

Georgian Emigrant Artists in the Complex Landscape of Contemporary Art World

Mzia Chikhradze*, Ketevan Shavgulidze*, Mariam Shergelashvili*

* Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Art History and Theory, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia

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ABSTRACT. To analyze and evaluate the contemporary Georgian art processes it is essential for study the art of Georgian emigrant artists and rethink their role in the process of integration of Georgia to the west. The study generalizes the problems of emigration and discusses the reason-result issues of integration of Georgian contemporary artists living and working in the west, on the example of the formation of their personal and artistic identity. Discussing the emigrant artists, the specific contemporary art propositions and postmodernist concepts are presented. In that scope, the meaning of national identity is clearly formed in global context of the 21st century. In the international cultural processes the role of Georgian emigrant artists is significant as they play an essential role in the integration processes with the west and simultaneously they enrich the local art space with western artistic values. The study determines how organically the emigrant Georgian artists merge with the western environment; what their conscious attitude towards their national art tradition is; how specifically – “Georgian” their art is presented in the condition of cultural integration. Also, the role of Georgian emigrant artists in the history of contemporary art is defined, that is an attempt to rethink and evaluate the post-soviet period of Georgian contemporary history in the terms of art and culture. The research shows the duality of the emigrant artists, their invisible „other side“, their living within double mentality, though how smoothly they manage to integrate into the complex landscape of the western contemporary art world. © 2019 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Key words: contemporary art, post-modernism, emigrant artists

Leading Cultural Centers in the World and Georgian Emigrant Contemporary Artists

The 1990's was the key period of artists' migration from Georgia to the western countries. The key motivators of this process were: economic reasons, broadening the creative or cognitive horizon, mastering the art trade, desire to integrate with modern western art space and etc. The professional

career of the migrated artists is taking its hold in the west and their art becomes the part of the western art, but they are also among those who create the contemporary Georgian art. Moreover, assessment of the contemporary Georgian art will be incomplete without taking their input into account. It should be noted that in this assessment not only their creative output but their values, their attitudes, worldview and social experience are important as well.

To study the life and works of Georgian artists living abroad, a TSU scientific team created a list of the countries that host the most Georgian artists. This group also created a list of the migrant artists. Members of the team travelled to Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the USA, where they met Georgian artists and got acquainted with their life and their works. During the first research trip to Europe, the scientific team members interviewed 31 respondents, most of them (18) live in Germany, 9 of them are located in Austria, and 4 artists live in Switzerland. Age of the interviewed artists varies in between 25-64. In Europe, they cooperate with such famous galleries as Micky Schubert, Hausler Contemporary, Sprueth Magers, Kaufmann Repetto, Previn – Kazakbaev gallery, Petra Rinck Gallery, Gallery Eva Meyer are. Several Georgian emigrant artists gained significant international fame (three respondents participated on Venice Biennale, part of the artists cooperated with such famous exhibition spaces as Kunsthalle Wien, Documenta, MoMa Projects, Vienna Secession, Tate Modern, Lost Gallery, Hamburger Bahnhof are). Some of the artists are also working with Georgian galleries: Popiashvili-Gvaberidze Window Project, Gallery Nectar, MoMa Tbilisi, TBS Gallery, Baia Gallery, Gala Gallery, Gallery Container. On the next stage of the project, 32 respondents were interviewed in the USA. The youngest respondent is 27 and the oldest - 70. The main success indicator of Georgian artists living in the USA is their active cooperation with internationally famous galleries and art projects: Sotheby's Auction, Venice Biennial, Florence Biennial, Chinese Biennial and also important exhibition spaces: Brooklyn Museum, Guggenheim Museum, Ningbo Contemporary Art Center, Saatchi Gallery, Simone Subal Gallery, etc. The interviews and discussions with emigrant Georgian artists became the main source of information to answer the key questions of this research: what were the reasons for leaving Georgia and in which conditions they did it, how did they get a foothold

in the foreign countries, how does the process of their integration in the western society take place, what connections do they make with the local artistic forces and what connections do they retain with Georgian artistic circles, how much do they perceive their art as the part of Georgian art, how do they assess the current art processes and integration of Georgia into the world art field?

