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منازل بلا ابواب

Manazil bela abwab

Houses without Doors

Avo Kaprealian

Producer Mohammed Ali Atassi, Christin Lüttich, Avo Kaprealian. **Production companies** Bidayyat for Audiovisual Arts (Beirut, Lebanon), Avo Kaprealian (Beirut, Lebanon). **Written and directed by** Avo Kaprealian. **Director of photography** Avo Kaprealian. **Editor** Raya Yamisha. **Music** Samer Saem Eldahr (Hello Psychaleppo). **Sound design** Samer Saem Eldahr (Hello Psychaleppo). **Sound** Raed Younan.

DCP, colour & black/white. 90 min. Arabic, Armenian, French.
Premiere 12 February 2016, Berlinale Forum

From the balcony of his family's apartment in Aleppo's Midan district, Avo Kaprealian began chronicling daily life on the streets, capturing the sense of foreboding rapidly approaching with the violent conflict engulfing the country. Once in a while, the father breaks his silence to reprimand his son for endangering the entire family. In contrast, the mother avails herself to the camera, recounting events and divulging emotion without reserve. Midan's residents are mainly descendants of survivors of the Armenian genocide, who fled their homes in modern-day Turkey to settle in Aleppo. As the armed conflict hits their street, Kaprealian's lens turns inward to record the family's quotidian life and how they cope with shelling, snipers and power cuts. For Armenian-Syrians, whose memory is deeply etched with the tragedy of forced exile, the prospect of leaving their homes and lives behind to escape death echoes like an ancestral trauma being re-lived. Kaprealian invokes the history of cinema to incarnate his family's agonising present and transforms an archive of the imaginary into one of lived experience, stitching together ruptures in modern history and providing condolence for grief.

Rasha Salti

Armenian history is repeating itself in Syria

What to remember, what to forget! What to capture, what to ignore?

When the Syrian uprising began in the spring of 2011, I decided to return to my hometown of Aleppo from Damascus, where I had studied at the Higher Institute of the Dramatic Arts. In Aleppo, I was returning to my memories, to the magical alleyways of the Old City, to my friends and family; and to a symbol for us Armenians: Aleppo is where we survived the genocide and started a new life.

When I arrived in the city, the popular movement had not yet taken hold, with only few demonstrations here and there. But there was a feeling that this city was headed for a catastrophe. So I started filming the daily life of people all over Aleppo from inside a car. At that time, filming became the most difficult thing to do in Aleppo – or in Syria for that matter – something that could get you arrested and subjected to the most horrific forms of torture, and sometimes killed. Despite this knowledge I continued to film short clips here and there, until the great flood of refugees started to arrive. But then, ‘they’ arrested me, and destroyed the hard disk; so all my filmed memories were gone...

To recreate memory, I started filming again. I filmed my family and neighbours, the lane outside our building, the vast wave of refugees with their tired and lost faces arriving in our neighbourhood, Al Midan, an area that had brought shelter to the persecuted Armenians one hundred years ago. In front of my eyes and my camera, history was repeating itself in our lane: residents started to move away, abandoning the space to the new refugees who inherited an ancient burden. It reminded me of the souls of my Armenian forefathers, who suffered massacres, injustice, treachery, and displacement – even now those souls do not lie peacefully in their graves.

After three years of intermittent filming and while reviewing my footage for the film, I discovered that war had been sending us warning signals all the time. I saw its inevitability clear as day. I saw that the smoke had not been so very distant, that what was far was really as close as could be, and it led to the tragedy of my family, the residents of Al Midan and all of Syria.

In *Manazil bela abwab*, I search for the idea of justice through the stories and images of my family, Syrian-Armenians, the Armenians, and Syria’s present-day reality. The idea of justice let me return to the 20th century, when the world began to go quickly towards absurdity and craziness, and you sometimes can’t do anything but watch... To me, the importance of this film lies in its importance as a document, a true involvement in what I and others lived through, the thesis of the absence of justice for my forefathers who were murdered one hundred years ago, and my fear that this lack of justice will be repeated with the Syrian people. It is a fear that there is no justice at all.

But as a Syrian director, I believe that the revolution, like any revolution – which has begun to fade from memory before the rising horror of war and battles and destruction and displacement – grew and spread to every aspect of life, including the arts. Our films must be revolutionary: radical in what they propose, extreme in their form.

Avo Kaprealian



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Avo Kaprealian was born in Aleppo, Syria in 1986. From 2005 to 2010, he studied in the Dramaturgy and Theatrical Studies Department of the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus. Since then, he has worked as a freelance theatre director, photographer, camera operator and translator. He currently also works in the Media Department at the Jesuit Refugee Service in Beirut. Following his debut film, the experimental *Just Two Steps Too* (2012, 4 min.), *Manazil bela abwab* is Kaprealian’s first full-length documentary film.