

September 27, 2025
– July 31, 2026

TOPOGRAPHIES OF DISSENT: ARMENIAN ART FROM THE DODGE COLLECTION



Zaven Sargsyan
*Removal of the Monument
of Lenin in Yerevan, 1991*
Chromogenic print
19 9/16 × 12 11/16 in.

Topographies of Dissent: Armenian Art from the Dodge Collection is organized by Lilit Sargsyan, independent curator, and Armen Yesayants, Director of Exhibitions, Cafesjian Center for the Arts, Yerevan, Armenia; with Julia Tulovsky, Head of the Department of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union and Arts of Eurasia, Zimmerli Art Museum.

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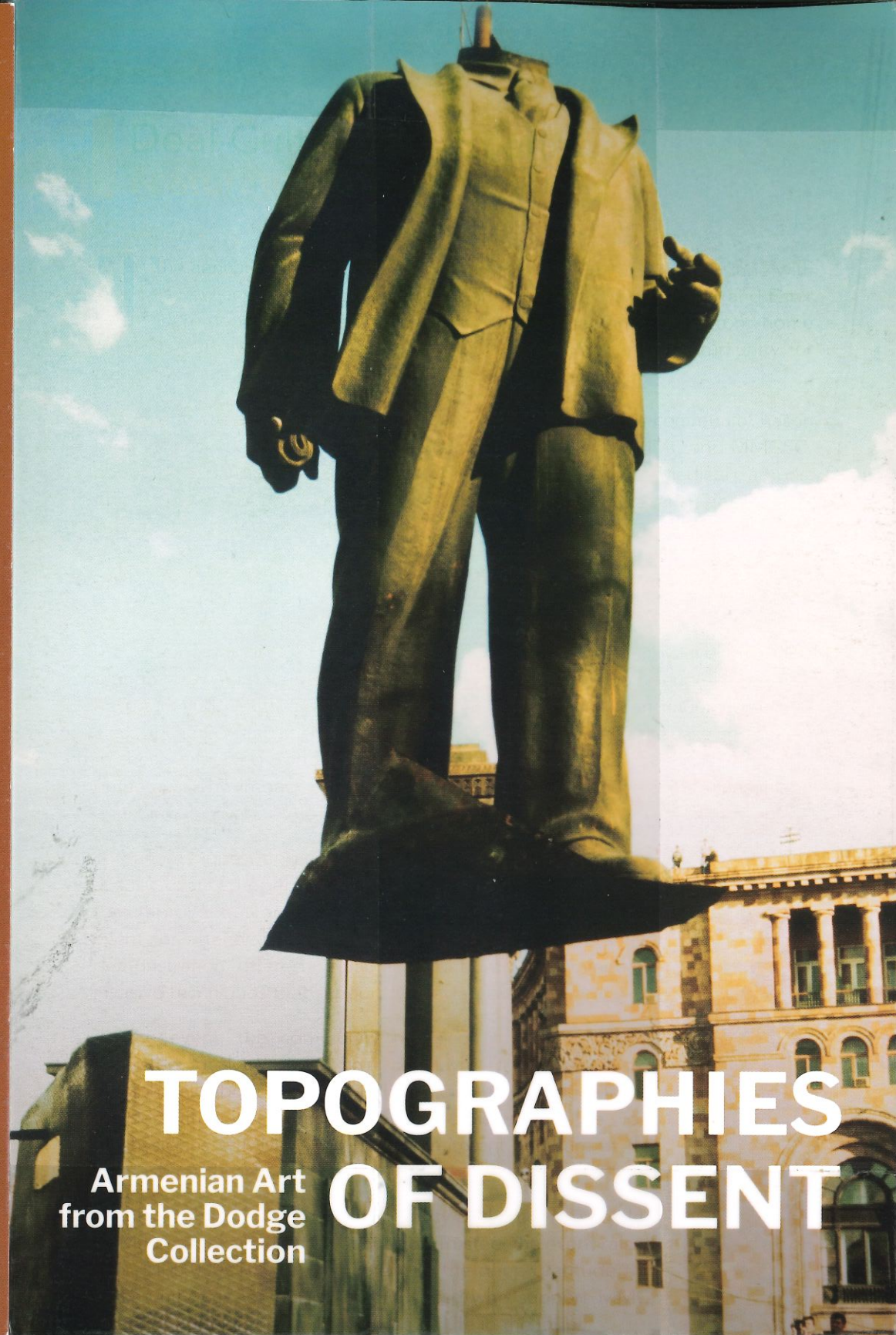
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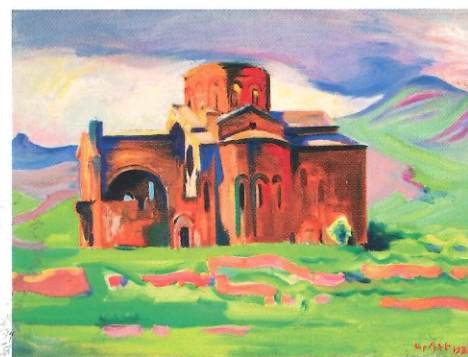
Topographies of Dissent presents Armenian nonconformist art from the second half of the 20th century, tracing its evolution across three generations—from early modernists to the radical voices of the Soviet Union's final decades.

