

20th Century

Diversity of Georgian Cinema

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MINISTRY OF CULTURE OF GEORGIA

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INTRODUCTION

Beginnings

The diversity of Georgian cinema vividly reflects the mental and national characteristics that have shaped the history of Georgian filmmaking from its origins to the present day. Unlike the general trajectory of world cinema, the earliest stage of Georgian cinema emerged directly from social and artistic processes. This period begins with the first Georgian feature-length documentary film, Akaki's Journey to Racha-Lechkhumi (1912).

The history of cinema in Georgia took root in parallel with global cinematic developments during a period of significant transformation. In 1896, on 16 November, the Lumière brothers' cinematograph was presented to audiences at the Tbilisi Nobility Theatre. From that moment, Georgian public figures began actively advocating for the establishment of permanent cinemas.

As reported by the Information Sheet:

"Nobility Theatre. Today, 16 November, renowned throughout Europe, the famous cinematograph—Lumière's animated photographic image—will be shown. Beginning at 8 o'clock. Ticket prices significantly reduced."

In 1900, photographer David Dighmelov, together with his son, brought the "Laterna Magica" to Tbilisi. Later, they acquired projection equipment produced by the Lumières, marking the beginning of film production depicting travels across the Caucasus.

A major milestone occurred in 1904, when the first cinema, Illusion, opened in Tbilisi. It was soon followed by Apollo, Coliseum, and Cinema.

The cinema Radium, situated in Kutaisi, is now a protected cultural heritage monument. On 20 September 1912, it hosted the screening of Vasil Amashukeli's Akaki's Journey to Racha-Lechkhumi. The event drew an extraordinarily large audience and featured live orchestral accompaniment, demonstrating both the public's admiration for the film and its deep affection for Akaki Tsereteli—the prominent public figure, educator, and poet.

However, before this landmark work, Amashukeli and Alexander Dighmelov had already filmed several documentaries in 1908, primarily newsreels. These works aligned with global cinematic trends of the era, capturing scenes of everyday life and contemporary events. Akaki's Journey, however, stands apart as the first feature-length documentary in world cinema focused on this type of subject matter, notable for its thematic scope and detailed narrative structure.

Between 1912 and 1916, cinematographic practice expanded significantly in Georgia. Patron-funded operators and aspiring film entrepreneurs produced newsreels covering a wide range of topics, including urban festivities, royal visits, parades, and various public events.

In 1916, the renowned theatre director and acting pedagogue Alexander Tsutsunava, active in the Public Theatre as well as in Chiatura, Baku, and the Tbilisi Opera, laid the foundation for Georgian feature cinema with Kristine, the first Georgian feature film. Based on the short story by Egnate Ninoshvili, the film portrayed the tragic fate of a provincial girl, performed by actors from the Georgian stage.

Film production in Georgia developed through the support of public figures and involvement of major cultural organizations, including the Society for the Spreading of Literacy Among Georgians.

"Market/Commercial cinema," as popular entertainment was often called, quickly gained a strong foothold. The Pathé and Gaumont studios established production branches in Georgia. Sofia Ivanitskaya from Odessa, inspired after viewing several films during intermission at a circus performance in Tbilisi, purchased a projection device and opened the Illusion cinema on Golovin Avenue. She played an important role in expanding newsreel production. Illusion later relocated to the city's Mushtaid Garden.

Many of Tbilisi's cinemas were located along Mikhailov Avenue. One of them, Arfasto, became known for offering high-quality film repertoires and was housed in what is today the building of the Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University.

In addition to Pathé and Gaumont, branches of major international film companies—such as Cines and Ambrosio—also opened in Tbilisi. In the port city of Poti, the merchant Gabelia built a large, fully equipped 500-seat cinema between 1911 and 1912. Meanwhile, Tbilisi's 15–20 advertising posters were always fully covered with film advertisements.

In 1914, the renowned film organizer and producer Germane Gogitidze built a cinema in Ozurgeti. After the establishment of Soviet rule in Georgia, he was appointed director of the Film Section of the People's Commissariat of Education, where he proposed an ambitious plan to produce 52 films across various genres—including adaptations of classical literature. The plan even included the potential adaptation of The Knight in the Panther's Skin.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Georgia attracted directors oriented toward film genres and acting technique, such as Vladimir Barsky, Ivan Perestiani—known for his dynamic style—and Amo Bek-Nazarov.

Prominent Georgian theatre directors, including Alexander Tsutsunava and Kote Marjanishvili, frequently turned to classic literary works for their film adaptations in this early period: Egnate Ninoshvili's Kristine and Revolt in Guria, Ethel Lilian Voynich's The Gadfly, David Kldiashvili's The Step-Mother of Samanishvili, Avksenti Tsagareli's Khanuma, Shio Aragvispireli's Giuli, and Alexander Kazbegi's Eliso.

As the surrounding world changed rapidly, early Georgian cinema sought increasingly complex and nuanced parallels to express its ideas—an approach that would remain one of its defining characteristics in the decades to come.

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СЕГОДНЯ

VASIL AMASHUKELI



1886-1977

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The First Georgian Filmmaker

At the end of the nineteenth century, the people of Georgia were already familiar with the new technical wonder of the age—cinema. Yet the establishment of a national film industry proved impossible at that time. Even so, several enthusiasts emerged whose modest yet dedicated efforts played a decisive role in the birth of Georgian cinema. Foremost among them was Vasil Amashukeli, the pioneering figure of the Georgian national film tradition.

Vasil Amashukeli was born in Kutaisi in 1886. He received his primary education in his hometown and, captivated by painting, continued his studies at an art school. In 1900 he moved to Moscow to pursue further training. Lacking financial means, he worked first as an engine fitter at the "Triokhgorka" factory and later as its chief electrician. During this period, he developed a growing



Akaki Tsereteli's journey to Racha-Lechkhumi (behind the scenes)

interest in cinematography and eventually apprenticed with a cinema mechanic at a local movie theater. Having mastered the basics of film projection, he sought more advanced knowledge and therefore approached the Moscow branch of the renowned French film company *Gaumont,* where, under the guidance of master cinematographer Dimitri Volkov, he learned the techniques of film shooting.

Due to family circumstances, Amashukeli had to return to Georgia. In 1906 he moved to Baku, where his brother, Mamuka Amashukeli, was performing in the Georgian-language theater. A new cinema hall, "Electro-Biograph," opened within the theater, and Vasil was invited to work as its projectionist. The cinema was supplied with films by the Belgian firm *Aladin* run by the Pirone brothers, but the owners—Kote Meskhi and Ilia Gepner—were dissatisfied with the artistic quality of these imports and decided to produce films themselves. The responsibility fell to Amashukeli, who, together with Gepner, transported newly purchased Gaumont filming and projection equipment from Moscow to Baku.

Beginning in 1908, Amashukeli started shooting short films (or "subjects"). His first work, *People's Stroll on the Seashore*, drew large crowds—everyone was eager to see themselves or their acquaintances appear on screen. He continued producing these short films, which were screened as additions to the main program. Unfortunately, almost all of them have been lost; only *Work at the Oil Wells* has survived, donated in 2011 by the Azerbaijan State Film Fund to the National Archives of Georgia. For the remaining films, only the titles and approximate lengths are known: *Swimming Competition* (200 meters), *Types of Baku Market* (70 meters), *Oil Transfer by Pumps* (60 meters), *Coal Transport by Camels* (50 meters), *Installation of New Rotary Machines at Tagiev's Printing House* (100 meters), and others.

A remarkable document, dated 15 May 1908, from Noe Ramishvili—the business manager of Tagiev's printing house, which printed cinema posters for "Electro-Biograph"

free of charge, asks that the printing-house employees filmed in one of Amashukeli's subjects be admitted to the cinema free of charge to view the film. This letter is the earliest verified source confirming that Amashukeli was already an active filmmaker by that time (no earlier document has been found). Consequently, this date is conventionally regarded as the beginning of Georgian cinema.



Amashukeli temporarily returned to Kutaisi in 1909, screening his Baku films to local audiences for a week. A year later he settled permanently in the city and continued his work with characteristic enthusiasm. In 1910–1911 he filmed new subjects such as *Work on the Farm*, *Excursion to the Ruins of Bagrati Cathedral*, *The Daisy Festival*, *Khoni Tex-*



Akaki Tsereteli's journey to Racha-Lechkhumi (behind the scenes)

tile Factory, *Akaki's Journey to Kvemo Imereti– Skhvitori and Mukhiani*, *Kutaisi Landscapes*, *Lado Meskhishvili's Jubilee*, *Stroll in the Boulevard*, and others. He also helped restore the *Radium* cinema, damaged by fire.

At that time, Kutaisi had three cinemas—*Radium*, *Mon Plaisir*, and *Tamar*. *Radium*, owned by Tikhon Asatiani and Pavle Mepisashvili, was a modern and elegantly equipped cinema accommodating 450 spectators, featuring both string and wind orchestras for musical accompaniment. Amashukeli became its projectionist.

In 1912, a twelve-day journey to Racha-Lechkhumi was organized for the esteemed Georgian poet, writer, and national liberation leader Akaki Tsereteli. The organizers invited Amashukeli to document the event. He accompanied the procession, filming the entire journey. On the very first day, despite bringing a sufficient amount of film stock, the abundance of noteworthy events he filmed exhausted his supply. Additional film was urgently dispatched from Kutaisi, allowing him to continue filming. It should be noted that the Georgian press of that time referred to V. Amashukeli not as a cinema operator, but as an employee of *Radium* and an expert in taking pictures "on cinematograph".

In total, Amashukeli shot nearly 1,600 meters of film. After the journey, he took the footage to Tbilisi for development at Sofia Ivanitskaya's laboratory, where Alexandre Dighmelov (Dighmelashvili), who was himself shooting subjects at that time, processed it. Amashukeli then edited the material down to 1,200 meters. He served as the film's director, cinematographer, and editor. The completed film, titled *The Journey of the Georgian Poet Akaki Tsereteli to Racha-Lechkhumi, 21 July – 2 August 1912* (commonly known as *Akaki's Journey*), became the first Georgian feature-length documentary.

The film premiered on 20 September 1912 at the *Radium* cinema before a full audience, including Akaki Tsereteli himself, who expressed great satisfaction and amazement at the number of viewers. *Akaki's Journey* was later screened in Tbilisi, Chiatura, Batumi, Poti, and Zugdidi, and eventually reached cinemas in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Baku, Istanbul, and Harbin.

Over time, the original negative was lost. A fragment survived in the Georgian Literature Museum, while other parts were later discovered by prominent film scholar Karlo Gogodze. Thanks to his efforts, the surviving material was restored (cleaned, and converted to a speed appropriate for contemporary projection equipment) in 1954. Although incomplete, the film remains a unique work in both Georgian and world film history. The French film historian Georges Sadoul wrote to Gogodze that, to his knowledge, before 1912 no country had produced a feature-length documentary (1,200 meters) dedicated to a distinguished public figure.

Amashukeli—who laid the foundations of Georgian national cinema—continued his work: he shot subjects (e.g., *Akaki Tsereteli's Funeral from Sachkhere to Shorapani*) and worked as a projectionist. The Georgian public recognized his contributions: in 1965 he was named Honored Art Worker, and in 1974, People's Artist of Georgia. That same year, Kutaisi hosted the first republican festival of Georgian cinema in his honor, and in 1975 his 90th anniversary was proudly celebrated.



Vasil Amashukeli died in Kutaisi in 1977. Since then, every year on March 14—his birthday—filmmakers, public figures, students, and schoolchildren travel to Kutaisi to honor the memory of the first Georgian filmmaker. Since 2005, May 15 has officially been celebrated as Georgian Cinema Day by the Ministry of Culture, Monument Protection and Sports of Georgia and the decree of the President of Georgia.

ALEKSANDRE THUTSUNAVA



1881-1955

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Georgian Cinema - Part of the World's Memory

In the history of art, it is rare to find that type of artist whose talent equally reaches different spheres and whose activity everywhere leaves a distinctive, significant, and innovative mark. Exactly such is Alexandre Tsutsunava's creative biography, who is one of the most significant figures of early 20th-century Georgian culture, because through his activity he simultaneously defines the development vector of both national dramatic theater and opera, as well as Georgian cinematography. Despite the fact that in cinema he made only five films in total, this small number became a fundamental contribution on the path of forming national cinema. All these factors determined that Alexandre Tsutsunava became a kind of symbol of Georgian culture's success in the twentieth century.

His creative path was as full of upheavals as the socio-political field of the early 20th century itself, saturated with



Kristine



demands for significant revolutionary and social changes. It was precisely in these conditions that he, as a creator, had to realize his own capabilities, search for the new, confront the old, struggle and self-assert, to which was added participation in a completely new art—cinematography.

In the 1910s, Georgian cinema was taking its first steps, and probably could not have imagined that he himself would have to write the most important pages of its history, as a screenwriter, as a director, as a creator whose name in Georgian cinema is associated with the authorship of the first feature film, the first film comedy, care for establishing a professional acting school, and bringing national literature to the screen. On Ioseb Imedashvili's small card, which was kept in Al. Tsutsunava's personal archive, there is this inscription: "That you made a complete revolution on the dramatic stage, created a new era, I noted at the time, but I didn't think you would triumph so in cinema as well."

Al. Tsutsunava's first acquaintance with cinematography occurred in 1909. An active participant in revolutionary upheavals, tried more than once, and at the same time having



The Guria Uprising

shared for 4 years in the innovative searches in Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko's laboratory, the director who graduated from the Moscow Art Theatre Studio returned to Georgia. According to Shalva Dadiani's screenplay, Mitrophane Kvliashvili was staging *Berikaoba-Kheenoba* in Surami, an artistic documentary film. Al. Tsutsunava's baptism occurred precisely with this film, as consultant to the film's cameraman. The film has not been preserved; accordingly, visual evidence of what came out of this collaboration is very scarce.

What should Georgian national cinematography have been like, what and about whom should it tell the viewer, what was important for Georgian society, and what did they expect from "the wonder of the twentieth century" (as cinema art was called in those days)?

On July 5, 1915, the journal "Theater and Life" published information that filming of *Kristine* had begun, with Alexandre Tsutsunava and Alexandre (Sandro) Akhmeteli named as directors. However, "the above-cited excerpt is the only information in which Sandro Akhmeteli is mentioned along with Al. Tsutsunava as the future director of the film *Kristine*." The initiative to stage the film is connected with Germane Gogitidze, and connected with him are not only the financial resources that were difficult to find for its filming, but also the management of difficulties related to the film's shooting process. Later, in memoirs, G. Gogitidze recalls that among everything else, I was also the administrator and the black worker. The choice was made for Egn. Ninoshvili's story. Al. Tsutsunava worked on the screenplay, which in turn implied bringing national literature to the screen, and with Al. Tsutsunava's direction, conceiving rich theatrical experience in

the new cinematographic language. Work on the film began...

"In a letter written by Dimitri Shevardnadze's sister, Nino, to her mother (April 16, 1916), we read: 'Dito has no time for us, he's busy. Tomorrow if it doesn't rain, at 12 o'clock they'll start filming the cinema, they have great preparations.' Germane Gogitidze bought a large preparation house from some Likhouri peasant. They put a tin roof on the house and removed one wall so that sunlight could easily illuminate 'Data's poor family,' recalled Siko Dolidze, an eyewitness to the filming. Germane Gogitidze became the director's assistant and financial manager. The film's shooting took place in Tbilisi and Guria." There are different opinions regarding the completion of the film's shooting. Al. Tsutsunava completed filming in 1916 itself with the episode of Kristine's escape to the city (Al. Tsutsunava went to work at the Baku theater that same year and then to Rostov), while in 1918 a new version with new editing came out on screen, where additions (especially the film's final part) were filmed by Germane Gogitidze.

In 1918, as a result of the Ottoman army's invasion of Guria, the film material—the film stock—existing in Ozurgeti was completely burned. A year later, Germane Gogitidze re-edited and restored the film based on material existing in Tbilisi.

Only 3 years after the beginning of the film's shooting, its public premiere took place at the "Apollo" cinema in May 1919, on the anniversary of Georgia's Independence Day. For the Georgian audience, Kristine's tragic story was much more than the plots played out in foreign melodramas before. The film tells the dramatic story of 16-year-old Kristine, who becomes the victim of nobleman Iason Ukmadze's love infatuation. The whole village learned the story of the abandoned woman expecting new life; even her father did not spare her and physically attacked her. Desperate Kristine sees the only way out in suicide to end the unbearable life. Kristine is saved, though the rescue is also conditional. It is unbearable for her to remain in an environment where she is constantly the object of condemnation. She tries to escape this heavy reality, leaves her child with her parents, and follows a female acquaintance to Tbilisi, who takes her to a brothel. Many years later, Kristine, marked and diseased by a difficult life, can only save herself through charity. The finale, when the woman finally dies in loneliness, completely destitute and forgotten by everyone, is a logical conclusion for Kristine, excluded from society and having escaped from herself.

Germane Gogitidze traveled all over Georgia with this film. In places where there was no electricity, he showed the film to viewers with a special device mounted on a cargo automobile. G. Gogitidze recalled that "the audience received 'Kristine' warmly, and although it was created with unspeakable suffering, it still gave the producers great moral satisfaction..."

With the release of the first feature film, it became clear that national theater and literature would be the icebreaker that would pave the way for Georgian cinema.

