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Alternative Feminine Narratives – Diffusion Effect

The Feminine - this concept creates an ambivalent chain of definitions in the modern world. What is the intersection between femininity and feminism? Feminism was able to generate three waves and thus step into the new millennium. Feminism establishes women's equality, while considering social circumstances. Reactionary feminist approaches played a pivotal role in the women's rights movement and the establishment of gender equality in society. Feminist art became an important field in the 20th century. The idea of women's struggle for equality and its consequence, the still marginalized role of women in art, remains an important topic of discussion in different cultures. Nonetheless, the feminist movement (like other ideological movements) in visual art often creates a specific direction; in this case, critical reaction purposefully involves stereotypical perceptions of women. Thus, feminism is a defined ideology with a need for causality. It develops in a specific time period of history, while the notion of the feminine is based on universal, natural, psycho-emotional beginnings which exist beyond time. According to the feminine idea, the concept is not identified just as "feminine" in the traditional sense of the word, since the feminine identity itself has become a variable coefficient in the contemporary world, as well as in the understanding of the modern person. The latest gender theories, which belong to different schools or processes, actively discuss gender and identity issues in a complex context. Thus post-feminism, a reaction to the ideological or radical motivations that feminist discourse has achieved in a historical context, has been established in the later stages of third wave feminism. The complex, multidisciplinary recognition of gender is naturally the result of postmodern thinking, where disruptive structures offer a variety of analyses of cognition, including identity recognition. In this essay we will discuss a wide range of complex concepts of feminism, as well as the theoretical reasoning of some authors, which are interpreted in contemporary visual art. The aim of the work is not to review feminism or feminist art, but to discuss the complex understanding of gender in contemporary art and the "I" identification issues via specific artists. This work has been developed and implemented within the framework of the project "Integration and Identity". It presents an alternative feminist narrative, developed as a result of the study of work by immigrant Georgian female artists. It

attempts to interpret the involvement, concepts, and different creative approaches of immigrant Georgian female artists abroad (in European and American countries), based on research. More specifically, the exhibition “12 Women Missing Gone” is the main inspiration for this essay. The project was displayed in Tbilisi, within the framework of the First International Art Fair in Tbilisi, under the curatorship of Elene Abashidze, in the State Silk Museum and the Writers' House.

This analysis is mainly based on the exhibition and some artists that participated in it.

A general analysis of the exhibition “12 Women Missing Gone”, and discussion of the works of participating artists, allows us to consider alternative feminist perceptions, deconstruction of gender classification, and fragmentation in the history of contemporary Georgian art. The exhibition posed questions about the role of the female artists and united art of different periods: late modernism (1960s) via the works of Vera Pagava; the transition period of the 1990s via Ketik Kapanadze's creative series; and the early 2000s through the current decade via works of Tea Gvetadze, Maia Naveriani, Tamuna Sirbiladze, Salome Machaidze, Tamar Khundadze (Tamara K.E.), Anna Edzgeradze (Anna K.E.), Ketuta Aleksis-Meskhishvili and Sopo Medoidze. The exhibition OXYGEN, and its affiliated projects, featuring works of Nino Sakanelidze and Nana Chichua, (both Georgian female artists working abroad) will be reviewed as well. Such linking in scholarly research is possible through the interpretative and analytical theory of the "diffusion effect". The term diffusion comes from the natural sciences -a borrowed concept from the field of physics - it intersects with the perception of individuality and sensuality. The effect of diffusion, in this case in a metaphorical sense of a physical event, indicates the continuous driving cycle that develops a series of mixing, probing, and overflowing monologues beyond the boundaries of isolated spaces. Probing, but not penetrating, they exist rather as an open surface, a single field... The two parallel events discussed in this essay represent the “fluidity” of visual-conceptual artistic practices in space, from room to room, from micro-universe to macro-universe...

