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## **Analyzing Work and Emigration Issues of the Contemporary Georgian Artists Living in the United States**

The second stage of the project "Integration and Identity" includes research of Georgian artists living in America, based on personal interviews, their current work and their life and work since their departure from Georgia.

32 respondents living in the United States participated in the second stage of the study; the youngest is 27 years old and the oldest - 70 years old. Their creative and life experience, causes of emigration and future goals are different as well. While most of these artists (except two respondents) have already received art education - most of them university-level art education - and are some of the artists are already established artists, who have found their creative identity and work direction, due to financial or other social and cultural reasons, some of these artists did not receive formal higher education abroad (except for those who went directly to study), and began to integrate into the new environment with the already existing knowledge and established worldviews. However, connection to the Georgian art education system is not apparent in works of those, who became artists in immigration. Despite the period when they've left Georgia, their readiness to collide with the new world and also their knowledge of the cultural environment and artistic processes that took place globally was different. Since they had left in different times, their memories and attitudes towards Georgia and the reasons for departure are different. Three basic periods of emigration are named: 1.1980s, and the Soviet period, with relatively open borders. This is the time that despite difficult bureaucratic procedures, it is possible to leave the country, information from the outer world flows in and professional and personal contacts slowly emerge. One of the respondents remembers it as a beginning of a progressive period: "Georgian art became more open in the second half of the 1980s. It became free and that contributed to its further development. This began when I was studying in Nikoladze. Dogmatic approaches were off in the academy, free European thought was apparent. There were meetings as well and new places of gathering were created". 2. The country's difficult socio-political situation of the 90s is reflected in the memory of each emigrant as chaotic, crisis time, when not only creative, but also

vital resources were under question. Like other citizens, they mostly had to leave the country to support their family members and the closest people, and later this period of creative search or stagnation becomes apparent in their work in terms of subconscious trauma reflection, nostalgia for the homeland and re-examination of experiences. 3. Artists emigrated during the 2000s remember Georgia as a country with politics of the transition period. One of respondent recalls: “I’d describe that period as I’d describe myself. I was like Georgia at that time, unformed, inexperienced and intolerant. The economic situation my family and I had, was the economic situation of the country as well.” Feeling of instability and political disorientation on the one hand and the emergence of powerful information streams about the Western art events, open borders, easy ways of leaving the country, access to foreign scholarships and study programs on the other hand, increased the number of people who wanted to leave and created different opportunities for self-determination and expression.

Despite difficulties that came with the move (adaptation and socialization in different environmental, loneliness, family separation, financial difficulties, and language difficulties mentioned by few), since the very first year of emigration, most of them managed to get involved in the local art processes, took part in group exhibitions, organized personal exhibitions, worked on theatrical events, created performances, and taught in the art institutions. In the creative life of artists whose emigration began with formal ways of improving their knowledge, the host educational institutions played a great role. Not only did they help the participants get involved in internal study exhibitions, but also taught them how to create and to manage their own exhibitions. The attitude of émigré artists towards professional career development is different as well. For some it is partially linked to creative self-actualization, while some connect it to society feedback and sales, while the challenges associated with the existing personal and artistic marketing are considered to be fruitful. An interesting and somewhat contradictory feeling towards Georgia takes place with respect to the background of a very rapid daily rhythm of life full of difficulties, frustrations, instant success or disappointments. Most of the respondents keep in touch with Georgia and manage to visit their relatives or perform various artistic and educational projects. They claim that they will definitely return, but due to material or other reasons, it is difficult to discuss return. Some don’t want to come back, despite acute nostalgia. They do not see themselves as part of the Georgian space, professionally or personally. Some find that their work is much more favorable for Georgia, if it takes place in the American artistic

atmosphere. The reasons lay in the events that took place in Georgia at the time when they left their homeland. Some of the respondents (mostly those who left the country in the 90s) answer the question of how their lives would be developed - professional career, personal relationships and possibility of self-actualization had they remained in Georgia, by stating that their very survival was threatened. Some respondents answer that they wouldn't probably be able to continue painting. Those who believe that they could pursue professional development in Georgia cherish Western experience and can't imagine being otherwise. A small part of the artists, who encountered more challenges in everyday American life, believe that they would have been better in Georgia. Thus, according to their vision, understanding Western culture, feeling of creative freedom, involvement in everyday life, engaging in artistic life, at the same time distancing and perceiving a different perspective of the Georgian reality, understanding theory of western thinking strengthens creation and perception of own art is pivotal. Simultaneously with free and developed art market, it is perceived to be the best possible experience, an experience that actually constitutes the only achievement offered to Georgian contemporary art. They plan on educational and artistic projects, bringing exhibitions, and taking films about Georgia.