It is significant that the first feature film *Kristine* was the only feature film created in the conditions of independent Georgia, since the history of the Democratic Republic of Georgia ended in 2021 [sic - should be 1921], when the Russian Red Army invaded Georgia and declared the Democratic Republic of Georgia the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. From this day, there was no longer an "actual



Khanuma

thought" about what national cinematography should be like; what becomes actual is how the Central Committee should use cinema to consolidate Soviet ideology. Soviet authorities did not spare financial resources for this purpose. Studios open in allied republics. In 1923, "Sakkinmretsvi" was founded in Georgia, on the base of the first film studio created by the Belgian film company "Filmes" in 1918 and transformed into a cinema section in 1921. Soviet authorities allocated a credit of 50 million rubles for film production. The nationalization of the studio was followed by the nationalization of cinemas.



In 1924, Al. Tsutsunava was again invited to cinema, though his return is already connected to completely different political conditions. According to Nino Nakashidze's

play, Tsutsunava created the screenplay; filming lasted 8 months, and in December 1925 the premiere of the film *Who Is Guilty? - The Wild West Rider* took place in Moscow. Sessions went simultaneously in six cinemas and unprecedented success followed. For the Georgian audience, at sessions scheduled for January at "Apollo," "Arpasto," and "Soleil," tickets were completely sold out, so they decided to extend the showings beyond what was planned. What was the reason for the film's success?

First of all, probably the play's popularity, whose staging on the Georgian stage was realized more than once. However, Al. Tsutsunava did not mechanically transfer theatrical experience; he himself created its screen version based on the play. He connected the play's moral problem to the social side, brought it forward, and gave the viewer the opportunity to answer the question themselves—who is guilty?

The film's plot tells the story of one family. Young Siko (Kote Mikaberidze) leaves his elderly mother (Tsetsilia Tsutsunava), wife Pati (Nato Vachnadze), and young child and travels to America with other fortune-seekers to earn money. To return rich to his own family and homeland, but dependent on material wealth, he loses everything that is precious. Pati's child dies. The woman left alone is given no peace by neighbor Besia. Mother-in-law Salikhe also wants Besia and Pati to get closer; she is also occupied with concerns about building a house with money sent by Siko and Besia's help. Besia achieves his desire, and Siko, returning from America, finds Pati pregnant. The disgraced woman drowns herself. Salikhe congratulates her son on a new bride and promises to arrange a better wife. Siko's decision proved fatal, and desperate, he burns down precisely that house which could not become equivalent to what was most valuable to him. It is logical that he himself also perishes.

The film created by Tsutsunava was both a melodrama and a social drama that reflects on the moral and social responsibility existing in society. The film's plot structure is based on a kind of search, where it examines the influence of the social environment on a person's personal decisions and the psychology of crime—guilty are the time, the system, social backwardness and poverty, but not only these, but also man himself and his choice.

Unusual and distinctive in the film was the American circus episode, for which a three-story building was constructed in five days. The film's cameraman N. Tikhonov recalled: "Such a scale still exceeds the capabilities of Soviet cinema—we need to build a three-story circus whose length would be 300 sazhens, width - 50; release 300 mounted horsemen onto the arena, give us a 100-person ballet, arrange their costumes, and most importantly find '2000 American circus audience members' who would externally be South American types and appropriately dressed." Such mass scenes were foreign to Georgian cinema, where up to 4000 people participated, which Tsutsunava managed to film in only one day. It is precisely from here that his mention as a great master of creating mass scenes begins.

The film underwent harsh censorship from Moscow. By decision of the Party's central organs, the two-part film was shortened without the director's consent, reduced to one part, and the film was significantly changed. Timing was named as the reason. Georgian cinema first tasted the censor's hand. Tsutsunava expressed sharp protest about this fact, whereby he defended not only his own work but also Georgian cine-

ma's right to national existence. However, the film still had to be shortened, re-edited; as the director himself recalled, he had to cut out scenes that distorted the content.

Despite censorship, *Who Is Guilty?* proved successful in its demonstration in Soviet space. It depicted the opposition of the individual and the system, which was very relevant for Georgian society of that time, and at the same time a kind of statement that Georgian cinema, beyond creating exotic, ethnographic pictures, could also investigate serious social problems.

Al. Tsutsunava, along with authorship of the first Georgian feature film, is the director who laid the foundation for Georgian film comedy. In 1925, work began on the screen adaptation of Avksenti Tsagareli's play *Khanuma* of the same name; the premiere took place in 1926. The director already had experience working with this play at the opera theater (in 1919), where he staged Viktor Dolidze's opera *Keto and Kote* created based on *Khanuma*. However, he added several new characters and episodes to the film screenplay. For the role of Khanuma, he invited the famous Georgian theater actress Elisabed Cherkezishvili, who also had experience working in cinema. He assembled an outstanding acting ensemble for the film: Kote Mikaberidze, Tamar Bolkvadze, Valerian Gunia, Mikheil Chiaureli, Taso Abashidze, Lado Kavsadze, Ina Nazarishvili, Vladimir Trapaidze, Tsetsilia Tsutsunava, Sophia Jozephi, Vaso Abashidze, Levan Khotivari, Sandro Kandelaki, Kokhta Karalashvili.

In old age, Prince Levan Pantiashvili, who has squandered his fortune on his dissolute life, sees salvation in marrying a rich wife. The prince sends matchmaker to the rich merchant Varakhidze. The merchant agrees because this marriage opens the way for him to high society. But beautiful Elo loves the young teacher Ilo and doesn't even want to hear the prince's name. A party is already scheduled for viewing the bride, but here the second matchmaker, Khanuma, enters the affair, who arranges matters so that she drives guests from the father's house and presents herself to the prince instead of Elo. Meanwhile, Elo and Ilo manage to sign the marriage register. The enraged prince and Varakhidze, fallen into thought, are forced to reconcile with the situation. Cinema's muteness did not give the director the opportunity to present the comedy of the play's dialogues, so he united theater, opera, and cinema in one structure—transferred all attention to comic situations. "This device, with the support of most talented actors, was justified. Many years later, French film scholars will say that it was precisely Tsutsunava and not Eisenstein, as is believed, who established in Soviet cinema the genre 'opera without song,' or silent film with opera aesthetics, where he united the expressive means of opera, theater, and cinema."

In 1927, he undertook the screen adaptation of Ilia Zurabashvili's story *Two Hunters*. The film's plot tells of two hunter brothers. Turiko and Mgelia fall in love with one woman. They decide to draw lots; the winner must kill the defeated, and the woman will remain his. The lot falls to the elder brother, Turiko. To fulfill the condition, the brothers enter the forest. Suddenly a bear attacks the younger brother Mgelia; Turiko stands aside, does not intend to extend a helping hand to him, and becomes not only a witness to his brother's death but also a participant. Mgelia perishes. Turiko returns to the village and does not reveal what happened to anyone. But the torment of conscience gives no rest—"I killed Mgelia!"—these are the three words that spin in his mind, the sen-

tence pronounced on himself deprives him of peace, and Turiko, driven mad, throws himself into an abyss. With this film, Al. Tsutsunava continues the tradition of social drama and makes the struggle of falling into sin and the experience of crime the film's leitmotif.

In 1928, Al. Tsutsunava's last film *Uprising in Guria* comes out, which represents a screen adaptation of Egnate Ninoshvili's novel of the same name and depicts the events of the 1841 Guria uprising. In the Guria uprising, nobility dissatisfied with the government participates along with peasants. The reason for the uprising was increased taxes imposed by the authorities. The rebels demanded a change of government that limited the privileges of hereditary nobility. The leader of the nobility group, Hasan Bek, supports the peasants' demands but stands before a difficult choice: accepting the government's conditions or perishing in a bloody uprising. The rebels, whom several Georgian nobles joined, initially managed to occupy most of Guria, but ultimately the rebels were defeated by Russia's army and its allied Georgian nobility. Al. Tsutsunava created a film as both historical and social drama, where the opposition of peasantry and nobility is considered in a national-political context. In masterfully created mass scenes, large-scale mise-en-scènes, tense tempo-rhythm, and the emotional intensity of developing action generate a feeling of documentalism in the viewer, as if making them a participant in the tragic events unfolding on screen. Tension particularly increases in the scenes of rebels' clashes with Russia's army. Tsutsunava directs mass action dynamically through parallel montage and sharp acceleration of tempo-rhythm.

This film is a social document that has a strong impact even a century later. A kind of culmination is represented in the final episode by earth covered with corpses, as the cruel and fatal result of betrayal, discord and confrontation, war.

With the film *Uprising in Guria*, Tsutsunava's period of activity in cinema ended (1916-1928). Five films—all five adaptations, where he inseparably connected the process of assimilating the experience of Georgian national culture, traditions of theatrical and visual arts, and Georgian literature with the process of creatively mastering and accumulating the expressive means and artistic devices of the new art.

From 2016-2020, through the joint efforts of Georgia's Ministry of Culture and the National Cinema Center, within the framework of the "Return of Georgian Cinema Heritage to the Homeland" project, original copies of Al. Tsutsunava's films arrived from Russia's film archive. On the base of Georgia's National Archive, the restoration of all five films by the director and their conversion to digital format was carried out. The digitized image crossed in the 21st century the limited space in which the Soviet epoch had locked it. In 2025, within the framework of the festival "Memory of the Whole World" organized by the Cinémathèque française, for the showing of Georgian films, two films out of five samples of Georgian silent cinema selected were precisely those created by Alexandre Tsutsunava: *Who Is Guilty?" and "Uprising in Guria*. Which once again confirms that Georgian cinema, one of whose founders is Al. Tsutsunava, is not only part of our history and memory but also the memory of the whole world.

Filmography:

1. *Kristine* – 1918 Director and screenplay author: Alexandre Tsutsunava Based on Egnate Ninoshvili's story of the same name Silent / Drama, Duration: 5 parts, 1240 meters, 50 minutes Cinematographer: Alexandre Shugermani, Alexandre Dighmelov Cast: Antonina Abelishvili (Kristine), Giorgi Pronispireli (Iason), Vasil (Vaso) Arabidze (Datia-Kristine's father), Sophia Kipshidze (Marika-Kristine's mother), Margarita Gogolashvili (Sona), Babo Rostomashvili (Nata), Tsetsilia Tsutsunava (Marine), Vaso Abashidze, Ilia Zurabashvili and others.
2. "The Wild West Rider (Who Is Guilty?)" – 1925 Director and screenplay author: Alexandre Tsutsunava The film is based on Nino Nakashidze's play of the same name. Silent / Drama, "Sakkinmretsvi", Duration: 8 parts, 2836 meters, 104 minutes Cinematographer: Sergei Zabozlaev Production designer: Dimitri Shevardnadze Cast: Kote Mikaberidze (Siko), Tsetsilia Tsutsunava (Salikhe–Siko's mother), Nato Vachnadze (Pati–Siko's wife), Dimitri Kipiani (Besia–Siko's neighbor), Vladimir Trapaidze (Isidore–Siko's brother), Arkadi Khintibidze (Karaman), Nikoloz Kakhidze (Jackie–cowboys' chief), Sophia Jozephi (Jeanette–circus actress), Kote Andronikashvili (circus director), Vasil (Vaso) Arabidze (matchmaker), Elisabed Cherkezishvili (Jupana–innkeeper), Mikheil Gelovani and others
3. "Khanuma" - 1926 Director and screenplay author: Alexandre Tsutsunava Based on Avksenti Tsagareli's play of the same name. Silent / Comedy, "Sakkinmretsvi", Duration: 7 parts, 2500 meters, 91 minutes Cinematographer: Sergei Zabozlaev Production designer: Valerian Sidamon–Eristavi, Mikheil Shavishvili. Cast: Valerian Gunia (merchant Adam), Tamar Bolkvadze (Elo–Adam's daughter), Tsetsilia Tsutsunava (Adam's servant woman), Kote Mikaberidze (Ilo), Vladimir Trapaidze (Mito–Adam's nephew), Mikheil Chiaureli (Dito–Adam's nephew), Elisabed Cherkezishvili (Khanuma–matchmaker), Taso (Anastasia) Abashidze (Kabato–matchmaker), Vladimir (Lado) Kavsadze (Prince Levan Pantiashvili), Vaso Abashidze (Papa), Kokhta Karalashvili (Kinto), Dimitri Kipiani (Kinto) and others.
4. "Two Hunters" – 1927 Director: Alexandre Tsutsunava Based on Ilia Eleftheridze's (Zurabashvili's) story Silent / Drama, "Sakkinmretsvi", Duration: 7 parts, 2105 meters, 76 minutes Screenplay authors: Alexandre Tsutsunava, Leli Japaridze Cinematographer: Sergei Zabozlaev Production designer: Valerian Sidamon–Eristavi Cast: Elisabed Cherkezishvili (Magdana), Mikheil Gelovani (Turiko), Kote Mikaberidze (Mgelia), Tamar Kalandadze (Mariko) and others.
5. "Uprising in Guria" - 1928 Director and screenplay author: Alexandre Tsutsunava The film is based on Egnate Ninoshvili's novel of the same name. Silent, "Sakkinmretsvi", Duration: 14 parts, 5200 meters, 176 minutes Cinematographer: Alexandre Dighmelov Production designer: Dimitri Shevardnadze Cast: Alexandre Mesniaev (General Brusilov), Kotsia Eristavi (Prince–Colonel), I. Korsunskaya (Prince's wife), T. Gurieli (Prince Telemaki), Tamar Bolkvadze (Telemaki's daughter), Elisabed Cherkezishvili (Telemaki's wife), Gaioz Meliava (Besia–leader of rebel peasants), Sandro Kandelaki (Rostom), Arkadi Khintibidze (Ivane–nobleman), Siko Palavandishvili (Ivane's servant) and others.

ხანუმა

1927 წ.

ტიპია აღდგენილია კინოსტუდიის „ქართულ ფილმში" აღდგენის რედაქტორი და ტექსტის ავტორი ჯ. ღოღობერიძე

1987



MIKHEIL CHIAURELI



1894-1974

Giorgi Razmadze
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The Creator of "High Stalinism"

According to philosopher and art theorist Boris Groys, Socialist Realism emerged from the avant-garde. This view contradicts the prevailing assumption that the two movements stood in complete opposition. Groys' interpretation acknowledges the antagonism between them, yet locates it not in form but in ideology: the avant-garde was oriented toward radical progress, while Socialist Realism, due to its profound conservatism, functioned instead as a restoration of classicism.

What Stalinist Socialist Realism represented can be understood through the analysis of Mikheil Chiaureli's work. Chiaureli, who began his career within the avant-garde, went on to become the principal architect of what is now called "High Stalinism." Another common misconception asserts that Socialist Realism was created solely through repression. Yet many avant-garde artists willingly and enthusiastically embraced the new artistic method.

Unlike Sergei Eisenstein, Chiaureli — the patriarch of Socialist Realism — believed that class struggle must continue even after the socialist revolution, and that such struggle was impossible without a strong vertical structure of power. Stalin shared this conviction. Chiaureli became Stalin's favored director precisely because his ideological views aligned with the regime's new political direction.

As artistic director of the Tbilisi Film Studio, Chiaureli played a crucial role in consolidating Socialist Realism across the Soviet Union after the release of the first Stalinist film, *The Great Dawn* (1938), which elevated Stalin's position in the narrative of the new state following the October Revolution. He was one of the first directors to present Stalin as Lenin's heir — the sole and legitimate successor of his mission.

Before it became an aesthetic doctrine, Socialist Realism served as a declaration of a new political course. "In the USSR, the period of the proletarian dictatorship and the construction of socialism is a period in which cultures flourish — socialist in content and national in form," Stalin proclaimed at the 16th Congress of the Communist Party. Until a unified socialist civilization emerged, the Soviet government declared support for the development of national cultures — but always within the framework of ongoing class struggle.

Initially, Socialist Realism did not strive to represent the present; rather, it reinterpreted the past through class theory. Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács argued that history begins when the proletariat becomes conscious of itself as a class, and that this consciousness is attained through the re-examination of history. It is precisely this task that Chiaureli set for himself in *Giorgi Saakadze* (1942–43).

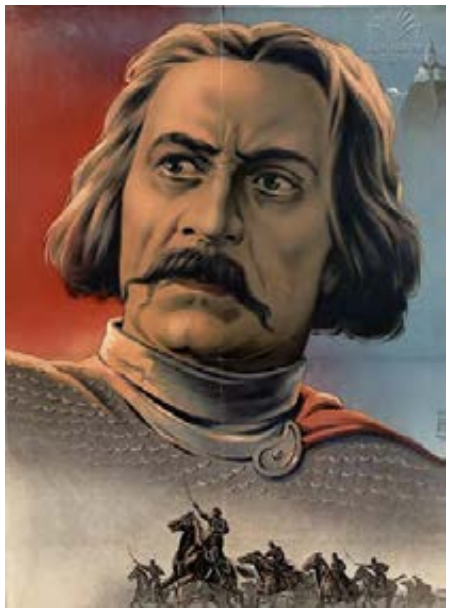
During World War II, two historical epic films dominated Soviet screens: Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* and Chiaureli's *Giorgi Saakadze*. Eisenstein's criticism of Stalin's power resulted in the shutdown of the filming of its third part. Chiaureli, by contrast, linked the establishment of central royal authority in 17th-century Georgia to Stalin's contemporary political agenda.

In the film, Saakadze opposes the feudal lords who undermine national unity. This narrative justified Stalin's intra-party purges and emphasized the necessity of a strong, centralized hierarchy in wartime.

