

ქართული ავანგარდული მხატვრობა ევროპულ კონტექსტში (1910-1930)

ციციშვილი მათა

ივანე ჯავახიშვილის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი

ქართული ავანგარდული მხატვრობა უაღრესად საინტერესო მოვლენაა, ევროპის უკიდურეს საზღვარზე მყოფი, უძველესი კულტურის მქონე პატარა ქვეყნისა, რომელიც ცნობილი ისტორიულ-პოლიტიკური მიზეზების გამო დღემდე ნაკლებად ცნობილია დასავლური სამყაროსათვის.

XX საუკუნის 10-20-იან წლებში, შემოქმედებით ძალთა სიჭარბემ და ცოცხალმა, დატვირთულმა სახელოვნებო სივრცემ თბილისი თანადროული ევროპული ავანგარდული ხელოვნების შესატყვისს, თავისებურ კულტურულ ცენტრად აქცია. ქართული კულტურული გარემო მზად იყო თანამედროვე ევროპული ხელოვნების სიახლეთა მისაღებად და გასაზიარებლად. საუკუნეთა მიჯნის კავკასიის დედაქალაქი, წარმოუდგენლად თავისებური იყო, სადაც ერთმანეთის გვერდით, ერთმანეთის საწინააღმდეგო, თითქოსდა შეუთავსებადი დასავლეთი და აღმოსავლეთი თანაარსებობდა, არსებობდა თავისი ხალხითა და კულტურით, ყოფით, ადათ-ჩვევებითა თუ ენით.

ახალგაზრდა ქართველ ავანგარდისტ მხატვრებს საერთო და უაღრესად მნიშვნელოვანი მიზანსწრაფვა აერთიანებდათ: ინტერესი ქვეყნის უძველესი კულტურისადმი, შუა საუკუნეების კედლის მოხატულობათა გადმოღება, რაც არათუ წარმოუდგენელი იქნებოდა ევროპელი ავანგარდისტებისათვის, არამედ პროგრამულად უარყოფილიც. სწორედ ამ თვისებამ თავიდანვე განაპირობა ევროპული და ქართული ავანგარდული მხატვრობის ერთგვარი სხვაობა. ქართველ მხატვრებს მიაჩნდათ, რომ თანადროული ქართული ხელოვნება უნდა ყოფილიყო „თანამედროვე და ეროვნული“ და მათ „უხილავი ძაფები უნდა გაეხათ“ საქართველოსა და ევროპას შორის. თბილისის კავეებისა და სალონების კედლებზე ერთმანეთს ენაცვლებოდა ადგილობრივი და ჩამოსული მხატვრების: ს. სუდეიკინის, ლ. გუდიაშვილის, კ. ზდანევიჩის, დ. კაკაბაძის, ს. ვალიშევსკის, ს. სორინის, ი. ზდანევიჩის, ი. ნიკოლაძის, ა. პეტრაკოვსკის, მ. თოიძის, ი. დეგენის, სერ-გეის, ი. თოიძის და სხვათა ერთმანეთისაგან საკმაოდ განსხვავებული სურათები თუ მოხატულობები.

Georgian Modernist Painting in the European Context (1910-1930)

Tsitsishvili Maya

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Avant-garde art, Georgia - this small country of ancient culture, located at the extreme border of Europe - developed in the 20th century is a highly interesting cultural phenomenon, which, for various historical and political reasons, remains largely unknown and unappreciated by the western world.

The abundance of creative forces and bustling artistic life in the 1910s and 1920s turned Tbilisi into a distinct cultural centre, congruent with contemporary European avant-garde art. The Georgian cultural space was ready to share and adopt the novelties of the contemporary European art. The Caucasian capital at the turn of the century was amazingly original, combining orient and occident, this seemingly mutually exclusive phenomenon, with their peoples and cultures, ways of life, customs and languages.

After the end of World War I and the fall of Tsarism, and before the announcement of the independence of Georgia, Tbilisi became a refuge for many Russian poets, artists, actors and musicians who had fled Russia. Tbilisi was not a random choice: apart from the better political environment and economic situation, it could offer intellectually a more vibrant live. Also, most of the members of the *Tsisperi Qantsebi* (Blue Horns), a group of poets founded in 1915, had been educated in Russia and Europe. Grounded in the national poetic tradition, they became infatuated by Russian and French Symbolist and Futurist poets. This group of highly gifted poets further enhanced the avant-garde cultural life in Tbilisi.

