

PICTURE LANGUAGES

PHOTOGRAPHIC ART FROM GEORGIA

**Andro Eradze, Natela Grigalashvili, Lado Lomitashvili, Dina Oganova, Koka Ramishvili,
Mariam Sitchinava, Daro Sulakauri, Guram Tsibakhashvili, Beso Uznadze
Historical Insight: Dimitri Ermakov, Nino Jorjadze, Alexander Roinashvili**

Ausstellungsdauer: **22. September – 18. November 2018**

Eröffnung: **Freitag, 21. September 2018, 19 Uhr**

Presserundgang: **Freitag, 21. September 2018, 11 Uhr**

ANDRO ERADZE (*1993)

Andro Eradze lives and works in Tiflis. He began as an amateur photographer and went through several styles. After studying at the Center of Contemporary Art Tbilisi and several 'Artist in Residence' programmes (among others the Salzburg Summer Academy 2015 and Juist 2016) he also works with video film and installations. His earliest works explore the boundaries and overlapping between photography and sculpture. His works have been published in books and magazines, among them *Georgian Photography 1955–2012* (published by Yuri Mechitov), *Indigo Magazine* and *Liberali* (both Tiflis) and *The History Maker* (Amsterdam). Eradze's art book *To all those untitled events* (2017) was presented at the Vienna Photo Book Festival 2017.

STATEMENT: URBAN METAPHYSICS & EPISODES OF POST SOVIET LIFE

I use photography, film and installation as a means of expression, experimentation and self-observation. These visual disciplines allow me to capture existing potentials and experiment with diverse languages for different subject matters. I am interested in recent history, traumas, memories, demystification of events or playing with social or economical counterpoints for understanding surroundings and environments. Documenting or recreating events enable me to keep the situations alive.

NATELA GRIGALASHVILI (*1965)

Her childhood dream was to be a camerawoman. Later as an artist, Natela Grigalashvili discovered photography. She familiarized herself with the camera in several studios; and has been freelancing since 1990. Grigalashvili participated in numerous exhibitions and art projects and became internationally known for her black and white series on Georgian village life – a lyrical homage to her childhood. In 2007, she received the Alexander Roinashvili Prize for her contribution to Georgian photography. Grigalashvili teaches photography at Tbilisi State University and Ilia State University. In addition, she realizes photo projects throughout Georgia. In 2014, she established a school for photography in Javakheti, in 2015 a second one in the Pankisi Valley and in 2017 a third one in the mountainous Adjara.

STATEMENT: VILLAGE OF THE MICE

'Tagveti' means 'village of the mice' and it is the place where I was born and raised. When I mention the name, it puts a smile on people's faces and they always ask 'Are

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there many mice in your village?’ These photos are my memories about my village as it used to be. I left the village and moved to the capital when I was 16. Two years later I became interested in photography and started photographing with a borrowed camera and since then I’ve been photographing my village (...) In the beginning the only reason I was photographing my village was to have photos of the people and places that I missed. As the years went by Tagveti changed because of the economical difficulties and the people started leaving. My village slowly became empty. There are a few families living there. Most of the people that I knew and the people that are in my photos are dead or have moved. The houses where my neighbors and my relatives used to live and where I spent my childhood playing are now ruins. I’ve been living in the city for more than 30 years and have continued to photograph my village. Despite the fact that everything I have is in the city, I still regard that my home is back there, in the village of the mice.

LADO LOMITASHVILI (*1994)

Lado Lomitashvili lives and works in Tbilisi. He graduated as an architect from the National Academy of the Arts, Tbilisi. He works as an architect as well as an artist. His artistic works are multifaceted: Lomitashvili works with drawings and photography, realizes sculptures, installations and art books. His work is characterised by architecture-like installations in spaces as well as photography based on mathematical formulas that play with dimension and perspective. In the past years, his works have been seen in individual and group exhibitions in Georgia and abroad.