As noted above, most of Georgian emigrant artists are located in the USA (New York) and Germany (Berlin, Dusseldorf). New York and Berlin are leading cultural centers in the USA and Europe respectively, where the modern art is marked with international global context. The works presented on New York art scene have their own distinct features. Firstly, it is a combination of output of artists of different national background, where the concept of national art disappears, dissolves in multiple global problems and it gains only a local context. In the integrated art space of New York, the national is underlined only when it serves as a foundation for artistic problems common to the global social political or philosophical contexts. Berlin is also an internationally open space, where the destruction of the wall resulted in the flourishing Berlin art scene; a free and open space emerged, where exchange of ideas, free contacts and collaboration excludes the type of establishment that exists for example in London or New York. The experimental field developed in Berlin is characterized by conceptual openness and interest in innovations, which attracts artists and results in the high concentration of creative energy (many artists in Berlin follow the double home concept).

In this kind of global, international world – where the stylistic imperative doesn't exist (Arthur Danto) [1], the art has no specifically identified face, there is no special rule to produce art and only its philosophical dimension can determine its attribution. The second specific feature of contemporary art emerges – multiplicity and diversity of postmodernism. Hence, the questions

arise: where, in this postmodern or post postmodern cultural clutter can one place the role of contemporary artists who emigrated from post-soviet Georgia; where and how did they find their place on the western art map; how has their absolutely divergent historical or personal experiences been transformed and precipitated (that merges with the latest Georgian political, historical or social situations); how did they manage to liberate themselves from the Soviet clichés that existed in their memories or were genetically transferred to them; and if their art has become the organic or original part of the western culture.

Georgian artists are firstly characterized as diverse. They radically differ not only from each other, but they offer different approaches, media and form creation within their own art. Nonetheless, two main themes can be pointed out: in one case, we see direct continuation of the modernist line, via the transformation of the modernist esthetics and formal side of the art, in the other case, we find completely the opposite tendency, when the historic narrative already ended and the culture has transferred into a new postmodern culture.

Diverse kaleidoscope of the migrated Georgian artists who live and work in the USA and Germany blend smoothly in the complex landscape of contemporary art. Their art crosses the space where the painting sculpture, photography, installations, cinema, video, performance, internet art and the art works, that do not belong to any specified category, coexist. The diversity of their problems is coherent with the themes that contemporary artists struggle with. The scope of these problems is huge: the themes of gender and sexual and ethnic minorities, fluid identities, displacement, political and social problems; cultural past and place, human and nature interactions, individual duality, hidden issues of subconscious. Their visual and cultural expressed forms are plural, where replica, comment, citation, metaphor, reproduction, textual multilateralism, invented and real, illusions and

reality, past and present combination result in dissolution of perception boundaries, where nothing is defined and the space is wide open for subjective reading.

National form which is alien for postmodernist culture is erased in the works of Georgian artists too. From a visual-formal perspective their art is international and global; however, experience, values, emotions, pain and even trauma are coded in their visual-artistic images linked to their territorial-historical and cultural bonds, which often defines the thematic or emotional inspirations of their art.

Invisible “Other Side”

Most of the interviewed artists have lived abroad for years; however, they still feel as a part of the Georgian art space. The artists who migrated to Europe talk about duality, about living experiences within double mentality, the invisible „other side“ for the others, which is continuously with them and often becomes the source of inspiration. The artists seem to exist in two dimensions at the same time. Almost all of them acknowledge the impact of Georgian trace in their art, however, in their view, this is a hard to grasp, shredded, hidden context, which is just a part and not the entire. Their integrity is divided in two parts, their personality – into two is... In this context, one of the paradigm issues of postmodernism is interesting, which defines an individual not as static, fixed structure, but as an open source, the so-called open identity.