Together with them were Georgian artists, almost of the same age, who had studied in Russia and Germany. There was a common ambition almost all of them cherished, unpronounced by some but deliberated and theoretically justified by others, which implied taking an interest in ancient culture and the copying of medieval wall-paintings. This would be inconceivable to and moreover, conceptually unacceptable for the European avant-garde. This was the feature that from the outset determined the difference between Georgian and European avant-garde movements. They believed that contemporary Georgian art should be “modern and national” and that they should establish “invisible ties between Georgia and Europe”. The issues related to avant-garde art were discussed in literary circles, salons and artists’ cafés, among which the most popular were *Fantasticheski kabachok* (*Fantastic tavern*), *Kimerioni, Ladja argonavtov* (*The Argonauts’ Boat*), *Pavlini khvost* (*Peacock’s Tail*) and *Imedi* (*Hope*). The creative atmosphere in the cafés created by poets and artists reciting poems and rendering speeches and debating on

the extreme movements of Modernist art in those years became an important part of the everyday life of the artistic intelligentsia. Pictures and paintings of the local and immigrant artists L. Gudishvili, K. Zdanevich, D. Kakabadze, S. Waliszewski, S. Sorin, I. Zdanevich, I. Nikoladze, A. Petrakovsky, M. Toidze, I. Degen, Sergey and I. Toidze, substantially differing from each other, adorned the walls of the cafés and salons. The most heated debates were held at the soirées of *Sindikát futuristov* (*Futurists' Syndicate*).

The Futurist and Dadaist poet, playwright and book designer, Ilia Zdanevich, was the most radical of Tbilisian Futurists. When studying in Russia, he was a member of *Oslini Khvost* (*Donkey's Tail*), a group established by Larionov, and founder of the *Vsechestvo* movement. Zdanevich, together with Kruchonykh, initiated the Tbilisi Futurist groups *Sindikát futuristov* and *41^o*. Together with the work of Tbilisi Futurists, he printed his dramas, the sketches and texts for which were offset by himself, in the *41^o* publishing house established by himself. For printing books, he used "phonetic spelling" which he himself invented; he gave preference to rough materials and random binding to emphasize the simplicity of the book. Experiments in the area of *Zaum* and in primitive painting affiliated him with the most radical and gifted of the Russian Futurists - Aleksey Kruchonykh. Iliadz, having moved to Paris in 1921, drew the attention of the most prominent representatives of European avant-garde. He acquainted Pablo Picasso with Pirosmeni's works, and the former painted a portrait of Pirosmeni for Iliadz's book entitled *Niko Pirosmenishvili. 1914*. From 1940, Iliadz published works in *Afet*. He collaborated with P. Picasso, G. Braque, A. Giacometti, F. Léger, M. Chagall, H. Matisse and others. It should be noted that Ilia Zdanevich, who considered himself Georgian, cared for the fate of Georgian culture all his life.

An exhibition of Kirill Zdanveich's works, arranged in November 1917 in Tbilisi, was the first presentation of leftist art in Georgia, and it received a positive feedback. His art was dubbed as "orchestrated" by his contemporaries. The artist was a member of *Sindikát futuristov* (*Futurists' Syndicate*) and of *41^o*. At different times, his art was influenced by Cubo-futurism, Futurism, Dada and Neo-primitivism. This explains the interest shown by the Zdanevich brothers in the art of Niko Pirosmenashvili.

The book illustrations, stage designs and paintings created in the 1920-30s are characterised by "energetic" Futuristic compositions, filled with figures articulated into fragments with sharp corners intersecting them, as well as with rotating, zigzag, spiral, elliptical and overturned cone forms. Some of them reveal one of the most essential principles of Futuristic picture – simultaneism.

Irakli Gamrekeli, one of the founders of Georgian stage design, joined the artistic life of Tbilisi slightly later. His early works are characterised by expressiveness and colourful treatment of extremely exaggerated and simplified figures. Beginning from the 1920s his art revealed the influence of various avant-garde movements, such as Cubism, Futurism and Dadaism. He

was the first artist to make use of constructive-spatial forms and cinematographic decoration. Protecting the theory of “industrial art” he was against easel painting. In 1924, he decorated the only issue of the Georgian Futurist’s journal *H₂SO₄. Georgian Circus*, composed of ten paper leaves, executed the same year was meant for the second issue of *H₂SO₄*. Characterised by the plasticity of dynamic, rapid movements, accents created by simplified geometric figures and highlighted eroticism, these works display the mixture of the elements of Futurism and Constructivism. His decorative sketches and model stage designs were exhibited in Paris in 1929 and later, in 1938, in New York.

Valerian Sidamon-Eristavi, one of the most remarkable artists with a wide array of interests, was, together with Irakli Gamrekeli, an art director of the avant-garde film by Kote Mikaberidze, *My Grandmother*, shot in 1929. It is to be noted that V. Sidamon-Eristavi was among the artists whose works most sharply reflect the Sovietisation of Georgia.

