

MODERN ESSAYS 2 ISTORY

Modern Essays 2

Istory

Hrair Sarkissian

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SALT Beyoğlu

In Hrair Sarkissian's work, landscape and the urban environment become stages for the expression of moments in history. Employing traditional documentary techniques, his photographs express the hidden paradox existing between the beauty and constancy of the surroundings and the potential realities they conceal.

In 2010, Sarkissian spent two months in İstanbul documenting the history sections of various semi-private and public libraries and archives in the city, from the Archaeological Museum and Topkapı Palace Libraries to the Atatürk Library in Taksim, the Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry General Directorate of State, and the Ottoman Bank Archives and Research Centre.

Sarkissian's own history is closely tied to these books and files, as his grandparents were forced to flee from Eastern Anatolia to Syria in 1915. The official historical narrative around this period in the Ottoman Empire, as presented since its collapse and transformation into the Republic of Turkey, is a subject of increasing debate within Turkey.

The second exhibition in the *Modern Essays* series, Sarkissian's photographs of rows of shelving caught in time and racks of files that appear rarely opened – of dark and oppressive spaces shot with only the light available – express the complexity of information these archives contain, and their role in denying or confirming the artist's inherited history and existence within the present.

Sarkissian studied photography at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie (Amsterdam). Current exhibitions of his work include *3rd Thessaloniki Biennale of*

Contemporary Art, Greece (2011) and *Facing Mirrors*, Thessaloniki Museum of Photography, Greece (2011). Recent exhibitions include *Out of Place* at TATE Modern, London, and Darat Al Funun - The Khalid Shoman Foundation, Amman, Jordan (2011); *Sharjah Biennial 10* (2011); *Underground*, Kalfayan Galleries, Athens (2010); *BREAKING NEWS. Contemporary Photography from the Middle East and Africa*, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Modena (2010-2011); *11th İstanbul Biennial* (2009); *New Ends, Old Beginnings*, the Bluecoat, Liverpool (2008).

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