One of the key issues within the study is the general theme related to the creativity of émigré artists. It is interesting to consider whether they feel creatively actualized, considering the different perceptions and attitudes towards self-actualization. Part of them agree and adds "it's often incredible and unbelievable when I think about the success that I've achieved in life gradually, and what is happening now". A 58-year-old male". Some believe that this is a long, gradual process and people can't fully actualize, because they are constantly evolving, creating something anew. For a part of the creators, there is a definite concept of creative actualization in Georgia and America, because while it is enough to get known in a small country once, you have to work in a big country to stay relevant to the public.

Most of these artists started to develop professional careers before emigration. During the course in Georgia, they participated in the exhibitions held at the academy, as well as exhibition spaces outside the academy in different periods: Artist's House, Conservatory, N Gallery, Karvasla, Blue Gallery, Vanda and others. They worked together with friends and gallery owners, creating exhibitions and projects (they named Irakli Bugiani, Levan Mindiashvili, Nunu Baliashvili, Ketevan Kordzakhia, Manana Gordel, Gela Kuprashvili, Baia Tsikoridze, Marina Shengelia)“ ,

and they factually created setting for the artistic spaces. “At the time (1996 or 1998), a creative space was born from darkness. Now I remember the contrasts, the sense of danger, that's what happened at the time. For example, some happening or concerts. This was followed by Exhibition in N Gallery, as well as another exhibition. I worked with a group of friends in the Fabrika, we also wrote interviews, and we were making photos. ”- Male, 42. Besides that, there were those who had exhibitions outside the country, through the Soviet Union, in Germany, in the USA -New York, and the responses outside Georgia and beyond, have been a major contributor to their future career.

By considering the different environments in which each of them was an artist, there are a wide variety of individuals or causes that influenced their development, to become inspiration for creative activities, or by directly assuming roles of teachers. Artists name the world –famous artists and philologists, painters and art history teachers, teachers from the art schools and the Academy of Arts, they consider the experience of family members and environment as important, personal experiences that they have received from observing art and also life experiences that occurred to them. Along with the latest technological changes in the modern world, internet was named as a huge information transmitter and a great experience that virtually replaces all other educational sources.

Major international exhibitions where these artists participated are a certain indicator of success. Their work was exhibited with other well-known artists with permanent and temporary expositions in the country, such as Europe, Asia and America: well-known exhibition spaces and contemporary art events, such as Sotheby's auction, the Brooklyn Museum, **Saatchi Gallery**, Simone Subal Gallery, Venice Biennale, Guggenheim Museum, the **Ningbo Museum of Art** , China Biennale, The Papal Basilica of St. Peter in the **Vatican** , Florence Biennale and others.

Artists’ self-expression in America takes different forms, some of them are still working with the medium where they’ve began, and some have changed dramatically. Each of them actively continues to work in different media: paintings, films, art projects, sculptures, photos, and also working on the textile lines, experimenting with objects and the concept of light perceptions, optics illusions, conceptual analyses of internal emptions; instead of using recent abstract works, some try to re-create old, graphic technique they used when they were students, some switched from classic painting to film, change is a natural process, along with the change of taste,

environment, thinking, priorities, and taste, but there is always an “essential” basis for each of them, which is associated with the artist from work to work. As an individual expression code, it can be both technical and linguistic, as well as carry a subjective, subconscious context.

Despite the grand scale of American art market compared to the rest of the art space, it is noteworthy that art is a major source of income for 50% of the artists living there, and at least 50% of them have to do additional work in order to allow for their creative work, while a very small part of them says that they don’t need to think about it.

