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**Gesture of Thoughts<sup>1</sup>**

**(Contemporary Georgian Emigrant Artists in USA)**

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New York is the artistic and cultural center of the today’s world, where not only American, but the art processes going on in the galleries across the world come together and therefore, the entire picture of the 21st-century art scene can be observed here. And yet, the art presented at New York stage has some specific features. Amongst this is the multiethnic unity, made possible through the blend and collaboration of artists of different nationalities, in which the concept of “national” (perceived as a phenomenon of merely local importance), is often undermined compared to “other” challenges of global significance. In this integrated art space the “national” becomes worth mentioning only when it echoes and reflects the global socio-political problems or falls in line with the actual philosophical discourses. One can speak about the “national” simply when specifically referring to the origins, biography or the historical background of certain artists. Our interest towards this issue is determined by the fact that there are several emigrant artists from Georgia, who live and work in this vibrant globalized and integrated art world. The issues how do they manage to integrate into the art space in NY or how relevant are their modes of expression in terms of form and content, are the key questions to be addressed in our study.

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<sup>1</sup> H. Belting, *The End of History of Art?* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London. 1987

When starting discussing the issues mentioned above, we must bear in mind that the historical preconditions and the subsequent existential or artistic experiences are still considerable factors, which strongly determined the formation of the perceptual and artistic worlds of artists migrated from Georgia (no matter in what age (from 14 to 48) did they leave their homeland).

In this regards it is important to note that the “national” mingled with the “international” acquires specific features with emigrant artists and hereby, the generation raised and formed as artists in Georgia, is worth special mentioning. The big majority of them are the graduates of Tbilisi State Academy of Arts. Some of them even graduated the vocational school named after Iakob Nikoladze prior to their submission in the academy. For most of them the academic degree is something like an “Achilles heel”, as it is perceived as a barrier of academic boundaries they had to break through for pursuing their own artistic paths. There are others however, who see their degree as an advantage, as the knowledge of basic fundamentals of academic drawing, composition or color combinations helped them to open new perspectives in their pedagogical activities. And yet, no matter what their perception is, all of them shaped their own artistic worlds by passing through this local academic system. In this respect, one specific feature, typical to Georgian emigrant artists should be mentioned: Notwithstanding how far they go from the academic art, how free they are “from the binding rules of any type of representation”<sup>2</sup>, how conceptual, innovative, out of the historical narrative their works are, all of them keep a certain level of aestheticism. From the formal point of view, their works are still aesthetically “beautiful”. From the first sight it seems to contradict with the concept of contemporary art, which “... violates the frontiers of aesthetic autonomy and repudiates the traditional experience of art”.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the new niche for the contemporary art opens up here, and a Hans Belting says

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<sup>2</sup> H. Belting, *The End of History of Art?* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1987.

in his book “The End of Art History?”, “... a new edition of the “-isms” (neo-avant-garde, post-avant-garde, trans-avant-garde), involves a deliberate retrospect on the road which art has already covered.”<sup>4</sup>. With this in mind, we can consider the aestheticism, mentioned above, as a part of this retrospective. In the circumstances, where the art could look like anything, when the difference between the soup cans of Andy Warhol and those, kept in the storages of supermarket vanished, when there is nothing differing art from reality, the majority of Georgian contemporary artists still make art and pursue the way, which somehow is linked with Modernism. It seems though, that it refers more to their formal aspects and aestheticism, rather than to the concept or the philosophical meaning behind their works. Despite the facts that from the formal point of view, the art of Georgian artist draws upon that historical narrative, (the rejection of which has been repeatedly mentioned by the number of art theoreticians and philosophers), it still seems to be in line with contemporary art context, when “Each and every object might be art through which we entered the period, referred by Arthur Danto as Post-historical”<sup>5</sup>.

Today in the Postmodern world the humans are lost, shaken, trembling without the stable fundament, trying to find themselves in the endless realm of the digital world, “where the reality has vanished and we are left solely to the icons of media”. The time seems to have accelerated, becoming fragmented and subjective, whereas the tragic conflict between the creator and the world, which originated in Renaissance, reaches its critical level. Now the concept of Nietzsche “The God is dead” is more acute than ever and the question: “what is the place of an artist?” is repeatedly addressed by various philosophers, art historians and

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<sup>3</sup> H. Belting, *The End of History of Art?* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1987, 31.

<sup>4</sup> H. Belting, *The End of History of Art?* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1987, 52.

<sup>5</sup> A. Danto, *khelovnebis dadasrulis shedeg, tanamedrove khelovneba da istoriis mijna* (After the end of art, contemporary art and the verge of the history), Tbilisi, 2013, 51 (in Georgian).

aesthetic philosophers. Boris Groys is among them. Does a human really own a place in this reality shown through his/her art? – this is the question he puts forward. If not, is there the “absence of a place” to be thematized by the artists according to the pioneering theories? Groys rejects this concept by saying that we are dealing with theories, which just give us a place, or propose the absence of a place in the construction or deconstruction of their versions of reality. This in turn, means that the real contexts and conditions, which are supposed to define the art and should be expressed in the artistic systems, are solely illusions and dreams, which with its artistic system just focus on the external aspects and nothing more<sup>6</sup>.

Here, I recall Jean Baudrillard, for whom “reality itself has begun merely to imitate the model, which now precedes and determines the real world”. Baudrillard’s “The third order of simulacra” is associated with postmodern era, where “we are confronted with a *precession* of simulacra; that is, the representation *precedes* and *determines* the real. There is no longer any distinction between reality and its representation; there is only the simulacrum”<sup>7</sup>.

The beholder is left face to face with the simulacral art, where one has to find the way in the culture, where “because of the intervention of numerical, cybernetic, and virtual technologies”, we are already beyond reality, and things are already beyond their destruction. They can no longer end, and they fall into the abyss of the endless (endless history, endless politics, endless economic crisis)<sup>8</sup>. This could be the edge of the brink. In these circumstances the importance of commentary (which has an immense role in

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<sup>6</sup> B. Groys, Kunst-Kommentare. Passagen: Wien, 1997. русс. версия: Комментарии к искусству, Изд. Художественный журнал, 2003, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Introduction to Jean Baudrillard, Module on Simulacra and Simulation, <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/postmodernism/modules/baudrillardsimulTnmainframe.html>, 5/3/18, 1:18 PM.

