

A PUBLICATION FOR THE ARMENIAN GENERAL BENEVOLENT UNION ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

# THE INSIDER

V°1/N°1

## DRESSED For SUCCESS

With an H&M Design Award under his belt, AGBU scholarship recipient Eddy Anemian is one to watch P.04

**ALSO**  
**TALKING TECH WITH**  
**ELIE AKILIAN AND**  
**HOVHANNES AVOYAN**

PLUS "PARIS  
VERSUS NEW YORK"  
EXCLUSIVE  
P.08

# THE INSIDER

ARMENIAN GENERAL BENEVOLENT UNION

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# From AGBU to You

by ARDA HARATUNIAN

**W**elcome to the inaugural issue of *The Insider!* Some might say that this publication has been in the works for more than a century. Since AGBU's founding in 1906, tens of thousands of Armenians across the world have been touched by its wide array of programs. Our schools, internships, summer camps, youth activities, scholarships and networks of young professionals have helped shape the lives of brilliant people who are now developing cutting-edge technology, launching revolutionary start-ups, taking the stage, reporting on current events and giving back to their communities through service projects and philanthropic work.

Every day, alumni and friends of AGBU are making a difference around the world. And now we finally have a place to share their exceptional stories.

*The Insider* is a unique forum that will provide access and insight into the lives and careers of well-established leaders in their fields and show the remarkable work of those rising up the ranks just

behind them. As you will see, each member of the global AGBU family has a fascinating story to tell.

Each issue will feature alumni perspectives on topics ranging from their own areas of professional expertise to pressing political or community issues. In this issue, for example, you will read about the work of burgeoning fashion designer Eddy Anemian and the inspiration behind graphic artist Vahram Muratyan's bestselling book *Paris versus New York: A Tally of Two Cities*.

Another key element of *The Insider* is highlighting the role AGBU has played in the personal and professional successes of its alumni. In this issue, we will see how, without an AGBU scholarship, Elie Akilian might never have received the education he needed to become the visionary tech entrepreneur he is today.

We are confident that *The Insider* will spark a global conversation among members of the AGBU family and are pleased to offer you a publication both contemporary in its voice and sophisticated in its style.

We look forward to your comments and warmly welcome your suggestions for future issues. ☺

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**Eddy Anemian**

Profession **Fashion Designer**  
Country **Paris, France**

Long strips of colorful fabric comprise the head-turning garments in Anemian's award-winning collection.

# KING *of* COUTURE

*AGBU scholarship recipient Eddy Anemian  
makes waves in the fashion world*

**I**n the cool, dark days of January, while the Scandinavian sun snoozes silently below the arctic horizon, the runways of Stockholm are crackling with shutter clicks and chromatic light. Lean models part the ivory catwalk with angular, jutted jaws; a pout of garnet lips, quick turns, swooshes of matted hair. Their loose garments, stitched carefully from long, torn strips of rough fabric, splash verdant colors in puffy pleats and vertical lines. It is the fashion equivalent of assemblage: clothing from collage. The collection's name, "They Can Cut All Flowers, They Cannot Keep Spring From Coming"—a quotation from Chilean poet Pablo Neruda—perfectly describes the refabricated raiment, whose vivid greens, whites, and yellows touch off a floral mosaic of billowing, vernal life.

"I always wanted to be a fashion designer," says Eddy Anemian, creator of the spring-inspired, 18-piece collection. "I don't know how I could do anything else."

Here at Mercedes Benz Fashion Week, one of several international shows sponsored by the German car maker, Anemian's single-minded ambition would come as little surprise to the crowd, which buzzes with excitement over the 24-year-old's avant-garde work. Inspired by Tilda Swinton's character in Luca Guadagnino's film *I Am Love*, as well as French painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Anemian's handcrafted apparel bested competi-

Anemian's collection was inspired by Tilda Swinton's character in the film *I Am Love*, as well as French painter Ingres.