Giorgi Saakadze achieved enormous popularity both within the USSR and internationally. It is reported that Hitler himself viewed the film. Following this unprecedented success, Chiaureli relocated to Russia. Until Stalin's death, he remained the chief director at Mosfilm, although under Nikita Khrushchev he was later exiled to Sverdlovsk. It was only in 1955–57 that he was allowed to return to Tbilisi.

Mikheil Chiaureli was born in Tbilisi in 1894. In 1910 he graduated from the Tbilisi Workshop School and joined the Geor-

gian Folk Performance Management Circle at the People's House (today's Marjanishvili Theatre) — an acting troupe led by Alexandre Tsutsunava, a pioneer of Georgian opera and cinema. Alongside theatre, Chiaureli studied sculpture at the Tbilisi School of Sculpture and Painting under Iakob Nikoladze (1912), one of the founders of Georgian modernism.



Giorgi Saakadze

Nikoladze is considered the father of Georgian realist sculpture, yet his realism was not literal. In many of his works, he retained the raw surfaces of the material, leaving forms seemingly unfinished. The tension between worked and unworked textures produced a surreal impression — a reconciliation of opposites. In modernism, surrealism stands closest to realism, borrowing its techniques to construct worlds of dreams and the unreal. Chiaureli employed these very qualities in developing the monumental "high style" of Stalinist cinema, merging realism and the fantastic — creating, in essence, a socialist-realist surrealism.

In *The Vow* (1946), which addresses the period after Lenin's death, industrialization appears as a dream-like process. After Stalin defeats Bukharin's fraction, the country embarks on grandiose construction. People build the technologies of the future with their own hands, strengthening and defending the Soviet system. Released after World War II, the film's purpose — the justification of rapid industrialization — was clear to audiences.

In *The Vow*, the nation expresses gratitude to Stalin for modernization — a kind of pre-emptive thanks for the victory over fascism. Factories are built not for private gain but for the collective future. In one key episode, after Lenin's passing, the leaders gather in Red Square around Stalin to swear an oath — to continue the mission of the revolutionary father.



The core ideal of communism — and of Lenin specifically — was the simplification of labor and daily life. This required mechanization, beginning with innovations such as the tractor, which eased the burden of agricultural work. It is around this tractor — transported by one

of the film's protagonists to Red Square — that the central conflict between Stalin and Bukharin unfolds. Stalin becomes the defender of the people's interests, initiating the construction of the Stalingrad Tractor Factory on the Volga.

Although the narrative of *The Vow* is surrealistic, many details are even more phantasmagorical — such as the opening of the tractor factory. On the banks of the Volga, crowds in ethnic costumes, carrying flags and national musical instruments, celebrate not merely an industrial site but the very idea of Soviet progress. Shots of tea-pickers merge with Central Asian horns, forming a kind of religious iconography of Socialist Realism. The entire nation participates in the ritual of building a communist future. At this moment, a massive portrait of Stalin is unfurled implying that progress is unimaginable without him.

Stalin's image even appears upon the surface of the Volga. Such visions belong only to dreams: celestial fanfares, extreme discrepancies in scale, Stalin appearing on water,



Otar's Widow



The Vow

people from distant regions united in a single ceremony.

Like Eisenstein, Chiaureli came to cinema through theatre. From 1915 onward, he worked as an actor and later as a director in theatres across Georgia. In 1917, he joined an archaeological expedition studying monuments in southern Georgia (Chorokhi, Tortumi), led by Ekvtime Takaishvili. In 1918, he began teaching drama at the Kutaisi Classical Gymnasium. In 1921 he founded the Tbilisi Satire Theatre, and from 1925 served as director and artistic director of the Workers' Theatre.

His film career began in 1921, when he played the lead role in *Arsena Jorjiashvili*, the first Georgian Soviet film, directed by Ivan Perestiani. Between 1922 and 1924, he interned in the sculpture workshop of the Academy of Arts and devoted several years exclusively to theatre and sculpture. In 1928, alongside Efim Dzigan, he directed *The First Cornet Streshnev*, which is credited with introducing animation to Georgian cinema.

In 1929, Chiaureli made *Saba*, a film addressing women's emancipation. Its genre is difficult to categorize: it is both drama and an agitational work promoting the Soviet Union's progressive stance on women's rights, family relations, alcoholism, and work ethics.

Saba belongs to the tradition of the Soviet avant-garde, but thereafter Chiaureli's style changed. In two films dedicated to the First Democratic Republic of Georgia and Sovietization (*In the Last Hour* (1929) and *The Last Masquerade* (1934)), he preserved poetic-montage aesthetics; however, with the arrival of sound, he turned to the performance methods of epic theatre. Pathos became increasingly pronounced — raising the question of how realism functions in his cinema. The actors' mannerisms, elongated gestures, and stylized facial expressions acquire a surreal dimension. Their performances evoke the elongated forms of Salvador Dalí — only on a monumental scale.

Monumentality became Chiaureli's signature, appearing in every film — from *The Otar's Widow* (1957) to the animated *How Mice Bury the Cat* (1969). Even in *Arsena* (1937), the central character — a bandit who robs the rich to help the poor — is endowed with an aura of global heroic significance. Walter Benjamin defined aura as something that feels close yet remains unreachable. Stalin's first cinematic appearance — in *The Great Dawn* — grew from Chiaureli's pursuit of this very sense of scale.

Mikheil Gelovani's portrayal of Stalin was so powerful that it determined the future of both Chiaureli and Soviet cinema. The actor later recalled entering a state of ecstasy while working under Chiaureli's direction. The director's three films about Stalin are almost religious in nature — better described not as a trilogy but as a *triptych*: *The Vow* (1946), *The Fall of Berlin* (1949), and *The Unforgettable Year 1919* (1951).

Within this triptych, Stalin appears as a truly divine being — seemingly equal to all, yet always elevated by a special aura. As Slavoj Žižek notes, in *The Fall of Berlin* Stalin descends in a radiant white coat like a heavenly deity. The scene recalls Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), which opens with Hitler's aircraft emerging from the clouds to meet the adoring nation. Chiaureli's Stalin not only brings victory over Nazism from heaven — he performs other miracles as well,

reuniting lovers separated by war with a single commanding glance.

As mentioned, after Stalin's death Chiaureli was exiled to Sverdlovsk, though he soon returned to Georgia. He resumed teaching — first at the acting studio of Tbilisi Film Studio, and later at the Moscow Institute of Cinematography.

He was among the first Soviet filmmakers to receive international honors and the first Georgian to win the Gold Medal at the Venice Film Festival in 1947 for *The Vow*. He was also a multiple recipient of the highest awards of the Karlovy Vary Film Festival. In the Soviet Union, he received all major state prizes and distinctions. His unique place in both Georgian and world cinema history is due to his establishment of monumentalism and the "High Stalinism" aesthetic — a phenomenon that continues to evoke astonishment today.

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Filmography

- The First Cornet Streshnev (1928)
- Saba (1929)
- In the Last Hour (1929)
- The Last Masquerade (1934)
- Arsena (1937)
- The Great Dawn (1938)
- Giorgi Saakadze (1943)
  The Vow (1946)
- The Fall of Berlin (1949)
- The Unforgettable Year 1919 (1951)
- Otar's Widow (1957)
- The Story of a Girl (1960)
- The General and the Tambourines (1963)
- What You Have Seen, You Will Never See Again (1965)
- Singer of Dawn (1967)
- How Mice Bury the Cat (1969)
- Rooster the Surgeon (1970)
- The Dragonfly and the Ant (1972)
- A Jar of Butter (Broken Dreams) (1972)
- The House/Home (1974)



What You Have Seen, you Will Never Seen Again



A Jar of Butter (Broken Dreams)

KOTE MARJANISHVILI



1872-1933

Nana Dolidze
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Kote Marjanishvili's Cinematographic Activity

The name of Kote Marjanishvili is primarily associated with Georgian theatre—a director who radically renewed theatrical language and played a decisive role in the development of the national stage. However, cinema also occupies an important place in his creative legacy. Although Marjanishvili's engagement with Georgian cinema was relatively brief, it was exceptionally significant. He was not merely a theatre director who temporarily turned to film; rather, he was an artist who sought to create a new cinematic language, endowed screen acting with new qualities, and transformed cinema into a medium of national memory and consciousness. One of the defining features of his work is the organic synthesis of theatre and cinema—a synthetic aesthetic that

marked a turning point in the development of Georgian art.

Marjanishvili's first encounter with cinematography also emerged from the theatrical stage. In 1912, while working in Kyiv at Solovtsov's Theatre, he staged the pantomime *Tears*. This production, which in essence represented a unique cinematic performance realized on a theatrical stage, clearly revealed the influence of cinema—the "phenomenon" of the new century. Russian film producer A. Khanzhonkov immediately noticed this distinctive quality of Marjanishvili's staging and proposed filming it. Khanzhonkov transferred the play directly to the screen, positioning the camera frontally in front of the stage and filming the entire performance.

In his memoirs, Khanzhonkov recalled: "I transferred the most interesting theatrical production of the season—the pantomime *Tears*—unchanged to cinema. It brought considerable profit and popularity. The director of the Moscow Art Theatre, K. A. Marjanov, organized a small troupe to stage a silent performance consisting of nine scenes—the play by A. S. Voznesensky, with sets by Simov and specially composed music by I. A. Sats. The production was, so to speak, transferred from the screen to the stage and was remarkable for its originality and its affinity with cinematography. This play then appeared on screen as well."

Montage thinking, plasticity of the frame, and the dynamic construction of the artistic image significantly shaped Marjanishvili's theatrical style. Therefore, after returning to Georgia, it was only natural that he wished to test his creative potential behind the film camera and to articulate his own distinct vision in cinema as well. Prior to this, he traveled to Petrograd, where in 1916 he signed a contract obligating him to make twenty-four films. In reality, only one film—*Omnipotent Love*—was completed.

The 1916 issues (Nos. 1–2) of the journal *Cine Phono* report that the joint-stock company Drankov released K. Marjanishvili's first film to the screen. The cast included actors from the Imperial and provincial theatres, as well as a renowned performer of original dance. Audiences were promised "stylish sets," a distinctive atmosphere, elaborate props, and similar attractions. The film was a melodrama depicting a love story from aristocratic life. Louis Forestier, the studio's leading cinematographer and a former collaborator of Léon Gaumont's film factory, was invited to shoot the film.

Drankov later offered Marjanishvili the position of artistic director of the film studio, but Marjanishvili declined further collaboration. He soon left the studio without regret, as Drankov insisted on producing bourgeois dramas. In order to satisfy market demands, the studio released hundreds of films annually on a conveyor-belt basis. Of the more than 2,700 films produced in the Russian Empire before 1920, only about 300 have survived—and Marjanishvili's first work is not among them.

Perhaps for this reason, the first surviving entry in his filmography dates from 1924—*Before the Storm*, co-directed with Shalva Dadiani. This film has not survived either, making detailed analysis difficult. Nevertheless, contemporary press accounts allow us to reconstruct certain aspects of its content. Set against a revolutionary background, the plot centers on the love story of Tade and Tasia, which serves as a pretext for depicting class confrontation. On the eve of their wedding, Prince

Rostom orders that Tasia be taken to him, a command that culminates in a peasant uprising and the prince's murder. Tade, who had previously fled after a conflict with a factory owner and participated in the rebellion, returns to the city, becomes involved in revolutionary activities, and is ultimately exposed and imprisoned. Marjanishvili sought to draw extensively on local historical context and to extract personal drama from broad socio-political processes.

The 1920s were a period of experimentation—the beginning of cinema's search for self-definition. At the same time, the socio-political environment created fertile ground for the politicization of the cinematic screen. Similar processes were unfolding in theatre and literature. From its earliest years, Georgian cinema turned toward literature; silent cinema, in particular, perceived national literature as a foundation for creating a distinctive Georgian cinematic identity. Although early screen adaptations often retained little more than narrative outlines from their literary sources, the development of Georgian cinema nonetheless proceeded largely through adaptations of literary works.

The prevalence of adaptations was also linked to a crisis in dramaturgy, as works were increasingly interpreted through the ideological lens of the Soviet era. Emphasis on social themes and the incorporation of revolutionary propaganda became common practice, often resulting in films marked by schematic simplicity and limited correspondence to the deeper ideological substance of the original texts. Despite these limitations, from today's perspective—more than a century later—it is evident that silent-era screen adaptations constitute some of the most compelling works of the period. This phenomenon is not unique to Georgian cinema but is characteristic of world cinema's early historical development.

Despite the abundance of adaptations, filmmakers were often hesitant to depict on screen characters who were deeply familiar and beloved by audiences. Alongside social melo-

The Gadfly





Samanishvili's Stepmother

drama, comedy emerged as a leading genre in Georgian cinema, with satire and grotesque frequently employed as dominant artistic strategies. These tendencies naturally influenced Marjanishvili's decision to adapt David Kldiashvili's *Samanishvili's Stepmother*.

"It must be noted," wrote Kote Marjanishvili, "that in my opinion Kldiashvili's plays are not properly understood by our directors at all. It is impossible, for example, to turn *Darispani's Misfortune* into an anecdotal vaudeville, because this seemingly small work is imbued with genuine tragedy. I repeat: this tragicomedy stands on the boundary between laughter and tears."

Marjanishvili accurately defined the genre nature of Kldiashvili's work, though his interpretation remained unrealized on the stage. In cinema, however, the demands of the era itself appear to have taken precedence. In his 1925 article *Pro domo sua*, Marjanishvili emphasized that one of the foremost tasks of national filmmaking should be the documentation of traditional ways of life and customs: the old type was disappearing, customs were changing, a new way of life was emerging, and time would soon erase the past. "We must immediately record on film all regions of our homeland—so colorful, so diverse."

Thus, Marjanishvili's orientation toward depicting the transition from old ways of life to new inevitably shaped his screen adaptation of Kldiashvili's work, where social emphasis was elevated to a primary objective.

The screenplay for *Samanishvili's Stepmother* was written by Kldiashvili's son, Sergo Kldiashvili, in collaboration with Nikoloz Shengelaia. The script has not survived, making detailed analysis difficult, though certain episodes in the finished film clearly bear the imprint of the screenwriters' creative intervention. Completed in just three weeks, the screenplay enabled Marjanishvili to begin filming immediately. The director invited Mikheil Chiaureli as production designer, while Kldiashvili's characters were embodied by experienced theatre actors: Shalva Gambashidze, Akaki Vasadze, Tsetsilia Tsutsunava, Alexandre Zhorzholiani, and Nutsa Javakhishvili.

The film's theatrical prehistory also played an important role, as Kldiashvili's world was already familiar to the actors. However, Marjanishvili introduced significant shifts in role distribution: Gambashidze, who had played Platon on stage, appeared as Bekina

on screen; Vasadze assumed the role of Platon; and Zhorzholiani, formerly the narrator, portrayed Aristo. These changes required actors to translate Kldiashvili's verbal expressiveness into gesture and facial expression—an adaptation facilitated by Marjanishvili and his deep respect for the acting profession.

"I have finally become convinced," Marjanishvili wrote, "that if theatre needs an actor rather than an amateur, cinema needs an actor all the more—and only an actor. I emphasize this because I have often encountered supporters of casting based solely on external appearance."

Rejecting the concept of the "type," Marjanishvili consistently advocated professional acting. While the history of cinema demonstrates the artistic achievements of both professional and non-professional performers, Marjanishvili approached cinema from a theatrical perspective, seeking to transplant the values of stage acting onto the screen. His choice was especially justified for *Samanishvili's Stepmother*, which is fundamentally a comedy of character rather than of situation. In silent cinema, professional acting skill was essential for the creation of nuanced characters.

Extreme poverty and the struggle against it define the dramatic and comic essence of Kldiashvili's characters. Fear, despair, and hope form the emotional backbone of the narrative, shaping its imagery and structure. Poverty emerges as a fatal, insurmountable force against which the nobility's morality, actions, and behavior are revealed. Kldiashvili's compassion for these characters does not prevent him from recognizing their absurdity; he laughs with them, sharing their suffering and anxieties.



Gogi Ratiani

In Marjanishvili's film, Kldiashvili's characters undergo a distinctive transformation. Bekina, in particular, loses the tragicomic chivalric nobility present in the literary source. Marjanishvili presents him as bent, ragged, self-satisfied, and conceited—incapable of recognizing his own errors.

Bekina's character appears in only a few episodes. At the beginning of the film, he is presented to the viewer with a black beard and mustache, thick black eyebrows, and dressed entirely in black. He is able, with ease, to drain a drinking horn, then empty a vase, and then flash his eyes theatrically. K. Marjanishvili and M. Chiaureli do not spare expressive means in order to give the old man's face greater caricatural sharpness. The character's costumes also serve this purpose. As theatre scholar E. Gugushvili notes, "the director emphasizes the character's wretchedness through careless dress (his clothing resembles underwear more than a nobleman's chokha) and through his entire outward appearance." The conceited Bekina's preening and posing in front of the mirror further exaggerate his character, rendering his desires ridiculous and turning—despite his age—the entire performance staged to please the bride into a comic spectacle.

The bride becomes a particularly sharp object of laughter. Marjanishvili's Elene, unlike Kldiashvili's kind and gentle prospective stepmother, is an elderly woman captivated and carried away by the idea of a possible future marriage, her face thickly rouged and her appearance carefully groomed. Aristo respectfully introduces Elene to Platon. The bride modestly smooths her dress, cannot find her place, fidgets nervously. Platon slowly inches closer to his future "mother." Elene, embarrassed, suddenly jumps up and runs off to fetch the backgammon board. The actress (N. Javakhishvili) does not spare facial expressions to emphasize her own shyness, which makes her all the more comical.