STATEMENT: COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE STONES

In some societies, a family’s totem is the object which they regard as a special symbol and which they believe has spiritual significance. The energy of the totem speaks to you in some way that is relevant to your own personality or circumstance in life.

“Collaboration between the Stones” is a gathering of twelve photographs of stones which I collected nearby the Tbilisi sea. The mysterious stone figures can be seen as markings in a public area which is also a private zone. These sculptural forms are the signs that someone was already here and can come back again. In spite of similarities in totems, all of them have a different mood and power. While I was capturing the images sometimes I had a feeling that I would be injured by someone’s arrow. I had a feeling that I was touching someone’s life and was going into their private area.

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DINA OGANOVA (*1987)

Dina Oganova completed a Yuri Mechitov Photography Workshop in 2006 and finished her Economics degree in 2009. She works as a freelance documentary photographer predominantly on long-term projects in Georgia and the former Soviet Union. Her works are personal, often showing people that seem to be waiting for something. In 2012, she received a grant from the Open Society Foundation to document issues on social and human rights. In 2013 she was a participant of the *Joop Swaart Masterclass* in Amsterdam and in 2017 she won the *EU Prize for Journalism* for best documentary photo. Her works have been exhibited internationally in numerous countries. Her hand crafted photo book, *My Place*, on the younger Georgian generation can be found among other places, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum New York.

STATEMENT: MY PLACE

This work is about the first generation of youth that was born in the last years of the Soviet Union and who were raised in an independent Georgia. Seen as a crossroads of two centuries, this is the generation that fights environments which try to limit them and one which seeks for freedom – for the real freedom. All were photographed in their own rooms and talking about themselves. I plan to come back to them every 10 years and see how the life of the characters will change.

STATEMENT: FROZEN WAVES

My whole childhood I used to hear how boys and men kidnapped girls to marry. Sometimes the kidnapped girls didn't know who would become their future husbands. They had no choice and they had to stay whether they wanted to or not. As a girl, it was a big shame to come back home after the kidnapping. Everybody thought that they were not virgins anymore: Who would marry disgraced girls? Traditionally the family would not have them back as they had new 'owners'. This ritual was normal practice in 1990's Georgia and nobody even protested. When I grew up, I thought it was over, but at some point I realized that it's still happening.

KOKA RAMISHVILI (*1956)

Koka Ramishvili has lived and worked in Geneva since 2000 and yet he is still considered a key figure of contemporary Georgian Art. Born in Tbilisi, he is one of the 1993 co-founders of the Center of Contemporary Art (CCA) in Tbilisi and later was an initiator of VISLAB and the magazine *Signal*. His works, predominantly video, photography and painting, can be seen in the Tate Modern London, the Musée d'art modern et contemporain (MAMCO) Geneva, Musée des Beaux-Arts Nantes, Museum Folkwang Essen or COBRA Museum

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Amsterdam and can also be found in international collections such as Pictet & Cie, M KHA Contemporary Art Museum Antwerp, the Funds of Contemporary Art (FMAC) and Centre de la Photographie, Geneva. In 2009, Ramishvili represented Georgia at the *Venice Biennial*.

STATEMENT

My interest belongs to the image and information behind the image. How does an image, as a container for information, migrate from one medium to another, from one context to another? Just how this migration affects the information of the image and image itself and how the image and information affect the discipline are of concern. This process helps me to present information through certain media and disciplines. On another hand the volume of information behind an image becomes more important and it becomes more visible.

MARIAM SITCHINAVA (*1989)

Mariam Sitchinava lives and works as a freelance photographer in Tbilisi. Her subjects are portraits and fashion; in both genres she conveys a noticeable passion for nature and womanhood. She is known for her sometimes romantic and sometimes mystical staging effects of models in pristine landscapes. Sitchinava began with photography in 2009 without any formal education. Already after eight months, she received her first photo job. Since then her images have been exhibited in numerous countries and published in magazines, fashion forums and other digital media. Also her first photo book *Me in You* (2015) is in international demand.