“  
**THANKS TO THIS  
FUNDING [FROM AGBU],  
I WAS ABLE TO BUY FABRIC  
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MORE CREATIVE.**  
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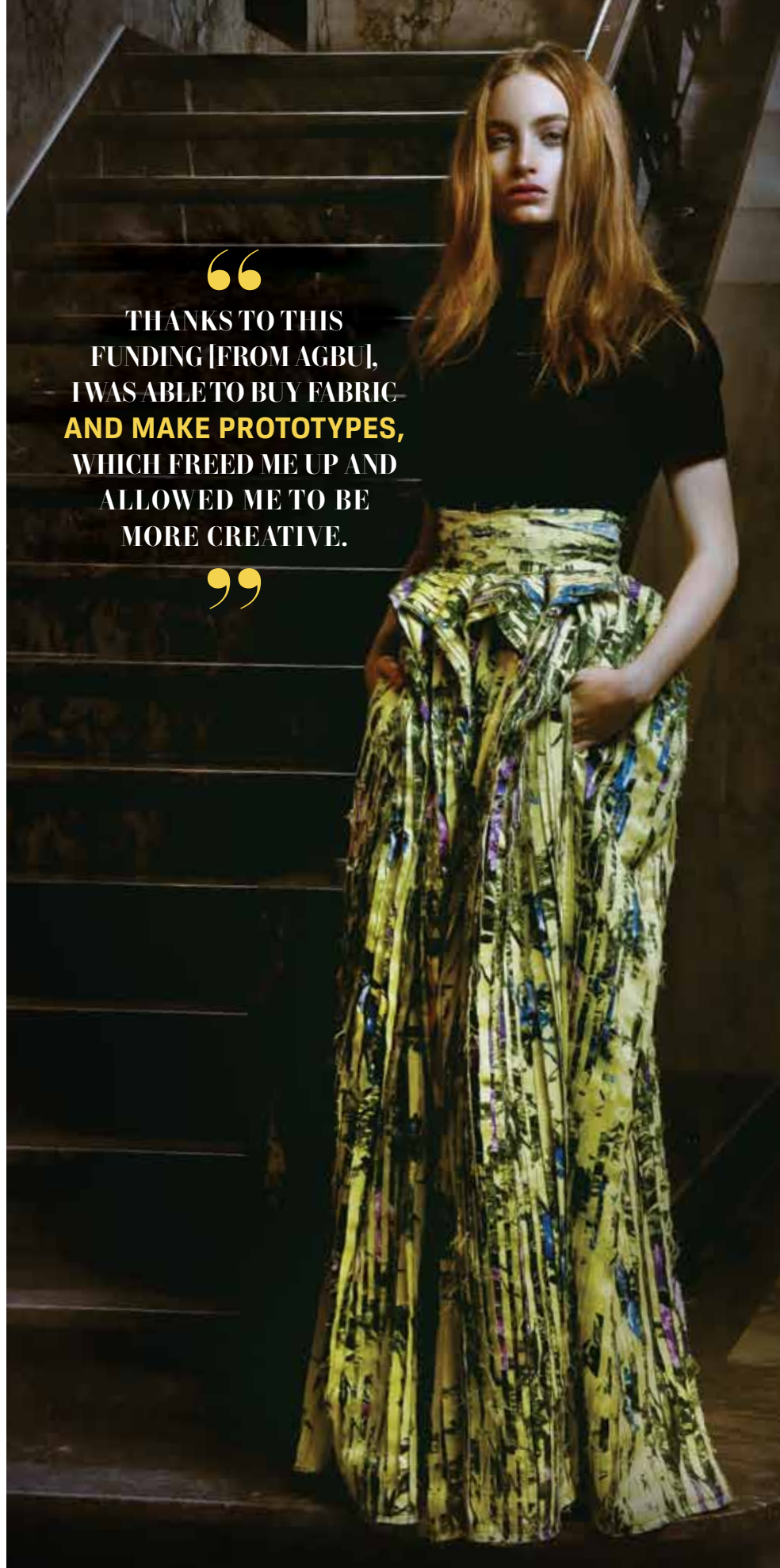
tors from 32 top-tier schools to win the H&M Design Award, giving the budding designer 50,000 euros and a development deal that will bring his designs to H&M stores in at least 12 countries this fall.

The prestigious prize is a windfall for Anemian, who is now finishing his fourth year at La Cambre fashion school in Brussels. Anemian is grateful to AGBU for the [scholarship](#) support that has enabled him to attend the elite school and buy material for his projects.

