

# AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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## 'Ararat'

Granddaughter of Armenian holocaust survivors speaks about the history film

By Shena Bausch  
THE BATTALION

"History is written by the victors, while poems, songs and art are written by the vanquished." Susan Kouyomjian recalled this historical quote as she spoke about the history of the first genocide of the 20th century.

"This quote is especially true of the Armenian genocide, which to this day people are unaware of," she said.

Kouyomjian, the widow and collaborator of the late Charles Gordone, a Pulitzer Prize-winning dramatist and Texas A&M professor, has visited College Station's Cinemark Hollywood twice since last Friday to see the movie "Ararat."

"Ararat" is a film within a film that follows the production of a documentary about the Holocaust of 1.5 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923.

Kouyomjian said it is very fortunate that "Ararat" has come to College Station because it has only been shown in big cities since its release in November 2002.

"This is a very pivotal moment for Armenians, because it has taken 85 years to get even this much of the Armenian history told," she said.

Kouyomjian said the movie had a particular interest to her because of her grandparent's involvement in the genocide.

"Three of my grandparents endured the death marches for nearly eight years, and it's remarkable that they survived," she said.

Kouyomjian said this movie is important and she encourages history students in particular to see "Ararat" because the film raises the issue of the Armenian history that has been left out of the history books.

Kouyomjian said many people don't realize that Armenia, which was founded in 301 A.D., is the most ancient Christian nation in the world.

"Making this film was very important to many of us who have been haunted for years by the memories of the Armenian genocide," she said. "The film itself, and its ending, has helped

Armenians begin to heal."

Although Kouyomjian has already seen the movie, she said she plans on seeing it again.

"When you watch 'Ararat,' the movie holds together in a very interesting way," she said. "Atom Egoyan speaks to you on many different levels, and it leaves you thinking about it for days after."

Atom Egoyan, the writer and director of "Ararat," has been commended and condemned for making this movie. "Ararat" stirred up controversy when filming began because Turkey still disputes whether the Ottoman Empire was responsible for the deaths of two-thirds of the Armenian population, which is the focus of the movie.

The opening of the film begins with the Armenian artist and survivor of the 1915 massacre at Van, Arshile Gorky, painting his mother's hands.

Historically, Gorky's mother starved to death in his arms during the genocide. He came to the United States at about the age of 15, and he spent 15 years painting a picture of his mother repeatedly and committed suicide when he was 44.

Kouyomjian said the movie reminds the world why artists are essential to remembering history.

"Through the eyes of the painter, Arshile Gorky, the plight of the Armenian people is preserved and made sacred through the portrait of himself and his mother," she said.

Several other characters swirl around Gorky and his painting, "The Artist and His Mother."

Ani (played by Egoyan's wife and actress Arsinee Khanjian) is an art historian specializing in Gorky's work, and has been made an adviser to the historical reenactment filmed within the film.

Edward Saroyan (Charles Aznavour) is a well-known Armenian director creating the reenactment based on the real-life, eyewitness account of Dr. Clarence Ussher, who wrote "An American Physician in Turkey."

Ani's son, Raffi (David Alpay), is a driver on the set of the film who journeys to find his roots, which may jeopardize his future. A customs



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David Alpay, right, plays the role of Raffi and Arsinee Khanjian plays Ani in the movie "Ararat", a story about the Armenian genocide that took place from 1915-1923. The film will play at Cinemark Theater until Thursday.

agent at the Toronto airport detains Raffi, and interrogates him about the film canisters that he has brought back with him from Turkey.

Raffi spends the majority of the movie telling the customs agent about the Armenian massacre and Turkey's denial that the event even happened.

Raffi's stepsister and girlfriend, Celia (Marie-Josée Croze), is haunted by her father's suicide, and wants nothing but retribution. Celia intervenes in Ani's presentations on the research she has done on Gorky. Ani speaks about Gorky, but Celia only hears what's happened in her own life. Raffi is torn between his mother and his lover.

The other part of the film looks at the life of the customs agent, David (Christopher Plummer), who is on the verge of retirement. David fears that he will not be allowed to see his grandson anymore, because his son, Philip (Brent Carver),

thinks he is being intolerant of his gay lover. David is trying to accommodate his son's situation, but Philip can't see that because he has his own traumas. Philip's lover is Ali (Elias Koteas), who plays a villain in the film within the film, in which he has to grapple with his conscience for playing such a role.

At the release, "Ararat" received mixed reactions ranging from "this movie was a masterpiece" to "this movie did not contribute anything to Armenian history." Some viewers thought the movie should have concentrated more on the genocide itself without bringing the other elements to the story, such as Raffi having a love affair with his stepsister.

Leticia Keremian, a graduate student of archi-

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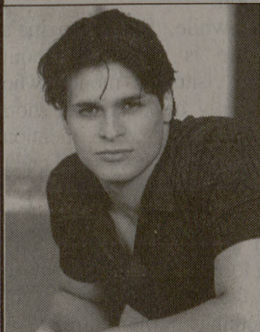
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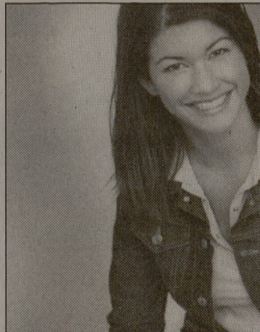
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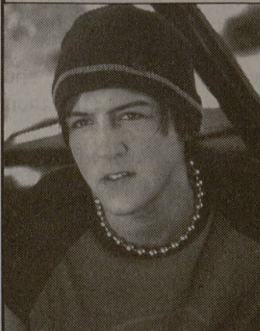
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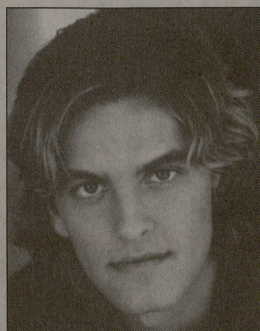
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