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OUR HURTING WORLD

WAR IN SYRIA POLICE BRUTALITY VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN DISEASE POVERTY
EDUCATION GAP CHILD SOLDIERS CLIMATE CHANGE SCHOOL SHOOTINGS BULLYING
ISIS ATTACKS GENOCIDE PAYDAY LOANS LAND GRAB SPIRITUAL THIRST

Uprooted

A visual essay on the Armenian Genocide
and the will to endure

BY LUCY JANJIGIAN

With an introduction from Presbyterians Today staff

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide—the Ottoman government’s systematic massacre of 1.5 million Armenians between 1915 and the early 1920s. Those who weren’t immediately killed (mostly women, children, and the elderly and infirm) were uprooted and sent on forced death marches through the desert and away from their homes in modern-day Turkey. These paintings tell their story.

The genocide was carried out during and after World War I when the Ottomans, then allied with Germany, attempted to exterminate their minority subjects. Along with the killings, rape and robbery were commonplace. Other minority groups such as Assyrians and Greeks were also attacked.

The result was an Armenian diaspora, with more than a million fleeing across the globe.

The word *genocide* and its role in international law are rooted in the Armenian experience. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Lawyer Raphael Lemkin, the coiner of the word and later its champion at the United Nations, repeatedly stated that early exposure to newspaper stories about Ottoman crimes against Armenians was key to his beliefs about the need for legal protection of groups.”

That experience took new shape two decades later during the Shoah, Hitler’s extermination of the Jews. “Perhaps most hauntingly, a novel about Armenian self-defense (Franz Werfel’s *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*) was secretly passed from hand-to-hand among Jews imprisoned in ghettos during the Holocaust, who saw in it an inspirational analogy to their plight and a call to resistance,” reports the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

To this day, Turkey refuses to use the word *genocide* to describe what happened.

The 221st General Assembly (2014) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) called on congregations to remember this event in worship, speak out for the recognition of this atrocity as genocide, and advocate for the legal protection of human rights.

Lucy Janjigian, the award-winning artist who shares a selection of her paintings here, is of Armenian descent and was born in Jerusalem. She has been entrusted, over the years, with many personal accounts of the massacres. “Ghostlike figures portrayed in dramatic colors, on large canvases, enable the viewer to ponder human suffering,” she writes.

You can see more of her artwork at lucyjanjigian.com. All of her paintings in this article are acrylic on canvas.



A Little Child Shall Lead Them: Armenians escape from their steep mountain villages on foot. A little child is leading them past a church in the valley.

Flames of Faith: A group escapes by night as an Armenian church burns, set on fire by Ottoman Turks. Those who had sought refuge in the church perished, as did all historical and personal documents.

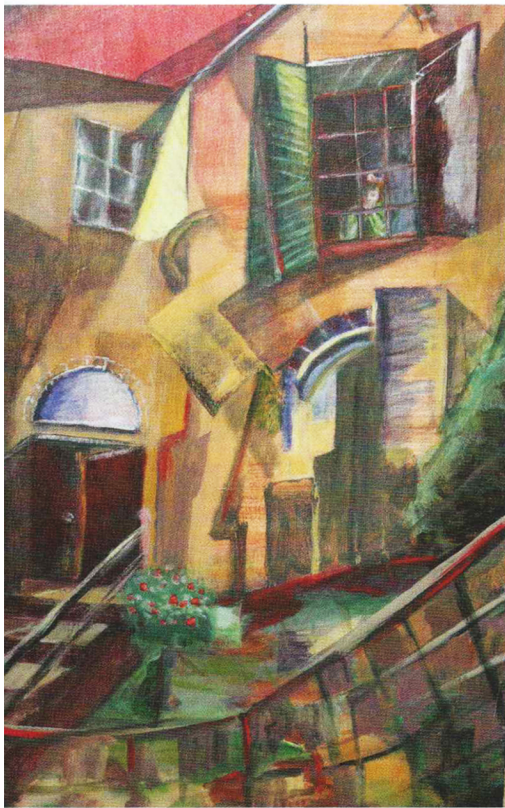


Journey: Beside a barren tree, a desolate family contemplates its fate in a deserted landscape.



Salvation Valley: Living in fear of Turkish wrath, the uprooted descend en masse from their hideouts to be ferried by boat to six French and British warships and then transported to the tented Lazaret refugee camp on the banks of the Suez Canal in Port Said, Egypt.