The search for Georgian trail in the works of émigré artists leads to conscious and unconscious insights. Some of the artists consciously try to tie their work with Georgia and the pain and everyday memories that they’ve felt here, while some avoid it in attempt to forget the bitter experience. Despite the fact that their visual art is often very global, some of the Georgian trails is clearly visible in some works “....The inner gravity, my work is characterized by the inner melancholy and the pain that appears all the time.” (51 years old, man). Most of them retain relations with Georgian artists.

Two thirds of artists working in the USA collaborate with leading galleries in foreign countries and Georgia: Gallery Vanda, Popiashvili-Gvaberidze Gallery - WINDOW PROJECT; Gallery One, Artarea, Art Beat project. Among galleries in the From America and Europe they names: Mars and Newman project; Ideal Glass Gallery; The Lodgetwo thirds Gallery New York City; Gloria Delson Contemporary Arts; M.B Art Gallery; Simone Subal Gallery, Barbara ThumM Gallery; 107 Project; KUnst rau, The Watch Gallery, Odeta Gallery; Holtzman Gallery; The pool NYC; Pax Gallery, N FINE ARTS. In America, Georgian Marita Damenia was identified; she connects Georgian artists here and helps them organize their exhibitions.

Most of the artists interviewed are not familiar with the Georgian art market at all, but others say it is so elusive that it does not exist, though they regard the new generation as interesting and believe that the talent needs support. Their view of modern Georgian art is different. They partly appreciate it: they see more creative freedom, lightness and daring. As a result of education of the younger generation, an influx of visual images of modern Western art takes place. “The fact is that there is a great deal of information online, at least from the visual point, connects art to Western trends. Visual proximity is often not based on knowledge, theory, and is therefore a more outward imitation” (39 years old, male, left in 2008). In addition, they feel the change in

the role of the artist from being merely an artist, to becoming a thinker, a philosopher, a socially active person who was not relevant to the Soviet era. The "eye-opening process" in the art direction began 20 years ago, in which they themselves were involved. Nevertheless, the process of integration the Georgian art space with Western thought and cultural events is still limited and they believe that contemporary art does not reflect contemporary problems. They believe that inexistence of art criticism is the main problem and at the same time nothing changes at the Academy of Arts, teaching methods and ideas do not improve and do not develop.

Apart from the scale, the Georgian art space differs from the West primarily with its historical past, attitudes, abilities, and attitudes towards artists - in Europe the state supports artists more actively, while in America it does not, in that they differ from one another, but in Georgia artists are left without any support whatsoever. Although many Georgian artists received education and their styles were blended to a certain degree of blending, contemporary Georgian art still seems more restricted and locked in than the West. "Georgia is still a separate country, neither Europe nor Asia, and the country is distinctive. Traditions are still deeply rooted here. In Georgia it is more difficult to make art, Western world is more open and free" (47 year old, female) In addition, Georgian art seems to be more local: it touches less central and global issues than in the West, it is less integrated with international problems. As one artist puts it, "Georgian is different in its basic visual documentary approach, in terms of craftsmanship, unlike the West, where art is philosophy and thinking" (43 years old).

It is difficult to be a Georgian artist; it is also difficult to answer the question of what it means to be a "Georgian artist". For some it does not mean anything, for some it does not change anything either, as they consider their work in a global context and do not want to limit it to nationality; for some it is a kind of work material and part of the image, since in a wide, open cultural space, a small country, a representative of a foreign culture "is perceived as exotic" (32-year-old female). For most, it is a big responsibility and they think that when a small country artist goes to a large space and finds himself / herself there, he / she is obliged not to turn his / her back on the small country and be an ambassador of the cultural codes that are genetically transmitted, while at the same time, he/she should try to work in an international language to make the work globally perceivable. Some of them respond with a slight pessimism, they don't want to talk about it, or have difficulty expressing dualistic attitudes. One of the artists replies "If Georgia means something, and then it should mean the same thing". (61 year old, male). Given the

above, most of these artists also perceive themselves to be part of the Georgian art space, as much as they are associated with Georgia, though they believe that this should not be a one-sided process, and that the Georgian artistic environment should be seeming as its part as well, they want to feel more interest and receive productive feedback.

