

MODERNISM IN GEORGIA (1910-30)

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TBILISI GE

Modernist art of Georgia, a small country of ancient culture, which is located on the outskirts of Europe, is a very interesting phenomenon. Because of the well-known historical and political reasons this cultural realm still remains unknown for the western world. In 1910-1920s abundance of creative energy, emergence of lively and active artistic environment transformed Tbilisi into a cultural center that was compatible with its contemporary European avant-garde counterparts.



I. Gamrekeli, Cover of H2504 magazine, published by Dadaists in Tbilisi, Georgia, 1924.

These developments were undoubtedly supported by short-lived independence of the country. Georgian cultural environment was ready to accept and share novelties of the contemporary European art. On the verge of the centuries the capital of the Caucasus turned into an unimaginably peculiar place that brought under its umbrella at the first glance ambivalent and incompatible east and west, their culture, living style, traditions and languages.

Modernist writer Grigol Robakidze wrote about the creative life of this period: „Tiflis lives through aesthetic perception of the universe. It used to be like this and still is. One could mention many names... They are united under the umbrella of art. People of different origin, different cultures, brothers in art... We believe in this new internationalism. Its foundation should be laid here in Tiflis.“

AVANT-GARDE ART SCENE IN TBILISI

After the end of the I WW and collapse of tsarism, even before Georgia became independent, numerous poets, painters, actors and musicians escaped Russia in order to find their new home in Tbilisi. Obviously their choice was not accidental as along with a better political and economic environment Georgia could offer them a very lively intellectual life. According to Osip Mandelstam the country “was perceived as a new Switzerland, a neutral and [...] sinless tiny piece of land”.



K. Zdanevich, Sketch of a costume for the play Malstrom; Paper, watercolor, gouache; 1924; Georgian State Museum of Theatre, Music, Film and Choreography.

At the beginning the newcomers were mostly attracted to a brilliant group of local writers, majority of whom was united under the avant-garde Blue Horns movement (established in 1915). Most of its members were people with close links to the Russian symbolist poets. This extremely talented poetic group facilitated forming of an avant-garde cultural environment in Tbilisi.

Their works were based on national poetic foundation, but at the same time they demonstrated special attraction to the Russian and French symbolists and futurists. This was the time when next to the poets Georgian painters of the same generation who were educated in Russia and Germany also emerged.

The issues of avant-garde art were discussed in literary circles, salons, artistic cafes where the poets and painters presented their poems, delivered the lectures and discussed urgent trends of the modernist art became an important part of everyday life of artistic intellectuals.

The walls of the cafes and salons displayed a variety of drawings and images by the local and foreign artists: S. Sudeikin, L. Gudiashvili, K. Zdanevich, D. Kakabadze, S. Valishevski, S. Sorin, I. Zdanevich, I. Nikoladze, A. Petrakovskiy, M. Toidze, I. Degen, Sir-Gay, I. Toidze and the others. The meetings of the Syndicate of the Futurists were known for especially agitated discussions.