<sup>8</sup> J. Baudrillard, A l'Ombre du Millenaire ou le Suspens de l'An 2000 (Paris: Sens & Tonka, April 1998). Translated in Miami, September 1998, 5.

Postmodern art) is getting more and more vital. Groys, who in his "Kunst-Kommentare" talks about the key role of art critical reviews, argues that the vaguer the text is, the better it is "protected" or "dressed up". Harve Fischer also talks about the importance of commentary in the contemporary art, where "The commentary is valued higher than the work."<sup>9</sup>

Another important feature of Postmodern era would be the tight interaction of the contemporary art with the society. "Today the art is perceived as a public communication tool"<sup>10</sup>. Theodor Adorno speculates that the exact interpretation of an art object, which instead of focusing on external expressions, reflects the exiting inner tensions in a society, gives us far more detailed and realistic picture as compared to the empirical sociology.

How do the contemporary Georgian emigrant artists fit into this mosaic? What is their place in the Postmodern cultural space and how naturally do they integrate in this world?

When there is no "stylistic imperative" (Arthur Danto), the art does not have any specific identification features and there are no special rules for art to be considered as art", there's only its philosophical concept, which ensures its transformation into an art object. Here the new trait of the Postmodern art - the diversity and variety typical for New York art scene comes to light.

The questions: what is the role of Georgian emigrant artists in this Postmodern or even Post-Postmodern turmoil? How and where are they placed on the map of American art? How are their different historical narratives, personal stories and experiences (which are tightly linked with Georgia's recent political, historical and social past) being transformed? How did they manage to free themselves from their memories and Soviet clichés encoded in their genetics?

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<sup>9</sup> H. Belting, *The End of History of Art?* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1987, 47.

<sup>10</sup> B. Groys, *Kunst-Kommentare. Passagen*: Wien, 1997. русс. версия: «Комментарии к искусству». Изд. Художественный журнал, 2003, 13.

And finally, did manage to become the organic or original parts of the American art and culture scene?

If we take a closer look at this subject, we will see, that the main feature typical to Georgian emigrant artists is their diversity. They not only differ from each other, but also often undergo through the radical transformations within the style, specific medium and mode of expression throughout their carriers. Amongst them, we can identify two main groups of artists: in one case we see the direct continuation of the path of Modernists achieved through the transformation of Modernist aesthetics and formal aspects, on the other hand, we come across the complete contradiction, where the historical narrative has finished and the art shifted to new Postmodern cultural space.

From the first group of artists, some have slightly departed from the Modernist discourse, though their artistic means and the aesthetic approaches are still in line with the principles of late Modernism. Moreover, we often come across the traces of the conceptual analysis in their art, which is being adapted with their individual artistic language. The latter, in turn, draws upon the Modernist form and aesthetics. Modernist thinking and formal approaches are evident in the art of sculptor Batu Sikharulidze (ill. 1), Gia Tkabladze (ill.2), Niko Abazadze, Papuna Dabrundashvili (ill. 3) Eliso Tsiklauri (ill. 4). Despite some conceptual meanings behind, the formal aspects, their transformations and relevance with the content are the key factors in their work. Notwithstanding the fact that many critics of the contemporary art speculate that “today the art history has finished, nothing new is being created as the artistic modes and the ranges of possibilities are already exhausted”<sup>11</sup>, these artist still seek for new visual modes and continue thinking in the formal manner across their artistic careers. Their artistic world is still complex and diverse similarly to the contemporary

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<sup>11</sup> В. Groys, Kunst-Kommentare. Passagen: Wien, 1997. русс. версия: «Комментарии к искусству». Изд. Художественный журнал, 2003, 13.

world, where the images are often fragmented, mutilated, vanished, sometimes abstracted or symbolized. And yet, the artists always draw upon the reality. They still manipulate with the real images and the existing forms.

These approaches could be observed in the art of: Nana Baghdavadze, Gia Chikvaidze, Ia Mchedlishvili, Tea Okropiridze, Tsira Akhobadze, Eka Maraneli, Vakho Muskheli, Tina Vachnadze or Nino Chumburidze. The “Beauty and Meaning” is never questioned in their art, which by no means becomes intentionally non-aesthetic. In contrast, it expresses through the visual modes and its concepts and meaning all speak the language of a “beauty”. If we will go deeper in our explorations, we will see that they together with abovementioned sculptors, pursue the way launched by the first Georgian emigrant artists in USA: Giorgi Papashvili and Botso Korisheli in 1940-50-ies. As a consequence, the historical narrative seems to be continued and in this context their art become a “new edition” of late Modernism<sup>12</sup>. By bringing more diversity to this *kaleidoscope* of Postmodernism, this direction gains its own place and importance within the contemporary art scene.

After discussing the specificities of the particular group of Georgian emigrant artist, we must shift our focus to those, who give us even more fascinating and deeper insight into the Postmodern discourse. And by doing this, I will touch upon their art in more details below, in order to argue or at least show the specifics of their work and their importance in the Postmodernism context.

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<sup>12</sup> H. Belting, *The End of History of Art?* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1987, 51.

In the Queens Museum in New York, a wall is occupied by **Anna K.E's** work named *"Profound Approach and Easy Outcome"*, in which we see the portrait of Nazi ghost (Hitler) and below the image of a young woman responding with the pathetic gesture (ill.5). The author explains the picture in the following way: Feminism, power, masculine domination and women artists, *"weak creature's"* resistance on the inequality and her reaction with *"comically intuitive and gestural responses"*.

Body, movement and plastic dynamism are the key means of expression in Anna's works. Her *"Crossing Gibraltar at Midday"* (ill.6) exhibited in New York, in Simone Subal gallery shows artist as a former ballerina with her choreography of segregated, decontextualized body parts, which in turn, evoke the trembling feelings of instability and crumbliness. This altogether create the unity and synthesis, which opposes the world with its fragile and crumbly body. In order to lean on something to resist the pressure the body parts in Anna's work are reinforced with the fasteners on the toes, knees and feet. The weak parts get stronger and secure in that way. This, in turn, is the metaphor of transformation how the clash and trauma might empower and strengthen a person.

