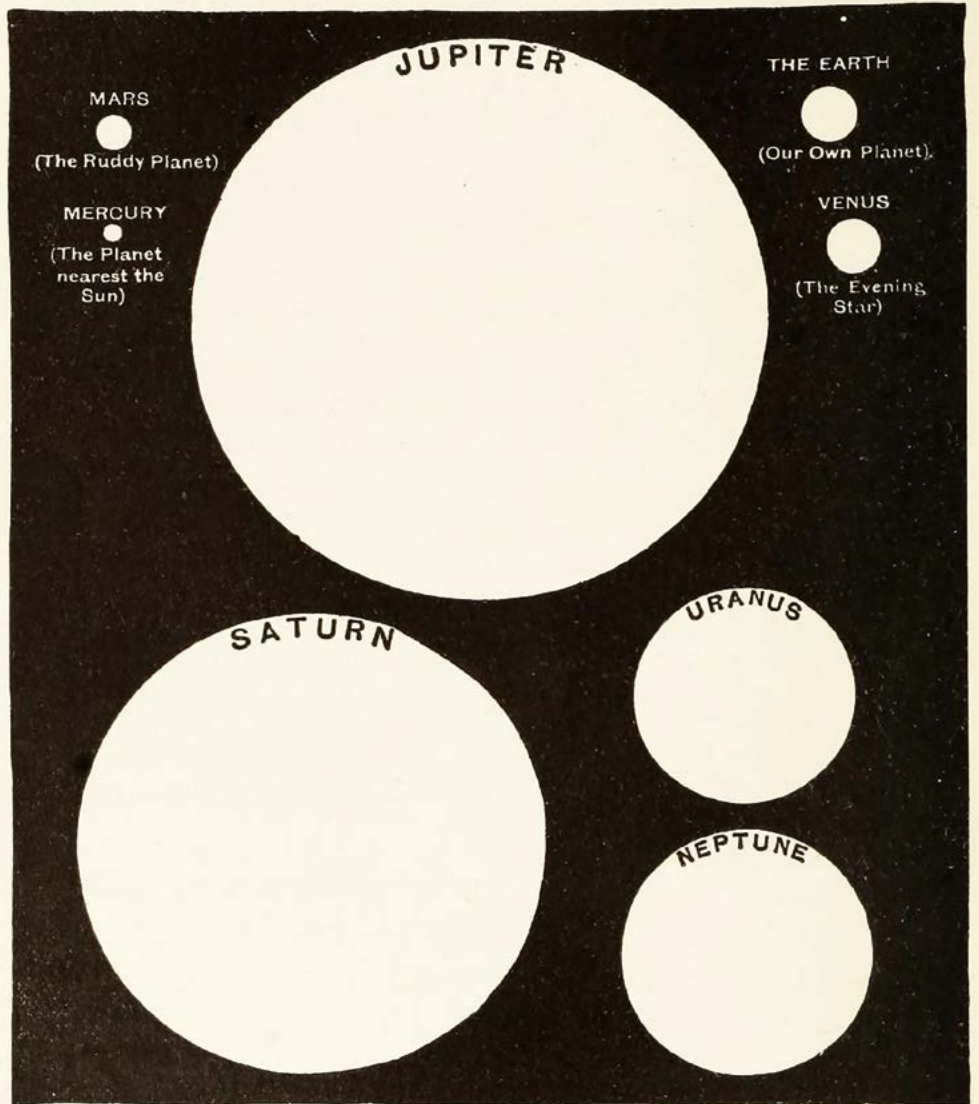
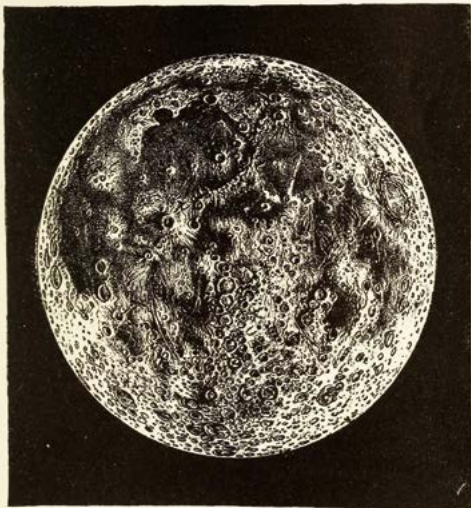