“When you are a fashion design student, you have to spend a lot of money on fabrics and photographs,” he says. “Thanks to this funding [from AGBU], I was able to buy fabric and make prototypes, which freed me up and allowed me to be more creative.”

A native of Saint-Chamond, a small town outside Lyon in central France, Anemian grew up being involved with AGBU and the Armenian community. As a child, he attended AGBU events with his parents, both of whom were active in the organization, and participated in AGBU sports and youth programs. Drawn to the arts from an early age, Anemian relied on the support of his family and community to help him pursue his creative goals.

“The fashion industry loves rich people. When you are rich and have lots of connections, it is easier,” Anemian says. “My grandfathers came from Turkey and Syria, and I am just a middle class French guy. It makes things more difficult.”





Those difficulties, however, didn't stop Anemian from entering the fierce competition for the H&M award. After being selected as one of 30 students to pass the first round, Anemian traveled to Sweden to present 10 of his outfits and interview with a main designer for H&M. The high-stakes final round took place in London, where he struggled to choose the best five outfits to present.

The jury included fashion designer Erdem Moralioglu, *Vogue Italia* fashion editor Sara Maino, *Downton Abbey* actress Michelle Dockery, British *Vogue* executive fashion editor Serena Hood, H&M creative advisor Margareta van den Bosch, and style star Michelle Violy Harper. After being selected the winner, Anemian rushed back to school to prepare eight additional outfits to present at the Stockholm show, completing six months of work in one frenzied four weeks.

With his cash prize, Anemian wants to put together a new collection and possibly work toward starting his own label. As he puts it, "I want a 20-year-old woman to wear my clothes as easily as a woman of 45." Also chief among his goals is to create clothing inspired by Armenia, which he has explored during his time at La Cambre.

"My school is afraid because they don't want something too folkloric or old," Anemian says. "I absolutely love Armenian costume, but I want to think of my Armenian

origins in a modern way. I bought some Armenian fabric when I went to Armenia three years ago, so maybe I will use it in my new collection."

Anemian is especially keen on incorporating Armenian colors into his apparel. "Armenia is such a beautiful country. You can see wonderful colors in the nature, like the green and yellow in Karabakh. I would like to use the very strong red that you see in the flag and pomegranate."

Now preparing to leave school and enter the professional world, Anemian is interested in designs that feature leather, applique, and embroidery. Having interned with such esteemed designers as Gaspard Yurkivich, Yiging Yin, and Balenciaga, Anemian

is armed with a wealth of ideas, experience, and practical knowledge. Although his heart lies in creating custom-made *haute couture* garments, such as those he displayed in Stockholm, he acknowledges the benefits of working with a major retailer like H&M, which can shine their spotlight on the up-and-coming Armenian star.

"I grew up Armenian," Anemian proclaims. "I speak Armenian with my family. I love Armenian culture, food, and music. I am proud of my origins, and I want to make a name for Armenians in fashion."

With tremendous talent, international recognition, and the backing of the AGBU community, Anemian certainly has a bright future coming his way. 🌟

Anemian presented 10 outfits in Sweden to win the prestigious H&M Design Award, which earned him 50,000 Euros and an international development deal.

ONE



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*Vahram Muratyan's Paris versus New York has produced a bestselling book, a hit blog and high-end prints for designers such as Dior, Hermes and Prada—and you should see what's next*