Due to its dramaturgy, the exhibition “12 Women Missing Gone” was an alternative to the Tbilisi International Art Fair. The atypical exhibition was intensified by the location selected for the viewing, as well as the topic. It had a non-commercial, receptive and representative character. “12 Women Missing Gone” was primarily a reflection on space. The construction of a two-sided

exposition (in the Writers' House and Silk Museum), and the purposeful interruption of the uniform narrative in exhibition spaces anticipated visitors' expectations and filled them with a sense of discovery and fresh perception. The existing historical spaces of the Writer's House and Silk Museum carry unique, authentic layers of the past, in itself a strong challenge for presenting artworks. Nevertheless, the non-neutral space created an additional context for the participating artists' work, their personal and subjective language. An exhibition with such a non-standard representation of communication allowed for metaphorical and symbolic generalization of the public space. One may draw an interesting parallel to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf presents the main thesis, informing the physical reality of creativity - the need for personal space. With the clear emphasis exemplary of the first wave of feminism, Woolf emphasizes the need for the development of creative (literary) activity in women's lives. Woolf's thesis is, in a way, linked with the exhibition's overall dramaturgy. In this case, instead of a personalized monologue, or even a collective narrative, the historical spaces depict fluid, autonomous spaces. Here, the artists demonstrate their creativity, and at the same time creating an intersecting dialogue with space, time and one another. The visual and curatorial idea of the exhibition does not explicitly convey this connection with Woolf or any other author, though the interpretive linking will help us determine the general and distinctive motivations of alternative feminine narratives. Woolf views creative freedom as necessarily experienced in an autonomous subjective reality (in one's own space and room), just as the exhibition area is perceived as creative territory for the exhibition artists. The Silk Museum exhibition's cabinets, rooms and library, as well as the architecture, interior space and decor of the Writer's House, with distribution of artwork from room to room, were designed to create a movable, vibrating field. Here not the chronological, but the visual and conceptual solution rendered the artists' accumulated messages. In an interview with the exhibition curator, Elene Abashidze, she revealed that her motivation was to present the works of the selected participants in dialogue and in a parallel situation. While discussing the exhibition's dramaturgy, Woolf's concept of the public importance of having one's own space, and its necessity for a woman artist's creative development, is worth mentioning. We can generalize this thesis to reflect the conditions of emigrant female art. The creative freedom, development and analyses of "personality" were developed abroad, and a representation of their views within the exhibition was unified in the intimate and reflective space conception of a "room".

Keti Kapanadze was one of the first female conceptual artists of the Soviet period who worked in Germany. Her 1990s photo series was purposefully exhibited in the historic exhibition hall of the Silk Museum, with rare samples of the 19th-century lace and jacquard textile. Intervention and dialogue of the black-and-white photos and sophisticated black-and-white lace designs proved to be impressive: the lace is associated with women's refined tenderness, while the photos presented vision, in this case Kapanadze's alternative vision, of the 1990s. The objects depicted on the photos are Kapanadze's everyday reality. The items conveyed - a box, a chest, or a shadow of the word - show the obsessive and "voyeuristic" attitude of the artist. The avant-garde symbolism of photography and framing is reminiscent of Maya Deren, though unlike Deren's purposeful avant-garde experimental calculations, Kapanadze's postmodernist and conceptual layers are on the verge of intuitive sensibility. The randomness effect is emphasized by mirrored deconstructed phrases, which coincide with Kapanadze's linguistic experiments in their initial period. Along with the photo exhibition, Kapanadze's metal objects were presented within the museum's authentic wooden cabinets. The opposition was expressed by placing "Love" (as a metallic phrase - the "love" object) in the inner cube of the same cabinet, presenting Kapanadze's work and linguistic experimentation alongside the samples associated with female tenderness (such as silk samples exhibited in the same closet). The incomplete phrases of Kapanadze - objects created in metallic bromine techniques, which refer to hidden wishes and calls - carry a semantic rendering of the word. The latter expresses a clear connection with post-structural practices. Julia Kristeva, a contemporary researcher of post-structural theory, as well as a philosopher and psychoanalyst, introduces the term "semiotic chorus" - the dimension of the subconscious. Kristeva claims that this is the dimension in which feminine access violates the symbolic order of masculine language and offers an alternative poetic version of symbolism. We can witness that kind of understanding of poetry, as intuitive, subtle access to subject matter and its verbal linkage, in Kapanadze's minimalist conceptual works.