For the film's authors, Kldiashvili's Elene is ridiculous because her desire to marry is incompatible with her age; therefore, the bride is with great difficulty pushed through the window, a gag is stuffed into the mouth of the writer's kind Elene, and upon arriving at her new family's home, she is even thrown off the horse's saddle.

It is noteworthy that the metaphorical language characteristic of silent cinema was not foreign to Marjanishvili. The director resorts to this device in the very first episode of the film, when Platon learns of his father's intention. One of the director's most successful discoveries is the detail of the sour pickle (when the stepmother slips into the kitchen and quietly eats a sour pickle, a gesture that hints at her pregnancy). It should be noted that the close-up—especially the use of detail—occupies an important place in the film; however, it often gives the impression of being deprived of a clear dramaturgical function and used as an end in itself. This is evident in the opening shots of the film. The camera leaves no corner of the Samanishvili household unnoticed. The director focuses his attention on the everyday routines of village life. On screen we see a pig stuck in a fence, close-ups of soapy hands, a fight between a dog and a pig, close-ups of vegetables being passed from hand to hand, a cat, a dog, and other such details.

Particularly noteworthy (and repeatedly emphasized by Georgian film scholars) is the scene of the stepmother's abduction, which in the literary source is only hinted at. The episode gains even greater intensity when, in the scene preceding the abduc-





Amok (Low and Duty)

tion, the film's authors have the characters—emboldened and slightly drunk from the feast laid out at Platon's table—stage a mock enactment of partisan ambush tactics in the stepmother's courtyard. It is precisely after this grotesquely exaggerated situation that the virtuoso scene of the bride's abduction begins.

The elderly Elene is frightened as a little girl and, at the same time, embarrassed; she is dressed up and adorned by the "former" daughter-in-law. The stepmother-to-be appears extremely awkward: flustered, she strikes her foot against a trough, after which she is passed through the window in a very clumsy manner. She lacks the traditional lightness associated with brides to be abducted, and for this reason she is dragged with difficulty on someone's back. With great effort, she is also hoisted onto the horse's saddle, and upon reaching their destination, the stepmother is finally knocked off the horse and thrown to the ground.

Simultaneously, Bekina's dream sequence unfolds: scenes of slaughter, Bekina's anguish, his drunken state, and Platon's beheading by Bekina's sword. When Bekina awakens from this disturbing dream, the bride is already waiting for him at home. In the dream, the anticipated danger of a father destroying his own son with his own hands is read unambiguously, since the appearance of an heir signifies not the beginning of new life, but the end of Platon's life.

The principle of parallel action is employed earlier in the film as well, when the director juxtaposes Kirile's unrestrained audacity with Platon's restraint. Kirile offers Platon a glass filled with wine. In a close-up, we see Platon wave his hand at the glass and knock it away. Enraged, he then mounts his horse and gallops off. In parallel, the director shows Kirile, who is far less troubled by his brother-in-law's behavior and has already begun dancing and reveling at the table.

In the film *Samanishvili's Stepmother,* the interiors meticulously crafted by the director and the production designer are immediately evident. Kote Marjanishvili pays particular

attention to frame composition: no character—even no object—occupies a position by chance, but is arranged according to a carefully predetermined compositional scheme. It is undeniable that the director's theatrical experience greatly assisted him in constructing cinematographic scenes.

From episode to episode, the rhythm of action intensifies and reaches its culmination in the abduction scene. Marjanishvili employs montage not merely as a technical device, but as an essential means of realizing the film's dramaturgical strategies. The entire acting ensemble is integrated into these objectives. Each scene gives the impression of having been thoroughly worked out prior to filming. It appears that rehearsals with actors were of particular importance to the director—a practice that had scarcely existed in Georgian cinematography up to that point.

"I do not intend to destroy individuality within it," Marjanishvili writes. "My task is to reveal the idea, to make it more accessible, to ignite and inspire the actor, to unite individual sensibilities into a single symphonic chord. I am obliged to protect the actor from error, but I have no right to interfere with the sacred fire. Only in that fire does the idea grow in all its beauty."

The director does not share Kldiashvili's liberal humanism and instead imbues the film with a sharper, more forceful tone. The tragicomic intonations of the original story are lost. Whereas in Kldiashvili's prose the characters gradually evolve into figures of drama, no such transformation occurs in the film, as the filmmakers emphasize, above all, the social characteristics of the class to which Kldiashvili's characters belong. Moreover, the "silence" inherent in early cinema offered fewer possibilities for adapting Kldiashvili's work for the screen, since he belongs to the group of writers for whom the spoken word is primary. David Kldiashvili, after all, is a master of dialogue.

Samanishvili's Stepmother proved to be a work in which the influence of reformist theatre, on the one hand, and national literature, on the other, manifested itself most clearly in Georgian cinema. Such detailed elaboration of roles and professional work on character—as seen in *Samanishvili's Stepmother*—was a novelty for Georgian cinema of the period. The primary emphasis is placed on the actor, and it was precisely after this film that the formation of a school of screen acting began, one that included many of Marjanishvili's students.

The film *Samanishvili's Stepmother* occupies an important place not only in the history of Georgian cinema, but above all in Kote Marjanishvili's own cinematographic oeuvre. Georgian cinema was developing under conditions of intense ideological pressure and lacked the rich cinematic tradition enjoyed by Georgian theatre, literature, music, or painting. In order to survive, and to seek out and establish a national identity, cinema inevitably had to rely on Georgian theatre and classical Georgian literature. Marjanishvili's work in cinema was, in a sense, an expression of this necessity, while the film's principal shortcomings represent the tribute paid by a great director to his era.

"If theatre requires an actor rather than a stage enthusiast, then cinema requires an actor even more so—an actor above all."

This approach ran counter to the avant-garde trends of the time. For this very reason, Marjanishvili was criticized, accused of having simply transferred theatre onto film. Yet, years later, it has become evi-

dent that he was, in fact, one of the first to argue convincingly for the necessity of the professional actor in Georgian cinema and for the development of a training system specific to the medium.

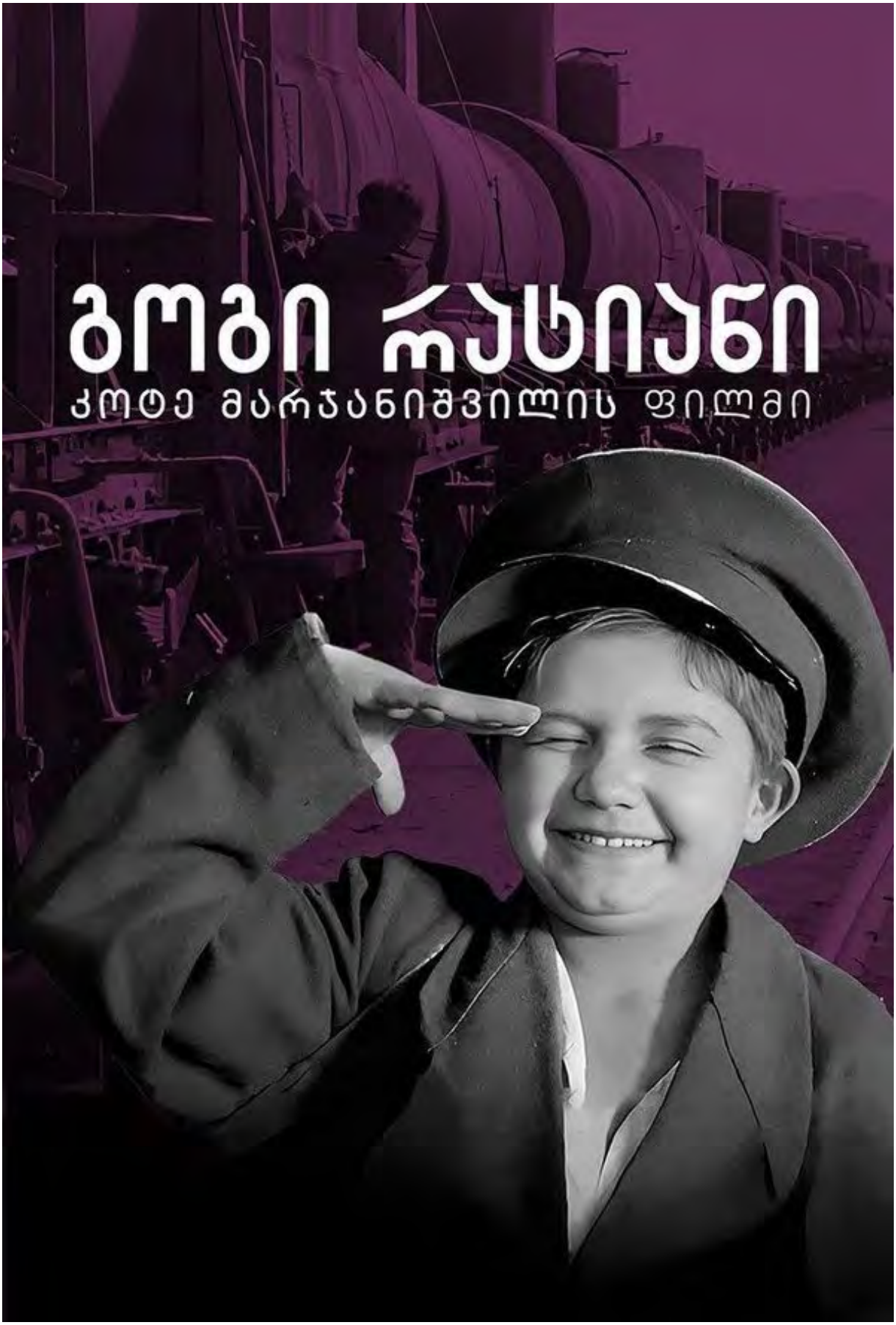
In 1927, two films were released simultaneously: *Amok (Law and Duty)*, based on Stefan Zweig's novel of the same title—one of the earliest attempts to adapt European literature for the screen—and *Gogi Ratiani*, the first children's feature film in Georgian cinema. In 1928, the screen adaptation of *The Gadfly*, the novel by the Irish writer Ethel Voynich, which had become a bestseller in the Soviet Union, was released. In 1929, Kote Marjanishvili concluded his period of work in cinema with the film *The Communard's Pipe*, based on Ilya Ehrenburg's short story of the same name.

Between 2016 and 2020, through the joint efforts of the Ministry of Culture of Georgia and the National Film Center, within the framework of the project "The Return of Georgian Cinematic Heritage to Its Homeland," original prints of Kote Marjanishvili's films were brought back from the Russian film archives. On the basis of the National Archives of Georgia, all of the director's films (with the exception of *Before the Storm*) were restored and digitized. This made it possible to render the cinematic legacy of the great director accessible not only to Georgian audiences, but to viewers worldwide. Marjanishvili was the first in Georgian cinema to establish a professional standard of screen acting, to introduce the concept of the national type, everyday detail, and historical memory into film, and to attempt a synthesis of montage, composition, and theatrical material—an approach that later became the foundation for the achievements of Nikoloz Shengelaia and other directors.

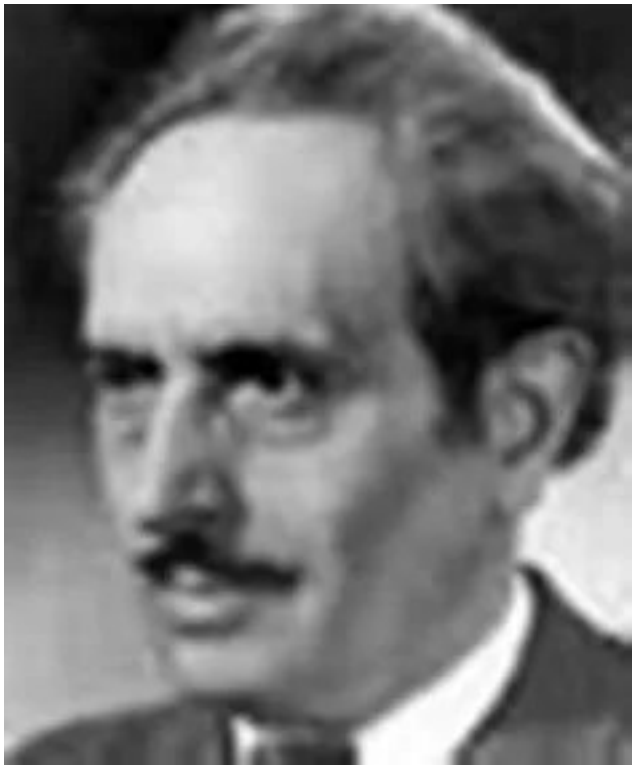
For Marjanishvili, cinema, like theatre, was a space for exploring the human condition, history, and national life. Consequently, despite the fact that some of his films have been lost, Marjanishvili's cinematic works remain an invaluable foundational resource for the study of the development of Georgian cinema. It was precisely cinema that became a kind of laboratory for the great theatre director—a space from which the experience gained was later applied on the theatrical stage.

Filmography

1924 – *Before the Storm*
1926 – *Samanishvili's Stepmother*
1927 – *Amok (Law and Duty)*
1927 – *Gogi Ratiani*
1928 – *The Gadfly*
1929 – *The Communard's Pipe*


ბოში პასიანი
კოტე მარჯანიშვილის ფილმი

KONSTANTINE MIKABERIDZE



1896-1973

Rusudan Kvaratskhelia
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Konstantine (Kote) Mikaberidze (born in 1896 in Termuki, present-day Kuban; died in 1973 in Tbilisi) was a Georgian actor and film director, Honored Art Worker of the Georgian SSR (1945).

Mikaberidze entered the world of cinema in 1921, during the historically dramatic period in which Russia occupied Georgia and imposed the Soviet regime. Actor, director, screenwriter, artist—he was the creator of one of the masterpieces of Georgian cinema, yet a man marked by a tragic fate. Mikaberidze's life story vividly reflects the reality of the Soviet epoch and the fate of thousands of people who, though spared physical destruction, were spiritually crushed by intense ideological pressure and deprived of their will.

Like many of his contemporaries, Kote Mikaberidze began in cinema as an actor. After completing Kutaisi Gymnasium, he worked from 1918 to 1921 as an actor in the theatres of Kutaisi and Batumi. From 1919 he was a member of the Drama Actors' Union. In 1921, he moved to Tbilisi to live and continue his studies, and soon became actively involved in stage work. He studied at the Drama Studio affiliated with the Rustaveli Theatre under Akaki Phaghava and simultaneously performed various character roles in productions by Aleksandre Tsutsunatava, Akaki Phaghava, and Kote Marjanishvili.

In 1921, on the recommendation of director Ivane Perestiani, Mikaberidze joined **Sakhkinmretsvi** (State Film Production) as a staff actor. At that time, Sakhkinmretsvi did not formally exist yet. In the very first year of the Soviet occupation, a film department was established under the People's Commissariat of Education (Gansakhkomi), and by decree of the Revolutionary Committee, all cinemas and their property were declared state-owned. Germane Gogitidze was appointed head of the film department, and Amo Bek-Nazarov its director. The primary purpose of the department was revolutionary propaganda and political education through cinema.

In the early 1920s, the newly established Soviet government demanded only one thing from film—turn it into a weapon of propaganda. The instability of Soviet power at that time forced the Bolsheviks to temporarily adopt market mechanisms to revive the national economy and calm the distressed population. This also affected cinema: the film market began to slowly revive. Since Soviet production was still weak, only a limited number of films with audience-appeal were permitted—many of which did not align with Bolshevik ideology or Leninist views on cinema. The state lacked the financial capacity to fully enforce its ideological objectives in such an expensive field. Therefore, the government was compelled to tolerate the presence of a market system in cinematography—one oriented toward viewers and profit rather than party directives. A state strategy for cinema development was also announced.

These circumstances shaped the interest in literary adaptations in Georgian cinema. Screen versions of works by Egnate Ninoshvili, Aleksandre Kazbegi, Shio Aragvispireli, Daniel Chonkadze, Giorgi Tsereteli, and Nino Nakashidze appeared one after another. For the Bolshevik party, however, ideological influence remained paramount, and with this purpose Ivane Perestiani—who had arrived from Russia—directed *Arsena Jorjiashvili* (1921), featuring Kote Mikaberidze. He portrayed a worker-revolutionary, a close comrade of the protagonist Arsena, fighting against social injustice. Although the role was not major and did not fully reveal his acting talent, the scene where he jumps into an icy river in winter remains particularly striking and courageous.

Soon after, Perestiani filmed *Three Lives* (1924), based on Giorgi Tsereteli's novel *The First Step*, and again invited Mikaberidze to act. The literary plot was framed within class inequality, and Mikaberidze played Batu, an escaped convict and bandit—another episodic role in which the director again emphasized his physical abilities. In his first appearance in the second episode, he performs a stunt escape from captivity using a rope thrown from a window.

Mikaberidze's third film role was Siko—





My Grandmother



one of the main characters—in Aleksandre Tsutsunava's *Who is Guilty* (1925), based on a play by Nino Nakashidze. Tsutsunava, who had vast theatrical experience before entering cinema and was well-versed in Stanislavsky's performance theory, shared these methods with his actors, including the rising cinema star Nato Vachnadze and Mikaberidze. As a result, their acting became more convincing, grounded in authentic transformation. After collaborating with Tsutsunava, Mikaberidze created sincere, emotionally nuanced screen characters in films such as: *The Case of Tariel Mklavadze's Murder* (dir. I. Perestian,1925), *Dina-Dzadzhu* (dir. I. Zheliabuzhsky, 1926), *Khanuma* (dir. Al. Tsutsunava, 1926), *Two Hunters* (dir. Al. Tsutsunava, 1927), *Gipsy Blood* (dir. L. Push, 1928), *The Last Masquerade* (dir. M. Chiaureli, 1934), and *Akaki's Cradle* (dir. K. Pipinashvili, 1947). His name rightfully joined the roster of Georgian film stars of the 1920s.

