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Exhibit spotlights Armenian scouting group

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Photographic portraits by Levon Parian depict members of Homenetmen, a pan-Armenian diaspora organization dedicated to scouting, athletics and leadership. (Courtesy of Ara Oshagan)



The 11 pairs of clasped hands extending vertically out of a gallery wall in Glendale's Downtown Central Library are elevating each other, according to the artist.

"They're rising with you," said Harry Vorperian, who created the work with Vahagn Thomasian for an exhibit celebrating the 100th anniversary of a pan-Armenian diaspora organization called Homenetmen, which is dedicated to scouting, athletics and leadership.

Homenetmen's motto is "Elevate yourself and elevate others with you," and it serves as an inspiration for the untitled work featuring the clasped hands and the name of the exhibit that will run until Sunday.

Hosted by Homenetmen in partnership with the Glendale Library, Arts & Culture department, "Elevate," on display in the library's ReflectSpace, features a centennial's worth of the international organization's archives and ephemera, in addition to site-specific contemporary work.

While the curators didn't initially think the exhibit was the right fit for the ReflectSpace, which is dedicated to addressing social-justice and human-rights issues, further examination of the organiza-

tion's work swayed them. "It played a critical historical role in helping revive the Armenian communities who were devastated" by the genocide and World War II, said Ara Oshagan, who cocurates the space with his wife, Anahid.

One condition for holding the exhibit was pairing the trove of photographs, medals, scout handkerchiefs and other artifacts with new works. The Oshagans enlisted a team that included Vorperian, Thomasian and Mher Tavidian to help flesh out the vision, as well as source and make the works. Vorperian, who joined Homenetmen when he was 8 years old and living in Lebanon, said he still feels a bond with the organization.

"I learned so much, a lot about nature and life itself," Vorperian said. He remains friends with some of the people he met in his young scouting days, he added.

Besides the "Elevate" installation, Vorperian made a 10-foot version of a knot he learned to make during his first year as a scout that is currently on display in the gallery. One wall is covered with large portraits of members of Homenetmen — ranging from a soccer player to clergy member — photographed by Levon Parian. In addition to the members' faces, Parian produced separate images of their hands and sometimes their legs, arranging them in vertical diptychs and triptychs. The idea is "to show that they are a community," Ara Oshagan said.

Outside the gallery, on the library floor, is an installation titled "Suspension Bridge Spanning a Hundred Years." Eight scout members from the Los Angeles area ranging from 19 to 35 years old constructed the bridge from rope and wood. In the wilderness, it could be used to traverse a ravine. In its new context, it becomes art, Oshagan said.

ReflectSpace is in the Downtown Central Library, 222 E. Harvard St.



Installation "Suspension Bridge Spanning a Hundred Years," was made by Los Angeles-area Homenetmen scout members. (Courtesy of Ara Ashagan)