Salome Machaidze offers a completely different interpretation of intuitive sensitivity; she is also an artist based in Germany, namely Berlin. She represents the experimental, alternative art of Berlin. The organic impact of the exhibition space was presented at Machaidze's showing in the Mulberry Exhibition Room. The intervention of Machaidze's works in the exhibition in relation to the mulberry tree revealed deep connections with the natural, intuitive feeling, childish happiness and freedom.

By using simple automatic painting and "unfinished drawing", Machaidze has demonstrated creativity as an actualization process without an analytical, goal-oriented picture. The illogical, subtle view was based on Machaidze's journal narrative, where the artist's intimate, chaotic expression was extended in a rationally distributed exposition of the museum's scientific themes.

The whole exposition was accompanied by a kind of atonal version of spatial associative - the exhibition "12 Women Missing Gone", complexly navigated in the Silk Museum and the Writers' House with a rhythm flowing from room to room, depicted artists' creative autonomous power and at the same time, opened up their perception range via a diffusive, fluid effect.

Personal freedom and the limitations of space on the art scene have been problematic for female artists in general; historical fragmentation and the localization of its chronological aspects still pose a complex problem in modern Georgian reality. For example, Vera Pagava is an earlier-generation representative of the artists involved in the exhibition. She immigrated to Germany in 1922 and moved to France in 1923. Despite Pagava's international recognition and importance, her creations are unknown and rarely researched within the contemporary reality of Georgia. Taking this into consideration, the interest in the exhibition - also presented at the Venice Biennale in 1966 - was heightened. This series included the abstracts created by the artist in 1963-66. Pagava's works were allocated to the central area of the entrance hall of the Writers' House. "A person should understand the essence of things, to reach the ground", was her creative credo, which we can freely combine with the ideological concept of modern art. It was clearly visible in the abstracts presented. Pagava's geometric order of bright colors, light and shade, and shape-shifting reveals a harmonious world where color is sensitive to the volume of forms; in this connection - an exquisite synthesis of details - a single composition is formed. Pagava's aesthetics in terms of abstract composition depict a close connection with the modernist process; namely, the motivation of artists working in modernism is apparent in this work - access to artistic integrity, and formation through new expressive techniques. It could not be easy for a modernist immigrant woman in France in 1920s, though as a result of her integration into French culture, Pagava developed her own artistic style, in which each detail is a defining part of an integral, profound, sophisticated and unique world.

Our discussion of alternating narratives continues with a look at Tea Gvetadze's exposition. The artist's very own world was represented by two large-scale paintings. The inspiration of the artist

leads to two different literary paths. Gvetadze presents these as universal symbolic layers. *Malanchamala* is created through a mixed technique. It is completely non-linear, depicting the mystical aspects of the Indian fairy tale via personal feelings and interpretations. Through the mystery and metaphor of the story, Gvetadze depicts unknown figures, the nature of the celebration and the story of the sacrifice - a story that developed in the oral folk-tales of medieval India. *Malanchamala's* main character is a twelve-year-old girl, a first wife, who is married to an infant prince. In the multifaceted fairy tale, the girl combines best the qualities of maternal and spousal self-sacrifice – through loyalty, combined with nature, she protects her infant husband and becomes a goddess. Through with her universal creativity, Gvetadze unifies profundity and the inner mood of the story, rather than emphasizing its narrative features. Expressing mask faces and symbolic environment she combines mystic love, self-sacrifice and folklore motifs of Oriental culture. Unified mysticism of details is an artistic pointer towards a boundless connection between the nature and human fantasy. *Malanchamala's* fictional image and fairy-tale story offers up the possibility of Freudian interpretation through the unconscious layers of its hidden imagery. However, a phallogocentric understanding of the Oedipus complex is completely overwhelmed by domination by the feminine power of the woman protagonist, in this case (*Malanchamala*). Gvetadze's alternative feminist narrative is indirectly hidden, and revealed in the whole composition through her intuitive experimentation. Like the artistic solution of *Malanchamala*, we can read a generalized connection in Gvetadze's second work - *Don Juan*. Don Juan is an established image in a medieval Spanish culture, a womanizer and heart-throb, a comic and tragic character, a knight who violated all ethical and moral laws and religious regulations. Don Juan followed his personal desires with a fatal game. Moliere has completed the literary character of Don Juan; his version unites the most important issues the "desire, death and God". It's hard to make definite claims, though we can see these themes from the symbolic depths of Gvetadze's *Don Juan*. Gvetadze's work has erased all gender roles and clear interpretations, though femininity may be suggested by an expectant face draped in black. It appears that vague ambivalence is depicted in this image, intensified by black colors. Don Juan's traditionally playful and cynical face is different, evoking the sense of sarcasm in the works of Gvetadze, due to its white color. At the same time, we can interpret white as an ephemeral color of transience. As if by an angelic gesture it calls to a woman, the abstract background with its naïvely joyful presentation of the landscape, hinting at the archetypal figures and intensifying the