Petre Otskheli is the artist whose original and surprisingly authentic art is almost unparalleled in European avant-garde. He was the youngest of his companions, but established himself as an artist at an early age. It was not given to him to become mature as he fell victim to the repressions in 1937. P. Otskheli worked only at the theatre, though each of his sketches represents an independent easel work. After Sovietisation, the theatre was the place where artists were given the most creative freedom in Georgia. Each of the plays decorated by the artist reveals the spirit, freedom, intuitive solutions, and play-like, limitless fantasy with which this artist of an extremely original outlook, equipped with information inadequate to his age, created artistic images. Otskheli did not reject real forms, but his deformed, strongly mannered, elongated, small-headed insect-like unreal figures reminding one of grasshoppers may have originated as a consequence of observations of live organisms. Almost all works, whether in Constructivist, Surrealistic or Art Nouveau style, reveal the refined taste and innovative creative thinking of the artist. With its aesthetic sense and vision, his art can be said to be avant-garde even today.

Shalva Kikodze created most of his paintings during his one and a half year stay in Paris, at a very young age. He was twenty-six in the beginning of 1920 when he found himself in the centre of European culture. The expressionist world outlook of Shalva Kikodze found its strongest reflection in the works dedicated to the everyday life of Paris and its bohemia. To him, like to European Expressionist artists, a large city with its way of life appeared hard to accept. It can be said that Shalva Kikodze, with his refined, decent nature was most, among all Georgian artists, sincerely and strongly concerned with the spiritual crisis of his epoch, the main reason of the alienation of an individual from the outside world in his contemporary European culture. The environment, so vulnerable and unacceptable to Shalva Kikodze, represents mixture of images loaded with mystical, fantastic, symbolic and allegorical features and simplified, often hastily depicted realistic forms. He sometimes lends the appearance of masks to the grotesque faces, lacking individuality, making up the scenes displaying the sense of hopelessness and sarcasm. These images create contrast with the self-portraits revealing a tragic presentiment, showing the artist either in the role of a participant or an observer.

When Lado Gudiashvili arrived in Paris in 1919, he had already developed a highly original and individual style. He led a very busy life taking part in the exhibitions arranged by *Salon d'Automne* and *Les indépendents*. His paintings were also displayed at exhibitions in Rome, Brussels, Amsterdam and New York, and in 1922 and in 1925, *Galerie La Licorne* and *Galerie Joseph Billiet* presented solo exhibitions of the artist. André Salmon and Maurice Raynal wrote about his art. Before that, between 1916 and 1919, he had been most actively engaged in the intensive cultural life in Tbilisi. L. Gudiashvili was a member of the *Sindikats futuristov* (Futurists Syndicate) and an active participant of soirées arranged by them. He created some of the wall paintings in *Fantasticheski kabachok* (Fantastic tavern) and *Kimerioni*.

One of the original features of Gudiashvili's paintings is an individual, witty interpretation of the theme of Tbilisian bohemia. His dreamy, fantastic characters and settings are rooted in Georgian folklore, fairy tales and freely revealed intuition and surrealist visions of the artist himself. Some of his works characterised by local planes, ornamental lines, strongly pronounced interest in Persian miniatures, overall decorative treatment of the composition, exaggeration of forms, love of arabesques and poetisation of the erotic reflects the spirit and taste of avant-garde art.

Davit Kakabadze was the only theoretician among the Georgian artists. Further development of contemporary Georgian art, to his mind, was possible only through the adoption and acceptance of formal achievements of advanced European art. This experimental artist employed a wide array of artistic means in his series and individual works.

Decorative Motifs by Davit Kakabadze stir an association of space, cells and embryos seen through a microscope. These seemingly dispersed, calligraphic, tenderly marked forms are fixed in the centre and balanced with conventional frames. Constructive-decorative compositions created by Davit Kakabadze from 1924 to 1925 relate the artist to representatives of the avant-garde trends, such as Dada and Surrealism. In these compositions Davit Kakabadze employed details of stereofilm facility, invented by him, such as lenses and mirrors. Like Cubists and Dadaists, apart from traditional materials, he made use of new materials, such as cardboard, wood, metal, glass, etc. Each of the compositions is analytically premeditated and the location of each detail is predetermined. Some of the samples include the images of reduced plants of organic form. Spectators seen in the mirrors add an effect of movement and dynamism to these balanced, static compositions. It is no mere coincidence that Davit Kakabadze's sculpture *Z* was selected by the collector Katherine Dreier, together with the avant-garde works of Man Ray, Naum Gabo, Constantine Brancusi, Jean Arp and other avant-garde artists. Beginning from the year 1921, Davit Kakabadze took part in the exhibitions of independent artists in Paris, rendered lectures and published articles. He also issued the books *Paris, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923, Art and Space* (Paris, 1924-1925), *Concerning Constructive Pictures*. Although he escaped physical repressions upon his return to Georgia, his art failed to develop freely under the new Soviet regime.