TWO

CITIES

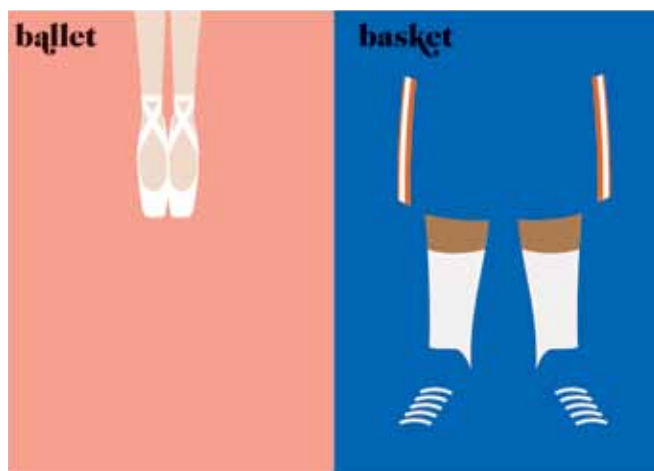
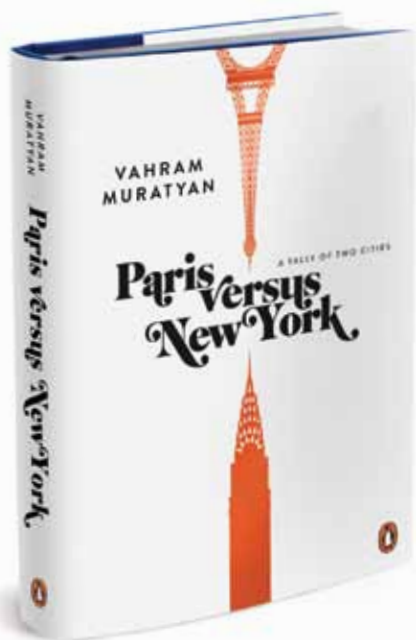




**Vahram Muratyan**

Profession **Graphic Artist**  
Country **Paris, France**

Conceptualized as an online travel journal, Muratyan's *Paris versus New York* (images here from blog and deluxe version book) attracted more than 1.5 million visits within its first months and went on to inspire an internationally bestselling book.



**B**aguette vs. Bagel. Quasimodo vs. King Kong. Grand Palais vs. Grand Central. Proust vs. Salinger. Stiff Upper Lip vs. Million Dollar Smile. Cancan vs. Gaga. Metro vs. Subway. Patisserie vs. Pastrami. Aznavour vs. Sinatra. Le Petit Prince vs. The Lion King. Champs-Elysees vs. Fifth Avenue. Marie-Antoinette vs. Madonna. Bordeaux vs. Cosmo. Non vs. Yes.

For graphic artist Vahram Muratyan, creator of the bestselling book *Paris versus New York: A Tally of Two Cities* and the blog that preceded it, words are as crucial as images when communicating an idea.

“Everything I do is based on words and sentences that are hidden behind the images,” says Muratyan, whose 2012 book has sold worldwide and been translated into French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, and Portuguese. “I love to open up an image by putting mysterious words around it.”

In the few short years since the blog and companion book were published, some of those images—Audrey Tautou’s dark bob paired with Sarah Jessica Parker’s blonde locks, or the exposed, elegant scaffolding of the Eiffel Tower next to the Statue of Liberty’s concealed iron skeleton—have become virtual icons of their associative cities. A resident of Paris, Muratyan was visiting New York when the duality of the two cities piqued his attention.

“You cannot find the same thing in these two cities. There’s this difference between the private and the public,” he says. “Paris is not open at first, because Paris protects its intimacy. The people are a bit aggressive; it’s in their blood and they don’t pretend otherwise. But when the doors open, they go deep. New York is the reverse; people are immediately friendly and will make small talk. You are close to everyone right away, which is what makes people think everything is possible in New York.”

