

Sabrina Amrani is pleased to present "Chant Avedissian: Go East, Young Man," an exhibition by the late artist Chant Avedissian



The exhibition *Go East, Young Man* is dedicated to Chant Avedissian (1951–2018), one of the most singular and rich voices of contemporary Egyptian art. Far from being a conventional retrospective, the exhibition is structured around an intimate and decisive document: the autobiography that the artist wrote himself shortly before his death. This brief and fragmentary text, in which travels, exhibitions, friendships, and personal episodes intertwine, is not only a biographical testimony but also an aesthetic and political statement about which events, people, and moments he chose to preserve as his legacy.

Avedissian's handwritten biography has been transcribed verbatim in vinyl on the gallery walls, forming a timeline that encircles the exhibition space. Year by year, visitors follow the artist's own words, without mediation or reinterpretation, and thus discover the milestones he chose to highlight in his life and career. The gesture is revealing: inclusions and omissions are equally significant. In his words appear foundational journeys, cherished collaborations, or crucial exhibitions, while other episodes—such as the record-breaking sale at Sotheby's Doha in 2013, when he briefly reached the status of the highest-valued living Arab artist at auction—remain deliberately absent. This strategy of conscious silences, of omitting what might be read as triumphs through external eyes, shows Avedissian's radical coherence: he refused to let the market dictate the meaning of his work and instead preferred to construct his own memory out of personal affinities, spiritual quests, and cultural commitments.

The timeline is “interrupted” and enriched by the presence of original works and documents that accompany and expand the written narrative. Textiles—tapestries and garments reflecting his early interest in design and applied arts—dialogue with his celebrated works on corrugated cardboard, including pieces from the Icons of the Nile series, where icons of Egyptian music, cinema, and politics from the 1950s and 60s coexist with patterns and motifs drawn from Ottoman, Pharaonic, and Central Asian traditions. These are joined by reproductions of watercolors, sketches, and drawings that provide a glimpse into his creative process, along with design objects conceived by the artist for Sabrina Amrani, underscoring his constant movement between major and minor arts, between the ephemeral and the monumental.

In parallel, the exhibition presents artist’s notebooks, posters he designed, leaflets from earlier exhibitions, personal photographs, and press articles in which he was reviewed. These materials not only illustrate specific episodes of his biography but also constitute a visual archive that resonates with his own interest in memory and the construction of cultural narratives. The inclusion of these documents within the timeline transforms the gallery into a palimpsest where life and work, archive and creation, private memory and public narrative are inseparably interwoven.

The title of the exhibition, *Go East, Young Man*, reinterprets the famous nineteenth-century proverb that urged one to “go West” in search of progress and opportunity. In Avedissian’s life and work, this orientation is reversed. After training in Canada and France, he returned to Egypt convinced that the future had to be sought in the revalorization of the East, in the cultural wealth of Samarkand, Bukhara, Cairo, Baghdad, or Aleppo, rather than continuing to look at Paris or London as exclusive art centers. His autobiography, with its first-person accounts of journeys and projects, thus becomes a map of displacements that never stray from the axis of the East. Against the Eurocentric narrative, Avedissian firmly affirms that the canon can also be written from here, wherever “here” may be.

The exhibition makes clear how his stencils on cardboard, created with local pigments and Arabic gum, were not mere decorative exercises but a way of affirming a distinctive aesthetic resistant to homogenizing globalization. Likewise, his dedication to textiles, costume design, and utilitarian objects reveals the breadth of his vision, capable of building bridges between the artisanal and the scholarly, between the popular and the academic.

In sum, *Go East, Young Man* is an invitation to journey through the life and work of Chant Avedissian in his own voice and on his own terms. Visitors encounter a biography handwritten by the artist, whose silences speak as eloquently as his words, and whose materiality unfolds in works and documents that form an intimate constellation. Along this path, Avedissian emerges not only as a visual creator but also as an archivist of himself, as the curator of his own memory. By abandoning the triumphalist narrative of the market and embracing a more human and coherent account, the artist reminds us that true posterity is not measured in auction figures but in the ability to bequeath a vision of the world that continues to question our present.

Curated by Jal Hamad

Chant Avedissian: Go East, young man
Chant Avedissian

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