

The Modern



BEING THERE ART ASSIGNMENT #2

Hrair Sarkissian: Sheltering

This activity packet was designed in collaboration with Kristen Cochran in conjunction with **FOCUS: HRAIR SARKISSIAN**. It is intended for middle and high school students.

FOCUS: HRAIR SARKISSIAN was on view from January 24 – March 15 , 2020 and guest curated by Dr. Omar Kholeif, Director of Collections and Senior Curator, Shariah Art Foundation.

Hrair Sarkissian (b. 1973 Syrian) currently lives in London and The Hague. Hrair is a photographer who earned his foundational training at his father's photographic studio, *Dream Color*, where he spent all his childhood vacations and worked full-time for twelve years after high school. In 2010 he completed a BFA in Photography at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam.

Employing traditional documentary techniques of dead pan photography, Hrair's work has an uncanny symbiosis between **absence and presence**.

Photography is Hrair's tool to search for answers related to personal memories and background.

Sarkissian tries to engage the viewer into a more profound reading of what lies behind the surface of the image, thereby re-evaluating larger historical or social narratives.

"With each series of photographs I always and primarily aim to explore an inner contemplation on a subject close to my heart." ~ Hrair Sarkissian

Please watch and read the selected videos and articles about Hrair Sarkissian and documentary photography. These resources will provide you with context about his work before you begin working on the activities.

***if hyperlinks are disabled in your browser, please copy and paste URL directly into your search bar**

Tuesday Evenings at the Modern: Hrair Sarkissian

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwzraNuVQUl>

Hrair Sarkissian Arts and Culture article

<https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/art/my-work-is-about-trauma-armenian-syrian-artist-hrair-sarkissian-describes-his-artwork-1.983757>

Hrair Sarkissian DREAM COLOR article

<https://www.bidoun.org/articles/hrair-sarkissian>

Hrair Sarkissian interview with Anahit Poturyan

<https://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/sarkissian-interviewed-by-anahit-poturyan/4376>

Deadpan photography article

<https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/what-is-deadpan-photography/>

Hrair Sarkissian website

<http://hairsarkissian.com>

HOMESICK, Two channel video, 11 min, 7min, 2014





In 'Homesick' (2014) Hrair Sarkissian recreated and destroyed an architecturally exact scaled model of the apartment building in Damascus where his parents are still living.

Like many of their generation, they have until now refused to leave Syria. Sarkissian grew up in this building, and lived there until he left Syria in 2008. It represents more than just a house. In addition to providing shelter to his parents, it is the place where he belongs, a container for his memories, and a place for his family's collective identity.

Through 'Homesick' Sarkissian constructs a story that, considering the current political situation and the ongoing destruction in his home country, could very well take place in the near future. What would be the consequences? What is it to expect the worst? Can we fast-forward the present and acknowledge loss and begin reshaping a collapsed history before the event? At the same time, by taking fate into his own hands, he is trying to regain some control over the situation and to tear down an unreal imagination.

Related terms:

Homesickness: *a longing for one's home or something or someone who represents home. Translated literally as "home-woe"*

Exile: *the state of being barred from one's native country, typically for political or punitive reasons.*

Simulacrum: *an image or representation of someone or something. An imitation or Substitute.*

Journaling Exercise: Making Meaning

- On the right side of this two channel video, the artist, Hrair, is seen repetitively swinging a sledgehammer at an unknown form. On the left side we see a sculptural replica of his childhood home, the home where his parents still live in Damascus, Syria, transforming into a pile of rubble. Think about the title of the work and the artist's action. What do you imagine the artist is trying to express or communicate through this presentation?

- What does this work make you wonder? If you could sit and have a chat with the artist, what would ask him about the work *HOMESICK*?

- Describe a time in your life when you've felt homesick. Where were you? What were the circumstances?

- In light of the current Coronavirus pandemic, and the local and national orders to stay at home, has your understanding of homesickness changed? How so?