Armenia stood apart from the rest of the USSR for its unusually liberal cultural climate, earning the nickname "USA"—the United States of Armenia. Yerevan, the capital, was home to the USSR's first and only Museum of Modern Art, opened in 1972, a symbol of this unique openness. Within Soviet Armenia, the line between state-sanctioned realism and unofficial art was unusually blurred. Artists navigated this space through informal exhibitions, private studios, and underground circles. Nonconformist art was less about direct protest and more about exploring personal freedom, cultural memory, and new visual languages. This gave rise to a style later known as "national modernism," blending Armenian tradition with global avant-garde tendencies. By the late 1980s, groups like the 3rd Floor artist collective pushed Armenian art into postmodern territory, breaking with past norms and embracing bold experimentation.

This exhibition explores Armenia's topographies of dissent—spaces where aesthetics map inner freedom, cultural memory, and creative resistance.



Sergey Hovsepian
Dream, 1974
Oil on canvas
36 5/8 x 45 1/4 in.



Armine Galents
Katoghike Church in Talin, Armenia, 1983
Oil on canvas
22 3/4 x 30 11/16 in.

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE: LAND, IDENTITY, DREAM

Landscape has long been central to Armenian painting. Martiros Saryan (1880–1972), the father of modern Armenian art, blended vivid color and modernist form to express a pantheistic vision where land reflects the universe. His approach shaped the national aesthetic and deeply influenced the modernists of the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast to Saryan's vibrant palette, Armenia's natural landscape is stark and elemental: rugged terrain, medieval churches, and the iconic silhouette of Mount Ararat, across the border in present-day Turkey. In subsequent artists' hands, these images became powerful symbols of national identity and loss, epic in tone and spiritual in presence.

Artists repatriating from the diaspora in the 1940s to 1960s, such as Armine Galents and Hagop Hagopyan, introduced new emotional depths—quiet sorrow, longing, and displacement. Many came from former French and British colonies in the Middle East, bringing hybrid cultural influences that blended Middle Eastern traditions with European aesthetics. In the process, they reshaped Armenian art's relationship to memory, place, and belonging.

FACETS OF “FORMALISM”



Robert Elibekyan
Crucifixion, 1986
Gouache and watercolor on paper
25 1/2 × 19 11/16 in.



Aram Kupetsyan
Assemblage. Object Composition No. 1, 1981
Oil, paper, and copper on panel
24 × 15 15/16 × 2 3/4 in.

In the USSR, “formalism” was a loaded term used to condemn any art that prioritized form, experimentation, or abstraction over the ideological clarity embodied by explicitly representational and government-approved style of socialist realism. Because “formalism” stood in direct opposition to the propagandistic framework of socialist realism, the Soviet regime weaponized the term to target nonconformist artists.

Armenian artists historically distanced themselves from socialist realism’s narrative and mimetic focus. Instead, styles like cubism, expressionism, and abstraction—rooted in classical modernism—became tools of resistance. These modernist styles resonated deeply with Armenian visual traditions such as manuscript illumination, frescoes, sculpture, and carpet design. This connection allowed artists to mask modernist (“formalist”) expression behind seemingly “national” art.