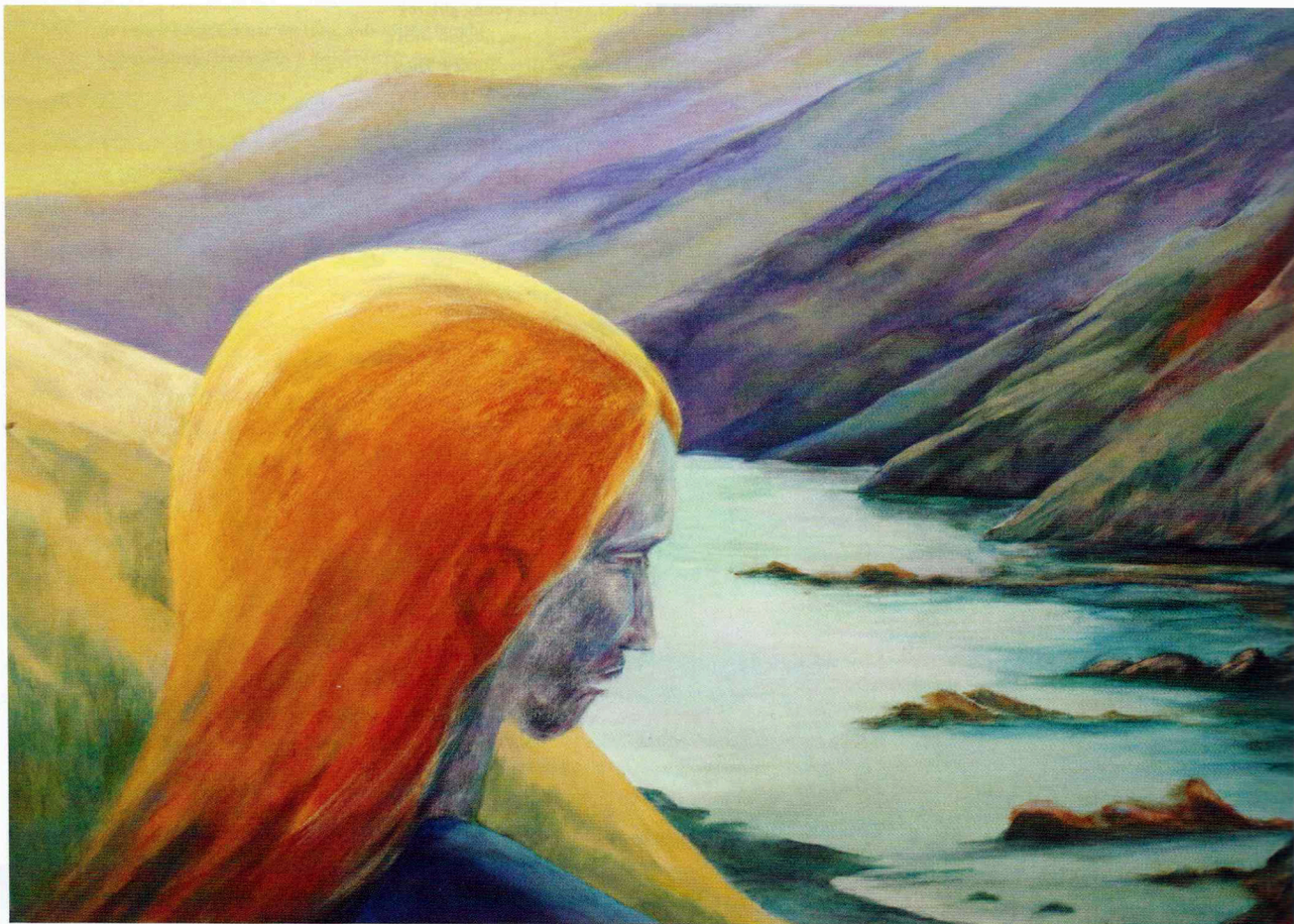




Hidden Child: Orphaned as a young girl, my mother, Sima Karakashian, was hidden with a wealthy Muslim family in Urfa, Turkey. They changed her name to Nariman. After several years, her older sister, who was staying with Franciscan nuns, brought her to the convent in Lebanon. There she was given another name, Mary, which she kept for the rest of her life.

Desert March: Deported refugees cross a merciless desert, banished from the land that for centuries had been their home.





River of No Return: A young woman wishes she was carved out of rock so that she could not be deported from her homeland. Armenians who saw this painting recalled the young women who, during their desert march, contemplated suicide in the river Euphrates rather than being subjected to rape, torture, or death. One observer said that she wished her mother could have seen the blue waters of the river, as she had always spoken of it running red with blood. Another observer recalled her sister-in-law who took her two teenage daughters to the river three times before she mustered the courage to drown them, sparing them the agonies that lay ahead.



A Drop of Water: An Armenian friend, Hagop Yacoubian, recorded his mother's demise in a poem. Standing in the desert, she stares at a broken water jug while clutching her baby and holding her eldest son. These are the words she utters as she breathes her last: "gatilme tchour, gatilme tchour," meaning "a drop of water, a drop of water."

LEARN MORE & TAKE ACTION

To read the full text of the General Assembly action, find worship and service ideas, and learn more about what happened 100 years ago: pcusa.org/armenian-genocide