The films of this decade intrigued audiences with their dynamic plots and sharply drawn characters. At the same time, several directors began artistic experimentation, incorporating elements of the avant-garde, surrealism, expressionism, and cubism.

In 1929, Kote Mikaberidze directed his first film—*My Grandmother*—a true masterpiece of Georgian cinema. This film radically differed in style from all earlier works. Here, grotesque tragicomedy, avant-garde surrealism, and the extreme stylization of expressionism appeared in Georgian film for the first time. *My Grandmother* was officially framed as an agitprop film against bureaucracy, yet it unexpectedly revealed the absurdity of the Soviet system itself. It became a biting caricature of Soviet reality.

The film offered an original interpretation of expressionist aesthetics while remaining unlike anything previously made in Georgia. Expressionism is inherently steeped in pessimism and a sense of impending catastrophe. Mikaberidze wrote in his memoirs:

"…I sought to create a cinematic satire that would sharply ridicule bureaucracy, philistinism, and protectionism. To achieve this, I passionately searched for a bold, expressive cinematic form" (Art Palace).





The Late Bridegroom

Though appearing to follow a narrative structure, *My Grandmother* intentionally disrupts logical causality and motivation. Even the title signifies symbolic, rather than literal, meaning: "grandmother" never appears as a character—she is an allegorical figure representing assistance in finding employment.

Modernist artist Irakli Gamrekeli designed the film's iconic set: a circular structure with thir-

teen doors, chairs affixed to them without supporting walls—an exaggerated, distorted space typical of expressionism. Anton Polikevich's unconventional cinematography—non-traditional framing, puppet animation, and deliberately chaotic visuals—creates a uniquely symbolic cinematic environment. The film cannot be stylistically assigned exclusively to German expressionism, French avant-garde, or constructivism, though it incorporates elements of each. Rather, it distills the wide range of modernist movements of the early 20th century.

From the standpoint of Soviet ideology, Mikaberidze committed an unforgivable act: He openly criticized the system and exposed the bureaucratic mechanism of governance. He also embraced experimental artistic forms deemed ideologically subversive. Labelled a "formalist director," he saw his film banned and shelved. In the Soviet cultural-political context, "formalism" was a grave accusation—one that cost countless artists their careers and sometimes their lives.

Sergei Tretyakov, a film specialist sent from Moscow, warned him after the film's screening: "Attempting experimental comedy is the most difficult genre under Soviet conditions. Satire and the prosecutor's office stand side by side" (Art Palace). Ultimately, *My Grandmother* was branded "anti-Soviet, formalist"—prohibited for decades—and only in 1976 was it recognized, first as a Soviet, and later as a Georgian and world cinema masterpiece.

For Kote Mikaberidze, *My Grandmother* marked the start of continuous setbacks—an unending chain of obstacles. Numerous projects remained unrealized, halted, or forgotten.

Archival documents reveal twelve completed or approved screenplays that never reached production. Though diverse in theme, they all shared a trait unacceptable to Soviet ideology: their protagonists were not "heroic fighters," but ordinary people with individual feelings and perspectives.

A year before *My Grandmother* was filmed, Mikaberidze planned to create a documentary titled *Harvest*, following Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Eye* principles, using montage to juxtapose dancing feet with grape-treading peasants, and incorporating animation. Preparations had begun, but the project was abandoned.

After the first "failure," Mikaberidze clearly understood the ideological constraints and created an educational documentary, *What You Sow, So Shall You Reap* (1930). It was a straightforward agitprop film, devoid of artistic experimentation, yet it too was never released.

His next project, *Rote Fahne*, focused on viticulture and the friendship between ethnic German and Georgian peasants in collective farming. The film, ideologically inconsistent with Bolshevik expectations, was discontinued. In 1932, a revised version of the story was filmed by director Leo Esakia as *Shakiri*. That same year, Mikaberidze completed his second film, *Hasan*, about an Adjara peasant saved from famine through collective labor. The film and its documentation are considered lost, possibly stored in Russian archives.

As his film work diminished, his acting roles also dwindled. He appeared only in M. Chiaureli's *The Last Masquerade* (1934). Creative interests led him to the conservatory, where he studied vocal beginning in 1934.

In 1935, he interrupted his studies to work

on *Kadjeti*—a planned prequel to *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*. The studio prepared for full-scale production in 1936–1937. The project was ambitious—using combined cinematography, visual effects, and stunts. Ivan Nikitchenko arrived from Moscow to handle composite filming. Though the screenplay by Mikaberidze and Nikitchenko was approved, the production suffered from Moscow's reduced funding, Lavrenty Beria's censorship, and the technical team's inability to meet expectations. The hardly finished *Kadjeti* was taken to Moscow for approval in 1936. A single positive review from a discussion held at Moscow's "House of Cinema" remains in the Art Palace archives. This dream, too, ended in failure.

Another unrealized project, *Kako the Bandit*, co-written with Siko Dolidze, was approved in October 1937. The crew was assembled and shooting began with cameraman Felix Vysotsky. However, in early 1938, orders from higher authorities halted production.



Kadjeti

Despite everything, Mikaberidze persevered and directed the satirical comedy *The Late Bridegroom* (1939), dedicated to Soviet life and "the new era." Although it conformed ideologically, Moscow censors still demanded significant cuts and removal of entire scenes.

In 1941, Mikaberidze's short feature *Outpost* was released. Aside from information that the film failed, no other documentation—or the film itself—is accessible.

Although the archive preserves scripts for fairy-tale films *Natsarkekia* and *The Magic Pipe*, and for *Manana's Abduction* and *9+1*, Mikaberidze was never again allowed to direct a major film.

From 1950, he was reassigned to the animation unit as co-director. Several screenplays were prepared: *The Evil Fox* (1950), *Transient Lands* (1965), and *Zuriko and Mariko* (1952)—only the last of which was realized as an animated film.

The final film project he worked on was a small documentary for the newsreel *Soviet Georgia—Albanian Delegation in Georgia*. This was merely a means of earning money. His family lived in extreme poverty.

In the 1930s, he narrowly survived repression for his film critical of the system. Yet at age 60, in 1957, he was arrested again based on four letters—two of which were anti-Soviet and sent to the editorial office under the pseudonym "Voice of Free Georgia." They stated: "Soviet power is a gigantic concentration camp; the most cowardly and fearful state, afraid of its own shadow, afraid of its people; a deceitful despot that has stripped Soviet citizens of every freedom, dignity, courage, and individuality… Soviet power is truly an imperialist state—worse even than a fascist state! The people know this. Long live free Georgia!" *(Ministry of Internal Affairs Archives)*

Such statements were unforgivable. Mikaberidze was sentenced to three years in a Mordovian prison camp.

He returned home in 1959—broken, subdued—never again permitted to work as a director. He was assigned to the dubbing department, where he remained silent and caused no "problems." He drew, wrote, listened to music, studied languages and medicine, but never again expressed the desire to make a film.

Kote Mikaberidze was recognized as a brilliant director only posthumously. It is difficult to imagine how one man—full of talent, hope, energy, and enthusiasm—endured so many defeats, hardships, humiliations, punishment, and finally, complete silence and enforced submission.

In 1973, during an evening dedicated to actor-director Arkadi Kintibidze, Mikaberidze concluded his speech by saying: "Let us remember one another and ask—how are you?"

Then the lights came on. The audience left the hall. The evening was over. And only one person remained seated—Kote Mikaberidze, who had passed away silently, without a word… in front of the screen…

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Filmography

• 1929 – *My Grandmother* (restored in 1976 by director Leila Gordeladze)
• 1930 – *What You Sow, So Shall You Reap* (documentary)
• 1932 – *Hasan*
• 1936 – *Kadjeti*
• 1939 – *The Late Bridegroom* (restored in 1966 by Kote Mikaberidze)
• 1941 – *Outpost*

ჟურნალი "ლაშქრობის" ნაწარმოები, 1937 წ

ქაჯეთი



NIKOLOZ SHENGELAIA



1901-1943

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Georgian cinema of the 1920s, experiencing the influence of Russian culture existing in a unified political, economic, and cultural space, creates manifestos that record enthusiasm for the dynamic "icon-painting" possibilities of cinema's "mumification" (A. Bazin). In "Cinema Apology" we read: "Cinema is a new art, cinema comes as a constructor of life" "Cinema, like life, is always dynamic, the word is falsehood, in cinema, where the word is rejected, falsehood will never exist." At the beginning and end of the century, a seemingly unified excitement is noted, new possibilities emerge. In the 1920s, Dziga Vertov is fascinated by the idea he formulates in the manifesto "I Am the Cinema Eye," and notes cinema's unique



Giuli



Twenty-six Commissars



The Orange Valley

possibility to create a new person, a new reality independent of the sign of time, that is, to produce "simulacral reality" (Žižek). In the 1920s, cinematography further concretizes and increases the function of specific devices, and it can be said that the process of forming new art forms, a new society, and state defined the pathos of 1920s Soviet cinematography, which was charged with the function of an "ideological mouthpiece."

It is precisely in Georgian cinema of this period that the name of Nikoloz Shengelaia, one of the founders of Soviet montage-avant-garde cinema, first appears. His entry into cinematography is connected with the name of Kote Marjanishvili, with whom he worked as an assistant director on the film "Before the Storm" in 1924, while in 1926-1927 he wrote screenplays with Sergo Kldiashvili for the films "Samanisvili's Stepmother" and "Flanking."

The director's debut came with the film *Giuli* (1927). The film's screenplay was created based on Shio Aragvispireli's story. Its plot is simple, melodramatic. It tells the love story of a Muslim woman, Giuli, and the Christian Mitro. Their relationship develops in one mountainous region where Christians and Muslims live side by side. The foundation of the tragic relationship between the young woman and man is precisely different traditions and religious beliefs. Family members forcibly marry Giuli to the elderly Ali. Despite this, the lovers try to escape. The insulted Ali pursues and kills them. Essentially, *Giuli* was the director's attempt to work independently in cinematography, to test his capabilities. Also significant in *Giuli* is Mikheil Kalatozishvili's cinematographic work, where he creates sharp angles and new forms of reflecting reality.

In 1928, Nikoloz Shengelaia, together with other art figures—Beso Zhghenti, Mikheil Chiaureli, Nato Vachnadze, Simon Chiqovani, Akaki Beliashvili, Giorgi Mdivani, and Siko Dolidze—formed "LEF" as a left futurist movement, whose basic concept implied the purification of the human soul, the liberation of the mind from the remnants of past culture.

That same year, he made the film *Eliso* based on Alexander Kazbegi's story of the same name. Nikoloz Shengelaia takes only the schema from the story, whereby the literary source and film version are perceived as completely independent units.

Al. Kazbegi's *Eliso*—against the background of Vazhia and Eliso's love—shows us the fact of the Chechens' resettlement; the action develops in a critical situation. Kazbegi emphatically highlights the necessity of Eliso making a choice between her father, who for Eliso is identified with feelings of duty and loyalty, and Vazhia—emotionality and tenderness. The processes occurring in Eliso's soul, the struggle of feelings, at a certain moment lead her to a strange compromise. Eliso is an ordinary woman for whom betrayal, revenge, and chaos are unacceptable; after unsuccessful negotiations with representatives of Russian authorities, the heroes make their final choice in favor of freedom—this is how Vazhia and Eliso act, and Anzor, overwhelmed by the power of feelings, acts as



Eliso

well. The finale is fatal because there is no way out of the enchanted, closed circle. Kazbegi characterizes the background, that is, the general condition of the Chechens, with several phrases, which very vividly, eloquently paints us a picture of general "mourning." Thus, it can be said that this theme with him is marked by more "passive-activity." The work's main pathos implies that it is impossible to sacrifice an already doomed nation that once possessed dignity and traditions to an individual's personal experiences. Every individual must seek a way out, be an active "fighter." Kazbegi's heroes are permeated with personal tragedy and are distinguished by active vital energy. The extreme manifestation of Eliso's internal struggle is loyalty to both father and Vazhia, their unity, because it is impossible to make a choice between feeling and duty, which could disturb spiritual harmony.

If with Alexander Kazbegi, "the love story" comes first, Nikoloz Shengelaia understands it from another angle, that is, brings socio-political problems to the foreground. With a sharp redistribution of accents, a new image is created, a canvas of mass, collective character; the individual is emptied of individual experiences and feelings and becomes a "hero." Consequently, each character is worked out schematically and the entire plot and story are built at the expense of several central episodes. It should also be noted that if we review the general production of the 1920s, we will see that films are mainly built by this method; the content and ideological layer unfolds into several highly rhythmic, effective episodes, while episodes necessary for the narrative, that is, auxiliary episodes, are more "chamber-like," schematic, and passive.

Eliso tells of the Chechens' struggle to preserve their native lands. The most important idea is highlighted: that it is impossible to sacrifice the country's common interests to personal ones. To embody these ideas, the director uses two "main" episodes: the scene of confrontation between Chechens and authorities. Tsarist Russia's cavalrymen stand opposite the Chechens. At this time, the Chechens are informed of the order regarding resettlement. The ineffectiveness of negotiations, the Chechens' "obedient protest," pushes the authorities' representatives toward violence. In the conflict situation, Chechens lying unarmed on the ground become a living barrier, stopping the galloping horses. With this episode, Shengelaia clearly shows us the strength of the mass, the unity of people against any violence. The cameraman takes the episode in a general shot, whereby the entire mise-en-scène is perceived simultaneously. The general shot is connected by active montage to details, close-ups—the movement of a horse frozen in place, a cavalryman, a hand's movement, Chechen leaders' faces, etc., whereby tension increases. Shengelaia offers us very clear, semantically precise, expressive phrases. The S. Eisenstein formula of image construction is evident, i.e., the creation of an emotional, unified image through "alogical" arrangement of frames in memory. Shengelaia condemns those people who betray the nation based on personal interests, and punishes them too. As I note, in Alexander Kazbegi's *Eliso,* feeling is significant, while with Nikoloz Shengelaia, it is duty. Kazbegi cannot separate their unity; Shengelaia gives the idea of duty, national unity global, monumental dimensions. The house-building episode, whose frames are pure rhythmic play, that is, a "musical etude"—close-ups of working hands, rhythmic play of hands moving on a drum, dancing feet, hands gliding on

the house wall, etc., is understood as solidarity and an ode to strength.

This aspiration of Nikoloz Shengelaia, the active transformation of ideological essence into montage-rhythmic form, was partly conditioned by his literary-poetic inclination. If we review his poetry, which was published in the journal "H2SO4," we will see that the rhythmic structure accurately reflects the pulse of the new era, fast tempo, civic positions. It is based on rhythmic-melodic play with words. For example: "Report One" with straightened shoulders /we came/ with a coat of arms/ USSR /together/ with firm step/ straight ahead /flags, flags, flags/ red upon red. variegated/ march/ revolutionaries—a row of words divided frame-by-frame and montage-wise.

The film's culmination is understood to be the resettlement scene: a deserted field, the Chechen camp is spread out at a distance from the village. The condition of people fallen into despair is further sharpened by the fact of a young woman's death. With the woman's death, the collision caused by the loss of national roots and land is "protocolized," actually understood. The "chamber" landscape, which they show us in a general shot, gradually comes to life and grows into a lament of death: women's frightened faces, a widowed, abandoned child, the deceased's face merge into one another. In this "chaos," the village elder's face is accentuated, as he seeks a way out. Musicians flash in the frame, rhythmically playing feet, body. The village elder's dance first gives birth to feelings of uncertainty, then joy, faith, hope, and mourning grows into a lament of life, because death is followed by life, disappointment by faith... Faces are cleansed, released, the rhythm also increases. Cinematographer V. Kereselidze shows us the transitional spectrum of feelings through the instantaneous alternation of portraits. In emotional arrangement, this scene very much resembles Eisenstein's famous scene "The Odessa Steps," where the main burden is precisely given to the portrait and detail.

Thus, *Eliso* chooses expressive forms widespread in Georgian cinema, where flat perspective seems to advance the object, frame composition is mainly static, angle sharp.

After a three-year break, Nikoloz Shengelaia begins work on the film "26 Commissars" (1932), which depicts the dramatic events of Baku in 1917-20, the last days of the Commune's life. The working class's confrontation with the ruling power for the protection of its own rights, which finally grew into an uprising. In 1918, the rebels were executed. In this film too, Nikoloz Shengelaia devotes much space to creating the image of a mass united by one idea. Very interesting in the film is the active montage-rhythmic series, the tendency to poeticize the realistic environment. Essentially, "26 Commissars" is his last work in silent cinema, where Shengelaia actively develops the experiments begun in "Eliso" to enrich the language of cinema. It can be said that the most significant stage of Nikoloz Shengelaia's work is precisely connected to montage-poetic cinematography.

In the 1930s, the situation in the Soviet Union changes, free space closes, and a totalitarian regime is formed that prohibits any "formalist searches" in art. A new direction appears in art—"socialist realism"—which stamps illusory-ideologized Soviet reality on screen. In 1933-1934, together with Mikhail Sholokhov, Nikoloz Shengelaia begins work on the screenplay for the film *Virgin Soil Upturned*, but the film's shooting does not succeed.