The trembling environment is further enhanced by the sounds from the speakers. The beholder hears the hostile, unfriendly noises: street echoes, whisper, and separate phrases *"You stink with the onion but I will love you more"*, *"women are so kind"* ... The segregated body parts and the photo collages of graphic works merge with the hostile sounds and altogether create the instable, threatening environment. This effect is somehow neutralized by the accuracy and aestheticism of the graphic drawings on the walls. The important element of this complex work is the short video *"God created the world, I did the rest"*, which is shown in the remote and specially arranged narrow corridor. This video intensifies artist's message on women feelings and experiences in this dangerous and hostile environment. The naked body of the artist slowly, part-by-part enters the camera. Soon after,

on the the beautiful naked body we see the pile of excrement, which from the first sight looks like an abstract spot, but shortly it starts to work as a sign, a metaphor of opposition, contradiction and duality, balance-misbalance of beauty and the opposing ugliness. Here one would pose the question: if we take away all of our knowledge about the content of excrements, would it still be a disgusting sight for us? This and many other questions are left unanswered by the artist. We as spectators are left facing these questions in this chaotic, Postmodern world and it is our turn to find answers or keep floating in the whirlpool of uncertainty, where we become the unstable, fragile and crumbly creatures.

Anna encountered the gender problems at the very beginning of her career, when she as young, 15 year-old girl passed the exams in the Stuttgart Art Gymnasium. The exam jury was composed on 8 men and one woman. She painfully recalls the masculine psychological insult from male board members in contrast with the solidarity expressed by the only women in jury. Thereafter, the feminist subject-matter penetrated Anna's works from as early as she became a student. The role and place of a woman, problems of integration, the fragility of a body and the inner steadiness of a spirit, the problem and clash and survival in this masculine-dominated world are amongst the her frequently addressed themes.

The artist always raises questions and finds answers on them, therefore, one of her first works exhibited in Dusseldorf Art Academy, which she created in the age of 16, is the iron sculpture bearing the punctuation marks: the exclamation and question marks, colons, semicolons, dots and commas. By posing questions, these signs and symbols express her attitude towards the world. She thinks that every artwork bears certain question addressed towards the life. The use of sound and video gives her more open space to give answers on these questions.

The encounter with the visual codes of the artistic works happened quite early in Anna's life. She began drawing and painting prior to talking. It started with the everyday creativity, the

strange vision, which she observed with her mother (Keti Kapanadze, the artists) in the childhood. Later, the first encounter was followed by the actual engagement with drawing, painting .... and other world. the door to this world was opened for her by her father Gia Edgveradze, the artist himself, when he offered the 9-year-old Anna to draw the portrait of a grandmother. She recalls the intense feelings she experienced, when she first draw the profile line of her grandmother on the blank paper and the aura of a women sitting in front of her was transmitted to her work. Thereafter, the creativity for Anna is the door to the new world. Ballet entered her life slightly later. Choreography, body and the motion have an immense importance in her work. She contemplated her own body through ballet. The freedom achieved in accuracy is one of the key factors for Anna, which she compares with the math, where “in the realm of meticulous calculations and formulas there is always a place for new discoveries and creative freedom”.

In the beginning her works were close to architecture, sculpture, design and installations. Now her artistic language became more complex and diverse as she started to experiment with video, sound and virtual reality... She often uses body language, dance, signs expressed through motion, which all work as symbols, falling in line with her work.

Anna doe’s not give credits to where she lives. For her the most important thing is to have the possibility to touch upon the mystery of the art, its endless and unreachable elements, which go beyond the borders of painting. She considers herself as a nomad artist with no land-bound identity. Others call Anna K an alien, as her artistic world is strange and peculiar. And yet her works still bear the traces of pain and trauma which she passed through time and space on different territories (Georgia, Germany, USA). Finally, all these feelings come together in artist’s works, because “it is impossible to erase one’s experiences, as where you’ve lived and what you’ve gone through, is what what you are now”. Anna always tries to find the best suitable linguistic form for the philosophic concepts, because she

herself speaks and thinks simultaneously on several languages. The same is in her artistic works, where she merges the feelings and different phases of her life into a new single whole, to find best forms to express *feelings and ideas*.

The second women artist, who emigrated to USA at the early age is **Nana Chachua**. She graduated the department of Art and Experimental Animation in California Art Institute, where she went through the intensive training. During her studies she experimented with many different artistic media: with prints, performances, photography, dance. Being an MA student, she made a 15-minute video "The impressions from Rustaveli" (ill.7) "This video"- says Tatiana Veliaminovich – "is a traditional poetic documentary, a colorful vision of the exotic world of Shota Rustaveli, a Georgian poet who lived in 12th century and is considered one of the greatest poets of the medieval literature... Nana's homage to Rustaveli -- the breathtaking picture of ...customs, costumes, folk dances, festivities, unique sound of famous male chorus on the backdrop of Grusia panoramic views..."<sup>13</sup>.

Despite experimenting with many different media, the artist thinks that for her painting is the most important media. She argues, that notwithstanding what she does and in what media, all originate from painting (ill.8). and yet, she continues working in film, painting, installation, sound, photo... shifting from one to another time after time. Her art holds lots of emotions, in which the poetic artistic images prevail. In her poetic world she invents and operates with the a vocabulary of visual images, which she applies in many different directions: in theater, film, prints etc.