Drawing Response: Memories of Home

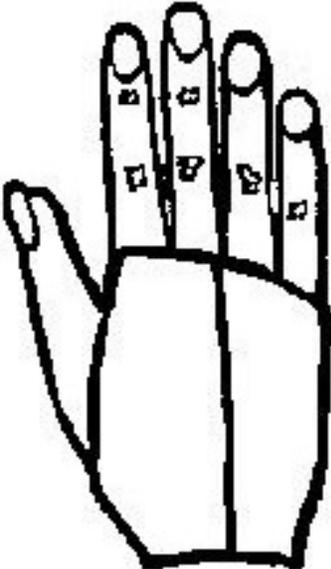
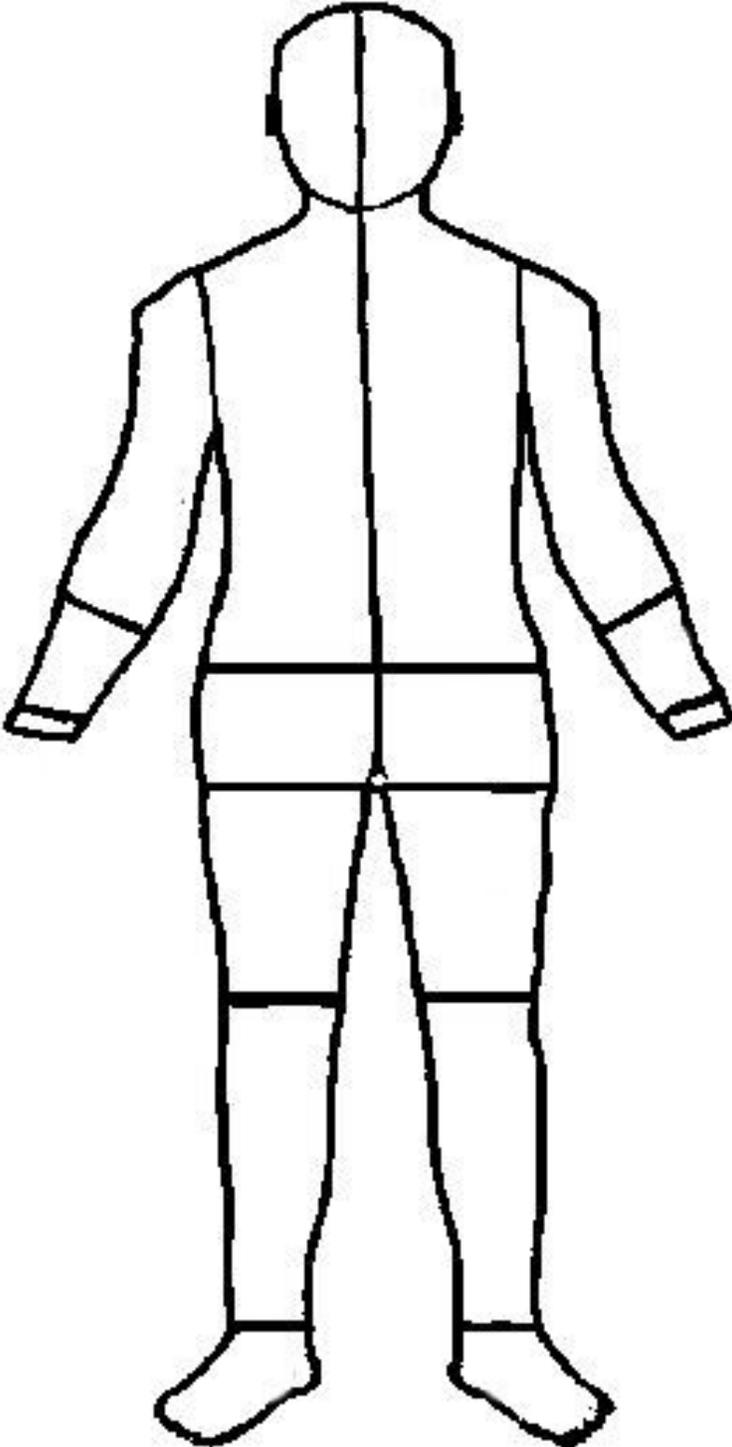
- Consider your current home or a place you've lived that represents home to you. Close your eyes and imagine one room in that place. Then, in the space below, draw it from memory. Include as much detail as you can. Your drawing could be a floor plan, an architectural cross section, a still life, etc.