In 1937, Nikoloz Shengelaia makes *The Orange Grove*, a film that contains all the narrative that was characteristic of socialist realism. The film dealt with the theme of collective farming. The director showed us two opposing sides: kulaks who try to destroy Soviet collective farming from within, maliciously destroy people's gains, and peasants who, through honest labor, way of life, patriotism, and self-sacrifice, contribute to the country's construction. In this general idyll, even the work process is fun for them; the village lives daily with internal excitement and uplift. This was precisely the most important message that Soviet ideology propagated through art not only inside the country but beyond its borders as well.

The film's main plot develops around three heroes: Tedo, Giorgi, and Nino—the love triangle brings a melodramatic element to the narrative "for enlivening." Despite the feeling existing among them, each of them gives priority in the relationship to the feelings of friendship and patriotism. Due to a sense of responsibility before the homeland, the film's heroes reject personal interests, refuse even close people. Nikoloz Shengelaia divides society into several layers: Communists—ideal people, enemies who are divided into internal and external enemies, and the wavering minority bearing negative traits. Besides the caste of Communists, the rest of society is the enemy. Such a wide spectrum actually reflects the entire scale of repressions that had really begun in society. The mandarin plantations are collective farm property; Tedo, who is engaged to Nino, leads them. Their relationship is limited to one episode. The engaged couple, sitting on a bench in one corner of the plantation, sings about the homeland's bright future and Stalin. Only a tender glance, a shyly bowed head reveals the lovers' internal mood. Their dialogues, every meeting is ideologically loaded and active. Communist Giorgi comes to work on the collective farm, who manages to win over a certain part of the dissatisfied peasantry; the village's resident population begins to work with new inspiration, and precisely at this time conflict arises: Giorgi's success irritates Tedo, revenge, ambition, and suspicion awaken in him. Parallel to this confrontation, Nikoloz Shengelaia shows us kulaks who have infiltrated the collective farm, who take advantage of the two Communists' confrontation and begin sabotage activities on the collective farm. Tedo exposes the kulaks, but before revealing this story to society, they kill him and accuse him of betraying the Party. At this moment, one episode becomes significant, in which the approved mechanism of violating personal spaces in Soviet reality clearly appears—through public discussion of personal problems, condemnation of the individual's actions. At a public Party meeting, the issue of the chairman's murder is discussed. At the moment of judgment, he is rejected and condemned not only by society, by his beloved woman, but also by his mother, who publicly renounces her son who betrayed the Party. The guilty person should have been completely rejected by society. During the repression period, such a narrative in itself served to fully justify the communist regime's actions, support it from society. Bringing the problem into the public space primarily served to create an internal censor in a person, and on the other hand pushed people to be interested in others' lives and to freely judge and criminalize them.

In 1939, Nikoloz Shengelaia makes the film *Homeland*, where he again speaks about foreign country agents planted in the country for sabotage activities. Here

too appears the theme of making a choice between feeling and duty; it can be said that this theme runs through Nikoloz Shengelaia's work like a refrain.

The film *He Will Return Again*, shot in 1943, is his last work, in which a Georgian soldier becomes a witness to the heroic death of a local Komsomol girl in the battle for one Russian village. The wounded soldier returns to his native village, but thoughts of the girl give him no rest, while her photograph becomes the cause of misunderstanding with his fiancée. In this film too, melodramatic elements and narratives characteristic of socialist realism are dominant. On January 4, 1943, Nikoloz Shengelaia passed away.

Awards

- In 1935, he was awarded the title of Honored Art Worker of the Union of Russia
- In 1941, he received the Stalin Prize.

Filmography:

- "Giuli" (1927),
- "Eliso" (1928),
- "Twenty-Six Commissars" (1933),
- "The Orange Valley" (1937),
- "Homeland" (1939),
- "In the Black Mountains" (1941),
- "He Will Return Again" (1943).

ფილმი

„ქართული ფილმი"
1928–1965

თქვენ ნახავთ ამ ფილმს _____ საათზე

დამაგებით ნაჩვენები იქნება _____

ჩვენი საბავშვო პროგრამა _____

MIKHEIL KALATOZISHVILI



1903-1973

Maia Levanidze
Doctor of Art Studies, Associate Professor at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

The work of Mikheil Kalatozishvili, one of the founders of Georgian montage-avant-garde cinema, can be divided into two stages: the first period is connected with Georgian avant-garde cinema, when he begins his activity as a cameraman, screenwriter, and director and makes one of the milestone films in Georgian cinema history, *Jim Shvante* or "Salt for Svaneti," while the second—the Russian period—encompasses the main stage of his activity from 1937 to 1973.

Mikheil Kalatozishvili was born in 1903 in Tbilisi. His first steps in cinema are connected with the name of Ivane Perestiani, in whose film acting studio he studied acting. Georgian cinema preserves his two episodic roles in Ivane Perestiani's films: *Three Lives*

and *The Knight of Our Land.* In 1925, Mikheil Kalatozishvili worked as assistant to the cameraman on the film *Who Is Guilty,* and in 1926, together with Nikoloz Shengelaia and Lev Punsh, he wrote the screenplay based on Shio Aragvispireli's story *Giuli.* In 1927, he made the film chronicles *Zahesi* and *Horses.*

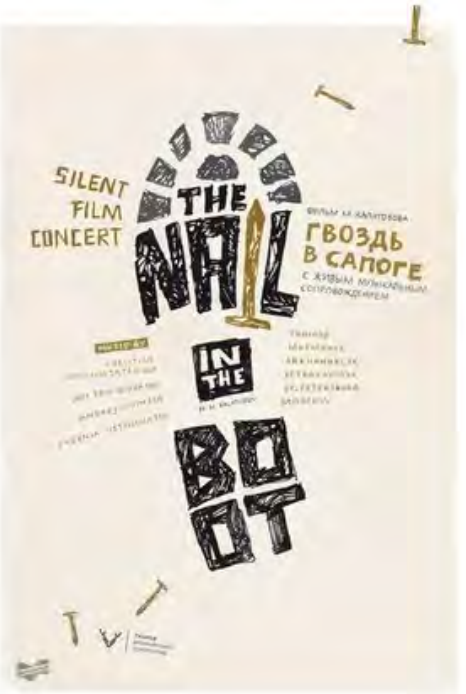
From 1928, he began his directorial activity. Together with Nutsa Gogoberidze, he created the documentary film *18/28* or *Their Kingdom* based on materials from 1918-1920 film chronicles, dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the Great October Revolution. The film contrasts the life of the Mensheviks and Soviet Georgia. Unfortunately, this film has not been preserved, though based on archival records we can only say that the film used scarce archival material from the Menshevik government. As with other Soviet avant-garde films, a parodic attitude toward "old times" was manifested here as well.

In 1930, Mikheil Kalatozishvili made the film *Jim Shvante or Salt for Svaneti*, where he is fascinated by the search for formal and technical devices. He gives priority to the eloquence of the frame, depth perspective, turning expressive plasticity into a living organism, where lighting, "light," the spatial composition of the frame, angle, and objective montage became stylistic features. The object becomes moving, heavy, sensitive. Mikheil Kalatozishvili first raises (in Georgian cinema) the necessity of an "active camera." The frame is loaded with simple beauty, active background, which is foreign to the 1920s; every frame with him is an endless, airy, dynamic snippet of life. The plastic structure of the film itself was greatly influenced by the artist Davit Kakabadze, his distinctive handwriting, expressive painting: Svaneti outlined with effective, dynamic lines, the colorful, endless spaces of Imereti divided into glances, abstract compositions where linear dynamics, texture, and diversity create amazing harmony, "Brittany" created with a certain influence of plastic Chinese-Japanese painting, or theoretical considerations that are not limited only to painting... "Jim Shvante" is as if a collection of this experience, a result. The film is divided into two main parts: "Old Times" and "New Times." Of these, the old is more eloquent, plastic, interesting than the "new," which is poster-like, unambiguous, and to a certain extent repeats the laconic style of "agitprop films" narratives.

The "old" is divided into three main themes. They unite in the problem of the relationship between nature and man, in the old, where man submits to nature and nature prepares cruel trials for him.

One of the film's themes is the lack of salt in Svaneti. If Christian religion considers salt as a symbol of immobility, non-existence, death, Mikheil Kalatozishvili encrypts it as the life-giving force of nature and man, an inexhaustible source of energy. It is precisely the lack of salt that Svaneti experiences. Mikheil Kalatozishvili shows us tormented, pale people and animals who use every means to find salt. This is only possible in connection with the lowlands. The path leading to the mountains is difficult, dangerous. Mikheil Kalatozishvili builds the narrative with parallel montage. The camera here is a passive recorder; landscapes shot from sharp angles are opposed to people's faces, portraits captured from a low angle. This point of the camera's view (from bottom to top) adds a grandiose appearance to mountains, people, objects. People going up the mountain diagonally cross the frame's space, where the play of light and

shadow creates a feeling of airy, endless space. It is precisely in contrast with it that people are perceived as small molecules; this contrast generates feelings of fear, euphoria, the grandeur and majesty of nature, which is intensified by the waiting, far-gazing eyes of women. The introduction of diagonal composition and lines into the frame contains tense emotion and dynamics, which combines with the variability of angles. The montage rhythm gradually increases, and the moment of the avalanche's





The Nail in the Boot



fall is understood as culmination. Statics breaks and collapses; the camera to a certain extent repeats the trajectory of the avalanche's fall. It seems to come alive, becomes active. The camera conveys to us a shock-like state, the mood of disappointed expectations and hopelessness. The frame instantly calms down and dynamics grows into statics.

In Mikheil Kalatozishvili's "old," everything seems to submit to one magical circular movement where there is no way out. A woman sitting at the plow is forced by the bull to work all day; the theme of labor is the second mainstay in the film. The circular movement of the plow, the camera moving around one point "is identified" with the woman's viewpoint, her perception of the environment.

Constant circular movement, the alternation of different angles of towers embedded in mountains turns the image into one shapeless form and conveys to us those difficult conditions, that physical and spiritual powerlessness that appears in a person in struggle with cruel nature; again statics opposes dynamics.

The "new" is the result of traditions, exhausting labor, and constant struggle with nature. A new society comes that fights the environment and recognizes man's primacy. Mikheil Kalatozishvili offers us frames shot from a low angle, where the worker's body covers space; mountains captured in the background become smaller against the background of his grandiose figure. In the "new," the image is often plastic, both in content and expression. Undoubtedly, what is interesting again is the camera's identification with the hero; to a certain extent, a "subjective camera" is used. The worker who is demolishing a wall, at one



Jim Shvante (Salt for Svaneti)



moment completely covers, fills the frame; he becomes the main object, therefore in the next moment the camera repeats the worker's trajectory, actively participates in the process, becomes a co-participant. "Jim Shvante," with the frame's linear perspective, the spot-like play of light and shadow, "brilliance" (Davit Kakabadze's term), makes space more transparent and wide. Mikheil Kalatozishvili mainly uses the moment of opposition—position-opposition, statics-dynamics.

The third theme—religion, faith—is considered as something devalued, as idolatry that gives priority not to life but to death. Here the main thing is again opposition: death and life. The ritual of burying the deceased is extensive and magnificent. An abandoned, family-rejected pregnant woman, with a bull in hand, goes into nature to wait for her child, new life. The birth of the child is met unfavorably by both people and nature. Nature cannot or does not feed the newborn; the woman in childbirth is doomed to loneliness. As if life is sacrificed to death. The struggle of death and life is built by the active rhythm of the narrative, the alternation of impressive portraits, the combination and opposition of two completely independent plots. The desperate cry of mothers is "heard" by "new" Svaneti, which destroys traditions.

After *Jim Shvante,* Mikheil Kalatozishvili made *Nails in Boots*. The film's plot is this: due to defective boots, during maneuvers, a worker fails to deliver an important message in time, and during a mock attack, an entire group of armored vehicles "perishes." The hero finds himself in the dock, but as it turns out, the tribunal itself is guilty: in its ranks is the "destroyed" group of armored vehicles, which includes the shoemakers who made the shoddy boots. This so-called "agitprop film" is simple in content, but here too, as in "Jim Shvante," Kalatozishvili creates an interesting, effective, active expressive series with sharp angles, active camera movement, and light-shadow contrast. The film was not successful in the Soviet Union because form was more important in it than content.

From 1932-1934, Mikheil Kalatozishvili continued to work in Georgia as director of the film studio, but the ongoing repressions in the country, the difficult social and moral environment forced him to refuse the position he held, and in 1937 he went to Moscow, where he made his first Russian films: *Courage* in 1939 and *Valeri Chkalov* in 1941.

From 1941-1945, during the war period, on Stalin's recommendation, Kalatozishvili traveled to America, where he worked with the status of consultant to the Soviet Union in the field of cinema. From 1945-1948, he returned to Russia and was appointed Deputy Minister of Cinematography of the USSR.

Since Mikheil Kalatozishvili's Russian period is less significant for us, I will highlight only two important works: *The Cranes Are Flying* in 1954, which brought him world recognition, and "I Am Cuba" in 1964.

The Cranes Are Flying—the best work of the "thaw" period. The first film of Russian cinema's turning point period brought the problems of the little person to screens. Instead of the "varnished" reality of the period of socialist realism and few films, "familiar reality" appeared on screen with everyday life and heroes who loved, made mistakes, and nothing human was alien to them. Kalatozishvili brought moral-ethical problems to screens. The film was based



The Cranes Are Flying

on Viktor Rozov's play of the same name. The story of the film's main character, Veronika, gave the opportunity to understand war globally, as an unnatural process that destroys the usual rhythm of life, changes people's personal lives and psyches. Soviet critic Lev Anninsky wrote about *The Cranes Are Flying*: "A living camera, catastrophic angles, dynamic and running composition, rhythm that came not from the frame but from the entire scene, that is, from the variability of frames."

Besides managing to oppose "old" cinema, with a new understanding of problems, he created a new expressive series: active, thinking, bearing the author's position. If we review Mikheil Kalatozishvili's work and especially "Jim Shvante," we might think that dynamic perception of the world, searching through the camera for precise forms or devices to express thought, emotionality, rhythmicity, psychological characterization of heroes through light and shadow are very characteristic of Kalatozishvili. In *Jim Shvante* and *The Cranes Are Flying*, we can discover the same, similar devices of camera use. For example, the circular movement of the camera in the plow scene, where as a result of a woman's tormenting labor, towers spin, and "Boris's death scene," when the camera, through the spinning of lime trees, tells us Boris's last experiences, the fact of his death. Thus, the active forms of representation by Kalatozishvili and cameraman Urusevsky had a huge influence on Soviet cinema.



I am Cuba

In 1964, Mikheil Kalatozishvili made the film *I Am Cuba*, which consists of four novellas. The novellas are united by the main theme—the Cuban revolution. The four novellas give the director the opportunity to tell us about different social strata and their problems. The film speaks about those negative quali-

ties of the capitalist world that pushed Cubans toward revolution. "I Am Cuba" was not accepted in the Soviet Union because they saw in it a tendency to romanticize the capitalist world, but today *I Am Cuba* amazes us with its distinctive visual structure. As in his previous film, Kalatozishvili used sharp angles, contrast lighting, and rhythmic montage, which further intensified the moods of the Cuban people excited with revolutionary spirit.

The Red Tent, shot in 1965, is Mikheil Kalatozishvili's last film. The first co-production in the Soviet Union between Italy, Britain, and Russia. Along with Georgian and Russian actors, European actors were invited to the film: Sean Connery, Claudia Cardinale, and Peter Finch. The composer was Ennio Morricone.

The film told about the unsuccessful 1928 international North Pole expedition of traveler and explorer Umberto Nobile, where all members perished. The film is built on Umberto Nobile's internal experiences and memories, his torment and sense of guilt, experiences that force him to recall the days spent there, the relationships among expedition members, to reconstruct in his memory every moment and detail, to summon each hero in order to understand and simultaneously judge his own actions. "The Red Tent" also received critical assessment in the Soviet Union, though in this film too, the peculiarity of Mikheil Kalatozishvili's worldview and creative style is sharply manifested.

