



A view of the exhibit at InteriorDasein

ARMENIA & KARABAKH ARTS & CULTURE INTERNATIONAL PARAJANOV CENTENNIAL

# Armenian Artists in Germany Unite around Parajanov Anniversary

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by **Muriel Mirak-Weissbach**

BERLIN — This is a first for the Armenian art scene in Germany, and a noteworthy one. Unified efforts have brought into being a remarkable exhibit of artworks, on display in three venues, thus far. The occasion is the 100th birthday of renowned film director Sergei Parajanov, who was born on January 9, 1924 and died on July 20, 1990. Although several organizations of Armenians in Germany regularly host “Armenian Culture Days” in their regions, this commemorative exhibit represents perhaps the first such joint

effort by several Armenian clubs and societies, who issued the call to compatriots living in Germany to take part.

Anahid Babayan, from the Armenian Cultural Society in Leipzig, organized the call that led to the first show in the Leipzig city center on August 30, with 25 artists presenting their works at the atelier of Eduard Panosian. Then the show opened in Halle an der Saale, hosted by the Ararat Culture in Halle-Hoffe Association. Now, it continues at InteriorDasein in Berlin, with the exhibit featuring paintings, drawings, prints, collages and montages, photographs, and AI-created pictures. The works represent a dialogue with Parajanov's prolific oeuvre, developing themes in its manifold forms and genres.

The current venue, InteriorDasein, is a project room in Berlin that functions as a unique meeting place for artists from the diaspora. It was established in 2008 by Archi Harutyun Galentz, a third-generation artist living and working in the German capital. The exhibit opened on November 11 and continues until January 9, 2025, the date of the film maker's birth. It may continue to travel next year.



*Sergei Parajanov, left, with Andrey Tarkovsky (courtesy RadioVan)*

## **An Artist for Many Nations**

Almost all the artists are living in Germany; although Armenia was the birthplace of the majority, Syria, Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Iran, and Argentina are also represented. Thus, they share something other than art with Parajanov, representing more than one nation.

It was Parajanov himself who defined his multiple national identities when he said, “Everybody knows that I have three motherlands:” Armenia, because he was the son of Armenian parents, Georgia, because his birthplace was the capital city Tbilisi, and Ukraine, because he studied and made his first films in Kiev.

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Parajanov, as briefly sketched in Galentz’s announcement of the initiative, was one of the most significant film directors of the Soviet Union and his work earned recognition from the start. His first film, “Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors,” won

the Gold Medal at the Thessaloniki film festival in 1965, the year of its premiere, and received prizes in France and England. In the Soviet Union it reached cult status. Galentz stressed that Parajanov's international fame rested not only on his cinematic productions, but also on his achievements as an artist, and his victimization as a Soviet prisoner. Prominent Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini campaigned for his release internationally.

In Armenia, Galentz recalled, Parajanov was more than honored: one of his famous films, "The Color of Pomegranates" (1969), is considered an icon still today. And in 1988, the state museum in Yerevan bearing his name was established to preserve and present his life and works.

## Parajanov and Berlin

The connection between Galentz's project room and Parajanov goes back several years, when in 2018–2019 the Potsdam Film Museum dedicated a major exhibit to the artist. InteriorDasein, which has an integrated workshop for artistic workmanship in wood, supported the exhibit by providing a special frame with museum glass, built by Galentz for a textile work of Parajanov's. Following the exhibit, he organized the safe return of the work to the museum in the Armenian capital. Galentz remained in close contact with the museum's director, the late Zaven Sargsyan, and is particularly happy, as he writes, to be able to present in this centennial exhibit several items from a work of photographic documentation done by Sargsyan and donated in Berlin to the atelier's collection.

The participants in the wandering exhibit, whose biographies Anahid Babayan has also assembled in a PDF catalogue, include Silvina der Meguerditchian (Berlin), Sam Grigoryan (Berlin), Ararat Haydeyan (Saathain), Hasmik Hovsepian-Haydeyan (Kleinkmehlen), Gagik Kurginian (Berlin), Archi Galentz (Berlin), Stepan Gantralyan (Berlin), Rosanna Eisenmenger-Karapetyan (Berlin), Anahit Mkrtchyan (Oranienburg), VAZO (Vazgen Pahlavuni Tadevosyan) (Die, France), and many more.

As part of the celebration, InteriorDasein hosted an evening of music on Sunday, December 1, featuring Ukrainian singer Roksana Vikaluk, who is also a composer and plays several instruments. Inspired by Parajanov's masterpiece, *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors*, she presented vocal improvisations of Ukrainian folk songs and shared stories of her family in relation to Parajanov. She related how her mother had

talked about the 1965 premiere of Parajanov's first film in Kiev, and described her later personal meeting with the artist.



*Zaven Sargsyan and Archi Galentz, 2018*

**Topics:** Parajanov Centennial

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### A Year of Tributes

Throughout the year now drawing to a close, the Parajanov centennial has been celebrated widely in various forms. To mention a few: international press coverage (Sergei Parajanov at 100: The Triumph of Imagination and Beauty – The Armenian Mirror-Spectator); with special honors granted, like the National Legend of Ukraine State Award (Zelensky Honors Parajanov with National Legend of Ukraine State Award – The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*); at festivities, at the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum in Milan, Italy (<https://mirrorspectator.com/2024/10/01/parajanov-100-a-grand-celebration-of-sergei-parajanovs-legacy-at-milans-bagatti-valsecchi-museum/>); with an exhibition at the European Parliament, and a flurry of activities, including special film showings and conferences in Russia, the United States, Greece, and France. In Armenia, the centennial festivities include an international conference titled “PARAJANOV-100: A Journey Through Time and Culture” organized by the Sergei Parajanov Museum in Yerevan.

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