Artists like Gevork Grigoryan (Giotto), Rudolf Khachatryan, Henry Elibekyan, Aram Kupetsyan, and Vladimir Markaryan (Valmar) employ cubist compositions to hearken back to Armenian ornament and architecture’s structure. Meanwhile, Robert Elibekyan, Ruben Adalyan, and Van Soghomonyan create expressionistic, spiritual, and philosophical meditations on faith and humanity.

ABSTRACTION



Grigor Mikaelyan (Kiki)
Bobo, 1986
Tempera on canvas
73 1/4 × 90 3/16 in.



Seyran Khatlamajyan
Apricot Tree, 1972
Oil on canvas
21 1/4 × 28 3/4 in.

In the 1960s, abstraction became a dominant current in Armenian painting, influenced strongly by Arshile Gorky (1904–1948, born Vostanik Adoyan), an Armenian-born pioneer of American modern art and genocide survivor. Gorky’s work was introduced to Soviet Armenia after the Armenian painter Hovhannes Zardaryan encountered it at the 1956 Venice Biennale and shared it with local artists. Armenian abstract art developed a lyrical, expressive style, exemplified by 1960s artists like Seyran Khatlamajyan and Henry Elibekyan. A postmodern second wave arose near the Soviet era’s end, led by Vigen Tadevosyan, who influenced younger artists.

Avant-garde collectives like the 3rd Floor and the underground community Bunker embraced pure abstraction as freedom from ideology and tradition. Drawing from European *art informel* and American abstract expressionism—movements that prioritize the spontaneous gesture—artists like Grigor Mikaelyan (Kiki), Armen Rotch-Hajyan, and others embodied this vision of absolute artistic freedom.

DYSTOPIAS OF THE EVIL EMPIRE

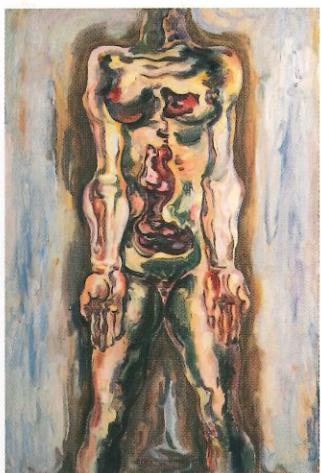


Hagop Hagopyan
No to the Neutron Bomb, 1977
 Oil on canvas
 76 3/8 x 117 5/16 in.
 1995.0890
 © Estate of Hagop Hagopian

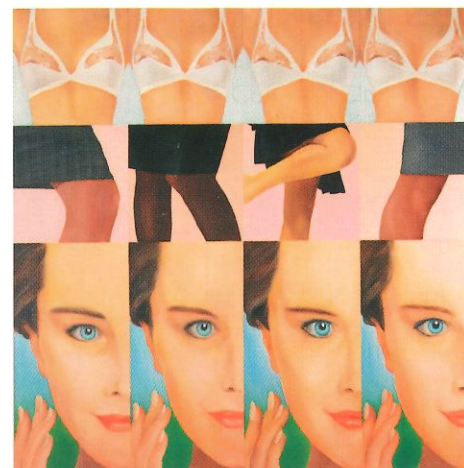
In the final years of the Cold War, Armenian artists began turning away from lyrical abstraction and decorative expressionism toward a new, emotionally charged figuration. Influenced by postmodernism—despite its limited recognition in the USSR—this shift embraced metaphor, photorealism, and direct engagement with political and psychological trauma.

This transformation reflected a deepening cultural crisis. Still-unhealed traumas from World War II were now intensified by nuclear anxiety, ecological fears, and the fading promise of the socialist utopia. As the ideological foundation of the Soviet Union began to erode, and the “evil empire” teetered toward collapse, artists searched for new ways to articulate fear, loss, and disillusionment.

This section brings together works that confront cruelty, depersonalization, and the crushing force of authoritarian power, alongside visions of madness, alienation, and spiritual fragmentation. Though diverse in style, the artists here share a common urgency. Sergey Hovsepyan, Hagop Hagopyan, and Evrika Zatikyan created works that function as visual acts of resistance, while Gayaneh Khachatryan, Suren Harutyunyan, and Raffi Adalyan offered surreal, symbolic responses to a world slipping toward collapse.