Georgian subject-matter: history, art, poetry, though analyzed in a global context, is often reflected in Nana's works. Her artistic world is marked by the colorful, poetic features, bearing the traces of oriental (Persian) art. With her rhythm and interest in color, she pays

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<sup>13</sup> T. Elmanovich, In the series: The Desplaces People Speak About the Tea Doll Dreams, <http://nanuka.com/SamovarReview>, 4/24/18, 12:55 PM.

homage to the art of S. Parajanov. She was raised in a family of art collectors, where she was surrounded by pictures, rugs and carpets, antiquities from the very childhood. This mysterious world had a strong impact on her artistic style and esthetics. When talking about Nana Chichua's video works, I must recall her film "Samovar or the Dream of a Tea Doll", which shows an animated doll, in turn, reminding me of Kustodiev's "Woman with the Samovar". It seems that the woman in this video comes from the fairy tale and the dream world. In a constant transformation from a human to a doll and vice versa, she is at the edge of real and mysterious. The sound: the play with the strange bells, which recall the exhibit from "The Museum of Jurassic Technology" and many similar objects, could be found in this video. The Samovar itself, is amongst them. Similar to the museums, in this video we float between real and unreal, between the true and invented, where we finally get absorbed by the fairy tale world, offered by the artist. In this respect we must mention the soundtrack of the video, which enhances and makes the visual aspect even more odd and enigmatic.

The movement, inscriptions, camera shots in Nana's works often remind us the Futurist books. In the sequence of black-and-white shots the color flashes randomly come in and disappear. The question - why - arises here. Samovar as a metaphor of dreams, imagination, magic and warm atmosphere, appears in a mist of the smoke in her video. This effect reminds us the imaginary world created in the museum (which is another real but still an imaginary environment) space of "The Museum of Jurassic Technology" in Los Angeles, established and developed by another artist – David Willson. This is the place, where Nana works already for many years. This is the small conceptual museum, where special halls for Georgian tea and for many other themes related to Georgia have been introduced from the perspective of ethnography and natural history. The Museum web-page opens up with the words of American scientist and artist Charls Willson Peale "... guided along as it were a chain of flowers into the mysteries of life."

As mentioned above, the particular museum has been established and developed by the artist David Hildebandt Willson. As soon as one enters the museum, the reality mingles up with the invented and the comfort comes alongside with strangely annoying feelings. Many different thoughts at once come to your mind. Artificial exhibits or historical facts, the real or made-up stories told through photo, video, or sound effects open up number of paths, which you start to explore through the labyrinths of art. Here the history is a fiction and you are embraced in the realm of art, where Georgia has its place. Arrangement of Georgian part in the particular museum has been initiated and introduced by Nana Chichua. The Georgian tea room, where Nana and her dog Tula are the hosts, is marked by the comfortable and cozy environment. Amongst other exhibits, the most fascinating is the video, which is shown in a small movie theater at the entrance of the particular room. Among four videos made by David Willson and his crew, which are systematically shown in this room, one is dedicated to Georgia. "Seven Songs of Georgians" is the video, which is the perfect story made of moving images on the themes of the Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani's fables. And this is a perfect example of a blend of Georgian and American cultures, where the marvels of Georgian culture are spread throughout the museum by Nana Chichua and David Willson.

Another women artist we would like to focus on is a young women artist **Khatia Esartia**, originally from Gagra (Abkhazia). Forced to leave her hometown after the Abkhazian war, she first left for Moscow, and afterwards, at the age of 14, she moved to USA together with her family.

Khatia recalls Gagra as a place of happiness, where everyone was joyful, in contrast with Moscow, where she often encountered rough and rude attitude from people. In her childhood memories Gagra was a place, where people laughed and greeted warmly each other in the streets, a place, where there was no danger in walking in the streets. The war

destroyed everything and the IDP artist with little funds and no professional contacts decided to move to another continent to find the American dream.

Khatia Graduated the Chicago Art Institute and obtained BA degree. Later, in NY she obtained her MA in art marketing and contemporary art history. Alongside her art pieces, she worked on the design for jewelry, costumes and even for cards. Now she is more focused on the visual art. Prior to the actual creation process, she used to explore the subject around which she plans to develop her work.

The main medium for Khatia's art is watercolor. Though, she thinks at this stage this medium has expired its possibilities and that's why she experiments with mixed media. Alongside with watercolor, she explores video, sound, painting and sculpture.

At this stage she experiments with metal wire sculptures. She is often compared with Calder, though she thinks her works are more related to Sarah Sze's all-controlling installations. The artist also feels deep connections with Agnes Martin (self-meditation on the paper) and a fiber textile artist Anne Willson.

In 2012 on her first group exhibition Khatia presented the big watercolors piece dedicated to the theme of Gagra and the Black Sea, which is marked by the intensity of color (ill.9). In these pictures the artists evolves the refugee theme, though indirectly, through showing the visual images of her own nostalgic reflections extracted from her memories.

Her recent works are inspired by Comics, where Khatia is trying to raise the profile of comics by paving the way from this particular medium to the art (ill.10). She thinks that the conceptual art is dead, as long as it does not create its own language because for her the language of art and the means of expression are extremely important. In her last works Khatia moves in-between video and performance, in which she tries to introduce Georgian elements, i.e. Georgian Table (Supra) and the related concept of Supra, which in itself is of a

performative nature. She also continues her work on watercolors (fruit series) and oil canvases, where the similar approaches typical to Sarah Sze and Julie Mehretu are evident. In these works the artist tries to recreate today's Gagra. Thus she returns back to world in her memories, transformed into the esthetically beautiful forms, which visualize her personal trauma through signs and images. The artist also works on outdoor sculptures, in which the issue of interaction of personal spaces with the public ones is raised. In parallel she makes videos, photos and designs. This altogether shows how she explores different media to find the suitable language to express her visual messages.

Now I would like to discuss the art of a completely different women artist **Ether Chkadua**. She emigrated to USA in Soviet times, when in the age of 23 she married the researcher of Georgian language Kavin Tuite.

During her studies in Tbilisi the painter started to explore the techniques of Dutch painting, which she continued to follow after she arrived in USA. Her early works, which were quite popular among the public, probably because she was a very talented young women, resemble the art of the 17th-century Dutch painting.

Soon after Ether Chkadua started to touch upon many conflicting themes, which reflected her complex and contradicting inner world. She emphasized many tabooed themes in her works. Shortly after her initial success, she turned away from her style and her works became far more complex in terms of subject-matter, where the resist problems have been addressed. She painted Afro-Americans, Caribbean, Rastafari lives, which occurred to be less acceptable for the public for which it seemed quite strange, when a young white woman got interested in Afro-American themes. The Afro-American intellectuals on the other hand, argued that white individuals could not properly understand their problems. This altogether

shows the existing tension around racist issues. Artist's interest towards the Jamaicans could be determined by the fact that she herself was from the small ethnic group and she might share some common problems with these minorities.