STATEMENT

Vivid, raw, natural essence. My passion is capturing the moments of feminine allure. The moment that cannot be re-created, it's stolen from history and stored on the grainy film. Nature gives us these moments, as long as we see and cherish them. With lights flickering softly, the breeze flows with graceful scents, the environment invites you to a very intimate affair. This affair has soft skin with a beaming color spectrum, blooming flowers and lavish landscapes. One's intimacy in the stillness of the universe. With a click of the finger, I'm borrowing that intimacy.

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DARO SULAKAURI (*1985)

Daro Sulakauri was born in the Caucasus region of Georgia and currently works and lives in Tbilisi. After obtaining a degree in cinematography in Tbilisi, she moved to New York to study photojournalism at the International Center of Photography (ICP). Before graduating in 2006, she was awarded the *John and Mary Phillips Scholarship* as well as being recognized by the *ICP Director's Fund Scholarship*. Her stories depict the social and political issues of the Caucasus. Sulakauri has won numerous awards for her photo projects, including a *Young Photographer in the Caucasus Award*, *Magnum Foundation*, the *LensCulture Visual Storytelling Award* and an *EU Prize for Journalism*. In 2017 she was a *Joop Swart Masterclass* participant; 2018 a *Reuters Grantee* and she is a *Canon Ambassador*. Her works can be seen in publications such as *National Geographic*, *Forbes*, *New York Times* and other international magazines.

STATEMENT: THE BLACK GOLD

Chiatura has the largest manganese reserve in Georgia. It was once a rich city with a great future, but after the collapse of the Soviet Union the town has suffered a depression: poor ecology, pollution and poverty. Open pit mined manganese causes an extremely poor urban ecology. The inhabitants' health is under permanent risk due to the polluted air. The only proper job in this town is to work in the mines. The working shift is 12–18 hours, 13 km deep in the ground for a monthly salary of approximately € 250. Most of the miners are from the villages that lay directly in the excavation zones: they are digging and exploding under their own homes. Georgian labor code does not oblige inspection of the working conditions of the mine workers. There have been several cases of miner deaths in the last couple of years, due to bad conditions, and working with equipment that has not been upgraded since installment, in the 1950's.

GURAM TSIBAKHASHVILI (*1960)

Fascinated by an exhibition of his countryman Yuri Mechitov, Guram Tsibakhashvili decided to concentrate on photography in 1982. His coverage of everyday life in Georgia spans the most critical periods of the last days and fall of the Soviet Union, the years of civil war in Georgia in the 1990s up to the millennium. As a photographer, the chemist is autodidact: he obtained his knowledge from books; besides Mechitov he names his role models to be Leonardo da Vinci, Paul Klee and Cy Twombly. For other series, Tsibakhashvili developed an experimental style: he combined photography with text, color and media and worked on paper, canvas or wood. Many of his works can be found today in collections of international art museums. From 1990 to 1994 he taught Theory of Photography at the National University in Tbilisi; he belongs to the co-founders of the

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Caucasian Center for Cultural Development (2002) and the Tbilisi Photography House (2007). Tsibakhashvili lives and works in Tbilisi.

STATEMENT

At the beginning of the 1980's as I began photographing, Georgia was still a part of the Soviet Union. As with so many of the photographers in the Soviet Union, photography was not my main profession. I am a chemist and did photography as a freelancer. Therefore I had no contracts or specifications and I could photograph what I found interesting. At that time, my photos were not printed in the press. With the end of the Soviet Union in the 1990's, Georgia became an independent country and the press also became independent. I began working as a press photographer and my photos gained a new function: They stirred the interest of the publishers. Images without the cosmetic reality of the 1980's were being shown. I continued to photograph what for Georgia was a very difficult period in the 1990's. I regard these pictures as well as those in the 1980's as my diary. At that time I photographed with Soviet black and white film material. This gave a special "quality" and the photos gained a more appearance and feel of the Soviet Union. Today I use these photos as work material for various conceptual series and they have been published in several books. My photos are also used as study material for the period in Georgia before and after the Soviet Union.