Ruben Adalyan
Untitled from the series Melancholy 1981
 Oil on canvas
 34 1/16 x 23 1/4 in.



Karine Matsakyan
Half-Hourly Difference, 1985–86
 Oil on canvas
 57 11/16 x 57 7/8 in.
 © Karine Matsakian



Arman Grigoryan
Das Ist Fantastisch, 1994
 Oil on canvas
 57 5/16 x 76 9/16 in.

THE 3RD FLOOR GROUP: POP ART, HYPERREALISM, AND NEO-DADA

Founded in 1987, on the eve of the Soviet Union’s collapse, the 3rd Floor movement became a prophetic force in Armenian contemporary art. Their work—and the radical freedom with which it was made and exhibited in the late 1980s—seemed to anticipate the fall of the Soviet empire itself. The group’s exhibitions in the early 1990s came to symbolize the beginning of a new era: an independent Armenia and a cultural shift toward individual expression, experimentation, and alignment with global contemporary art practices.

These young, independent artists embraced Western counterculture—punk rock, breakdance, and underground media. Their work, ranging from performance and installation to ironic conceptual gestures, was controversial and often seen as threatening within the Soviet context, where such experimentation was politically charged.

The artists Arman Grigoryan, Karine Matsakyan, and Edward Enfiajyan drew on neo-Dadaist montage, projecting “readymade images” onto canvas. Grigoryan and Matsakyan focused on figurative work of bodies and objects, while Enfiajyan created a symbolic meta-language blending art history and contemporary reality.

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

As of September 29, 2025

Raffi Adalyan
The Gulag Archipelago. No. 2
1984
Shoes and mixed media
on board
40 3/16 × 40 3/8 in.

Ruben Adalyan
A Battle of Horses, 1973
Oil on canvas
47 13/16 × 34 1/8 in.

Untitled from the series
Melancholy, 1981
Oil on canvas
34 1/16 × 23 1/4 in.

Nareg Antabyan
Agony, 1985
Mixed media on canvas
39 3/8 × 39 7/16 in.

Raphael Atoyan
Our Courtyard, 1970
Oil on canvas
35 7/16 × 27 15/16 in.

Minas Avetisyan
Gegard Cathedral, 1960
Oil on canvas
23 1/4 × 32 7/8 in.

Samvel Baghdasaryan
Preference, 1995
Monotype with collage,
embossing, and hand-
coloring
20 7/8 × 32 11/16 in.

Ten Squares with White, 1995
Monotype with collage,
embossing, and hand-coloring
19 3/16 × 25 1/4 in.

Henry Elibekyan
Untitled, 1980
Oil and collage on paper
19 15/16 × 28 13/16 in.

Still Life of Fruit on Table, 1976
Oil on canvas mounted
on panel
18 7/8 × 22 in.

Robert Elibekyan
Crucifixion, 1986
Gouache and watercolor
25 1/2 × 19 11/16 in.

Edward Enfiajyan
Catastrophe, 1980
Collage and gouache
on paperboard
13 9/16 × 10 11/16 in.

Edward Enfiajyan
Untitled, 1982
Gouache and collage
4 15/16 × 8 7/16 in.

Edward Enfiajyan
Pros and Cons of Spotlights
1985
Mixed media on canvas
34 7/16 × 48 1/16 in.

Armine Galents
Katoghike Church in Talin,
Armenia, 1983
Oil on canvas
22 3/4 × 30 11/16 in.

Arman Grigoryan
Zone, 1990
Oil on canvas
43 1/2 × 47 1/4 in.

Das Ist Fantastisch, 1994
Oil on canvas
57 5/16 × 76 9/16 in.

All works are from the Norton
and Nancy Dodge Collection
of Nonconformist Art from the
Soviet Union, Zimmerli Art Museum
at Rutgers, The State University
of New Jersey.

Bagrat Grigoryan
A Corner in Leninakan, 1980s
Oil on canvas
31 3/16 × 25 9/16 in.

Gevork Grigoryan (Giotto)
Still Life, 1960
Oil on canvas
21 1/4 × 18 11/16 in.

Hagop Hagopyan
No to the Neutron Bomb!, 1977
Oil on canvas
76 3/8 × 117 5/16 in.

Ravine at Garni, 1983
Oil on canvas
39 9/16 × 28 7/8 in.