The turning point in Ether's life was the moment she got acquainted with the Italian art dealer Enzo Sperone. She had painted several self-portraits by then. The dealer offered her to continue storytelling with her portraits and this is how her series of self-portraits were born (ill.11). She used her face to tell the story of a Georgian women. She became the main character for her own paintings. The self-portrait is the way to open up in front of a beholder. Her artistic language is realistic, almost naturalistic, though it speaks through the metaphor, signs and symbols. Her paintings are dedicated to several themes and concepts: from a women-hero of the exotic mythology to the sarcasm on the theme of traditions and altered rites and rituals, tense political-social issues or feminist statements. "Minimal surrealism, hyper-realistic figurative images are merged with fantastic, dreamlike contexts, heterogeneous and binary themes. The artist represents a women as "A Feminist Demon", with the diverse psychology aspects and angles"<sup>14</sup>. "She is always is the center of her own drama: revolutionary, fleshy and brave, revolting, conspirative, scared, welcoming, conformist or even a villain" –writes Cintra Wilson about Ether's works<sup>15</sup>.

Currently Ether Chkadua is interested in social and psychological problems, reflected in series of her works "If I Could I Would I Should". In her project "Alien Bloom" she addresses such problems like – unemployment and homelessness (ill.12). She represents humans, who "could not find their place on the earth" and that is why they are transferred to an imaginary planet, where the "losers" are placed in a green, flourishing milieu. These multicolored backgrounds are made by the artist Gotcha Chkadua (brother) from the

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<sup>14</sup> N. Motsikulashvili,, *Ether Chkauduas avtoportreti* (Ethr Chkadua's Self-portrait) BA thesis, Tbilisi 2016 (In Georgian)

<sup>15</sup> C. Wilson, *Etheri Chkadua*, The Catalogue, Tbilisi 2013.

recycled plastic. It works as a metaphor to show the society the right ways to treat the “losers” by offering them the alternative of beauty and kindness.

The artist **Levan Mindiashvili** thinks that “we experience another Postmodernism at the moment, in the epoch of post internet and **genderfluid** identity, when it is very difficult to identify any single direction. In the process of finding something new, more and more artists go back to the past commentaries, many draw upon the Modernist experiences and their commentaries. This is probably the classic example to explore the state where you are at the moment. The examination of contemporary becomes possible only through the research and analyses of the past”. After graduating Tbilisi State Academy of Art (Sculpture), Levan obtained the MA degree in Multimedia art in Buenos Aires in The National University of Art.

While being in Argentina, Levan moved from painting to performance and photography. By then, he was already interested in home, place and identity-related issues. For the first two years he was exploring the problems of land-bound identities, when humans carry their cultural past during their entire life with them. Having a long-term interest in dance, he himself became engaged in performances, while investigating new possibilities of this medium.

Soon after his departure from the country, the war started in Georgia and new themes emerged in his art - historic past, the war, massacre, insult, which he thought already were in the past, suddenly reemerged and became actual again. Levan’s interest in the particular theme is reflected in his performance “The Warrior”, in which he as an artist tried to find his place as a human and his approach to the past.

The issue of a place, though seen from another perspective, was further enhanced afterwards in his paintings and sculptures, when Levan moved to NY. The public spaces, which build up our identities and after a while become intimate and our, are the perfect examples of the vanishing boundaries between the private and public. This theme was the focus of Levan's interest already from those times, when he lived in Argentina. As an opposite to the public spaces Levan made another the series of his works dedicated to the empty beds (ill. 13), which symbolize the private. This overlap between the private and the public is still a fascinating issue in Levan's art.

The place, our identity and attitude to the past, which are the main themes through which Levan Mindiashvili manipulates became even more actual in Tbilisi. In 2015 Levan started new big project named "The Unintended Archeology of a Place" (ill.14), which was inspired on one hand by the urban developments in Tbilisi and on the other, by Georgian's attitude towards the past. He thinks, that cultural past and the place we come from are the main sources of inspiration from which artists' ideas initiate.

In the project named "Blue", Levan Mindiashvili goes back to the theme of interiors, to the questions how these private spaces become public and how the boundaries between the intimate and collective are vanished. In these explorations, Levan poses the question: is it really intimate, what is already public, or is it a another façade, hiding something behind it? Here the color blue comes in on one hand as a poetic interpretation with a lyrical flavor, and on the other, as an intimidating term for sexual minorities. With this metaphor the artists highlights the duality of notions, showing how such poetic terms might sound intimidating at the same time. The question what is a queer identity and to what extent could it be the part of the marketing, and moreover, a very important one, is raised in Levan's works. Today the topic of transgender and genderfluid artist becomes more and more actual

alongside with the topic of women artists and Levan Mindiashvili gives us an fascinating insight into this theme.

Levan is always experimenting with different media and materials to find the best ways to express his concepts and ideas. His first works on architectural sculptures, for example, were made in gypsum, which imitated the concrete. By using gypsum instead of concrete, the artist shattered our perception of house or home as of a fundamental value and emphasized its sensitive and fragile nature. The material – gypsum, which is colored to look like a concrete, in reality is very delicate and crumbly, which in turns, speaks to the unsteadiness and crumbliness of the idea itself.

Levan Minidashvili works in different media demonstrate his flawless taste and the exquisite skills of a sculptor and painter.

**Uta Paata Bekaia** moved to USA at the age of 24. By that time he had already graduated The Minor Academy, The Professional Art School named after M. Toidze and partially, the course of film producing in The Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University in Tbilisi.

He started working in the theatres as soon as he arrived in New York. During 10 years he was engaged in the stage, costume design and scenography. By then Uta has already developed his own esthetics and artistic manner, which he evolved further. Working independently on his performances and shows, he demonstrated very specific and peculiar features of his art.