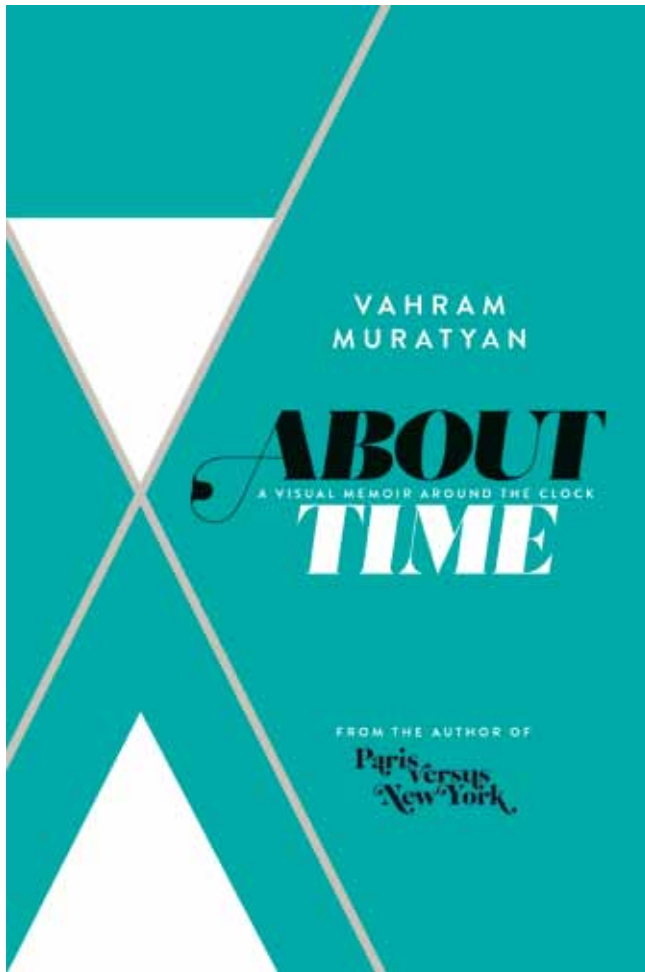
Muratyan admits that his perspective is

informed by greater familiarity with Paris, where he was born and raised, than with New York and the other cities that interest him. “In New York, I have virgin eyes. That’s why I chose not to live in New York, so I wouldn’t lose that fresh excitement.”

Earlier in his life, maintaining interest in his work was one of the things that lured Muratyan away from other artistic pursuits to graphic design.

“Before I went to art school, I was attracted to geography, history, and architecture. I wanted to be a cartographer or an architect. All these jobs have basically the same goals: to simplify complex things, to make them tidy and sharp. As an architect, though, you’ll sometimes work on a project for three years, so finally I chose graphic design because I wanted to be able to move from one subject to another.”

Indeed, Muratyan keeps his portfolio varied and full. Besides collaborating with such high-end fashion houses as Dior and Prada, he has done design work in Paris for David



Left: Muratyan's visual memoir *About Time* will be published in November 2014. Right: Graphic design work for the L'Intime Literary Festival in Belgium.

Lynch's nightclub, Silencio, and the prestigious L'Intime Literary Festival. Much like the twin cities he famously parallels, corporate and personal projects hold different opportunities and challenges for Muratyan.

"With commissioned work, I get into a new universe I'm not used to," he says. "It's like a Chinese puzzle: I look at something and have to find the best solution. With my own work, my goal is to say what I want and create something close to what I am. A personal project is much deeper because I have no boundaries; I put myself into it."

That freedom and personal investment, though, requires time. A corporate project will usually take him a few weeks, whereas personal projects take longer. "It's like the difference between an actor and director: the actor will come on a project for eight weeks, but the director may be on a two-year journey," he explained.

Muratyan's most recent creative journey has been *About Time*, a visual memoir to be published in November, 2014 by Little,

Brown and Company. The forthcoming book follows in the tradition of such graphic memoirs as Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, though Muratyan deliberately took a more minimalist approach to incorporating text in his narrative.

"With books like *Fun Home*, there is a text, and then that text is made into images—but the whole text is still included. For me, it was better to use only flash words, which are more conceptual," explains Muratyan. "My goal was to make a visual memoir of our time. By erasing what I write, [the story] becomes more open to the reader. A personal work like this is not egocentric; maybe it's about the person who is reading it."

While *Paris versus New York* is about space, Muratyan says, his next book explores the human relationship to time and how it shapes our lives. "It's about why we're obsessed with getting old, and why we're so angry when we wait for something. Time also affects how we experience the places we go: whether you're moving somewhere versus

spending 10 days, or if there is a definite beginning and end to being there."

An avid traveler, Muratyan counts Armenia among the nations he has visited. He credits his parents and more than 10 years of [Saturday classes](#) at an AGBU center—where he took courses in Armenian language, dancing, and *duduk*—with helping him learn about his cultural heritage.

"My father moved here from Turkey in the 1950s, and my mother came in the 1970s," Muratyan says. "They were very active in AGBU, so my brother and I were always surrounded by the Armenian community."

When asked which city he would compare Yerevan to (a la *Paris versus New York*), Muratyan ponders the matter deeply. "That's a hard question!" he laughs. "I felt very close to Armenians when I was in Montréal, Buenos Aires, Istanbul, and other cities. There's a common connection there. Maybe that would be a good book, comparing Armenia with the diaspora." @

**Houry Avedissian**

Profession **Architect**  
Country **Ottawa, Canada**