Drawing Response: Homesickness Survival Kit

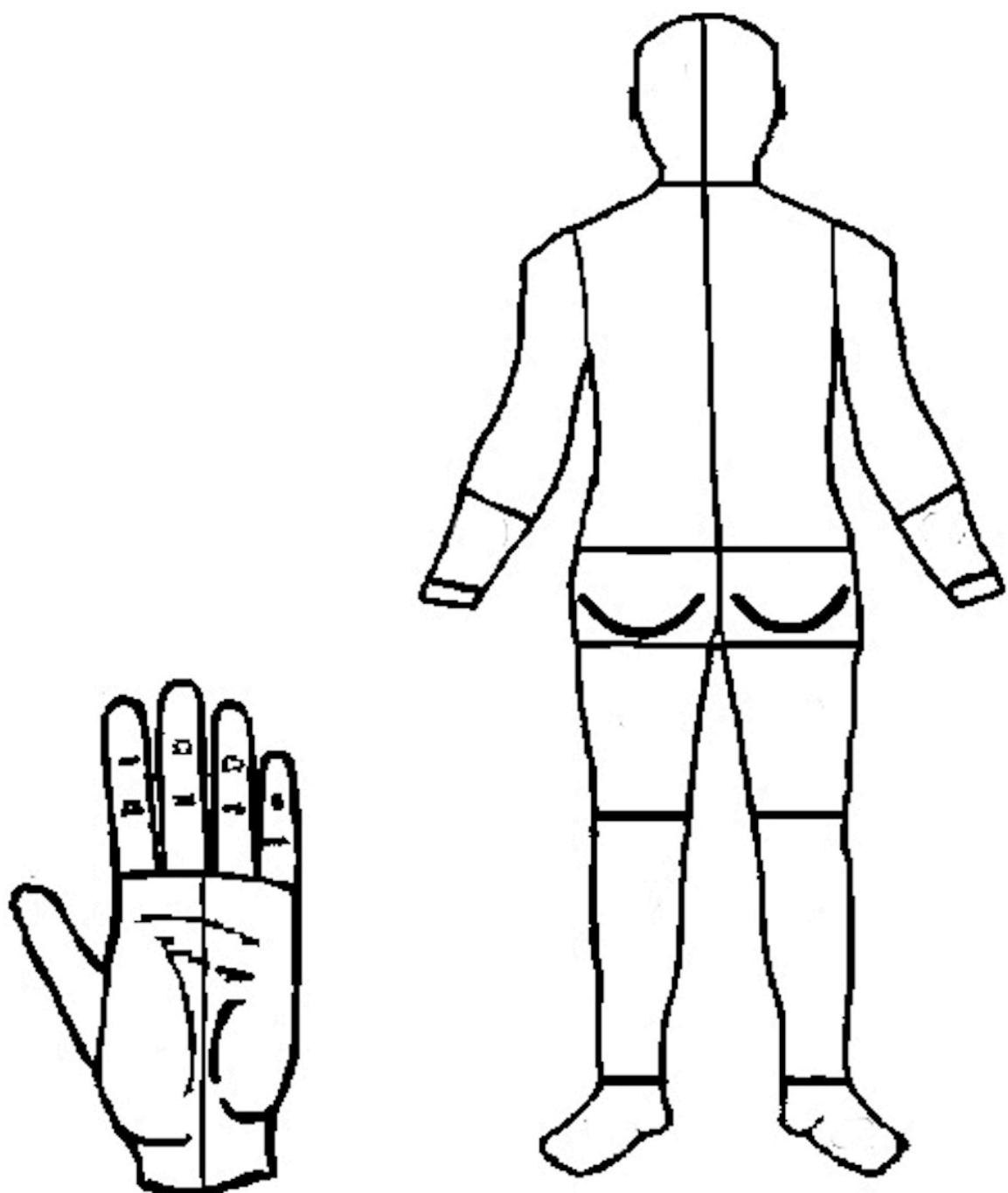
- If you could make a care package or a survival kit to help homesickness, what would it include? Make a list of 5-10 items in the space below. Feel free to include animate and inanimate objects: things like pets, people, snacks, smells, tunes, tv shows or even places. Your list can be composed of words, images or both.

- Now, imagine that the container for this kit is your body (as if you could carry these homesickness helpers around inside you, all the time). Write or draw pictures of the items on your list anywhere inside the body diagram.

FRONT



BACK



LAST SCENE, Archival inkjet prints, 42 x 50 cm, 2016



Last Scene' (2016) is a series of 47 photographs of places in The Netherlands that were chosen by terminally ill patients to go and see as their last wish.

The project centers on the power of a well-loved place to compress an outlook on life into a telling scene that is at once melancholic and joyful. The simplicity of each landscape or scene heightens attention to an inner journey of remembering the past and envisioning a future that no longer includes you. In contemporary culture the notion of death and dying is often consciously ignored. This project gives the viewer a way in to grapple with the question of where we come from, and where we are going. The images turn into mirrors: on the one hand you try imagine the person who looked at the scene for the last time, while at the same time it encourages introspection: what would my wish be? These scenes were photographed at the date and time of the actual last visit.