Given the scale of contemporary art development, it is interesting to see immigrant artists' attitudes towards general artistic issues, and a different approach to the need for academic art education. Some believe that an academic, classical-realistic basis is necessary. Because if you want to "create" art, you have to be able to physically create the art, though you don't need it in order to "do" art. Some artists believe that in our time, being an artist does not necessarily imply academic education, as we have examples of how successful people of other professions can be, who have chosen art as a language and created conceptual art and have the skills of reasoning, thinking, and expression.

As for the artist's role in society, it is defined by the place of art in the modern world's cultural life, global system of thought. The artist appears as an actor that contributes to the development of culture, his/her role becomes more social, his/her outlook is linked to the current events, because it helps the general public re-think questions and develop an awareness, and at the same time, has the ability to influence current processes and society. "An artist is like a guide, and the society follows in 10-20 years". 61-year-old male artist. This different attitude towards art creates attitude towards beyond, and serves to express the higher purpose, while; on the other hand, the modern human has a particular interest for the interactive works, which, in addition to the knowledge and aesthetic perception, also carries an entertainment feature.

There are also multiple answers to the question of what it means to be an immigrant artist, since it implies a constant readiness for contradictions and challenges. At the same time, their strangeness is interesting for the onlookers and they have to take advantage of it. However, most of the artists claim that unlike Europe, due to America's multiculturalism and multinationalism, they do not feel that they are immigrants, they do not feel alienated from the society and the integration process in this environment is much simpler and painless, plus technological development actually removes boundaries and simplifies the exchange of information and the expansion of contacts and connections.

Arts funding is an urgent issue, the majority believes that the arts should be financed indirectly by the state, there should be support programs, projects, focused on the development of the arts, as well as a responsible share of the private sector, which has always provided a great financial support of art.

In the post-Internet era, most of the artists of the twenty-first century believe that difficult processes are going on around current events. However, only 3 respondents perceive this happening as uniquely negative and believe that the modern art is in deadlock, others believe that modern technology has caused changes with various consequences, and it is possible to serve the development of art. Science and technology has transformed the art through creating a new direction, a new medium of expression in new ways. However, it also became obscure, hard to perceive, technologized, as if emptied of creation in the classical sense. "Until now everything was done manually, and technology has raised many questions - e.g. do you need to paint when the camera can shoot? In the past, religions, authorities, societies, hierarchies have appeared in art, and now these themes have disappeared and people are expressing their personal emotional attitudes. Computer-generated art is becoming very popular". Escaping this globalization seems impossible, and it creates fears that art is losing its creative role and becoming a mechanized, pointless repetition, an invisible, identity-defying act that can easily disappear one day.

The ongoing cultural integration process generates both positive and negative aspects of artistic evolution is simultaneously useful and threatening, albeit it seems unstoppable. Negative characteristics include endangered authenticity, loss of identity. However, the process of integration, as the driving force of civilization, seems to be the only way to survive. If integration entails mental changes and the creation of a new value system, it will be especially beneficial for Georgia, since contact with other cultures is business as usual for and it has the ability to experience to transform novelties, and it seems like the only way to survive in today's borderless world.

The vast majority of artists interviewed are actively creating works, with some (10) preparing for exhibitions in the near future. 5 respondents said that they work spontaneously and plan nothing in advance, although they also work, they create, some of whom say they are happy to do exhibitions in Georgia, while two of them carry out educational creative projects in Georgia,



conduct trainings, receive films and so on. Two of them are working to promote Georgian silk specifically. One of them wants to devote more time to creativity.

Ultimately these artists' creative integration of the Western American art space is individual for each of them. Georgian contemporary art in general is a useful and productive process, which is based on many of the challenges and frustrations, and at the same time, many successful exhibitions and works. Finally Globalization's unstoppable stream inflow promotes Georgian culture motives, it is internationally observed, at the same time, Georgia's western art processes helps connect the actual art issues and direction to the rest of the world as a visual-aesthetic, as well to relevant issues.