mystery of the topic. The overlapping connections are reached via color symbolism, grace of figures and at the same time, naive expression.

The dramatic line of the exhibition, and the completely different creative visions of the participant artists, forms a united picture with associative interpretations. The next room on the first floor of the Writer's House also featured Maia Naveriani's artistic series, together with the works of Pagava and Gvetadze. Naveriani crosses the axis line in the concept of the exhibition, because the title of the entire exhibition, "12 Women Missing Gone", is borrowed from Naveriani's work. Which sort of women's faces appear or disappear in Maia Naveriani's paintings? Is there a particular face or image? The impulse to disappear, the notion of transiency, the feeling of pain and femininity is hidden, ironic, painful and playful in Naveriani's universe. "I will show you what you cannot see - the inner strength of a body" - this poetic phrase by Francesca Woodman relates to Naveriani's creativity. Woodman's photographic vision, her brisk dramatism, revealed in black-and-white photos, is often lyrical – a romantic symbolism standing in complete opposition to Naveriani's aesthetics. Naveriani uses the simplified form of pop-art, the sharpness of color and the line-shaped structure, thus we won't touch upon aesthetic links with Woodman. In this case, idea itself refers to the body which expresses internal strength rather than demonstration of eccentric figure. We see this strength in Naveriani's works. A room's imitation is created in the main work of the series and the handwritten scribble looks like as an open message. It tells us about the twelve vanished women who probably disappeared behind the red light of an open door. "12 Women Missing Gone" - this phrase is also reflects upon the other works of the same series, so the artist is able to achieve a maximum tension with minimal means. Such tension is caused by work "balloons", where the figure of the woman in the center of the space is precisely reflected in a photo that creates sensual contrasts with the contours of balloons or feminine profiles. Through such aesthetic confrontation, a woman is perceived in many ways. Protesting consumerist perception of the female body we may even draw a parallel to the act of violence. Feminist messages are somewhat more open within the work of Naveriani, where the emphasis on the emotional effect is demonstrated through the simple linear structure of the body and inscriptions. As the artist notes, defining feminism was not a fixation for her; it accidentally and gradually grew evident in her works. This contingency is not really aggressive and unequivocal; it's often a reference, an emotionally precise detail. Naveriani's feminine vision encompasses elements of the game, the feeling of freedom and the

sensual dynamics of perception, where the disappeared or covered items are unified beyond the line of clear structures.

The destructive, fractured feminine understanding of bodies is transformed into a large, expressive and experimental work by one of the other artists of the exhibition - Tamara K.E., in an installation of the artist who resides in Germany, "From the Series Revising Fear". Works completed in 2016-18 create an oppositional structure, different from paintings of archival and film prints, while simultaneously offering a new understanding of the visualization of two-dimensional objects. An image created on the border of installation and print demonstrates the manner of Tamara K.E.'s experiments, first presented by the artist in Georgia. The series formed a contrast with the historic walls of the silk museum, where the temporal layers created a mood of melancholy. In this space, Tamara K.E.'s works were temporarily revealed and successfully accomplished an intensification of controversy. The contrast between space and visual-image format were as sensitive as time layers. The past and the future reached one metaphase, where transparent reflections, pigment blackened spots, cartilage and surface structural sediments were presented as an alternative to the body. Talking with the artist revealed that a new time and technology is a challenge for her, where the social or gender structure of the bodies creates a hybrid chain. By reassessing fear, one attempts to overcome the fear of modernity, the main anxiety that accompanies the technocratic dominance of humanity. Tamara K.E.'s deformed constructions from penis to the ribs reveal the links between the spine and plasma, links where we can search for new possibilities of artificial intelligence and human perception.