BESO UZNADZE (*1968)

Known for his documentary portraits and multi-layered abstractions of flora and body studies the Georgian Beso Uznadze lived and worked in London between 2000 and 2017. Since then he has been living in Tbilisi. In his pictures he narrates stories from everyday life, about occurrences and emotions that everyone knows: melancholy, luck, love, separation, sex, death, fear. His photos are often portraits of friends or people that he met when he visited Georgia, some are Georgians who live in London. Uznadze's series often bear ordinary and self-explanatory names such as *In the Mood for Love*, *2B* or *Tbilisi Portraits* and have been frequently exhibited and published. Since 2015, Uznadze began using digital image processing and other photographic materials.

STATEMENT: TBILISI PORTRAITS

I left Georgia in 2000 to pursue photography. Nearly 20 years after the fall of the Soviet bloc, life was still hard in Georgia: Electricity and running water were unreliable and the ongoing territorial conflict lead to battles. Tbilisi Portraits depicts Georgians in London

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and Tbilisi. The struggle took its toll on Georgians, and, on visits home, I was struck by the changes it had on my friends and family. Their faces had aged in the time since I had lived there, in a way that I had not. I started the subject in Tbilisi in 2007. In 2008, conflict broke out between Georgia and Russia. The anxiety this caused Georgians in London, as they waited for news, was also evident in their faces so I started to photograph Georgians in London. Since I had regularly visited home, I considered myself a messenger, taking news of the outside back to Georgia and sharing images of Georgia with the outside world. I tried to show the humor and joy of Georgian life, as well as its hardships. I returned to Georgia in 2017.

STATEMENT: DELUSION

The series 'Delusion' is a result of working more abstract with digital formats: creating multiple layers of different exposures of nude studies brought into one composition.

HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHIES:

DIMITRI ERMAKOV (1846–1916)

Dimitri Ermakov, Russian photographer, collector and entrepreneur was born in Tiflis in 1846. His father was the Italian architect Lodovico Cambiaggio, his mother was a Russian. Her second marriage was to a Russian named Ermakov, this name was taken by her son. Dimitri Ermakov began his career as a photographer in 1860. He undertook extensive journeys for his photos, including the Caucasus, Turkey and Iran. These trips produced large photo documentations of the history, ethnography, landscape, and everyday culture of the regions portrayed. Ermakov's images were internationally exhibited, awarded with many prizes and great recognition. So much so that the Persian Shah invited him to be his personal photographer. He participated in the Russian–Turkish War (1877–78) as a military photographer. From 1880 Ermakov ran a photography studio from Tbilisi while still continuing his travels. His photographic estate can be found in the Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi.

NINO JORJADZE (1884–1968)

With her unusual photo series, the enthusiastic amateur photographer Nino Jorjadze has found a special place in the history of Georgia as the first female photographer. After her studies at the Sorbonne in Paris, Jorjadze volunteered for the International Red Cross at the beginning of the First World War. As a nurse, she took care of wounded soldiers at the same time documenting war events happening around her in diaries and with the camera. Because of her courage, she received the Order of St. George, the second Russian ever to receive it. Her photo chronicle of the fighting from 1914–1917 can be found today in the Georgian Museum of Photography in Tiflis.

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ALEXANDER ROINASHVILI (1846–1898)

He is considered the first Georgian photographer and has achieved a central place in Georgian education of photography: Alexander Roinashvili opened his own photo studio in 1875, took portraits of personalities and attractions, landscapes and people in their everyday life. Additionally, he was engaged in expanding cultural life. He supported the theatre, libraries and founded schools, opened a boarding school, giving the students lessons in photography for free. And he made this medium mobile with the first private traveling exhibitions of Caucasus antiquities and stereoscopic pictures of landscapes.

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