Monumental Migration: Public Sculpture and the Patronage of Arab and Armenian Diaspora Communities in 20th century Argentina

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Abstract

At the turn of the twentieth century, Argentina experienced a wave of mass migration that radically transformed the racial, urban, and architectural environment of the southern cone. While the majority of migrants arrived from Europe, Arab and Armenian immigrants also arrived as early as the 1860s. This religiously diverse group—problematically labeled “turco”—hailed from neighboring Ottoman provinces in the Eastern Mediterranean. My project explores public monuments sponsored by these immigrants in the capital city and provinces of Buenos Aires as a response to nationalist discourses and a means of self-representation. Via case studies of key monuments sponsored by these communities, I demonstrate how art and architectural patronage served as an agentive tool to rebuild and re-shape rapidly shifting collective identities during politically turbulent decades. The appropriation, re-signification of space, and styles incorporated in the institutions sponsored by these communities constructed a positive public image in a city where their presence was initially marginalized. My project ultimately seeks to contribute to emergent research on minority contributions to modernity, inscribing new transcultural meaning to local, national and global styles.