Exhibition artist Anna K.E. offers her a sensual, dynamic solution and visualization of the body and personality. Her three-channel video projection is called "Multiple Keyholes". The video installation was created in 2012-14, and is the property of the artist and the gallery Simone Subal. Anna K.E. is a young, successful artist who exhibits work actively in America and Europe. She was chosen to represent the Georgian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2019. The video Projection "Multiple Keyholes" unifies Anna K.E.'s practice, in which the biographical motivation is completely resolved and expressed in frequent experimentation with various media. In this case, a video, the principle of moving frames, is based on alternating static and minimal dynamics, allowing for the artist's personal space - a work studio as a place to perform. The artist's constantly moving body gains symbolic importance. It simultaneously breaks through the structure of the transparent window in the backdrop and naturally fits in. The artist's bodily

plasticity reminds us of the Dance Curve¹ principles, but here the geometric order is traversed with an existential search. The artist presents a kind of training strategy, in which the dynamics of movement indicate the intended purpose of setting up the personal space and at the same time, the wish to escape it. In a video where the whole visual and conceptual narrative is built on the artist's movement, the falling body is a culminating phase, followed by a repeated action from the beginning. Starting from the beginning, a recurring, serial continuity of rhythm suggests to us an alternative version of "The Myth of Sisyphus". The mystery of Sisyphus expresses the tragedy of the human predicament, namely fruitless work, but it also demonstrates a continuous self-sacrifice, the meaning of being human. A similar meaning is demonstrated in Anna K.E.'s video projection, accompanied by different layers of associations and interpretations. The artist's emphasis is the vulnerable, shattering reflection of the body as a movable element, a fragile reflection within the frozen transiency of the universe, which can be the object of observation from multiple transparent slits.

Such unified, altered passages contain reflection and inner understanding of participant artists' stories, events and characters. The above-mentioned alternative can be elaborated and linked to Julia Kristeva's interpretation of Hannah Arendt - the "who" concept of the 20th century's most important, thinker and philosopher.

In her work *Hannah Arendt: Life is a Narrative*, and in the subsection "Who and the Body", she claims: "Who, spread in human multiplicity and an infinity of human narratives manifests itself as dynamic sensitivity, energy that transcends beyond the pursuit of heroic deeds and acts and opposes any attempt of objectification..." "who" seems to be the source of the creative process". Kristeva's interpretation of "who" is important to our discussion of the feminine creative credo, which is rooted in intuitive access to sense, will and thought. The feminist alternative in the works of the artists we discussed in this essay refers to the integrity of the mind and sensation. This integrity is represented via an isolated subjectivity of self. An imaginative "open field" appears in the works, where the creative "actual energy" is built on the recognition of self-observation, contact with the outside world, the intangible

¹ Vasili Kandinski's theoretical work of Bauhaus period: "DANCE CURVES AND POINT AND LINE TO PLANE," illustrated by the author's geometric sketches according to the photos of a modern dancer Gret Palucca.

nature of love and the knowledge of the universe. "The experiment of self with itself" - Kristeva's uses this phrase from Arendt's works to define the ideological motivation of "who" as "...complete and perfect understanding of the subject itself, not just as it is in the mind. The subject itself, "who" as activation of movement, with a multi-layered depth of symbolic comprehension that creates an opportunity for analyzing an alternative creative unity.