Uta perceives himself as an international artist, which now continues his work in Georgia. Art is the energy and pattern for him, which he bears in his mind. Later, they are shaped in a physical substance of his artistic images. As typical to the art of the 21st-century, Uta often

applies and changes the diversity of medium in which he works. The design, painting, costume, video and sculptures come and merge together in his art. His images often evoke associations with the art of Sergo Parajanov, Matthew Barney and David Lynch. As Uta argues, Parajanov, Gurjiev and the mother nature are amongst his best teachers and therefore, the close ties with the nature and its colorful shades are vividly shown in his works (ill. 15).

The time-consuming and labor-intense preceding preparation process, the traces of which can be clearly observed in his creations, is another valuable quality of Uta's works. At the moment the Uta mostly works on the ancient art of Georgia, its history (from the crafts to the history), which acts as a source for inspiration in his works. Uta's art is full of experiments. In his recent works called "Super humans" he first used his own image as an art object (ill.16). Uta himself plays on his resemblance with the mystical beast *Dev* from Georgian fairy tales, while his artistic world recreates the fairy tale-like world residing in his souls and unconscious mind. His shows, performances and videos are inhabited with mystical creatures. This effect is mainly achieved through their costumes, which are marked by their festive, carnival mood. The beholder becomes the participant in this celebration. Notwithstanding the clear associations with S. Parajanov's colorful art or Matthew Barney's kaleidoscopic videos, which come to our mind, Uta's works are marked by his individual manner. In this imaginary realm Uta opens up his own bag of fairy tales to let the mystic creatures penetrate our world and make it more intriguing, beautiful, colorful and vivid.

We must say, though that the art of Uta Bekaia should not be diminished to merely formal aestheticism. The "ornaments" in his works always bear profound meaning. As the artist said he is specially interested in the complex, inner life of this world, where the masculine is mingled with the feminine nature. The artist often builds up his concepts around these themes connected to gender, its duality and related unconscious, hidden aspects.

**Luka Lasareishvili** (Luka Lazari) is the representative of Georgian Soviet underground art, who moved away from the main course of development and started to experiment with abstraction. His first abstractions were made in 1985. Soon after in 1989, he was invited to work abroad: first in France, later in Germany, and finally after 2003 in NY.

Luka started to study psychology as soon as he arrived in USA. He got acquainted with literature, philosophy, psychology. He kept exploring abstraction and its meditating nature. In 2000 he created his work "The white curtain" (ill.17) executed in the style of minimalistic geometric abstraction. In the particular picture, the white curtain covers his window. The world beyond, which remains invisible to the beholder, still exists in the consciousness of the artist. Furthermore, the imaginations on the world beyond the curtains each time is a subject of change. This is how the mind starts to recreate figures and the ideas in the emptiness of the blank canvases. The artist admires the peace and the process of penetration into the color, which for him is something similar to meditation.

After the "White curtain" Luka Lazari created the "One-liners", which are the huge canvases with a sequence of flat lines against the background. These lines started to move in his later works. This is how the "Moving Stills", "Dimond" emerged. He wants to reduce his abstraction to minimalism in order to prevent mind's focus on one object and give birth to imagination and ever-changing images (ill. 18).

The artist created the abstracted space, where nothing is obvious, the beholder is lost in the vague, obscure net of uncertainty, where the illusion mingles with the real. The postmodern phantasms "invade" the beholder, creator offends spectator's imagination with the "Subjective insults" and offers his own hyperreal world. Alongside with painting, Luka also

works in many different media. He makes objects and installations, where he often uses video art.

**Zurab Gulishvili** has been formed as an artist during the collapse of the Soviet Union and therefore, his complex and diverse artistic world reflects the political, cultural and economic turmoil of Georgia's recent past. His artistic life and works are full of contrasts evolving from orthodox Christianity to the contemporary signs and images. After the graduation of Tbilisi State Academy of Art, his desire to move forward to grab new experiences led him to Cypress to study in the Byzantine Academy of Nicosia. In 2015 he moved to USA, where new artistic possibilities opened up for his professional carrier. The local art scene offered him a strange world and the fertile soil for his controversial artistic world, full of symbols and deeply penetrated with the Orthodox Christian iconographic motives. In New York, where there are no cultural boundaries Zurab Gulishvili's art fits perfectly, as for him "cultural boundaries are only conventional and sometimes different cultural modes overlap and develop into a strange hybrid out of those elements, the unity of which was never imagined before"<sup>16</sup>.

Zura has experimented with many different media starting from icon painting, photo, sculpture and painting. His works are similarly varied from "The Surrealism of abstract spaces, united with the symbolism and iconographic motives of Orthodox Christianity"<sup>17</sup> to installations, assemblages and art books, where he successfully applies the technique of a collage. This diversity is already clearly seen in his works made in Tbilisi, in which Zura's mastery and exquisite skills are demonstrated. Alongside the figurative art, he experimented with the abstraction. One of his early exhibitions in 1986 held in Tbilisi State Conservatoire

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<sup>16</sup> Kh. Khabuliani, *Shuamavali* - A painting Series by Zura Gulishvili, Tb. 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Kh. Khabuliani, *Shuamavali* - A painting Series by Zura Gulishvili, Tb. 2017

demonstrated several aspects, which have been developed further throughout his career. On this exhibition he displayed the dark colored canvases with skeleton-like abstracted forms. This particular direction is followed by the artist even today. His art is conceptual. Each of his works, even those with clear figurative compositions, always bears some philosophic-conceptual meaning, which could be read in many way different ways. The beholder tries to read the concept of the work encoded by the artist. Therefore spectators follow the labyrinths of the thoughts when contemplating his art. And this is how these seemingly simple figures, which come from the religious scenes, myths, fairy tales and biblical fables are transformed into the profound and fascinating artistic images.

The relation of a human with the cosmos is one of Zurab's major themes. A human is the main inspiration for his art. In order to express his ideas Zurab uses media, which perfectly suites the particular concept he wants to develop.