It is clear that a stable identity becomes fragmented, multilevel, contradictive and unlimited. It is discussed in close connection with the other, alien; it could be different culture, people or the values. Thus, it happens the projection of others identity, which forms a new, open identity. Assimilation of new in this multicultural world is an infinite and constant process. Self-identification orients change constantly. No permanent identity exists. In the aspect of postmodernism, it is a dynamic, heterogeneous, fragmented source, which

is composed of not one but many, often contradictory identities. The respondents acknowledge that completely unified, accomplished, secure and whole identity is a fantasy. The art of the respondents is a hybrid of different codes, structures and fragments that are woven from wails, citations creating a new language. In this context, it should be noted that one of the respondents talks about the “cross-breeding” of cultures. Most of them positively assess the integration process and see perspective of interesting development. It means not only borrowing fragments (such as, wrapping up your art in your Georgian identity or culture), but also a stylistic code, that represents the form of thinking or tradition. In the play of cultural codes and languages, none are given the advantage. In the art of majority, just like in a postmodernist space, where the war against any kind of a discourse is announced, two different discourses coexist and develop simultaneously: two texts, two codes, two languages, two homes...

Collage of Cultural Semiotic Codes

Collaging, as the demonstration of cultural polycentrism manifests itself in the works of Georgian artists working abroad. Their works, as visual signs of specific time and environment, clearly reflect the features of postmodernism. They are understood as collage of cultural semiotic codes or as a structure of citations organized according to collage principle interplay of which creates the polyphonic semantic field. As postmodernism is defined by the coexistence of ideological and genetic contradictions, their art works reflect the eagerness to work with different medias and forms, creating complex social-conceptual images in the same way.

The interviewed artists, as already mentioned, work with completely different media – film, photography, graphics, collage, jewelry. Their field of interest is heterogeneous and it includes practical, as well as theoretical discourse. While

some of them are interested in technical experiments, design and social projects, others are interested in diverse and current topics, such as space and object interaction, communication and language issues, children problems, importance of matriarchy and others. The processes that happen within art are understood by them as absurd, chaotic, mixed, fragmented and unpredictable, but on the other hand interesting and complex: a kind of a floating condition, where nothing is well-defined. This heterogeneous and free, communication-oriented culture speaks in the language of new signs. Hybrid disciplines and the development of various approaches are very obvious. Promotion of multidisciplinary approaches and theoretical discourses, new technologies, the impact of internet, computer visualization and easy access to information on art, which, in their view, significantly changes the world vision and creates a complex system of paraphrasing, associational indications and allusions.

It is noteworthy that some of the interviewed artists are considering to implement their plans in Georgia, they want to carry out projects, establish art platforms, hold exhibitions and teach in Georgia. It is notable, however, that the part of the artists focus on the searching process and not on specific projects, when talking about their future plans. Instead of exhibitions, they are actively talking about research projects or continuing their study. It must be noted that most of them work simultaneously on several projects. Their majority do not have a specific plan or do not plan for a long term.

Concept of Labyrinth

When discussing Georgian artists in the postmodern paradigm, the answer of one of the respondents is of particular interest, as it clearly describes the processes in contemporary art.

In postmodernism, classical labyrinths are confronted by the rhizomorphic labyrinth that gives

birth to infinite values. Traveling through it resembles wandering in the infinite labyrinth of the infinite possibilities of the universe. There is no central topos that determines the movement vector. Movement, moving is the only permanent condition.