As a conclusion to this essay, we want to fully expand the diffusion effect, an idea of fluid conception, and connect it to another important cultural art event in Tbilisi - OXYGEN and two projects – in order to also talk about two female artists who work abroad, Nana Chichua and Nino Sakandelidze. They represent different art practices. It is noteworthy that the exhibition “12 Women Missing Gone”, as already mentioned, was an alternative to the Tbilisi International Art Fair, within the scope of the same event, while the exhibition OXYGEN was a parallel event to the Tbilisi Art Fair. As co-curator and participant artist, Sakandelidze mentioned in an interview, about OXYGEN: "This is an eco-commentary on today's state of art."². The exhibition united both professional and emerging artists working in Georgia and abroad. The exhibition was held within the territory of Stamba³ and presented 33 artists and two art schools. The eco-commentary, coupled with a degree of freedom, and use of exhibition halls in different rooms, attempted to circumvent limited spaces of the creative area and at the same time to open them up. It is noteworthy that “The 12 Women” participants were presented at OXYGEN as well, with the very different projects (Gvetadze presented a large performing installation, Kapanadze implemented the phrase-burning performance, Machaidze presented her solo exhibition, and so on.) Sakandelidze's art commentary was demonstrated through her large-scale installation “Workout Fear”, where the artist explored the concept of freedom and the limits of its perception. Sakandelidze is an artist working in Vienna, who temporarily continued her work in Tbilisi. In her artistic practice Sakandelidze expresses poetic fragmentation and duality. Sakandelidze perceives the Soviet period as an important topic of study, often using fragments of this period. Sakandelidze connects fragments of the Soviet sculpture - the fist and trampoline, a metaphor of freedom. The fist on the trampoline is a binary opposition that the viewers could observe behind the transparently abstract glass design. With double visual codes, Sakandelidze

² Excerpt from the interview <https://at.ge/2018/05/16/oxygen/>

³ former publishing house, currently functioning as a hotel which supports art events in general

explores the complexity of access to freedom – can a sense of freedom be achieved in a real time or is it a prerogative of the creative process? The installation of Sakandelidze offers an alternative version of this search.

Nana Chichua, in collaboration with Bibi Asatiani and Wade Ivy, presents the metaphor, an alternative and even original solution to the knowledge of freedom and the universe. Chichua works in America. Her artwork includes a variety of media including painting and books. Chichua also works at a unique institution in Los Angeles, the Museum of Jurassic Technologies, where the synthesis of imaginative reality, historical layers and the museum concept provides viewers with a unique experience. The concept of the Museum of Jurassic Technologies is an inspiration for the artist, and it helped Chichua and Ivy developed the Autopia concept. The Autopia project included a multi-layer exposure where the limitless interpretation of the experiment was expanded via pictorial, installation, video and sound installations. Autopia, as a completely imaginative, surreal concept was defined in Chichua's large-scale paintings, where abstract forms are characterized by a deeply sensual visualization of color. The concept of the project incorporates several layers and is closely linked with the Museum of Jurassic Technology. Inspired by the “Beekeeping Institute of Poetry Research”, the exposition combines a number of hive-like and honeycomb objects that fill the space with ritual energy. The sound of the video-project focuses on abstract imagery, calling to the imaginary beginnings of the nature. As an exposition concept, Autopia is yet another inspiring concept which intersects with the author of the mystical literature of the Museum of Jurassic Technology. As Valentine Worth notes, “The world is the world within worlds, visible and invisible, physical and intangible, everything is linked and trying to expand its influence.” This quality of expansion has been demonstrated in the Autopia project through an expression of alternative imagery, a visualization of the possibilities of modern technology and their tangible, poetic link. At the end of the essay, this is the alternative vision - we can imagine a macro-model of the universe through linked, deconstructed and reconstructed parallel prisms. The diffusion effect is the beginning of such a duality in which one event demonstrates an ideal relationship with the parallel situation.

As a conclusion, we'd like to note that the feminist narratives and visions discussed in the essay show the importance of the individual, in which Foucault's understanding plays a central role. Foucault proposes post-modern perspectives, and his concept of the personality of an individual is the following: “The individual is not a combination of individual inspirations, primitive atoms,

but also a multiple and inner matter, the power of which affects the individual. So the individual bodies, individual discourses, individual desires are identified as individuals.” Individual, in Foucault's interpretation, includes deconstructive and reconstructive active phases and attained solutions to social, environment and internal processes. In our case, Foucault's concept provides a reflection of the creative process, in the diffusion structure, where an intuitive, non-constructive, but sensual, emotional, fantastical, and desire-based feminist structure plays the active role. Paired with the creative process, perchance this is the new perception of the modern world.

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Online Resources

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