



1. Koka Ramishvili
War from my Window
1991-1992

13 b/w photographs, 32 cm x 42 cm
Printed on Baryta Rag Hahnemuhle

The work of Koka Ramishvili entitled *War from my window* documents a complex page of the history of his native country, Georgia, or the days of the civil war of 1991–1992, a conflict that flared up shortly after the country’s proclamation of independence. After a series of mistakes made by the new government in domestic policies and regarding the national minorities, including the declaration of independence of the autonomous regions, President Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s attempt to start negotiations with the State committee for the state of emergency and obviously, Moscow’s loss of any control over the South Caucasus, South Ossetia and subsequently Abkhazia proclaimed their right to self-determination. Against this background, Moscow tried to impose a new candidate, Eduard Shevardnadze. Using criminal organizations and a compliant part of the intelligentsia, a civil war was provoked, that was extremely local in character. Shops, cafes and restaurants were in fact open; people sat in the bars literally a few meters away from the theater of war.

As the clashes raged throughout the country, Ramishvili filmed the fighting that was taking place in the center of Tbilisi from the window of his home. As far as it may seem paradoxical, in this work Ramishvili does not investigate the possibilities of setting down war through the photographic medium, or creating some kind of documentation or archive. At the same time, he does not even try to reveal and discuss the “heavy,” deeply dramatic aesthetics of the conflict. His photographic project rather shows war in a deliberately sober and contained format that, in turn, transmits with extreme precision the sensation of an eternal, transeunt moment. The landscape as a metaphor for the eternal, the title and the whiffs of smoke as transeunts. There is nothing here that has to do with nations, states or territories, but only the same landscape and twelve days of invisible war. A twelve-day meditation on a “landscape with war.” And the most singular thing is that the lens remains fixed, moving only slightly, now to the right, now to the left. A project that exploits in all its drama that meditative bond that has always been inherent in photography.

2. Babi Badalov
Visual poetry on textile
2015-2017

Series of collages on textile

In his work, the artist and poet Babi Badalov systematically criticizes the political regime set up in his native country, Azerbaijan, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. A regime that caused his exile and the amazing and complex existential path followed by the artist throughout these years. Born on the border between Azerbaijan and Iran, Badalov did his compulsory military service in the Soviet Army, after which he moved to Russia, finding himself at the center of the underground art scene in St. Petersburg. Upon his return to Azerbaijan in 2006, in fear of being persecuted and deported due to his being gay, the artist was forced to seek political asylum in Britain. Following his rejection, he settled in Paris. The linguistic consequences of his existence as a refugee, migrant, and artist struggling for freedom in the broadest sense of the term re-emerge in many of his works through a play of idioms and meanings. Badalov defines himself as a “victim of language,” because in these long years of forced wandering he has not found a language that has really become his own. Consequently,

his work is partly a reflection on the linguistic boundaries and the links between national identity and cultural integration, which is through a mixture of the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, of alliterations and onomatopoeia. His visual poetry also often takes on the form of a diary or poster, starting with the combination of linguistic analyses and figurative material, mostly featuring a political subtext. In this way, Badalov’s works create in their entirety a vast panorama of meanings and allusions behind which one glimpses much more than the personal history of an individual, with his difficulties and his conflicts, and that is, a whole set of problems of a supra-national dimension.

3. Aslan Gaisumov

Postcards

2015

Series of nine postcards
15 x 10 cm each

Postcards containing images of Grozny, the Chechen capital destroyed during the First War of 1994–1996, were issued during the brief rule of the Republic of Ichkeria that was abolished at the end of the Second War of 1999–2009. The postcards are historic artifacts forbidden in present day Chechnya. The artist sent nine postcards out of the ten he had, accomplishing the initial purpose they were made for.

4. Taus Makhacheva

Landscape

2013 – present

Set of objects, wood, different sizes
Courtesy of the artist

The work *Landscape* consists of a collection (still being expanded) of noses of the inhabitants of the northern Caucasus, made in wood in natural-size, scale 1:1. This series has its “prehistory”, or even several of them. In Dagestan in particular, various legends exist about men who have lost their noses. To prove their valor and recover their noses, they set off and perform heroic deeds. This subject not only refers back to initiation rites and the search for a virile principle at the heart of Dagestan’s cultural map, but also of something that typifies the majority of young Caucasian men, with their thirst for adventure and their taste for the most unbridled amusement. Another “prehistory” of this work is inextricably linked to the deep historical ties that the population of the Caucasus has with the surrounding mountainscape.¹ A direct testimony of this connection can for example be traced to the avar language, in which *megier* means both nose and mountain. At the same time, the mountains of the Caucasus have been an escape route since ancient times, a kind of natural hiding place protected from enemy incursions. In other words, a sacred territory around which many myths and legends have been woven during the course of history.