GEORGIAN MODERNIST ARTISTS

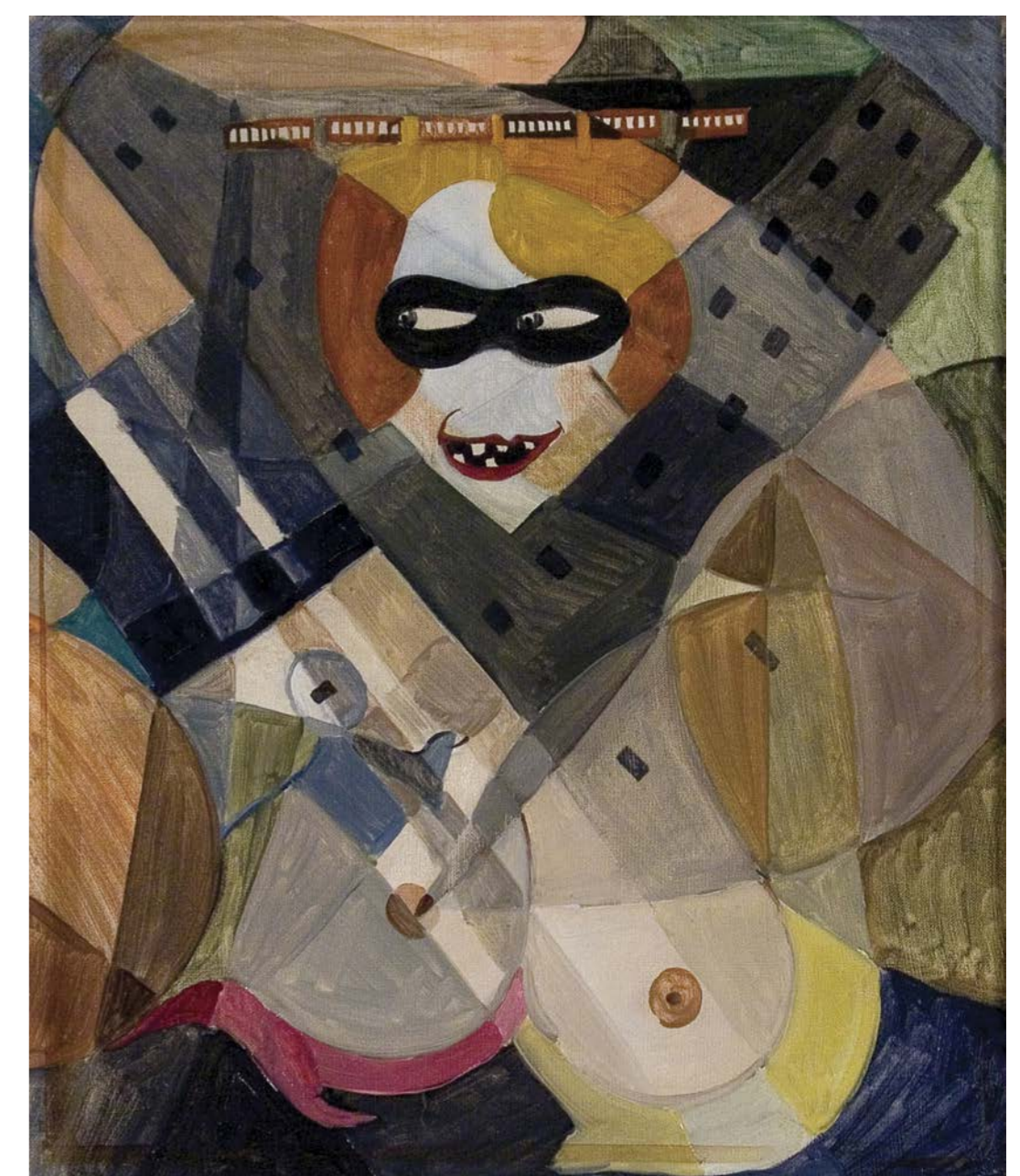
On the contrary to the Georgian symbolist or futurist poets modernist artists did not form any formal artistic group as they did not give specific preference to any of the modernist movements. Their creative life took individual independent paths. However, all of them pursued common and very important interest towards ancient culture of the country replicating medieval wall drawings – a goal that would not only be unimaginable for European avant-garde artists but also rejected by them on conceptual level.



D. Kakabadze, Constructive and Decorative Composition; Wood, metal, glass, tempera; 1924; Sh. Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts.

One would think that one of the goals for establishment of the Society of Georgian Artists (1916) was primarily connected to collecting and preserving of national treasures. This was the feature that determined the important difference between the Georgian and European avant-garde drawing.

Similar to David Kakabadze - the only theoretician among the painters, the others: painters, poets, writers, musicians and theatre representatives worried about the character and future of contemporary art. They thought that Georgian art of that time should be “contemporary and national” in order to establish invisible links between Georgia and Europe.”



Sh. Kikodze, Masque; Canvas, oil; 1921; Sh. Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts.