

galerie frank elbaz.

Rooms Studio and Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili

The Wet Material

February 5 - March 5, 2022

Opening on Saturday, February 5, 2022

ნედლი მასალა

მე თვით განგებამ, ხელოში მომცა მასალა სველი,
ნედლი მასალა, სულ ახალი, ხელუხლებელი,
სხვა ნიადაგზე, მზის ნამტვერში ამონაკვეთი
და ზეციური ბალსამოსით ნაკურ-ნაწვეთი.
მე უსიცოცხლოს კიდევ შემწევს იმდენი ძალა,
რომ დამწვარ სულში 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, ყალბ სიყვარულს, მუნჯ ხვაშიადსა,
დაგროვილ ვნების ქარტეხილის ქროლოვას დიადსა.
...მე ხელთ მიჭირავს მშვენიერი ნედლი მასალა,
თუ ამ წყულმა, 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

galerie frank elbaz.

There must be something in the ether 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 ethereal vibe 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 Toloraia) and Ketuta 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 made camera free, where the artist works directly on analog negative film, exposing the translucent bags on film 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. These objects represent a transitional quality, and contain traces of various bodies of work as well as present new objects that experiment with other forms and materials. In the two benches found at the back of the gallery, they have appropriate un-authored utilitarian furniture found on Tbilisi streets and re-built them with salvaged wood. The objects are then embellished with metal panels that are hand applied and reveal the gesture of the embellishment through the visible folds in the metal. In the main room, a metal covered desk uses a similar technique, however the form was developed from playing around with their hands with a hanging structure of a picture frame. The large white table in the back of the first space has two hand-carved egg holders rising out of its surface. The one white glass egg present, by default seems to point to

galerie frank elbaz.

the original inclination of traditional Georgian ornaments.

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 an oval, black, metal bench by Rooms Studio, which stands in front of it.

However, where the parallel forces of Rooms Studio and Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili fully come together is in their collaborative piece, a light, the form of which recalls a frequent blue rose motif from Alexi-Meskhishvili's photographs and handmade metal work of recent Rooms Studio's objects. The central figure and the axis to the exhibition, *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.

In a sense, the three women of this exhibition act as Baudelaire's Flaneurs, but a century later, and rather than observers more as subjective filters of a city, which like Paris in Baudelaire's time is in the midst of change, but this time of a never ending one.

- Elene Abashidze