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<u> Hidden Histories – New Identities European Art 20 Years After the Iron Curtain</u>

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The Invention of "Contemporary Art" in Georgia Nini Palavandishvili

is no openness towards teaching staff from a younger generation who, if they are allowed to teach, are very restricted or limited in their methods. It should also be mentioned at the outset that the society's religious views play a very important role in the educational system, regarding most western values as unethical. The Internet is the only alternative to an academic education, providing information about developments in the contemporary art world. There are only very limited possibilities to purchase recent or even older books and catalogs about contemporary art. No state library offers them and bookshops mostly sell popular books, with no interest in selling anything unprofitable – only a small number of students can afford to purchase lots of good, expensive art books.

The second problem relates to exhibition and presentation opportunities: there is no institution in Georgia representing contemporary art. There are state museums and galleries that exhibit cultural heritage and art from periods up to the 1970s or 1980s. The "Georgian National Museum: Ioseb Grishashvili Tbilisi Historical Museum - Carvasla" is the only state museum that hosts most of the contemporary exhibitions taking place in Thilisi, although it has no clearly defined profile. The job it does is absolutely creditable -- if it weren't for the "Carvasla" there would be no possibility of hosting large-scale projects – but it is not part of its remit to collect information on and archive past projects. Most of the galleries that consider themselves contemporary do indeed show art works that are being produced in the here and now, but those works are absolutely not contemporary in their conception and realization, not to mention term "new" as Boris Groys defines it: "A new artwork should not repeat the forms of old, traditional, already museographed art. But today, to be really new a new artwork should not repeat the old differences between art objects and ordinary things. By repeating these differences, it is possible only to create a different artwork, not a new artwork. A new artwork looks really new and alive only if it resembles, in a certain sense, every other ordinary, profane thing, or every other ordinary product of popular culture. Only in such a case can the new artwork function as a signifier for the world outside the museum walls. The new can be experienced as such only if it produces an effect of out-of-bounds infinity - if it opens an infinite view on reality outside of the museum." ^I

There were and still are very few galleries in Tbilisi that could be described as a "gallery" in the "western" sense of the word - that is, a gallery that represents a chosen artist and provides full information about him or her. The term "gallery owner" also remains abstract. The gallery owner is simply understood to be the manager of a gallery, not the mediator and spokesperson for the artist in business dealings between collector/buyer and artist. Business transactions are mostly negotiated directly between buyer and artist.

Alongside the general problem of education, it should be mentioned that there are no professional gallerists and curators in Georgia. During the Soviet period, the only faculty within the educational system related to the theory of art was art history, not even art criticism. There was no notion of art management or curatorial practice. This leads once again to the problems of present practice, whereby contemporary art exhibitions lack a theoretical and the matic background.

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In Georgia, the terms "contemporary art" and "contemporary art environment" are both very recent. In 2004, when I returned to Georgia from Germany, the situation was very difficult, as the contemporary art scene had no public presence there. The impression back then was that all the artists were holed up in their studios. As an outsider it was almost impossible to get an insight into a city's cultural life. No museum or gallery provided information about the state of the arts in the city or the country as a whole, there was no magazine dedicated to contemporary art and art discourse, and not even a city guide with listings of galleries and cultural events. In short, there was no shared cultural facility or adviser to guide the "outsider" through a city's cultural landscape. Since the 1990s, artistic events have rarely been documented and materials are scattered between private studios, homes, and short-lived galleries and institutions. The local artistic scene is invisible to itself as well as to the rest of the world, its potential for development impeded. Cultural projects can emerge only for short periods of time on account of political instability and the lack of a cultural strategy, longterm thinking and systematic analysis. The continuity needed for sustainable cultural development is missing.

There are several problems that are reciprocal and combine to produce the general situation that Georgia's art scene faces today.

The first is the lack of a good system of art education. The state art academy is very conservative and totalitarian. Teachers from an earlier generation simply do not have the knowledge of the contemporary art discourse of western or world art markets to transfer it to students. Moreover, there thoughts about Georgian Contemporary Art Situation/thoughts about Georgian Contemporary Art Situation/thoughts about Georgian Contemporary Art Situation/thoughts about Georgian



international contributors and audiences from cities and villages. (www.garikula.org) ARTELI RATCHA (founded by artist Kote lincharadze)

has been active since 2005, successfully organizing and hosting contemporary art workshops in the village of Chkvishi in the Ratcha region of Georgia. The aim of the project - "Artists for Ratcha" - is to plan and organize dialogues, master classes and discussions between Georgian and international artists and a local audience. (arteliratcha.blogspot.com)

One should admit, however, that there have been several

attempts to change the historically determined situation:

MAF (media art farm) was a school that existed from 2000

to 2006, bringing together and educating students in new

media (photo, video, etc.). MAF also organized two interna-

tional contemporary art exhibitions, called "APPENDIX".

