

# Baronian

## Press release

Rue de la Concorde 33  
1050 Brussels

**19.04 - 27.05.2023**

### Opening

Wednesday 19.04.2023  
6 - 9 pm

On the occasion of  
Gallery Night by Art  
Brussels

## Mekhitar Garabedian

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The fringes of History

In his new exhibition, Mekhitar Garabedian exhibits a series of drawings, calendars and a poster, which together serve to manifest the fragility and weight of heritage.

In his drawings, he shares his personal, alternative interpretation of the dense, prolific manuscript heritage of Armenia. By re-appropriating this medieval tradition, he becomes a copyist himself, opening up the graphic and artistic possibilities that this practice introduced. The creation of this series of sketches has seemingly reactivated the scribes' muscle memory, underscoring the singular, contemporary relevance of these text fragments and imagery. Could Garabedian's drawings be the 'revenants' and traces of the long, material, textual, and artistic history of these manuscripts?

The artist references the Armenian tradition of annotations and eyewitness accounts left by scribes at the end of manuscripts. These colophons provide valuable historic, and often surprising, information about the sociopolitical context as well as the personal circumstances of the monks who created these manuscripts. The titles of the show and of each of the works are all phrases taken from these colophons. The constant threat of hostile populations is a recurring theme in these colophons. Evoking the meticulous work of these Armenian copyists in light of the return of mass violence is a confronting reflection on cultural heritage, given that Armenia is still under attack as a result of the very complex situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Garabedian highlights the fact that the combinations of 'hidden' motifs, shapes, colours were necessarily relegated to the margins and borders of these illuminations. He repeats and redirects the scribe's original gesture, bringing these graphic elements - which are often ignored or neglected - back to the fore. By reworking and reinterpreting the decorative borders of the illuminations and rearranging their ornamental elements, Garabedian creates new, different, mobile, and obviously more minimal configurations. Appropriation, language and translation have always been at the heart of his artistic practice. Although the liminal is manifested here in a graphic style, it is also deeply political. The echoes of a vulnerable Armenia, that has been invisible and forgotten all too often, springs forth from the margins, breaking with tradition and breaking free from limitations.

With this show, Garabedian pursues his reflection on repetition, referencing his series on the Armenian alphabet. However, the repetition transcends appropriative mechanics or technical prowess, becoming more akin to an exercise that is meditative, abstract and dynamic. The citation, displacement, and translation around which the artist's work revolves highlight yet again how artistic practice is always fashioned from what preceded it. It constantly seeks an archival, archaeological impulse.

By exploring these visual and textual sources, Garabedian gives an iconic tradition a new lease of life, as a constant reminder that the process of memory often takes place on the margins, the fringes, the borders, contours and sidelines of History.

- Marie-Aude Baronian