

Tamuna Sirbiladze

21 February–5 April 2019
24 Grafton Street, London

Private view: Wednesday 20 February, 6–8 PM



Tamuna Sirbiladze, *Pink Flower*, 2015. Oil on Canvas.
Courtesy David Zwirner and Estate Tamuna Sirbiladze
© Estate Tamuna Sirbiladze

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of paintings by Tamuna Sirbiladze (1971–2016) in The Upper Room at the gallery's London location. Including works from throughout her career, this exhibition will offer an illuminating overview of Sirbiladze's singular and vital oeuvre.

Born in Tbilisi, Georgia, Sirbiladze attended the country's State Academy of Arts before continuing her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and the Slade School of Fine Art in London. Informed equally by the traditional underpinnings of her early education in the Soviet republic and the liberalism of her later training, her works are characterised by a bold treatment of form and light and an iconoclastic approach to style and subject matter. Most of the artist's canvases oscillate between abstraction and figuration, with brisk strokes ripe with expressive and symbolic meaning.

Sirbiladze was deeply engaged with the representation of women in the history of art, both as subjects and as artists themselves. Although the female body often appears to be in a state of distress in her work, or occupying a variety of vulnerable and ambiguous poses, she insisted that she painted 'light and joyful [women], full of zest for life and fun.'¹ Her unapologetic approach became fashioned as a kind of revenge aimed at a male-dominated canon and a distancing from the autobiographical tendency of some women artists.

Part of a series of square-format, two-by-two-meter paintings begun in the mid-2000s, *Flavonal* (2003) is a prime example of Sirbiladze's all-over, animated compositions. A female figure—discernible primarily by her long black hair—merges with a plethora of indeterminate forms in green, red, violet, pink, and orange hues. A sense of intense movement is suggested by the layered paint and frequent drips as well as by the sway of the hair, while the repeated spelling of 'koks' at the bottom suggests a state of intoxication. A barely discernible body appears again next to a syringe in *Tryangel* (2007), in which a more serene palette informs an introspective mood. In *Matisse* (2012), a woman's back occupies the centre of a boldly coloured composition, at once evoking and suspending the shapes of Henri Matisse's iconic, stylised bathers. As if to emphasise the immediacy of these works, Sirbiladze occasionally leant them, one against the other, in a freestanding sculptural formation directly on the floor, implying that visitors could flip through them like posters in a shop.

Andy's Hair (2014) belongs to Sirbiladze's series of flower paintings, started in the early 2010s. Carrying over the joyful assertiveness of her depictions of women, these works were inspired by Andy Warhol's Polaroid self-portraits and posit lighthearted visual comparisons between the blossoming flower heads and the pop artist's mane. Their often thick layers of paint offer traces of previous compositions and contrast with another group of paintings made around the same time by applying oil stick to unprimed, unstretched canvas. In these works, several of which are on view, Sirbiladze employed rapid, bold gestures, often moving swiftly from one composition to another in the process. Shapes emerged spontaneously, offering a mix of abstract and figurative motifs. Many are directly inspired by modernist still lifes—*M Vase (Matisse Vase)* (2015), for example, again revisits Matisse, depicting a classic vase,

¹Tamuna Sirbiladze, 'When It Comes to the Point, What I'm Doing Now Is Almost Something Like Revenge . . . : Benedikt Ledebur in Conversation with Tamuna Sirbiladze', in *Tamuna Sirbiladze*. Exh. cat. (New York: David Zwirner Books, 2017), p. 10.

David Zwirner

while *Pomegranate* (2015) evokes Sirbiladze's native Georgia through the symbol of its national fruit; yet, others take their departure in children's illustrations. Emphasising the mimetic plasticity of her works, Sirbiladze proposed that they 'can be seen in the attitude of "bad painting," but only as one aspect. At the same time, the colors are very light, with an impressionistic cheerfulness. . . . My pictures should be flexible.'²

Comprising painting as well as video, drawing, and collage, **Tamuna Sirbiladze's** (1971–2016) work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions across Europe since the late 1990s. She frequently collaborated with other artists, including her late husband Franz West. She had her first solo presentation in New York in 2015, and several of her paintings were included in the group show *No Man's Land: Women Artists from the Rubell Family Collection*, which opened at the Rubell Family Collection in Miami in 2015 and travelled to the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC, closing in 2017.

For all press enquiries, contact

Sara Chan +44 20 3538 3165 sara@davidzwirner.com

² Ibid., p. 11.