It is noteworthy that the main characteristics of postmodern culture, the decentralization, discretion, and demolition of the hierarchical structures, can be identified in the responses of Georgian artists. In terms of their art, the above-mentioned labyrinth-rhizome, or rhizomorphic labyrinth concept is important, which in its structure is based on the principles of formless space organization and anti-hierarchical principles. The principle of rhizomatic pluralism denies the existence of one axis that marks integrity. There is no section in the rhizome, which will be considered

as a root or an axis for the other or be in any meta position with it. All of them equally belong to the multiplicity, which is not connected to the unity. The rhizome is heterogeneous: each dot is connected to the other in a way that they themselves are not fixed. The rhizome does not fit into boundaries, you can identify its coordinates and understand its development trajectory. "The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be", but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and... and... and..." This conjunction carries enough forces to shake and uproot the verb "to be." [2]

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ხელოვნების ისტორია

ქართველი ემიგრანტი ხელოვანები თანამედროვე ხელოვნების მრავალფეროვან სამყაროში

მ. ჩიხრაძე*, ე. შავგულიძე*, მ. შერგელაშვილი*

** ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახ. თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, ჰუმანიტარულ მეცნიერებათა ფაკულტეტი, ხელოვნების ისტორიისა და თეორიის ინსტიტუტი, თბილისი, საქართველო*

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის რ. გორდეზიანის მიერ)

თანამედროვე ქართული სახელოვნებო პროცესების შესაფასებლად და გასაანალიზებლად უმნიშვნელოვანესია საქართველოს ფარგლებს გარეთ მოღვაწე შემოქმედთა შესწავლა და მათი როლის ხელახალი გააზრება საქართველოს დასავლეთთან ინტეგრაციის პროცესში. ნაშრომში განზოგადებულია ემიგრაციის პრობლემატიკა და განხილულია ინტეგრაციის მიზეზ-შედეგობრივი საკითხები დასავლეთში მოღვაწე ხელოვანთა შემოქმედების, მათი პიროვნული და შემოქმედებითი იდენტობის ფორმირების მაგალითზე. აღნიშნული საკითხი აქტუალურია იმდენად, რამდენადაც არ არსებობს სისტემური კვლევა ქართველი ემიგრანტი ხელოვანების

შემოქმედებაზე როგორც ქართულ, ისე საერთაშორისო სახელოვნებო სამეცნიერო წრეებში. ემიგრანტი ხელოვანების შესახებ მსჯელობისას წარმოდგენილია თანამედროვე ხელოვნების სახასიათო თეორიები, პოსტმოდერნისტული კონცეფციები, რომელთა ფარგლებშიც ნათლად იკვეთება ეროვნული იდენტობის საკითხის მნიშვნელობა და რაობა XXI საუკუნის გლობალურ კონტექსტში. ამ საერთაშორისო კულტურულ პროცესში ქართველი ემიგრანტი ხელოვანების როლი ნიშანდობლივია იმდენად, რამდენადაც ისინი მნიშვნელოვან როლს თამაშობენ დასავლეთთან კულტურული ინტეგრაციის თვალსაზრისით და ამავდროულად, ამდიდრებენ ლოკალურ სახელოვნებო სივრცეს განსხვავებული, დასავლეთიდან შემოსული მხატვრული ღირებულებებით. კვლევის შედეგად პასუხი გაეცა კითხვებს: რამდენად ორგანულად ერწყმიან საქართველოდან იმიგრირებული ხელოვანნი დასავლურ გარემოს, როგორია მათი ცნობიერი დამოკიდებულება ქართული მხატვრული ტრადიციის მიმართ; რამდენად სპეციფიკურად – “ქართულად” წარმოჩინდება მათი ხელოვნება ასეთი კულტურული ინტეგრაციის პირობებში. გამოიკვეთა ემიგრანტ ხელოვანთა როლი ქართული თანამედროვე ხელოვნების ისტორიაში, ყოველივე ეს კი მცდელობაა ხელახლა გავიაზროთ და შევაფასოთ საქართველოს უახლესი ისტორიის პოსტსაბჭოთა პერიოდი თავისი ხელოვნებითა და კულტურით. კვლევაში ნაჩვენებია ის პიროვნული გაორება, რაც ემიგრანტ ხელოვანებში იჩენს თავს და თანაც, მათი ორგანული შერწყმა იმ რთულ პროცესებთან, რაც დასავლური თანამედროვე ხელოვნების პოსტმოდერნისტულ სამყროს ახასიათებს.

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