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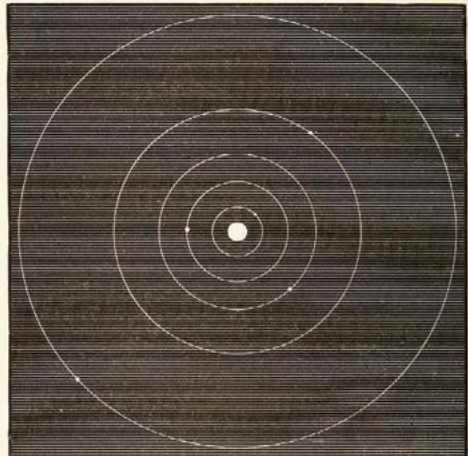
COMPARATIVE SIZE OF THE PLANETARY WORLDS.



THE MOON—AN EXPIRED PLANET.



PHASES OF MERCURY BEFORE INFERIOR CONJUNCTION—EVENING STAR.



THE SYSTEM OF JUPITER.





# A Love Letter to Tbilisi

## Interview by Juule Kay

Deeply rooted in Georgian culture, Rooms Studio creates hand-made interior design pieces with a contemporary twist.

Hidden in a side street in the heart of Tbilisi, Georgia, Nata Janberidze and Ketil Toloraia have established an interior design studio that feels more like coming home after a long day than entering a showroom. It's a small labyrinth of spacious rooms with high ceilings and wooden floors that creak gently with every step towards exploring their one-of-a-kind creations. Quilted blankets hang from the unplastered walls, full-sized "talismans mirrors" reflect your curiosity, and a bunch of sculptural chairs made of reclaimed oak invite you to sit down. There's even a "Bus Stop Bench" covered in graffiti by local artist Max Machaidze. Every piece resembles a remnant of the past, soaked in ancient symbolism yet translated into a contemporary design language.

Founded in 2007, Rooms Studio was born out of a shared vision and deep friendship after Janberidze and Toloraia met during their interior design studies at Tbilisi Academy of Arts. Designing furniture and collectible objects as well as architectural spaces, the creative duo often reflect the streets of their hometown, which are full of surprises. "Elsewhere, it would be nearly impossible to come across someone constructing a random object like a sofa in the middle of a parking lot," says Toloraia, who loves to study her surroundings. Moved by the utilitarian furniture discovered on everyday walks, the Georgian artists even dedicated an entire collection to the absurdities of their city's lively street-scape – making observations the essence of their work.

In the streets of Tbilisi, you will not only find inspiration, but also resistance. Back in May 2024, tens of thousands of demonstrators, including Janberidze and Toloraia, protested the passing of the so-called "foreign agents" law, which threatens the country's chances to join the European Union and harms its democratic freedom. Here, the two explain how to find joy in times of crisis and what memories they connect to their motherland.

**JUULE KAY** This issue is all about embarking on a profound exploration of happiness under the most challenging circumstances. Given the current political situation in Georgia, how do you usually tap into joy when it feels like the world is on fire?

**NATA JANBERIDZE** It's hard to find joy during times that shape the future of my country, affecting everyone around me. It's tough to maintain inner peace and resilience in times of global crises, even when you are personally OK. With everything happening in Georgia, I feel uneasy about experiencing joy, but nonetheless, I'm dedicated to my work, and my microcosm is a great escape from daily stress. The artistic nature of my work and spending time with close friends and my children help me navigate through these emotions. Intuitive moments give me reassurance that somehow things will work out in the end.

**KETIL TOLORAIA** It's very difficult to find joy in this situation, as you're caught in an endless cycle of survival. In this madness, concentrating on work becomes challenging, and everything seems like you're on autopilot. But, after a while, you learn to manage your emotions – I don't mean giving up – and continue to live, seeking out happy moments. Relationships with like-minded people and my work bring me great joy, but there's always a feeling of guilt for experiencing it amidst the chaos in the world. However, you realize that there is no other way than to continue living.

**JK** What is your personal definition of joy?

**NJ** Joy is an inner state of lightness, filled with love. Anything can bring me joy, especially the little coincidences of life – fresh air, the sounds of music, good art, small discoveries, happy people, or coming across interesting objects. Observations also give me great pleasure, especially when I catch a perfect scene in everyday life that looks like a film sequence.

**KT** Joy is inner peace, feeling grateful and a sense of purpose in life. For me, joy comes from engaging in meaningful interactions, personal growth, and small *happy moments* in everyday life.

“We continually investigate our cultural identity and social rituals.”

**JK** In an interview, Nata once said, “You can't wipe away the past. You have to use it, change it and make peace with it.” How do you question your cultural past and future in your work?

**NJ** In this quote, I was referring to the Soviet aesthetics of our childhood. Our past often becomes a part of our present. Instead of doing nothing and living with it, it's more about reclaiming it through a lively dialogue. Instead of suppressing our past, we have the ability to reimagine it and give it a different context. The cultural past of Georgia is like an ancient tree whose roots are deeply anchored in the motherland, while its branches grow by reflecting different cultures.

**KT** Our series, *Wild Minimalism*, is a great example of a dialogue between history and cultural traditions that shapes our vision. The raw, handmade quality of the pieces is an ode to centuries-old Georgian craftsmanship. It's a mix of ethnic and primitive shape and architectural forms from the Soviet Era. Using wood and stone carving techniques passed down from our ancestors, we wanted to catch the simple bliss of life and create something very minimalist but wild at the same time. A design that is rooted in the archaic but feels modern and authentic in everyday life. Nata's



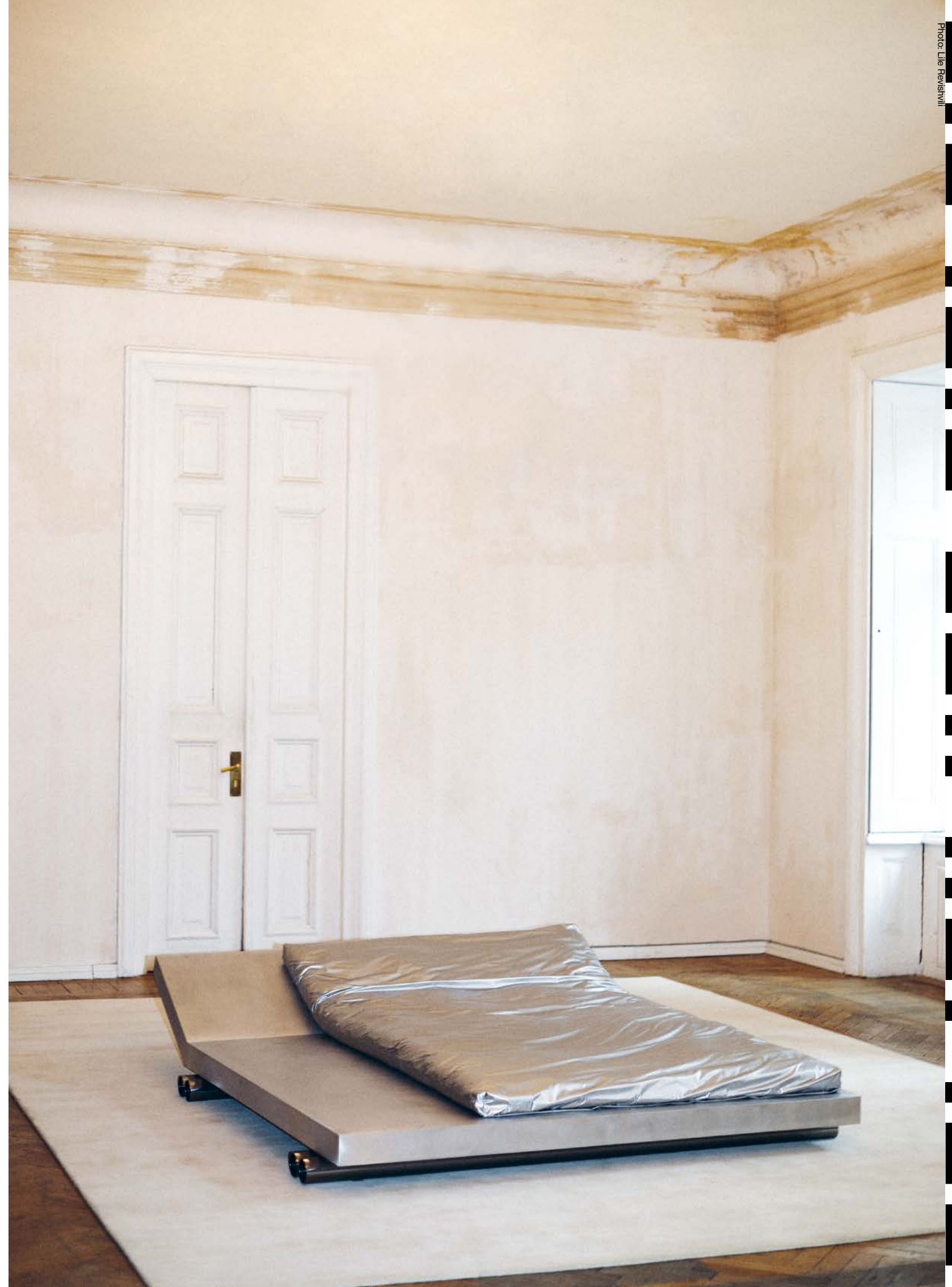
PHOTO: ADRIANA GIAMANO







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quote reflects this process, exploring the notion of accepting the past and the need to feel integrated in today's world. We continually investigate our cultural identity and social rituals and translate them into various materials and forms. It's our attempt to connect the past and the future.

**JK** When you think of your motherland, what comes to mind?  
**NJ** The feeling of being at home. Naive yet wise energy. I can't help but think of nature, air, sun and people. Lately, there has been a real unity among the Georgian people. We are all standing together for freedom, and you can't help but notice the genuine sense of togetherness.

**KT** When I think about my country, I recall the good weather and my childhood. Even though I grew up in the 90s, the hardest period for Georgia, it was still the happiest time. I remember many people in the dining room, a huge spread-out table, and everyone being happy. We have a very important tradition, the Georgian feast called "Supra" (სუპრა). These gatherings are more than just meals. It's all about bringing people together and the feeling of joy.

**JK** Your studio is located in the heart of Tbilisi in a historical building, but you also opened a space in Paris four years ago. Now that you have a comparison, what makes Tbilisi's design scene different from other European cities?

**NJ** The Georgian design scene is still emerging, but there are many talented designers here. I appreciate that their practice is more intellectual than mere decoration. We've collaborated with several artists for different projects, and it's been an interesting exchange of conceptual and practical thinking. *Sacral Geometry*, for example, is a wax series we did together with artist Shotiko Aptsiauri. Our usage of a fluid material like beeswax – traditional to Georgia's religious culture – and solidifying it into a sculptural form is an exploration of mortality.

**KT** Growing up in such a distinct reality, within an information vacuum, has unintentionally shaped us and our vision in a different way.

“The design principles we always follow are necessity and honesty.”

**JK** You are usually guided by intuition and repetition. How would you describe your way of working? What does your inner world look like?

**NJ** The design principles we always follow are necessity and honesty. Our work is mostly intuitive, reflecting our inner feelings and responses to our surroundings. Ideas come and go, but there's always something that lingers and won't leave until you do something with it.

**KT** I'm constantly searching and observing. My creative process is chaotic, with a constant exchange of ideas and long conversations. Sketching is a crucial phase, but once we agree on the concept and overall feel, we slowly move onto 3D modeling and the actual process of making it. I often find myself wanting to pursue multiple ideas simultaneously. Even when I know exactly what I want to do or how to achieve it, I never feel completely content with the final result. Instead, I strive to do more, dive deeper and explore further.

**JK** Your collectible objects are usually informed by their cultural heritage and surroundings. What's the most random thing you've witnessed on Tbilisi's streets so far?

**KT** Elsewhere, it would be nearly impossible to come across someone constructing a random object like a sofa in the middle of a parking lot, solely out of immediate necessity and without permission. This has become a theme that we observe and do a lot of research on.

**NJ** Our ongoing *Street Series* is inspired by the charms of our city – ever-changing, vibrant streets that feel truly alive. In Tbilisi, you can discover plenty of objects made by real people for their functional needs, whether for seating or resting. I remember how impressed I was by a daybed I once found at the Dry Bridge Market, made out of simple planks with a soft head cushion. It was squeezed in between two trees to support the body. Our *Street Series* is dedicated to preserving these examples of urgent and spontaneous creations, as these kinds of designs tend to disappear over time. They are made for personal use, and I think that's the main reason why these pieces are crafted with such love and honesty – embodying the essence of their creators.

All images courtesy of Rooms Studio

