

Review | Weaving Culture — from Nagorno-Karabakh to Yerevan, knot by knot

Mariam Shonia · OC Media · 2026-06-22

For decades, traditional Armenian carpets have worked within a strict grammar: the double-knot technique; a colour palette drawn from the land — madder root, pomegranate rind, walnut bark; and rarely more than 10 to 12 colours in a single piece. The motifs are geometric and symbolic.

Walking into Weaving Culture at the National Gallery of Armenia, that grammar is immediately, and deliberately, changed.

The exhibition was conceived by the curatorial practice AHA collective and curated by Nairi Khatchadourian. It presents 37 handmade carpets and tapestries produced over nine months by six women weavers displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh, working from drawings made by the Armenian-Egyptian-Canadian artist Anna Boghiguiian during her residency at AHA's studio in July 2025. The exhibition is Boghiguiian's first solo project in Armenia.

The show is structured in three acts across four gallery halls, though in practice the space reads as continuous — the visual consistency of the works, their shared palette and sensibility, creates the feeling of moving through a single extended argument rather than through separate rooms.

The first gallery opens with the landscapes of Armenia: suns, mountains, cattle. Here the carpet becomes an inhabited space. A crouching female figure appears in 'Meghri, The Earth Rises', invested with mythological force — at once a portrayal of a guardian and an allegory of resistance, setting the tone for what the exhibition's own text describes as 'a fragile territory where this feminine presence emerges'.

In the second gallery, the narrative shifts. The carpet becomes a woven garden, a symbolic threshold, transporting the viewer toward the river Aras. By the third, the work has moved from the real to the imaginary, and from the imaginary to the metaphysical.

The carpets range from painting-sized pieces to large-scale works. The largest are the most immersive: what you read from a distance transforms as you approach and the texture of the weave asserts itself. The woven surface adds a physical weight and warmth which Boghiguiian's watercolours, while surprisingly still bright, are lacking in intensity.

The colour is the first provocation when entering the space — nothing like what a visitor expecting a carpet exhibition might anticipate. Boghiguiian's drawings transformed into wool required more than 200 distinct dye formulas, the work of two dyers: Evgenya Shabazyan, a chemist with 40 years of secret formula notebooks, and Mariam Nalbandyan, who forages wild Armenian flora for natural pigments. Shabazyan's notebooks — handwritten columns of chemical ratios with wool swatches tucked between pages — are displayed alongside the finished carpets.

One practical issue is worth noting. Armenia's National Gallery is a large institution with a great deal in it, and Weaving Culture is not staged in a way that actively draws in visitors who have not specifically come to see it. For anyone entering the building without prior knowledge of the exhibition, it risks being missed.

Weaving Culture is on view at the National Gallery of Armenia in Yerevan until 15 August 2026.

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