His assemblages (ill. 19) show best of his conceptual thinking. As the art critic Khatuna Khabuliani mentioned "Zura Gulishvili's art reflects the new reality of archetypes of Georgian culture, which are combined with the visual rethinking of contemporary art. His transcendental landscape touches upon the territory, where the existential themes are linked with different cultural codes, such as symbolism, spiritual mood and artistic inspiration" (ill. 20).<sup>18</sup>

**Levan Songhulashvili** is the 27-year-old Georgian artist. He went to study in USA after the graduation of the graphic department in Tbilisi State Academy of Arts. He obtained his MA degree in painting in Andy Warhol New York Academy of Art. For Levan New York is a world city, which he considers not only as the Makkah of education, but also a comfortable milieu, which offered him extremely different experiences. In New York he was deeply

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<sup>18</sup> Kh. Khabuliani, Shuamavali - A painting Series by Zura Gulishvili, Tb. 2017.

influenced by the the jazz rhythms, which he admires so much. The artist perfectly fits in this environment. Levan was listed as number one in the top ten of New York's best artists.

His exhibitions often combine works executed in different media, united under a single theme. His last project "Styx" presented in "ERTI Galley" is an example of the above-mentioned. The project shows artist's interest towards the global themes and his ability to think in the metaphoric artistic ways. The main artistic image of this exhibition is the jellyfish used as a metaphor, which unites and reflects the existing global problems. Artist explores the origins of life, infinity and darkness, all combined in the image of the jellyfish (ill.21). The poetic vision recreated in this seemingly ordinary image, is further emphasized in his video art of the animated jellyfish, where the effects are enhanced by the accompanying sounds.

Amongst other themes engaging the artist are the individual perception of identity, conformism and pointless repetition... all expressed through his video-sculpture installation "System of Objects". The concept and the visual-formal aspects developed around it, is an important facet of the work. The conceptual meaning of the art is what is thoroughly thought out by the artist, whereas the visual embodiment of the idea usually follows the "Irrational Impulses". He thinks about everything: "about the language of form, visual codes, music in color, image perception, free-elements isolated from the compound, interrelation of an eye, mind and soul, about the art of present and future... ". In this thoughts he comes back to "the surface and the mysterious feeling when unveiling the unseen, which [for him] means the victory over the nihilism"<sup>19</sup>. This is how the graphic picture becomes a vehicle for him to reach and visualize the unreachable, where his delicate skills and profound mastery of execution are demonstrated (ill. 22).

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<sup>19</sup>Kh. Khabuliani, *meduza manhetenze*, (The jellyfish on the Manhattan)

<http://indigo.com.ge/articles/inspiration/meduza-manhetenze>; 2:27AM. (in Georgian)

**Lado Pochkhua** is the graduate of Tbilisi State Academy of Art the department of graphic art. He moved to New York in the age of 34. Lado is the artist, who makes art, knows well the history and the contemporary music, reads a lot and is engaged in analyzing and writing. His Postmodern thinking finds parallels with the French philosopher and novelist Jean D'Ormesson. His *The Glory of the Empire* is the rich and absorbing history of an extraordinary empire, at one point a rival to Rome. Jean d'Ormesson goes into the daily life of the Empire, its popular customs, and its contribution to the arts and the sciences, which, as he demonstrates, exercised an influence on the world as a whole, from the East to the West, and whose repercussions are still felt today. But it is all fiction, a thought experiment worthy of Jorge Luis Borges, and in the end *The Glory of the Empire* emerges as a great shimmering mirage, filling us with wonder even as it makes us wonder at the fugitive nature of power and the meaning of history itself.<sup>20</sup> Another parallel with David Willson and his "Museum of Jurassic Technology" can be found here in terms of the duality and synthesis of the invented and real, which is a general feature of Postmodern era. Wilson, similarly to Jean D'Ormesson, thinks that the art is where the simulacra itself builds up the reality and where "It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality"<sup>21</sup>.

In Lado Pochkhua's art one will encounter with nobles, which never existed, invented personalities, which look like the real ones. As typical to Postmodernism, the narrative in Lado's works is invented (ill.23). It guides you through the irritating path, on the verge of real and unreal, true and invented, contemporary and historical, which altogether build up

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<sup>20</sup> About the Glory of the Empire, <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/531322/the-glory-of-the-empire-by-jean-dormesson/9781590179659/>; 10:55PM.

<sup>21</sup> J. Baudrillard, Selected Writings (Mark Poster's Edition), [http://faculty.humanities.uci.edu/poster/books/Baudrillard,%20Jean%20-%20Selected%20Writings\\_ok.pdf](http://faculty.humanities.uci.edu/poster/books/Baudrillard,%20Jean%20-%20Selected%20Writings_ok.pdf), p. 166.

the labyrinths of contemporary art. The use of various techniques and media like the drawing, painting, print, collage or the photo compositions make his art more complex in terms of visual expressions.

Lado Pochkhua is an analytical thinker, whom does not satisfy the mimetic imitation of the world or the recreation of Modernist canvases transformed in a new context. On the contrary, his art reflects history, literature and art transformed through the prism of the artistic vision.

Lado is the refugee from Sokhumi. After leaving Abkhazia, he lived in the IDP settlement in Tskneti. The entire turmoil of the 1990-s Georgia and the difficulties connected with the life as an IDP in Tskneti, all are captured in his photos. Lado exhibited these photos in 2013 in the National Gallery in Tbilisi. This is the story describing the IDP life seen from inside, through the prism of an artists. Themes around refugees are very popular and acute in today's world, in light of which Lado's documental and artistic photo-world becomes even more compelling.

Lado Pochkhua admires the art of the famous contemporary artist Anish Kapoor. Therefore in his art objects we often come across the use of Anish's black color<sup>22</sup>, or more particularly, the Stuart Semple black.

Black is the symbol of colorlessness used by Lado Pochkhua to recreate the "Negative Space", on which the artistic images are placed against the black background and this "no color" is what acts as an element of shaping the forms. On one of Lado's compositions we see Stuart Semple black, upon which the sculpture of Antonio Canova is imprinted (ill.24).

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<sup>22</sup> Vanatablack is a black color developed with Nanotechnologies, which nobody can buy or apply other than Anish Kapoor. As an alternative Stuart Semple from UK developed the acryl paint "Black 2.0", which is the most pigmented, mattest, flattest black in the world, which could be bought by everyone except Kapoor.

The details are further embellished by the artist by hand. The graphic details are added to the abstracted forms. This altogether create a new artistic realm, where the many features like replication, vagueness and multiple reality etc. typical to Postmodernism can be detected.

