Diana Markosian’s Multi-Media Series *1915* And Photography’s Unique Capacity To Contribute To A Multi-Perspectival Global Art History

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A global reconfiguration of art history is tasked with analysing and conceptualizing new ways of history writing and seeks the decentering and pluralization of a conventionally Eurocentric (art) history. My study suggests to read Diana Markosian’s (b.1989) contemporary multimedia artwork series titled *1915* (2015) in this context and additionally, as adopting a media critical perspective. In my research project, I examine Markosian’s use of photography as a medium to shed light on subjective narratives of three survivors of the Armenian genocide in 1915 that have not been visible in official history writing. I am particularly interested in how she uses photography as a medium of history writing, and how her photographs of the survivor Movses Haneshyan, titled *Movses, from the series 1915* and *Movses and Musa-ler from the series 1915*, can be read as critical engagements with photography’s unique capacity to reconcile past and present temporalities.

Taking the subjective constructedness of the photographs as a starting point, I argue that *1915* follows a poststructuralist understanding of history writing as construction. To do so, I discuss Keith Jenkins’s “Re-Thinking History” (1991) and his formulation of the question “who is history for” rather than “what is history”. It is with this interpretation of history as subjective and constructed that I argue photographers working in the global framework may use the medium to pluralize history by ‘writing’ and shedding light on subjective histories. In this light, I position Markosian’s use of subjective constructedness in her *1915* photographs as critiquing a historicist notion of history writing as objective as well as emphasizing how histories are constructed by both certain-power structures and subjective experiences. It is only when history writing is acknowledged as constructed that a multi-perspectival global art history becomes possible.

Further, I discuss Markosian’s photographs as a useful media of multi-perspectival global history writing through the lens of Roland Barthes’ photo theory. First, I suggest to read her use of photographic layering in the images of Movses by relating it to Barthes’s understanding of photography as generating a new time/space (Barthes, ‘Rhetoric of The Image’, 1964). In my paper I will argue that this aspect of photography has the potential to act as a bridge between multiple histories; each viewers’ and the photographic subjects. Second, I will unpack and critically engage with the two contrasting binary elements *studium* and *punctum* that according to Roland Barthes constitute photography and photographic meaning (*Camera Lucida*, 1979) in relation to Markosian’s photographs. According to Barthes, *punctum* relates to the seemingly individual affective effect of a photograph on the viewer and *studium* denotes the culturally coded meaning a viewer may gather through a given photograph.

In my paper I argue that even the realm of the *punctum*, the seemingly individual, is ultimately culturally-coded. To make this argument I refer to Shawn Michelle Smith’s “Race and Reproduction in Camera Lucida” (2013) which convincingly shows how Barthes’s own conceptualization of photography is culturally charged in a certain way. In addition to this, scholars such as Eduardo Cadava and Paola Cortés-Rocca (“Notes on Love and Photography”, 2006) conceive of the *punctum* as co-present with the *studium*, lending a poststructuralist understanding of meaning to my research. These re-readings of *Camera Lucida* act as pathways towards understanding how photographic meaning and meaning in general are culturally-coded particularly once they are verbally expressed and communicated.

It is against this background that I use Markosian’s photographs to discuss how culturally-coded meanings are ever-present in the viewer’s reception of a photograph. I argue that the recognition of one’s culturally-coded meanings when viewing a photograph may allow an individual viewer to understand the individuality of the subject and in turn, recognize the culturally-coded meanings of others. This in turn, I argue, is the precondition for a multi-perspectival global art history that relies on analysing, comparing and exchanging multiple cultural and historical meanings of photography and art respectively.