

# ILLOSTORIES

## ARTISTS WE LOVE:

### ARPI KRIKORIAN

#### ABOUT

This month we interviewed Arpi Krikorian, an illustrator from Los Angeles, best known for her beautiful artworks celebrating her Armenian culture and heritage. In the Fall of 2018 she made a pitch and outfitted the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC with a collection of her products for their Armenia!

Exhibition from September 2018-January 2019. She was kind enough to tell us all about her experience for this month's IlloStories Workbook!

#### LET'S GET STARTED:

*IS: Hi Arpi! So! Tell us how you got such an exciting gig with the Met!*

**Arpi:** In October of 2017, I went to the Eschschian Museum, a museum of Armenian history and culture in Los Angeles, to see a lecture by the curator of the upcoming [ARMENIA! exhibition](#) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NY. After the lecture we were introduced by the curator of the Eschschian Museum who had told Dr. Evans from the Met about me and my work. Dr. Evans said she'd show my work to the Met's merchandising department! I gave her a travel mug and a gift bag in gratitude and we said our goodbyes.

The next week, I called the Met's merchandising department but was told unless I had a name, they could not transfer me! Dr. Evans was traveling and I had no way of reaching her! So from October 2017-May 2018, I called different departments at the MET each week and emailed each month to try to make contact with the decision makers with no luck. FINALLY, in May 2018, nearly seven months later and four months before the exhibition was to open, I reached Dr. Evans and she gave me the name of the person I needed to speak to, the Head of Merchandising! I called and SHE PICKED UP! When I told her that Dr. Evans had referred me and I was calling about the upcoming Armenia! exhibition, she told me she was sorry but they already had the merchandise they needed! But I had come too far to give up and said, "Please, can you just take a look at my website?" She was nice enough and said, "Sure!" The next thing I heard was,

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"OMG, this is the answer we've been looking for!" Within a few hours, there were group emails back and forth and I became a vendor for the Metropolitan Museum of Art! It still gives me goosebumps as I type this.

*IS: Wow! That is so exciting, Arpi! How did you feel when you pitched your idea?*

**Arpi:** This was the crazy part. They ordered 20 different products. Many of them are print on demand (POD) so those were easy to fulfill, however my espresso cup sets are made overseas. I had 48 left in stock at the time. Luckily, one of my stockists was nice enough to trade two sets with me so I was able to fulfill the first order.

The second challenge was packaging. Before I would just ship my products with a thank you card insert. Now I had to think about branding and packaging.

I spent two weeks designing box labels, inserts, hangtags, and a bio card, then ordered my packaging and print materials and waited. As pieces came in, my assistant, her mom, my cousin, my daughters and I worked for 10 days straight in my living room, labeling, packaging and packing. We even made more of the bracelets I needed in my sister-in-law's kitchen!



The third challenge: The MET had very specific instructions about how to ship. Luckily, I have friends in manufacturing and importing who guided me through the process.

It's ok to say, "I don't know what the heck I'm doing. Can you please help me!" So my team and I got it all packaged and shipped by our deadline!

*IS: That sounds both crazy and exciting! And didn't they sell out right after the Met Armenia exhibition's opening weekend? What did you do then when they needed more?*

**Arpi:** I FREAKED OUT! I called all my vendors, told them my situation and asked for their help to expedite my orders. They were all as excited as I was. The hardest part was paying for rush shipping from overseas for my espresso cup sets. Those were going to be delayed but the MET was fine with it.

At this point, I hired help and spent the next two months fulfilling reorders as they came in. In total, they ordered 6 times more than the original order. They had thought one order would last them the entire 4 months!

*IS: Whoa! You must have felt great!*

**Arpi:** It was absolutely amazing. I can tell you it did wonders to clarify my mission for my career. The response I received from the Met as well as from the people buying my work helped me understand my priorities. Now I knew I was in a position to make a difference in the global Armenian community. My "niche" —art celebrating my Armenian heritage— got me into one of the best museums in the world! I realized I was fulfilling a need my community was desperately seeking: images that connected us to our culture and homeland. I learned finally to embrace my uniqueness because that's what made my art stand out.

*IS: Amazing Arpi. Last question: is there anything you might do*

*differently next time? What did you learn from the experience?*

**Arpi:** I learned that ANYTHING is possible so DREAM BIG! The decision-makers are human just like us. Their work is to fulfill needs for their company. They're looking for good fresh art and products. WE are the ones to give that to them! The only difference is we know who they are and they just need to learn who we are! That's our biggest task.

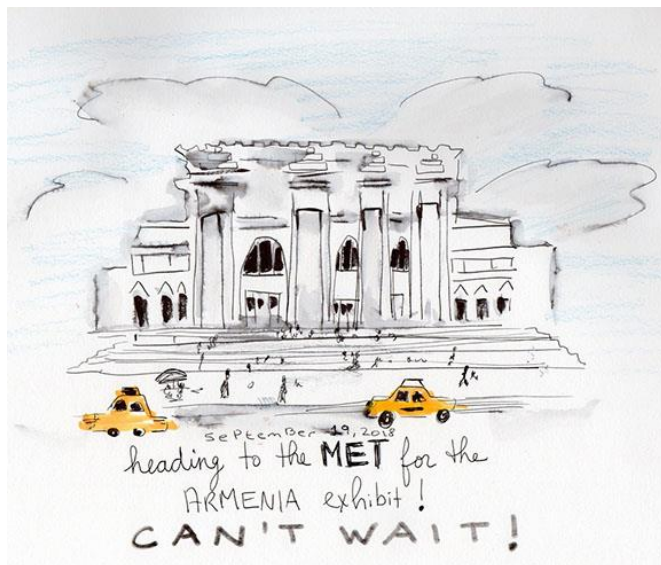
Second thing I learned was to make sure you have good branding and packaging. This is how people remember you once they leave the store or see your art. What I would do differently is what I'm spending time doing right now: creating branding and packaging materials for all of my products not just the ones the Met purchased. I'm also revamping my website. Success comes when preparation meets opportunity so I'm getting prepared for the next one!

Two years ago I would have never thought I'd be selling my work at the Metropolitan Museum. I learned that all my negative thoughts about the kind of art and business I made were the very things holding me back. I was the only one making my business feel small and insignificant.

I now present myself as an ambassador for Armenian cultural art. That's my life's mission and I do it with pride. I now embrace that what's important for me is also important for my audience who enjoy my art! I am here to provide, not hide ☺ (I made a rhyme!)

*IS: Thank you for sharing your amazing journey with us, Arpi! Such a great tale of perseverance, learning and success! Do you have any last bits of advice for someone who might dream of doing the same thing?*

**Arpi:** Don't keep yourself a secret!







Bringing the Armenian story into the 21st century, The Met Store has stocked a range of gifts featuring vibrant designs by California-based illustrator Arpi Krikorian. Krikorian creates a singular visual world that draws on her training as a children's animator as well as her proud heritage. With oversize eyes, intricately drawn costumes, and evocative names, her whimsically drawn characters bring Armenian folk characters and traditions to life. Her designs appear on notecards, totes, and even espresso cups, all for sale at the exhibition store.



Other traditional handicrafts, made of ceramic and terra cotta, are also on offer—as are edible gifts, including dried apricots, quince jams, and more. Consider this the perfect store for anyone who wants to get a taste—literal and figurative—of Armenian culture.