Art Villa Garikula - or simply Garikula - invites, hosts

and promotes contemporary art and culture festivals and meetings in Garikula, Akhalkalaki, in the Kaspi region of

Georgia. Garikula supports residency, exchange and educa-

tional programs, working with vision and passion to trans-

form the Garikula district of Akhalkalaki into a "city of fes-

tivals" - an art village where visual artists, filmmakers and

musicians can work together, promote their art and invite

GeoAIR has organized and supported international exchange projects since 2003 with the goal of strengthening the Georgian and Caucasian art world, bringing together artists from different cultural backgrounds and finding relevant contexts within which they can work. In 2007 GeoAIR started a project called "Archidrome" Contemporary Art Archive, which serves as a presentation room where regular meetings, discussions and presentations take place. Local as well as foreign artists are invited for presentations and lectures that concern cultural events in the region. Archidrome is about making a place where people can come and see creations, knowledge, experience and ideas that originate or are to be found in the Caucasus. It is intended to be like opening a window that gives you the opportunity to look into the region.

GeoAIR started its residency program in 2010. The program is a self-directed residency that offers primarily curators and cultural producers the opportunity to base themselves in Tbilisi and to use this location as a starting point from which to build networks, meet artists, cultural insti-

tutions and curators from the Caucasus region, and to develop and deepen their knowledge and research of the Caucasus context. There is no pre-programmed residency available in Tblisi and very rare opportunities for curators and theoreticians to work in and about Georgia and the Caucasus. The residency program emphasizes a collaborative process with institutions, organizations and cultural producers from the Caucasus region, intended to strengthen and extend the artistic foundation of the area and to encourage and stimulate the exchange of knowledge and the production of significant cultural projects over a long period of time. (geoair.blogspot.com www.archidrome. blogspot. com/|georgianartistsarchidrome.blogspot.com)

Georgia's Ministry of Culture started to support the Georgian art scene a few years ago. With its financial support Georgia has been represented at the Venice Biennale since 2007, while "Artisterium" – International Contemporary Art Exhibition and Art Events – was first held in 2008 in Tbilisi. (www.artisterium.org)

Several curators are interested in the Georgian art scene, supporting it and contributing to its development. Since 2004 Daniel Bauman has worked in collaboration with and support of AIRL, a Georgian institution that organizes international art projects under the rubric "Tbilisi". Additionally, between 1998 and 2008 AIRL provided the only exchange program in Georgia within the IAAB framework of the Christoph Merian Stiftung, Basel. (www.tbilisi2.com). The Goethe-Institut and British Council in Georgia also strongly support exchanges between contemporary artists from within and outside Georgia.

One should also stress that the situation described above is illustrative only of Tbilisi - in other regions it is much worse. There is interest from the younger generation, but the chance to develop it is still not provided. Two examples mentioned above – Art Villa Garikula and ARTELI RATCHA - are organized and run by artists based in Tbilisi and function as residencies only during the summer. We can say that Georgia is experiencing a very long transitional period. The generation that is interested in contemporary art discourse - present and future artists, curators or critics - mostly live and study abroad. We all hope that cultural policymakers in Georgia will soon recognize that there may well be a permanent need for the development of contemporary art and artistic initiatives, and that institutional provision is required in that situation.

We are under permanent construction :) •

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www.uoc.edu/artnodes/ espai/eng/art/groys1002/groys1 002 html (accessed April 2 2010)

Venues of Participatory Art

Marek Adamov

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the fields of art and culture, not in academia. Many of my thoughts result from my observations of life in these fields in Slovakia. Maybe the thoughts are naive and simple. But why make the problem even bigger by using some high, coded language? The questions are simple – and they also have simple answers.

Institution and collective

Stanica, the organization where I work, is a cultural center based in an old train station in Žilina. Since 2003, it has been something in-between a venue/institution and a collective of activists. Why institution? There is the building, a formal management structure and relations among the team. regular programming, planned fundraising, and, of course, a long-term vision and strategic plan. But what, then, is the collective within it? It is mainly the whole enthusiasm and personal engagement of all the team members, both volunteers and professional staff; a horizontal management structure; especially, the permanent search for alternatives, not only in terms of artistic programming, but also in terms of operations, fundraising and management; and it is the permanent search for sense in our activity. Because we are an independent organization, we are able to comment freely and to focus on hot topics from the public and political scenes, as well as carrying out some non-official and even legally inadmissible interventions.

What is missing in the institutions

I will speak about the crisis of institutions mainly in terms

My background is with an NGO – practical work in of things that institutions are missing, which is one of the main reasons for the critical state of their operations, especially in Slovakia. The crisis is obvious primarily in governmental or public institutions. However, we also find negative predicaments in NGOs and non-formal collectives, the result more often of external influences, such as problems with financing, political attacks, etc., or even personal reasons like the burn-out syndrome. This is one of the very few levels on which public institutions are stronger than NGOs. on account of their institutionalized structure, funding and formal relations. But an enormously bloated bureaucracy is killing any creative ideas and especially the will to do something. Nowadays, with the EU funds, things are only getting worse

Roles of NGOs and institutions

I am not opposed to public institutions in culture – not at all. But I am happy to ask what the different roles of public institutions and NGOs are; or, rather, to ask what their different roles should be. I think public institutions have priority - and the capacity to act seriously - in the field of documentation and archiving, as well as in dissemination and communicating with larger audiences. But the field of laboratory research, creation, experimentation, discovery and critical evaluation. I see as much more lively within NGOs. non-formal collectives and think tanks, and in the hands of independent artists. The very big problem in Slovakia arises when institutions focus in on themselves, and operate only to satisfy their own raison d'être, losing contact with the art scene and their audience, as well as losing critical distance.