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Rooms Studio and Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili

The Wet Material

February 5 - March 19, 2022

Opening on Saturday, February 5, 2022



ნედლი მასალა

მე თვით განგებამ, ხელოში მომცა მასალა სველი,
ნედლი მასალა, სულო ახალი, ხელოვნოებელი,
სხვა ნიადაგზე, მზის ნამტვერში ამონაკვეთი
და ზეციური ბალსამოსით ნაკურ-ნაწვეთი.
მე უსიცოცხლოს კიდევ შემწევს იმდენი ძალა,
რომ დამწვარ სულოში ჩავაქსოვო ნედლი მასალა,
და სისხლის ზვირთით ისე შევკრა და შევამზადო,
რომ შევქმნა ლექსი, ლექსი წმინდა, ლექსი უზადო.
მე შიგ ჩავაქსოვ: დაჭრილ მკერდის კვნესა-წვალეზას,
მაჯის ცხელ ცემას, სწულს სახის გაფერკმთალებას,
დამსხვრეულ იმედს, ყაღბ სიყვარულს, მუნჯ ზვაშიადსა,
დაგროვილ ვნების ქარტეხილის ქროლოვას დიადსა.
...მე ხელთ მიჭირავს მშვენიერი ნედლი მასალა,
თუ ამ წყეულმა, დაჭრილ გულმა ცოტა აცალა
მარიჯანი, 1921

Fate itself has handed me the wet material,
raw material, pristine, unstained,
on a different soil, carved out from the sun dust
and spray-sprinkled with a heavenly balm.
Although lifeless, still I hold enough strength,
to weave into the burnt soul the raw material,
assemble, foregather with the ripple of the blood current,
to compose a poem, a poem pure, a poem flawless.
I will weave into it: moaning-tormenting of the wounded chest,
hot pulsating of the wrist, paling of the ailing face,
broken hopes, fake romance, mute fervor,
magnificent blasts of turbulence from lust accumulating.
...In my hands I hold a lovely raw material,
only if this damned, wounded heart would let me

Marijan, 1921

translated by Ana Gzirishvili for Danarti Issue 15

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There must be something in the air that has brought the work of these three women together as a single exhibition. In fact, air and light are the first welcoming phenomena inside the two rooms of the gallery. Read as a multi-faceted Vitrage, the exhibition creates a meditative space where various mediums speak to each other. I wonder if the atmosphere is created due to the disposition of the objects and photographs creating this dialogue, or by the objects and photographs themselves ?

Wondering about this, as I walk down the streets of Tbilisi, I constantly stumble upon spontaneous arrangements of things. These unclassified objects that have not been named, labeled or systematized embody the ever-changing nature of this particular city, which has been transforming from one system to another for decades. It does not seem as though it is going to end, this constant state of mutation, I think to myself and I cannot remember how it ever started. The three women were born in this city too, more or less at the same time as I was.

Maybe this exhibition is about the strangeness of growing up in this city. Following a river and developing alongside it for centuries, Tbilisi seems to resemble a river itself - one can never walk into the same city twice. Nothing there seems to outlive a moment, yet everything seems to have been placed there for eternity. Its contemporary street decor is visually unstable and yet has an archaic nature. Space and imagery is not optimized or designed but rather grows chaotically and intuitively. Organic, vernacular, spontaneous and fluid, Tbilisi has set otherwise distinct practices of Rooms Studio (Nata Janberidze and Ketia Toloriaia) and Ketia Alexi-Meskhishvili up for a conversation here.

For her recent project, Georgian Ornament, shown at the Rencontres d'Arles, Alexi-Meskhishvili collected and photographed plastic bags used in tourist shops in Tbilisi. These particular bags have traditional Georgian motifs printed on them, which are usually found on byzantine basilicas. The original ornaments are meant to represent unity (braids), fertility (vines) and rebirth (suns) but printed on these plastic bags and distributed commercially, they lose context and become unresolved like Tbilisi itself.

Half of these images are photographed with an analog, large format camera while the other half are made camera-free. Here, the artist engages directly with analog, negative film, exposing the translucent bags on the film emulsion with finger lights, thus capturing the gesture of her hand, and the act of recording itself. They capture air and light in-between the layers, as if going back to what photography as a process inclined - light, and the hand-made click of the shutter.

A similar hand-made quality is present in the new series of objects exhibited by Rooms Studio. The pieces are of a transitional nature, reflecting traces of previous body of work yet, developing new experimental direction. The wet material echoes the improvisation-led nature of the works, underlying the importance of experimentation process. The new work is presented as a wet and a raw material itself, frozen in the moment of making. Some of these objects are continuation of Rooms Studio's ongoing street series. References from historic public space architecture in their previous work (Bus Stop and Historic Benches) evolve into exploration of un-authored utilitarian furniture found in Tbilisi streets. These incidental objects, assembled out of pure necessity with materials accessible on the spot define the focal observation point of Rooms Studio. Honesty and authenticity of these objects are inseparable elements of Tbilisi.

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In the two objects titled after the city areas where they were found: Silver Street Bench and Dry Bridge Day Bed Janberidze and Toloraia use salvaged wood and aluminum. Led by improvisation and by working closely with artisans, Rooms Studio blends the borders between pre-designed and spontaneous.

Almost, similar process, continues in the Polygon Desk (oak and aluminum) which is assembled with five exact polygon shaped pieces. The preliminary scale model was created by playing around with canvas wedges and silver duct tape.

The linear shape of I See You is contrasted with the raw, hand carving technique innate to Rooms Studio's Wild Minimalism series. Two cone shapes emerging from the table's surface and looking like two wondering eyes are both functional and symbolic. The two vessels for salt and pepper or eggs can be read as symbols of fertility creating a cross-media dialogue across time with some of Georgian iconographers and Byzantine frescos.

In one corner of the gallery hangs a small, red photographic collage, Hujar's Hand on Motherhood by Alexi-Meskhishvili, which consists of two images shot with an iPhone camera, printed on transparent photographic paper and layered in front of each other. The work's Gothic demeanor is amplified by a crescent-shaped, black, metal Sunday Bench by Rooms Studio.

However, where the parallel forces of Rooms Studio and Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili fully come together is in their collaborative piece In the Ether - a light, the form of which recalls a frequent blue rose motif from Alexi-Meskhishvili's photographs and glass and metal work of Rooms Studio's molding and sculpting practice. The central figure and the axis to The Wet Material stands as a symbol of their friendship and recalls shared memories of Soviet postcards where, lacking religious symbols, images of flowers were used to commemorate festivities.

- Elene Abashidze