Armen Rotch-Hajyan
Untitled, 1984
Oil on canvas
35 5/8 × 31 1/2 in.

Untitled, 1990
Oil and plaster on canvas
35 3/8 × 30 13/16 in.

Suren Harutyunyan
Untitled [Surrealist scene
with monument by Vera
Mukhina, *Industrial Worker*
and *Collective Farmer*], 1977
Gouache
13 15/16 × 9 7/8 in.

Michael Hovhannissyan
Armenian Landscape, 1961
Oil on fiberboard
18 1/8 × 12 5/8 in.

Ara Hovsepyan
Spiral, 1987
Ink and watercolor
20 1/2 × 28 7/8 in.

Untitled, 1988
Gouache
19 11/16 × 28 3/4 in.

Sergey Hovsepyan
Dream, 1974
Oil on canvas
36 5/8 × 45 1/4 in.

Artist and Time, early 1980s
Oil on canvas
57 5/16 × 77 3/4 in.

Achot Achot
12 Closed Gospels, 1986
Colored pencil
8 1/4 × 7 3/8 in.

Angel Supporting the
Kingdom of Heaven, 1986
Colored pencil and
watercolor
10 9/16 × 9 in.

Three Gospels Opening,
1986
Graphite, colored pencil,
and watercolor
11 × 8 5/16 in.

Achot Achot
The Kingdom of Heaven, 1986
Watercolor and colored pencil
12 1/16 × 16 15/16 in.

Gayaneh Khachatryan
Réquiem. Bloody Moon, 1975
Oil on canvas
29 13/16 × 51 15/16 in.

Rudolf Khachatryan
Untitled, 1962
Ink on paper
15 × 9 13/16 in.

Kiss, 1969
Lithograph
20 7/8 × 16 5/8 in.

Seyran Khatlamajyan
Apricot Tree, 1972
Oil on canvas
21 1/4 × 28 3/4 in.

Sunrise, 1973
Oil on canvas
31 1/2 × 31 11/16 in.

Yervand Kotchar
Sketch for the cover
of the magazine *Science*
and *Technology*, 1964
Watercolor, ink, and gouache
11 15/16 × 8 13/16 in.

Aram Kupetsyan
Assemblage. Object
Composition No. 1, 1981
Oil, paper, and copper
on panel
24 × 15 15/16 × 2 3/4 in.

Vladimir Markaryan (Valmar)
Composition, 1978
Oil on fiberboard
23 5/8 × 23 5/8 in.

Karine Matsakyan
Half-Hourly Difference
1985–86
Oil on canvas
57 11/16 × 57 7/8 in.

Reanimation, 1985–86
Oil on canvas
31 11/16 × 39 5/8 in.

Grigor Mikaelyan (Kiki)
Bobo, 1986
Tempera on canvas
73 1/4 × 90 3/16 in.

Kamo Nigaryan
Untitled from the series
Metahallucinations, 1985
Gelatin silver print
21 1/4 × 27 1/2 in.

Untitled from the series
Metahallucinations, 1985
Gelatin silver print
21 1/4 × 28 3/8 in.

Vahan Rumelyan
Untitled, 1986
Mixed media (ink, collage,
and tempera)
23 5/8 × 31 1/4 in.

Martiros Saryan
Village of Shamshadin,
Armenia, 1944
Watercolor
10 13/16 × 15 1/4 in.

Zaven Sargsyan
Removal of the Monument
of Lenin in Erevan, 1991
Chromogenic print
19 9/16 × 12 11/16 in.

Set Semerjyan
Space Inside, 1993–94
Oil on canvas
39 3/4 × 47 15/16 in.

Van Soghomonyan
Untitled from the series
Linear Meditation, 1982
Ink on paper
10 5/16 × 8 in.

Vigen Tadevosyan
Rythme Bleu, 1973
Oil on canvas
23 13/16 × 28 15/16 in.

Trio, 1975
Oil on canvas
28 9/16 × 28 9/16 in.

Varuzhan Vardanyan
Horseman, 1980
Oil on board
19 1/2 × 15 3/4 in.

Evrika Zatikyan
Prisoners' Round, 1976
Oil on canvas,
38 13/16 × 24 11/16 in.

Dimensions are given
in inches, height preceding
width preceding depth.