Writing and Image Response: Final

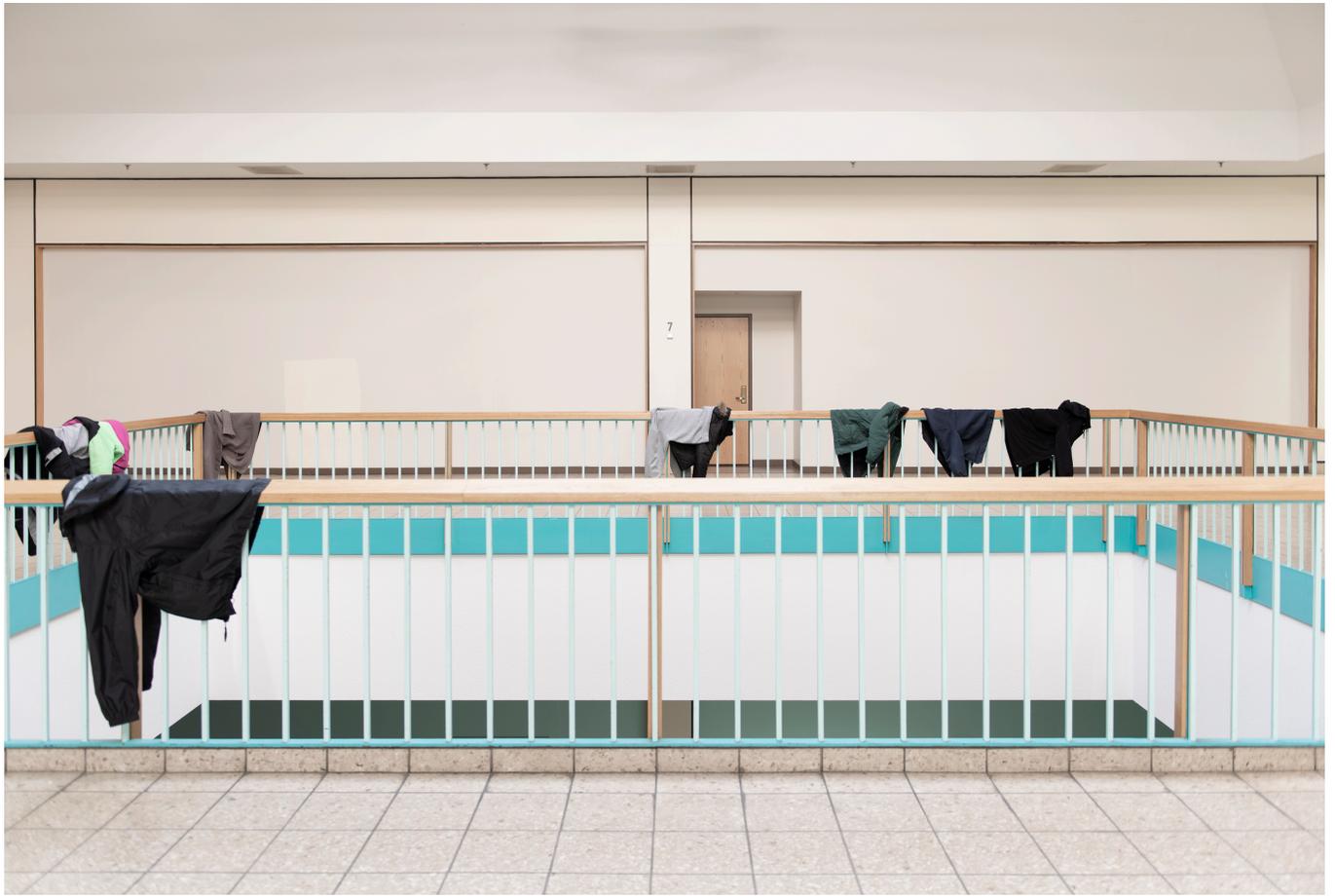
- Describe a location you would want see one final time, or for the first time.
- What details or memories help conjure this place for you?
- Would you prefer to see this site alone, or would you hope to be accompanied by others?
- Please use text and/or an image for your final response

*for example

Once in a dream, I had forgotten everything about myself. It felt like imagining either the first or final stage of Alzheimer's disease. I wandered through an abandoned 1980's shopping mall, alone, trying to slowly recall one's life. I came across 4 giant balloons in a slightly sunken pit, tethered, but moving vertically. As I watched the balloons touch the ceiling before they descended back to the floor, I suddenly remembered who I was again. My father used to bring me here when he had a day off of work. We would get a slice a pizza before watching something together at the cinema.

I remember a simple happiness being with him on those occasions.

Many years later, I visited the mall one last time before they demolished the building to find that nearly all of the shops were vacant and that its primary use had become a space for elderly mall walkers.



Thank you for participating in these exercises about HRAIR SARKISSIAN.

If you would like to share your results, please fill out the photo release form and send it along with your files to jbarnett@themodern.org.

Please save the file as either a JPG or PDF and include First and Last name_Modern_2

For example,

JesseBarnett_Modern_2.pdf

JesseBarnett_Modern_2.jpg

If you have any questions about the packet, instructions, or file sharing, please don't hesitate contacting me.

Take care out/in there.

Jesse Morgan Barnett
Assistant Curator of Education
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

The Modern

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