We see the imprint of Murilio's saints on another his work. Its details are attached on the rectangular wide wooden frame. This is how the impression of three-dimension are achieved, which in turn, often happens with the contemporary art and new technologies. In Lado's art however, this effect is achieved without the use of video technologies. Thus, By applying different media and offering a conceptual analyses, in which there is seemingly nothing clear, the artist reflects on multilingualism of the contemporary art and open up a space for unrestricted thinking and debate.

Amongst the Georgian emigrant artist in USA are other artists, who quite differ from the the artists discussed above. Amongst these are: **David Datuna, Mark Poliakov and Temur Sulukhia (Temos Pear).**

The contemporary visual artist **David Datuna** is amongst the most successful emigrant artists, who managed to build a prosperous career soon after he arrived in USA. The artist created his own original language. He makes compositions and collages using lenses and eyeglasses. This extraordinary medium evokes astonishment and admiration in spectators. However, the messages encoded in these works are often even more important. The artist is interested in overall problems actual in the global contexts. He is a political artist. The themes in his art are extremely acute, which include specific political, ecological, health-related and economic problems. David uses the mixed media, computer technologies and digital reproductions in his works. They often feature flags of different countries. He often creates portraits. These art pieces are frequently used in his performances.

In 2016 David Datuna presented the performance “Make America Stronger Together” (ill. 25) in which the USA flag with the pictures and sculptures attached, was installed on a big track. The hybrid of campaign slogans of Donald Trump - “Make America” and Hilary Clinton – “Strong together” have been written on the flag. The first stop of the track was in the New York City in front of the Trump tower. The plastic hands with bagging gestures came out of the flag. The protruding hands formed the inscriptions: SOS on one side and ONE on the other. When put together, these words emphasize the idea of unity, which is proposed by the artist as a solution to the existing problems.

In 2017 David Datuna held the performance at the Union Square named “This Too Shall Pass”, which was addressed against Donald Trump. He assembled the inscription “Trump” with ice cubes, which shortly melted away metaphorically alluding and at some stage bearing the warning about the temporary nature, or ephemerality of everything in this world.

The particular artist often addresses the ecological and health problems. He dedicated the special work “The Life Award” to the problem of C hepatitis and its combating challenges in Georgia. His installation had the shape of a heart made of a specific media – lenses, behind which the photo collage assembled with the portraits of people who survived the disease thanks to the Gilead supported program were placed. The multidimensional narrative, where the value of a human and the importance of the public and institutional support for health issues is emphasized. Furthermore, he is known for his active charity activities. David gives back the income generated from his works to the “Life Foundation” to help people fighting with cancer.

**Mark Polyakov** is a graphic artist. His art is marked by the extraordinary, mystic, surrealist images, in which mythology and religious subject-matter is the main source for inspiration (ill. 26). Metaphoric thinking, signs and symbols on the surfaces combined with the exquisite graphic skills make Mark Polyakov an extraordinary artist. Soon after his arrival in USA, he moved away from the local art scene, as he encountered difficulties in finding his place within American contemporary art space. Thereafter Mark neither exhibits his works in the galleries, nor participates in the art projects. He only disseminates information about his art through the internet. He thinks that digital technologies and internet are the future, which will replace exhibition halls and the art market.

**Temur Sulukhia** is another refugee artist from Abkhazia, who emigrated to USA in 2009. His nickname – Temos Pear comes from his surname, which means pear in Megrelian language. The professional graphic artist, which still considers himself as such, began experimenting with photography after his arrival in USA. His photos are black-and-white and as the artist said in his interview with Ia Merkviladze, black-and-white colors penetrate and follow him throughout his life since he after the fall of Sokhumi, escaped and passed over the Svanetian Mountains by foot. “When we were already on the safe side, I looked in the mirror and I saw myself being completely black – the dust and mud of all three days of travel were on my face .... and again my life was still black-and-white, when I lived in the shared IDP flats in *Temka* (the remote district in Tbilisi)”. Migration, homelessness of a refugee gives a nostalgic flavor to his photos (ill. 27, 28). “In Temur’s pictures dark elements prevail. It seems he intentionally avoids the clear depiction of objects. Sometimes it is hard to identify if a picture is taken during the day or nighttime. Such play with light and shadow

gives more intense emotional flavour to the pictures, transcending us in-between the real and illusive worlds”<sup>23</sup>

The colorful kaleidoscope of Georgian emigrant artist in USA perfectly copes with the complex artistic landscape of American contemporary art. Their art falls in line with the space where “painting, sculpture, photography, installation, cinema, video, performance, digital art and works, which do not belong to any of these categories” (Ketevan Shavgulidze) coexists. Their challenges and the diversity of problems often are in line with those themes addressed by the contemporary American artists. The range of these problems is extremely wide: Feminism, gender related themes, sexual and national minorities, gender fluid identities, migration, refugee themes, political, social problems, a place and a role of cultural past, humans and nature, internal duality of a person, unconscious processes are amongst them. The modes for their visualization and artistic expression are similarly plural including: replica, commentary, quotation, metaphor, reproduction and the multilayered texts, synthesis of invented and authentic, illusive and real, past and present, which altogether give us more possibility for diverse interpretation, flexible identification, where nothing is precise and the space is wide open for subjective reading.

As already mentioned above, Georgian emigrants artist naturally merge with the American art scene. And in this process of integrations there are specific features connected with Georgia and their Georgian origins discussed in the introduction above. For the Postmodern culture, though the issue of “foreign” national forms is not actual any more. Furthermore, the art of Georgian emigrant artists in USA is international and global in terms of their visual and formal aspects, however simultaneously they encode their identity, experiences, values,

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<sup>23</sup> I. Merkviladze, *Temur Sulukhias “achrdilebis kvaldakval”* (Tracing back Temur Sukukhia’s ghosts), <http://blogs.netgazeti.ge/2018/05/10/Temur-sulukhias-aChrdile/>; 18:30. (in Georgian)

feelings, pain and trauma, which come from the territorial-historical context and cultural bounds, which in turn, often act as the sources for their thematic and emotional inspiration.