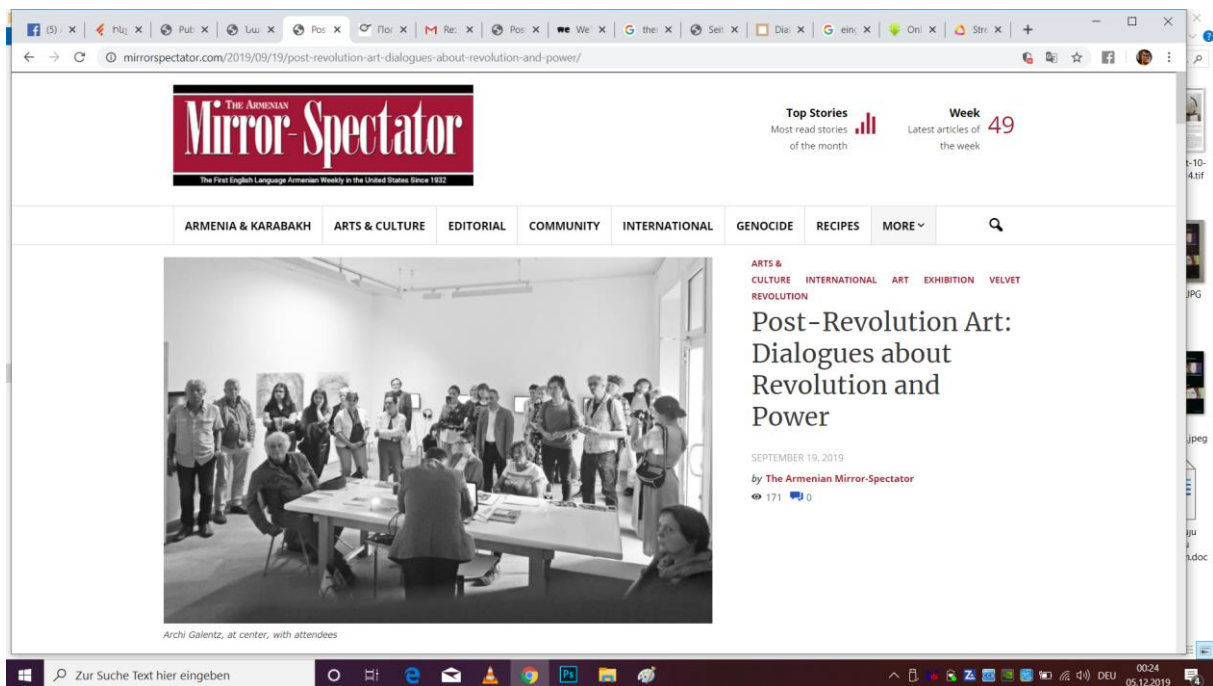


<https://mirrorspectator.com/2019/09/19/post-revolution-art-dialogues-about-revolution-and-power/>



The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the article "Post-Revolution Art: Dialogues about Revolution and Power" on the Mirror-Spectator website. The website's logo is at the top left, and the article title is prominently displayed on the right. A navigation menu is visible below the logo. The main image shows a group of people in a gallery setting, with a caption below it identifying Archi Galentz at the center with attendees. The article is dated September 19, 2019, and is by The Armenian Mirror-Spectator. The browser's address bar shows the URL, and the Windows taskbar is visible at the bottom.

Post-Revolution Art: Dialogues about Revolution and Power

By Archi Harutyun Galentz

BERLIN — On August 14 an exhibition opened in Berlin, which was not only dedicated to the revolution in Armenia, but also, with the help of a special perspective, analyzed that acclaimed process of social change.

In one of the display windows of the gallery a video was set up, with pictures of the street protests and other political actions that shook Armenia one year and a half ago. On the other side of the entrance door there was a poster hanging that introduced the exhibition as “voices of queer-feminist activists and scientists, and feminist art from Armenia.” This exhibit project was presented by the experienced Armenian curator Susanna Gyulamiryan, who stated in her introduction to the show:

“The project, ‘Dialogues about Revolution and Power,’ is dedicated to all those women who have participated in political and social protest in Armenia for the last two decades,

who initiated it and organized it, those who formed and shaped the women's movement, who stimulated a feminist debate and developed modes of critical thinking..."

Average art lovers found themselves confronted by several challenges; the show raised questions about the very image of what an art work is and what it means.

On one wall of the gallery there were four monitors that displayed reflections and analyses of the 2018 Armenian revolution contributed by young Armenian female experts. The political positions expressed by these self-conscious women citizens of the republic are to be viewed as artistic actions. Formally conceived as a unified gestalt, this series of portraits moves from a poetical declaration (Anna Zhamakochyan "Revolution: The Return of Reality") or the presentation of a one-line poem (Ruzanna Grigoryan "for the sake of the revolution, not to talk about the revolution"), to complaints about the incompetence of official reporting in Armenia, incapable of analyzing or even taking note of social phenomena (Gayan Ayvazyan "Chronicles of the April Revolution") and a merciless deconstruction of the attempt on the part of the new government elites to instrumentalize the women's movement (Anna Nikogosyan "The Gendered Shades of Regime Change in Armenia"). Nikogosyan can also be seen in the trailer projected onto the display window, with a poster from the protests in Spring 2018. Its radical conclusion, that it is too early (to put it mildly) to speak of revolutionary changes in the country, lends the entire exhibition a serious tenor, an uncompromising and skeptical attitude toward the populist rhetoric of officialdom.

These four video statements are also integral parts of the Armenian pavilion at the Venice Biennale this year, and can be seen at the Garden of Palazzo Zenobio of the Collegio Armeno Moorat Raphael until November 24.