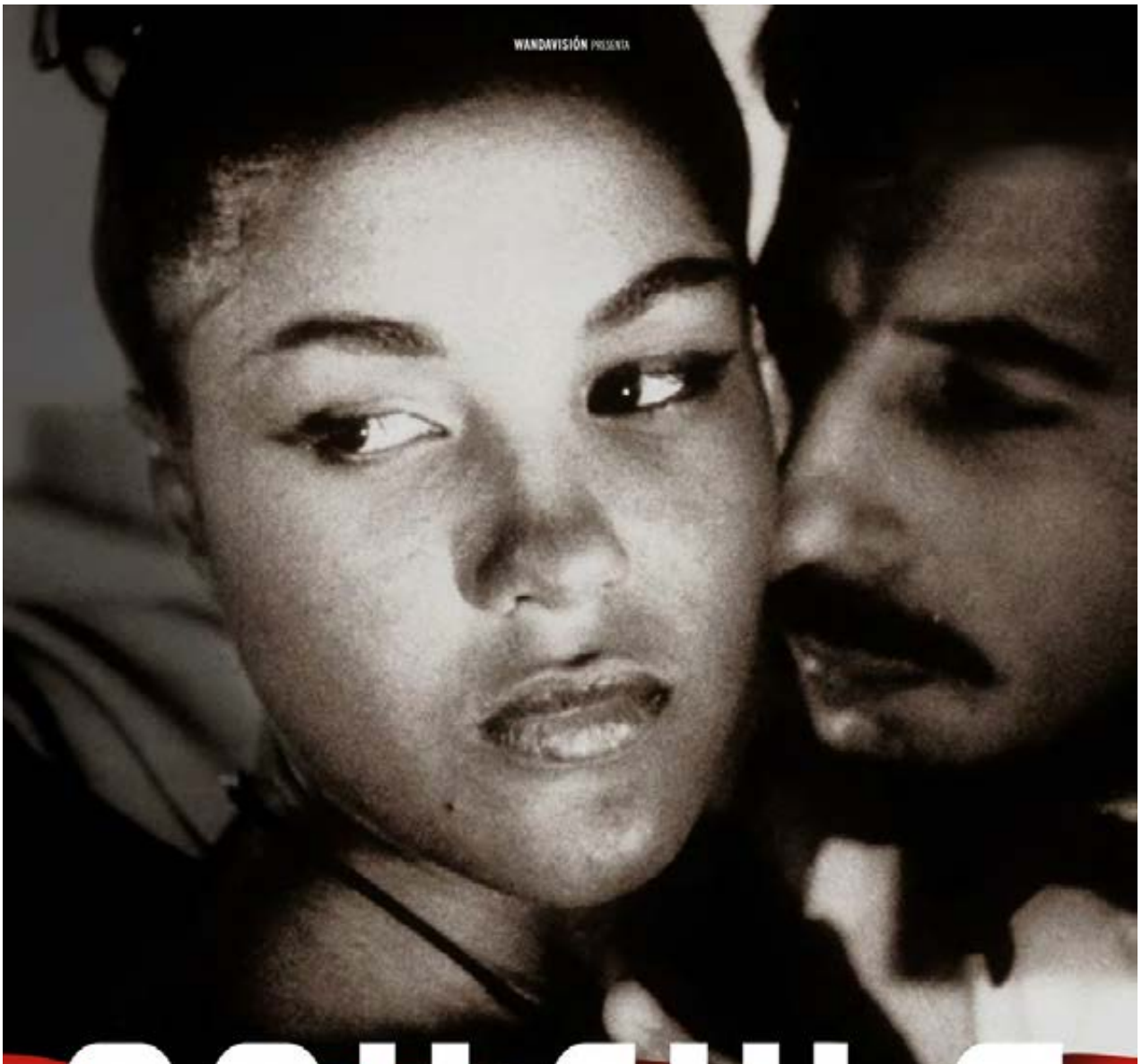
Thus, Mikheil Kalatozishvili's life and work left a great mark on the development of both Georgian and Russian cinematography. He passed away in the spring of 1973.

Awards and Prizes:

- 1969 - People's Artist of the USSR
- 1965 - People's Artist of the Georgian SSR
- 1958 - Locarno International Film Festival, Honorary Diploma for the film "The Cranes Are Flying"
- 1958 - Mexico International Film Festival, Honorary Prize for the film "The Cranes Are Flying"
- 1958 - Cannes International Film Festival, "Golden Palm Branch" for the film "The Cranes Are Flying"
- 1954 - Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, "Crystal Globe" for the film "Faithful Friends"
- 1951 - Stalin Prize for the film "Conspiracy of the Doomed"
- 1950 - Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, Peace Prize for the film "Conspiracy of the Doomed"
- 1944 - Order of the Red Star

Filmography:

"Their Kingdom" (1928); "Jim Shvante" ("Salt for Svaneti," 1930); "Courage" (1939); "Valeri Chkalov" (1941); "Conspiracy of the Doomed" (1950); "The Cranes Are Flying" (1957); "I Am Cuba" (1964); "The Red Tent" (1965)



SOY CUBA

UNA PELÍCULA DE MIKHAIL KALATOZOV

SOY CUBA, UNA PRODUCCIÓN DEL ICAIC Y MOSFILM STUDIOS

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WANDA VISION MOSFILM STUDIOS ICAIC NIRVANA

NIKOLOZ SANISHVILI



1902-1995

Manana Lekborashvili
Doctor of Art Studies, Associate Professor at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

Master of Georgian Commercial Cinema
7.01.1903 – 26.10.1995
People's Artist of Georgia (1964)

Georgian cinema does not have many "commercial" directors—servants of Soviet cinema generally preferred ideologically correct films to commercially successful ones. But if we are to look for such directors, the first and foremost among them is Nikoloz Sanishvili.

As was common at the time, Nikoloz Sanishvili began his career as an actor. After graduating from Kutaisi Classical Gymnasium (1921) and Meliton Balanchivadze Music School (violin class, 1923), he continued his studies at the Engineering Faculty of Tbilisi State



Abezara

University, but soon transferred to the Film Acting School under Georgia's People's Commissariat of Education (1924).

As an actor, he appeared in films by his teacher, Vladimir Barsky, as well as in productions by "Vostok-kino," "Goskino," "Mezhrabpomfilm," and other studios. He worked at the Baku Documentary Film Studio, where he made his directorial debut with the documentary *Bolsheviks of the Oil Five-Year Plan* (1931).

From 1936–1940 he worked as a director at "Mosfilm," serving as assistant director to Vsevolod Pudovkin (on *Minin and Pozharsky*, 1939, and *Suvorov*, 1940) and as second director to Mikheil Chiaureli on *Giorgi Saakadze* (1942). From 1940 on, he worked at Tbilisi Film Studio (known as "Georgian Film Studio" from 1953).

If we do not count the 1932 agitprop film *Desert*, his debut in feature filmmaking was *David Guramishvili* (1946), co-directed with Ioseb Tumanishvili. Made according to strict directives from above, the film belongs to the historical-biographical genre, though it is noteworthy that the protagonist is not a military commander or political figure but a famous Georgian poet, and that a fictional tragic love story is woven into the hardships of his life path.

Love stories would later become an essential and recognizable component of Nikoloz Sanishvili's films. According to the demands of the era, he made films about collective farm life (*Happy Meeting*, 1949; *Spring in Sakeni*, 1950), industrial construction (*They Came Down from the Mountain*, 1954), and others, but each time the central theme was supported by the twists and turns of personal lives—a love story that became the main point of attraction for audiences.



Dolls Are Laughing

In the 1950s, after Stalin's death, cinema shifted—on the principle of a pendulum—from the cult of large-scale personalities to interest in the lives of "ordinary people." Melodrama increased in the cinema of the time, though as a pure genre it was still considered unprestigious. Thus it cloaked itself as "film narrative," or raised its status under the guise of "drama," or found refuge in comedy.

Nikoloz Sanishvili made romantic comedies one after another: *Abezara* (1956), *Dolls Are Laughing* (1963), *Meeting in the Mountains* (1966). Contemporary critics chastised the superficial characters and "fairy-tale" plots, but society welcomed these "fairy tales," the cheerful characters, and the humor. Of course, the situations, conflicts, and shafts of humor remained firmly grounded in "Soviet soil": the films criticized "philistinism," the striving for material comfort and false prestige. But audiences were more drawn to the form than to the content.

In the musical comedies *Meeting in the Mountains* (1966) and *Chari-Rama* (1972), there is practically nothing left to criticize. Officials disapproved of such comedies, but love stories built on misunderstandings, supported by good music and popular performers, became some of the audience's favorite films.



In Sanishvili's hands, not only everyday situations but even real dramas turned into viewer-friendly cinema—if not comedies, then melodramas. Whether the theme was war and the friendship of peoples (*Interrupted Song*, 1960), an adaptation of Alexander Kazbegi's dramatic work (*Khevisber Gocha*, 1964), or a social drama from the lives of young miners (*Alarm*, 1968), the intense personal dramas pushed aside the themes favored by Soviet officials and foregrounded during film planning. In his work, even international themes and the struggle against social inequality turned into vivid, compelling adventure films. Such is *Chermeni* (1970), about the struggle of Ossetian peasants at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries against the cunning feudal lord Khevisber Dako—particularly notable because it was the first Georgian widescreen film, which made the spectacle even more attractive.



They Came Down from the Mountain

Sanishvili's final film, *Mevludi* (1985), also deals with a peasant from Adjara fighting social injustice; his

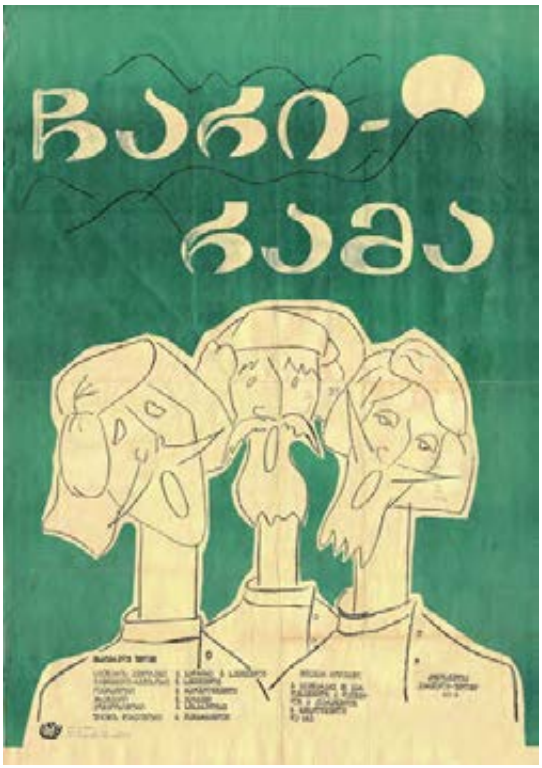
dramatic adventures remain among Georgian audiences' favorite stories to this day.

Nikoloz Sanishvili's films clearly demonstrate that a film remains in viewers' memories and hearts not only because of deep characters and meaningful themes. In their own time, his films were rental leaders not only in Georgia but throughout the Soviet Union (for example, *Abezara* was watched by 29.3 million viewers, *Interrupted Song* by 26.9 million).

Times have changed, and themes once topical have lost their ideological support, but Nikoloz Sanishvili's films are still remembered today—every generation knows them by heart and watches them again and again with pleasure.

Filmography

The Time Has Come (*For a Thousand*, 1923) – actor (Shalva)
The Mystery/Secret of the Lighthouse (1924) – actor (young fisherman)
*Ab**rek** Zauri* (1925) – actor (Murtazi)
Horrors of the Past (1925) – actor (revolutionary)
Zelim-Khan (1928) – actor (Ayub Tamaev)
Law of the Mountains (1927) – actor (Dolgat, Ismail's friend)
The Earth Is Thirsty (1930, "Vostok-kino") – actor (Niko, Komsomol builder)
Anush (1930, "Armenfilm") – actor



Chari-rama

Bolsheviks of the Oil Five-Year Plan (1931) – director
Desert (1932) – director, screenwriter (with Samson Sulakauri)
Victory (1938, "Mosfilm") – actor (Gudiashvili)
Friends Meet Again (1939, Stalinabad Film Studio) – actor (Ataev)
David Guramishvili (1946) – director (with Ioseb Tumanishvili), screenwriter (with Simon Chikovan, Vladimir Orlov, Ioseb Tumanishvili)
Happy Meeting (1949) – director
Spring in Sakeni (1950) – director, screenwriter
They Came Down from the Mountain (1954) – director, screenwriter (with Akaki Beliashvili and M. Bolshintsov)
Abezara (1956) – director
Woman's Burden (1957) – director, screenwriter
Interrupted Song (1960) – director, screenwriter (with Konstantine Lortkipanidze and Albert Marenchin)



Meeting in Mountains



Dolls Are Laughing (1963) – director
Khevisberi Gocha (1964) – director, screenwriter (with Archil Sulakauri)
Meeting in the Mountains (1966) – director, screenwriter (with Petre Gruzinsky)
Alarm (1968) – director, screenwriter (with Archil Sulakauri, Anzor Salukvadze, Revaz Inanishvili)
Chermeni (1970) – director, screenwriter (with Giorgi Pliev, Alexander Misharin)
The Sunset (1971) – director, screenwriter (with Jansug Charkviani)
Chari-Rama (1972) – director, screenwriter
Night Visit (1974) – director
Bird's Milk (1975) – director
Life to Ermile (from the almanac *The Price of Life*, 1977) – director
House on Lesnaya (1977) – director
Mevludi (1985) – director, screenwriter (with Nugzar Shataidze)

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Woman's Burden

თოჯინები იცინიან

კს "ქართული ფილმი"
1964

ნიკოლოზ
სანიშვილი

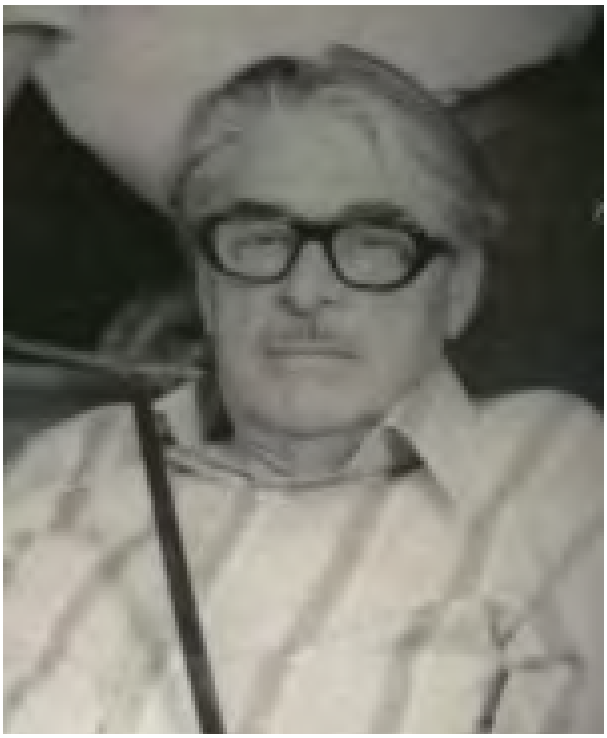


პანოკომედია



მ.თავაძე
ი.ხვიჩია
ე.მანჯგალაძე
ს.თაყაიშვილი
მ.თბილელი
მ.კეჭერაძე
ა.ჟორჟოლიანი

SIKO DOLIZE



1903-1983

Giorgi Razmadze
Doctor of Art Studies, Researcher of Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

A Crusader of Socialist Realism

One of the directors with the most extensive filmographies in Georgian cinema is Siko Dolidze—an artist whose creative path began in the avant-garde era, passed through all of its decisive stages, and ended in 1982, when, together with young filmmaker Keti Dolidze, he made *Kukaracha*, one of the landmark works of the final decade of Soviet cinema.

The director was born on February 6, 1903, in Ozurgeti. His fascination with cinema began in early childhood, when he saw Vasil Amashukeli's *Transportation of Oil by Camels*—filmed in Baku—during a screening in his village. It is symbolic that this newsreel is considered the first Georgian film.

In 1925, he graduated from the Historical-Philological Faculty of Tbilisi State University. Yet cinema remained his cen-



tral passion, which led him to seek work at the state film studio "Sakhkinmretsvi," first as an administrator and later as an assistant director.

In 1928, Dolidze founded the studio's newsreel division, which he himself led. This initiative was particularly significant because producing newsreels at that time required not only technical mastery but also the recording of living history. It was precisely within this department that a milestone of Georgian and world avant-garde cinema was created—Mikheil Kalatozishvili's *Jim Shvante* (1930)—along with many other important works.



Chrichina

Dolidze's filmography is notable for its thematic diversity. The director was equally drawn to folkloric motifs, socio-cultural issues, the relationship between humans and their environment, and much more. *Dariko* (1936), *Jurga's Shield* (1944), *Lake Paliastomi* (1963), *Chrichina/Dragonfly* (1954), *Fatima* (1959), and *The City Wakes Early* (1967)—each earned the audience's approval not only for its narrative but also for its artistic value. To this day, Dolidze's work continues to hold a special place in the history of Georgian cinema.

His first major film was created during the Soviet avant-garde period. *The Last Crusaders* (1934) addresses the implementation of the ideals of the October Revolution within a traditional society. For centuries, various peoples living in the Caucasian mountains had been enemies—largely due to the scarcity of resources. In the film, however, the Georgian highlanders come to realize that their poverty is caused not by one another, but by the exploitative upper class—appropriating resources and impoverishing everyone, whether Khevsur, Kist, or Dagestani.

The nobility and monarchical system had long oppressed those on the lower levels of the social structure. This theme is universal—geographically, culturally, and historically. In *The Last Crusaders* the action unfolds in the post-revolutionary period, yet traces of the former class hierarchy persist. The caste of wealthy peasants—the kulaks—acts as a continuation of the old aristocracy. The revolution had toppled vertical power structures, but the class system itself still needed to be dismantled. This was understood not only by politicians but also by artists. As Georg Lukács argued, progress requires the proletariat to recognize its own condition—to understand who is responsible for its unjust circumstances. Art, he believed, was one of the most powerful means of enabling such awareness.





The Last Day The First Day



Fatima



In *The Last Crusaders*, the villagers eventually unite against the kulaks—the remnants of class society. Even nature supports this struggle: an avalanche suddenly sweeps away the kulak leader. Immediately afterwards, a tractor arrives in the village—a symbol of technological progress. The machine will lighten the peasants' labor, increase the harvest, and eliminate competition over resources.

The tractor as an allegorical image of advancement appears in many later films, yet Siko Dolidze was among the first to use this symbol so powerfully.

