



## *New York Meets Tbilisi: Defining Otherness - Part 2*

**March 1 - April 5, 2020**

**Curated by Nina Mdivani**

**Opening: Sunday, March 1, 4-6 PM**

**Artists:** Anuk Beluga, Nino Biniashvili, Tim Foley, Rita Khachaturian, Tamara Kvesitadze, Dana Levy, Shiri Mordechay, Mariam Natroshvili & Detu Jincharadze, Andy Ralph, Giorgi Rodionov, Mikheil Sulakauri

Bringing the rare dialogue between contemporary Georgian and American art to New York, Kunstrraum is pleased to present *New York Meets Tbilisi: Defining Otherness - Part 2*. As the result of a year-long period of curatorial research as Kunstrraum's Curator-in-Residence, Nina Mdivani sets works by eight Georgian and four American artists into relation to facilitate a discussion on Otherness – and what it potentially means.



Compassion, sympathy, possessiveness, infatuation, mistrust, anger, rage, an ability or inability to relate— all of these affects derive either from a pull of belonging or a push towards a threatening annihilation of the self. At times, they are projected towards a single being, a distinct society, an architecture, languages or cultural iconography. The purpose of this two-part, Georgian-American exhibition is to explore and evoke emotions and perspectives that habitually arise when we confront the other on a micro or macro scale.

Two distinct cultures are set in conversation through the face-to-face encounters of Georgian and American artists. Distinct artistic narratives have been selected for the purpose of showing particular forms of Otherness— be it in the form of another person, a different ideology, a distinct sexual orientation or the alienating part of ourselves and our collective past. All trajectories around Otherness fall into the psychological dichotomy of affection or disaffection, and, in a wider sense, the feelings of desire and fear of death.

Highlighting strands of love and fear and their visual iterations in the contemporary art of Georgia and the United States, this exhibition is interested in developing a way of unifying disparate parts into one understandable whole, as if putting the shards of a broken mirror back together to admit the impossibilities of portrayal and the necessity to actively fill gaps towards a larger understanding. With prejudices and insecurities across these two countries, a picture of similarity can be seen— a modern conundrum filled with potency.

**Anuk Beluga** (1989) and **Tim Foley** (1991) both explore the idea of transformation as they search for a novel understanding of gender and its fluidity. By using religious symbolism in striking clay sculpture, Beluga merges the age-old Georgian tradition of venerating a departed soul on the 40<sup>th</sup> day of a person's passing with the same 40-day period it takes for hormonal changes to begin when transforming one's gender. Similarly, Foley confronts the idea of gravity and how both self-love and self-loathing could find expression whilst searching for one's gender.

**Tamara Kvesitadze** (1968), who represented Georgia at the 2011 Venice Biennale, works in sculpture and watercolor. Her light and deceptively simple drawings are rooted in mythology as well as surrealism. The women she portrays in her work are vulnerable. Their oversized or fragmented limbs symbolize inner conflicts with modernity and the difficulty of relating to one's surrounding environment. Kvesitadze illustrates Simone de Beauvoir's dictum that woman is the ultimate Other. In a similar vein, New York-based **Shiri Mordechay** (1978) imagines surreal scenes in her small-scale ink drawings to scrutinize the distance between her own personal feelings of empathy and madness and being an outcast. By experiencing the delusions of her characters on paper, Mordechay exorcises her own delusions in constructed, controlled and highly detailed settings.

**Dana Levy** (1975) and **Mikheil Sulakauri** (1996), two video artists, use specific environments in their anthropological explorations to confront the Otherness of places, acting as guides for the viewer. Levy's work in this exhibition was shot during her residency in the Everglades where



she saw how people learn to exist within the wildness, sometimes inviting it into their homes. Sulakauri uses religious syncretism originating from remote Georgia to illustrate what has been annihilated with the advancement of modernity. This video, showing an endless circulation of symbols throughout the centuries, combines the forgotten sounds of the past with memories, cultural codes, desires and attitudes.

**Nino Biniashvili, Andy Ralph, and Rita Khachaturian** all work with the multidimensional notion of identity. In her short animation film, Biniashvili (1980) examines what it means to be a woman in Georgia, Sweden and Israel: what would be expected of her within these different societies and what would it take to become less of the Other in these three cultures? Ralph (1982) uses the materials of his sculptures, such as polished bronze and sanded grout, as characters to allegorize his longing of communicating with the beloved people in his life— a yearning to understand the scope of our reality and to find new ways of relating to those classified as Others. Through her six oil portraits Khachaturian (1982) presents parts of her series *Fear* that act as her catalogue of human emotion and map out individual stories also addressing Otherness in her own environment.

**Giorgi Rodionov** and artistic duo of **Mariam Natroshvili & Detu Jincharadze** take a look at a larger context of Georgian society by addressing its Soviet past as well as its dynamic today. In his photographic project *My Parent's Don't Talk to Me*, Radionov (1990) attempts to uncover the Soviet legacy that often remains an unspoken secret in Georgia, haunting the country, but rarely addressed. Natroshvili (1987) & Jincharadze (1984) use text-based conceptual work to tell the narrative of countless migrants that came to the US, never to become fully at home.

Otherness is something that we encounter every day in one form or another. Art is here to show us how to overcome the possibly negative dissonance Otherness causes and to see how we all have the same pains, sorrows and delights. The exhibition seeks to implant a soothing understanding of our own demons and help to see the sameness inside a global society.

The opening of the exhibition will host *Skinship*, a performance by **Yu Rim Chung**.

On March 30, a panel will be held at Kunstraum centered around the representation of Eastern European art in the West. Confirmed guests of the panel include independent curator **Monika Fabijanska, Yulia Topchiy** (Assembly Room), and Boston-based Hungarian artist **Zsuzsanna Varga Szegedi**.

Image credit: Tim Foley, Gravity Collaboration (Photograph Dropped from Six Feet), 2019, Photograph, mirror, glass, 36 x 48 inches

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