Another work, which is also part of Armenia's presentation at the Biennale, was the action by Narine Arakelyan (see ADK 183, "Revolution auf Sparflamme"), in which about 50 volunteers in Venice reenacted the periodic "iron pots and pans" action. During the revolution, women in Yerevan and other Armenian cities would open their windows and bang on pots and pans. In Berlin, a special video documentation of the action in Venice was produced for the Wolf&Galentz exhibition. Since one could listen to all the other

videos at the Berlin show with ear phones, the noise of soup spoons banging pots and pans created background noise and brought the message home to the visitors.

The last video work, which could be viewed on a separate monitor, was linked aesthetically to the four videos in the entrance area. Tamar Shirinian, a Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology and Anthropology in Jackson, Mississippi, tells the story of the women's movement in the early years of socialism and the Stalin era in Armenia and the Soviet Union overall. Shirinian accuses the Bolsheviks of having exploited the "women's issue" to rule in the outlying regions.

Gyulamiryan included this video in the exhibition as a deliberately provocative statement. Shirinian places in question something that has long since become a commonplace, namely, that in the Soviet Union — to which Armenia belonged — equality between the sexes was more advanced (in the sense that it guaranteed more rights for women) than in the West. She makes clear that the relations between the sexes must be considered in a more differentiated form, and that more or less hidden disadvantages for women in the Soviet Union must be made visible; also, that the motives for the actual improvement in living standards for women must be examined critically.



Some of the work displayed

Two further exhibits complete the show. First, the three posters by Lusine Talayan. One of her works is a photo with graffiti, a play on words in Armenian, that might be freely translated, “A woman is without man.”/”A woman has no lord.” (see Armenian) As the curator writes in her text for the exhibition, this sentence, together with another work, discusses the theme of a “Reflection about complex questions regarding the visibility or invisibility of women, their relations to one another, and their desire for appropriate recognition of their importance in the social realm; the possibility of remembrance and the politics of commemoration.”

The third poster presents in simple graphic form the well-known statue of Mother Armenia, without her sword. The artist adds an obscene phrase borrowed from “male language,” except in the female form. This short saying functions as an eye-catcher for Armenian speakers; but, more important in my view, is the rejection formulated in the text, of any formal portrayal of Mother Armenia as a “patriarchal” representation of power.

The artist had originally planned to present the poster in multiple copies for the exhibition, and thereby express an explicitly democratic element. The plan could not be realized for financial reasons, as the printing costs were exorbitant; the print shop in Armenia was not willing to meet the artist half way — perhaps a sign of the unwillingness in Armenia to support contemporary art and feminist concerns.

The works of another artist must also be mentioned: two large color pencil drawings by Lousineh Navasartian. The Iranian born artist and designer lives in the Armenian capital Yerevan; in the Berlin exhibition she shows drawings of wounds that activists received during street protests. The works are based on photos taken by friends. Her delicate drawings stand as a monument and perform a kind of symbolic healing. By placing these drawings next to the posters by Lusine Talayan, which express patriarchal forms of monuments, these drawings might perhaps be considered as an alternative, explicitly female form of remembrance culture. The titles of the works, “Tamarik 29.07.2016” and “Gev 27.11.2014,” make clear that it is not only a question of the 2018 Velvet Revolution, but rather of the numerous protests and demonstrations that brought increasing numbers of people into the streets in the years before and that paved the way for the peaceful revolution.

Susanna Gyulamiryan’s exhibition at Wolf&Galentz is also framed by three female portraits from the 1960s to 1980s by Armine Kalentz (1920-2007), who is presented as a guest artist. As the curator writes: “The presentation of this series of female portraits by the Soviet Armenian painter Armine Kalentz is a recognition of her life and her artistic journey, in which a lot of gender conflicts played a role. Unlike other Soviet Armenian artists, Armine Kalentz did not shy away from depicting in her memoirs gestures of male superiority and male methods of suppressing women.” The female portraits by Kalentz forge a bridge to the video presentation by Tamar Shirinian.



Noteworthy in this connection is also the fact that the funds, which were raised exclusively by these women, served almost exclusively to pay the male artists.

“Dialogues about Revolution and Power” has become a multifaceted exhibition that has elicited varying interpretations. The young gallery in Berlin-Pankow, which was established by two artists, Andreas Wolf and Archi Galentz, hosted this project for its third exhibition. They both have years of experience in organizing project spaces and, as working artists, are also interested in art forms and phenomena that reach beyond borders. In addition, they aimed at demonstrating support for an initiative that, from conception to realization of the Armenian pavilion in the Venice Biennale, was under the overall leadership of women; the commissioner, curator, and developing manager were all women. Noteworthy in this connection is also the fact that the funds, which were raised exclusively by these women, served almost exclusively to pay the male artists.

For her successful work in creating the Venice exhibition, the curator, after six months of hard work, received a small payment only after repeated requests. She was not given a

contract, and following vigorous protests, the Deputy Cultural Minister Nazeni Gahribyan was fired.

There was no official support for the Berlin exhibition, neither from foundations nor the Embassy, nor the Armenian Cultural Ministry. This exhibition represents an attempt to offer a space for the public recognition – officially lacking – of the achievements of women from Armenia.”

(This article, “Gespräche über Revolution und Macht“ in der Galerie Wolf&Galentz in Berlin, appears in the original German version in the upcoming issue of Armenische-Deutsche-Korrespondenz, ADK Jg. 2019/Heft 3, the publication of the Armenian-German Society, with the kind permission of its chairman Dr. Raffi Kantian. Muriel Mirak-Weissbach translated the text into English.)