¹ Ju. Ju. Karpov, *Vzglyad na gorcev. Vzglyad s gor.*

5. Babi Badalov

Visual poetry

2013–2014

Series of collages

6. Aslan Gaisumov

Flag

2015–2016

Video HD, colour, sound
4 min 45 secs

With an absorbed look on her face a woman attaches a piece of white cloth to a pole, some already prepared white flags are placed on a wall not far from her. It is well known that the white flag symbolises armistice, that is, a provisory agreement that puts an end to the state of war and during which martial law is still in force.

7. Lusine Djanyan

Ires

2014

Oil on fabric
140 x 400 cm

Although Lusine Djanyan’s work involves various techniques and subjects, the theme of her work is always linked to what could be termed as the fundamental purpose and projection of contemporary art, namely the quest for and the discovery of a space of freedom. This project in particular investigates the possibilities of memory and imagination, historical events and their interpretation, and is devoted to a series of traumatic events in the history of the Armenian people, including the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict of the nineties, that also affected the artist’s own destiny. Djanyan remembers and recounts: “The *Ires* is a special cut of a precious fabric that is applied to the upper part of the blanket, called *Astar*. The *Astar* is a beautiful colorful cloth that covers the blanket completely, preserving it intact and clean. The blanket itself—which is called *Ērchan* —is made of pure sheep’s wool. According to tradition, the *Ērchan* was sewn by hand by the elder women of the family using large needles. As a child, I heard the story of an Armenian woman who fled from Azerbaijan, who had placed her most valuable possessions in the blanket to take them away with her.

At night, she wrapped her children in that same blanket, to prevent them from dying of cold. The blanket contained some valuables, some savings and photographs, old family photos. These same photographs were the most precious thing that this woman wanted to leave her children. The images of her loved ones and their faces remained intact under the *Ires*, the “face” of the blanket. The *Ērchan* thus preserves the memory of past generations and transmits it to the future ones. I wanted to make my memory visible. I took the photos of my ancestors and transferred them onto the cloth. For example, this tiny little child, sitting on his mother’s knees, is my grandfather. Here, however, we see him standing, surrounded by his own children (including my father). Only the folds of the fabric separate the past from the present.”

8. Taus Makhacheva

Delinking

2011

Photographic documentation
of a performance / Milan

The cultural archaeology and the authorial interpretations that follow is one of the key methods used by Taus Makhacheva in her work. In *Delinking* (a term that roughly means “demarcation” and that was proposed at the time by Madina V. Tlostanova and Walter D. Mignolo), Makhacheva turns to Oriental culture in general and, in particular, to the tradition of painting one’s body with henna, called mehndi. As a result, during the course of the performance, the face of the artist is covered with Indian, African, and Near Eastern arabesques. Once the arabesques have been drawn, the empty spaces between them are also filled with henna, until the face becomes a monochromatic stain in shades of dark green. Gradually the henna dries and the orange and brown traces that remain on the skin are visible for about a week, thus extending the performance over time. *Delinking* contains a whole series of cultural references that sink their roots into the most diverse places and at the same time, in the Western world are automatically associated with the ‘other’, with the East, or that is with an indissoluble link to the many contradictions of the current times. In this work, the very face of the artist be-

comes the space in which the contradictions of women’s position in the East (or that of Eastern women in the West), the sacrifice of oneself in the name of art, and the search for one’s own identity in a multipolar world are encountered.

8. Musay Gaivoronskiy

EXIT

2012

Video, Colour, Sound, 9.06 min
Courtesy of the artist

Of all the potential meanings contained in this work, the author of the performance emphasizes one in particular, that is the search for and the finding of one’s own personal path that must not be corrupted by extraneous authorities or socio-cultural norms imposed from on high. Nonetheless, this work remains open to all kinds of interpretation. As the action takes place, the protagonist passes through a whole life seen in a succession of stages. Freeing himself from the rope and in this way, “breaking the umbilical cord”, he receives a bunch of keys he must use on his own. However, he soon finds out that none of them corresponds to the door lock that an existential need demands he open. What is disturbing to the author is the illusionary nature of the choice that ends up by associating us to others, a choice already predetermined by one’s family, one’s circle of friends and acquaintances, by society ... “Banging your head against the wall” and realizing the mistakes made, the protagonist decides to risk everything and to draw on what’s left of his energy in order to achieve his purpose. In the space beyond the door that precedes his long-cherished goal, another, absolutely unknown reality opens up, of which he knows neither the laws nor the rules. And in just one gruff movement he destroys this world that is as fragile as crystal, a world that he had sought after and desired for so many years. When, on the other hand—the author believes—to find one’s own way, one just needs to rid oneself of the blinkers and the artificial barriers created by others.

Andrey Misiano