In the film, it is precisely modern technology and scientific progress that "reconcile" former blood enemies—Muslims and Christians, Chechens and Khevsurs. According to the film scholar Gogi Gvakharia , "Brotherhood not by blood kinship, but on the basis of humanity"—this key principle of the 1920s avant-garde world cinema for the last time appears in Soviet cinema in Dolidze's *The Last Crusaders*.

The development of class consciousness was the core objective of the Soviet avant-garde. Socialist Realism, adopted in the 1930s as the new artistic method, pursued the same goal. In its early phase—guided by Stalinist doctrine—the emphasis fell on declaring class war against the remnants of the old world that impeded progress. Just like in *The Last Crusaders*, Dolidze's next film, *Dariko*, depicts the confrontation between the rich peasant class and ordinary people.

In adapting socialist writer Egnate Ninoshvili's stories (*Dariko* and *Mose the Writer*), Dolidze used class antagonism to depict the pre-revolutionary environment and the social conditions that led to an uprising.

Dariko and other films of the era are rare examples in world art history of a distinctly Marxist interpretation of history, presenting class antagonisms with great precision. *Dariko* also highlights issues of women's emancipation—an important aspect of Soviet progressive politics.

Dariko was one of the first films of the initial wave of Socialist Realism. Yet it was again Siko Dolidze—now working alongside Levan Khotivari—who directed the transitional film marking the beginning of the post-Stalinist period in Soviet cinema: *Chrichina/ (Dragonfly)* (1954). In this key work, the filmmakers constructed a model of post-class society and an image of future communism—finalizing the ideas first explored in the 1930s.

The protagonist of *Chrichina*, the carefree and stubborn Marine, grows up in a village where her father serves as chairman of the collective farm. Thanks to this privileged position, she is excused from work. She is only assigned to manage the village library, which she neglects due to her passion for singing. The collective farm council disapproves, but immediately yields in deference to her father. Soviet art is often dismissed as propaganda lacking self-criticism, but this and many other examples prove that such a judgment is incomplete.

Chrichina functions as a visual manual—a cinematic illustration of communist ideals. It shows an ideal society in which inequality has been eradicated after the end of private property and class division. It is not yet communism, but the villagers are actively building this desired future with their own hands.

Human transformation is made visible just as the transformation of space is. Next to the imposing headquarters of the collective farm, a cultural center is being constructed. Together with a town square and a Lenin monument, it will form an ensemble of modern architecture. In the old world, the village center was marked by the nobleman's house or the church. Under socialism—also for the first time in Georgian history—the public space was organized around self-governance, education, and culture.

The new reality fundamentally altered people's lives. Famous for her comedic escapades, *Chrichina* leaves her father's home and moves into a poultry farm—both to live and to work. Such emancipation from the family institution was unimaginable in traditional society. Through gradual socio-economic transformation, socialism preserved the best elements of the past while reducing or removing its harmful aspects. In *Chrichina*, structural injustice disappears in space; the next stage is human transformation.

Marx saw the progress of society as dependent on the progress of the individual. At the film's conclusion, Marine changes: through her experience at the incubator, she comes to understand the importance of caring for others and the necessity of labor for the com-



Dariko

mon good. She is no longer stubborn or lazy—she chooses to become a collective member, working not for selfish ends but for the common future.

Dolidze co-authored nearly all of his own screenplays, but he also wrote for other directors. Animated masterpieces that later became part of the golden fund of Georgian animation—*The Sparrows' Wedding* (1957), *The Hoop* (1965), and *The Nightingale's Jubilee* (1978)—were created based on his ideas.

From 1957 to 1976, Siko Dolidze served as chairman of the Georgian Filmmakers' Union—a role that carried enormous administrative responsibility and provided significant influence over Georgian cinema's development. It was precisely during this period that Georgian cinema reached a fundamentally new stage. Young directors emerged who sought to establish new styles. Dolidze did not obstruct them—he actively supported them. Ultimately, the internationally acclaimed "New Wave" of Georgian cinema began during his leadership.

The director received numerous medals and state honors, including the Order of Lenin. In 1950, he was awarded the Stalin Prize for his outstanding contribution to Georgian cinematography. Later, in 1965, he received the title of People's Artist of the USSR—an honor reserved only for the most distinguished figures in Soviet cinema.

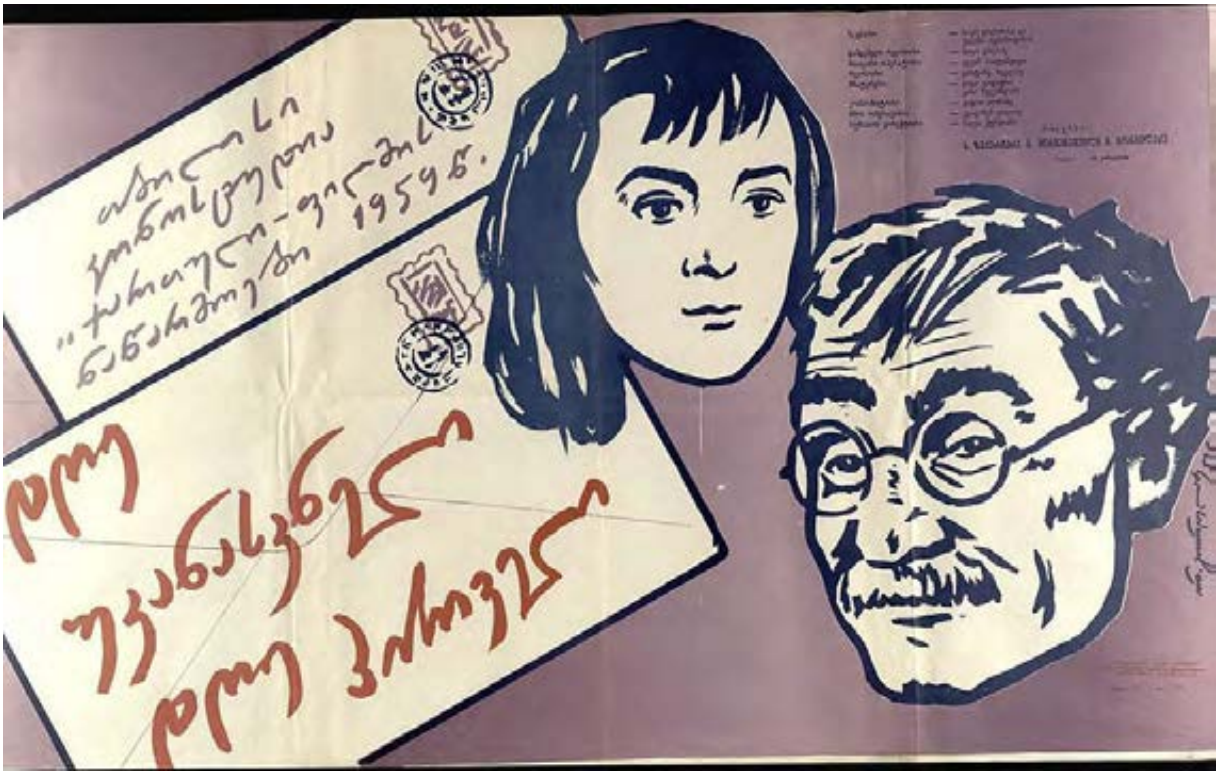
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- Is Man Human?! (1979)
- Kukaracha (1982)

The Last Day The First Day



KONSTANTINE PIPINASHVILI



1912-1969

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One of the distinguished directors of Georgian cinema, Konstantine Pipinashvili, was born in Kutaisi in 1912. At the age of nineteen he moved to Tbilisi, where he began working as an assistant worker and electromechanic at the mobile kolkhoz theatre, and later as an artist in the animation workshop at *Sakhkinmretsvi*. Once he entered the studio environment, his life became permanently connected to cinema, and he continued his education in this field.

In 1932, Pipinashvili enrolled in the preparatory faculty of the Moscow State Institute of Cinematography, graduating in 1936. He continued his studies at the same institute in the directing faculty, in Sergei Eisenstein's workshop.



Kadjana



Pipinashvili is the only Georgian director to have studied under a world cinema classic. His relationship with Eisenstein was close, and he even participated in the filming of *Bezhin Meadow* (1935–37), one of the most notable works in the creative legacy of the founder of poetic-montage cinema. The film was destroyed by censorship, though its editor secretly saved individual frames. Based on these surviving materials, Naum Kleiman and Sergei Yutkevich created a restored photographic version in 1967.

The idea for Pipinashvili's debut film *Kadjana* (1940) originated during his first year of study, and he developed it with Eisenstein for years. The concept envisioned *Kadjana* as a prequel to *Bezhin Meadow* or, as suggested in correspondence between teacher and student, "the first part." According to Pipinashvili, the film would end with an inscription informing viewers that the story continues in *Bezhin Meadow*.

As mentioned above, *Bezhin Meadow* was destroyed, and Eisenstein came under heavy political criticism. For this, and possibly other reasons, Pipinashvili faced serious difficulties in beginning production. Returning to Tbilisi in 1939, he could not initially obtain studio approval. It seems that he and Eisenstein encountered opposition from the wider filmmaking establishment, which obstructed their work. Nevertheless, production of *Kadjana* eventually began.

The film premiered in 1941. In a letter to Eisenstein, Pipinashvili wrote: "It came out! A six-month battle ended with the victory of the young people." By "young people,"

he meant himself and the cinematographer Felix Vysotsky, for whom this film was also intended as a diploma project.

Niko Lomouri's story *Kadjana* reflects the ideals of 19th-century Georgian educators, centered on the struggle to introduce rationalism into traditional society. In both the literary work and the film, the plot revolves around a poor village family. The landlord wants to purchase Kikola's property, yet the peasant refuses to agree. A self-styled reader named Babale involves himself in the situation, frightening the uneducated peasants with evil spirits and curses. Kikola's son becomes mute after an event in church, which strengthens the landlord's position. However, a schoolteacher enters the scene and opposes irrational fear and social injustice. Through rational thinking, the oppressed peasants overcome superstition and confront the landlord's deceitful schemes.

Children of the Sea



For centuries, ruling elites have used religion and belief systems to control and neutralize populations. Class struggle is resolved through rationalism in both Eisenstein's and Pipinashvili's works. In *Bezhin Meadow*, the villagers triumph over the kulaks and convert the church into a culture club. In *Kadjana*, the oppressed class overcomes its fear of imaginary forces, which empowers them to fight against tyranny.

Recently, the researcher Soso Dumbadze discovered previously unknown stenographic records of Sergei Eisenstein's lectures preserved in Pipinashvili's archive and published them in Tbilisi in 2017. Without Pipinashvili, these exceptionally important reflections by Eisenstein on the methodology of teaching directing (and more) would have remained unknown to the world.

Sadly, the premiere of *Kadjana* coincided with the Soviet Union's entry into World War II, and for that reason this significant contribution to Georgian and Soviet cinema did not receive widespread public attention. Nonetheless, the film was positively received among professionals, which predetermined Pipinashvili's future success as a director.

His next film addressed the immediate re-



alities of war. In 1942, together with Shota Managadze, he made *The Bridge*, a war-themed film set on the front line. The cinematographer was again Felix Vysotsky. The two would continue their collaboration on several later projects.

One of Pipinashvili's first widely popular works was *The Golden Trail* (1945), shot at the end of the war and made according to the traditions of the first wave of socialist realism. This period of filmmaking can also be described as "historical socialist realism," as its focus lay on prerevolutionary or early revolutionary events.



In *The Golden Trail*, the story takes place in 1918. German colonists in the Altai Mountains secretly mine gold and smuggle it into China. The new government assigns the communist Yegor Perekrestov to prevent this. Perekrestov discovers the deposit and informs the central authorities, but the courier is killed en route, and the expedition team is destroyed when the mine explodes. Two decades later, using a discovered report and the testimony of a German colonist imprisoned for being a Hitler supporter, Soviet geologists find the lost deposit once more. Now, the gold serves the common good, rather than personal wealth.

Many major Russian film stars appeared in this film, and it received a positive critical response. Film historians have referred to these years as the era of "minor filmmaking," since only a few film studios across the Soviet Union continued functioning, and film production had been drastically reduced. *Tbilisi Film Studio* was among the few that survived, and therefore was actively

engaged in state propaganda.

The Golden Trail was aligned with Stalin's population relocation policies. Its direct, unequivocal narrative was dictated by a single objective: to justify the mass deportation of Germans from the Volga region and southern Georgia (and, more broadly, the practice of forced resettlement). Pipinashvili himself had no particular affection for Stalin, but he was compelled to make this propaganda film, especially at a time when tensions between his teacher Eisenstein and Stalin were escalating, eventually leading to the banning of the second part of *Ivan the Terrible* (1945).

In 1946, Pipinashvili directed one of the most classic films of "High Stalinism," *Akaki's Cradle*. The film belongs to a cycle dedicated to the theme of "Russian-Georgian friendship." In Stalinist cinema, alongside class struggle, the ideology of "brotherhood" between the two nations became highly emphasized, and many films were devoted to it. Works such as *Giorgi Saakadze* (Mikheil Chiaureli, 1942–43), *Davit Guramishvili* (Nikoloz Sanishvili and Ioseb Tumanishvili, 1946), and *Keto and Kote* (Vakhtang Tabliashvili and Shalva Gedevanishvili, 1948) presented narratives of Russian-Georgian friendship in different historical periods from the 16th century onward—narratives that did not reflect historical truth.

Akaki's Cradle was based on Akaki Tsereteli's story *The Tutor*, though like the other films mentioned, it contained numerous historical distortions and deliberate inventions. For example, Pipinashvili inserted a monologue in which the Georgian writer expresses gratitude toward Russian culture and celebrates Russia's role in Georgia's development. Nothing of the kind exists in historical sources. On the contrary, Akaki Tsereteli's anti-Russian views are well documented, and in some cases remarkably radical.

One of Pipinashvili's most ambitious and internationally recognized works is *The Secret of Two Oceans* (1957), which received a diploma at the Venice Film Festival. The film is a rare genre hybrid in Soviet cinema—a fusion of science fiction and adventure. It features large-scale set pieces, special effects, and underwater cinematography, all of which were innovative for Soviet filmmaking of the time.

In the 1950s–60s, Pipinashvili made the lyrical-heroic film *This is How Mayakovsky Began* (1958), dedicated to the Soviet avant-garde poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, who was born in Georgia. The director not only recounts the writer's biography, but also seeks to recreate the spirit and modernist atmosphere of the 1920s. By honoring Mayakovsky, he also pays tribute to the Soviet avant-garde and, inevitably, to Sergei Eisenstein.

Pipinashvili's next film, *Where is Your Happiness, Mzia?* (1959), is a more intimate work focused on personal and social issues. Its narrative, based on the contrast between village and city life, offers today's viewers valuable insight into Soviet society during the "Thaw." Particularly significant is the theme of women's emancipation, which forms the central thread of the film.

The protagonist, Mzia, decides to return to the village after being raped by the privileged engineer Lado. Although she gives up the opportunity for higher education, she asserts her autonomy by choosing her own path, even against her parents' wishes.

Pipinashvili's final film, *Waiting* (1969), again returns to the theme of World War II. After working with other cinematographers, the director reunited with Felix Vysotsky for their last joint project. The central role is played by Georgian cinema star Leila Abashidze, whose character Ketevan lives in a village and has two sons already sent to the front. Still hoping for their return, she ultimately sends her third son to war as well.

In this film, Pipinashvili revives the myth of Medea. Ketevan resembles a divine figure—capable of giving life and taking it away—but unlike Medea, she acts not from personal motives but for collective well-being. She sacrifices her own children to save the children of other mothers.

Waiting received a prize at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival in 1971, though by that time the director had already passed away. In 1969, at the age of 56, Konstantine Pipinashvili died suddenly.

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This is How Mayakovsky Began (1958)
Where is Your Happiness, Mzia? (1959)
Children of the Sea (1964)
Waiting (1969)

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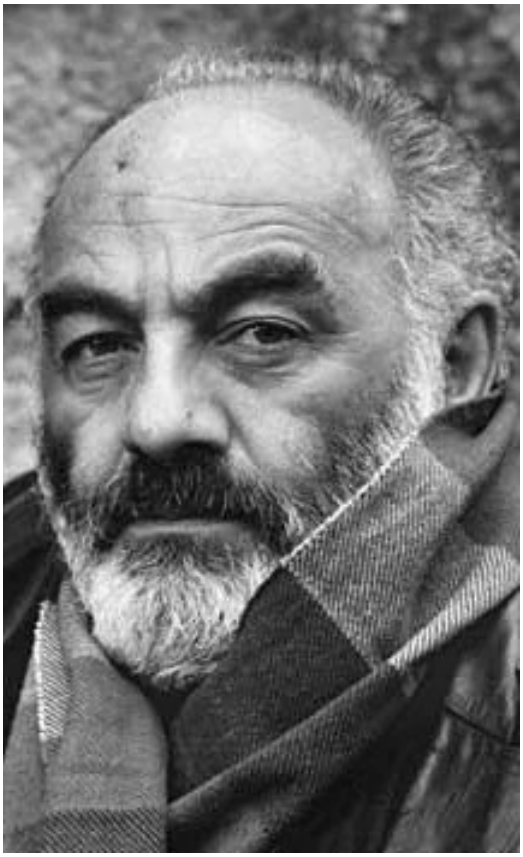


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კინოსტუდია „საქართველო ფილმის“ ნაწარმოები

SERGO PARAJANOV



1924-1990

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Sergei Parajanov, master of poetic cinema and visual metaphor, was born on January 9, 1924, in Tbilisi's multi-ethnic quarter. Growing up in this diverse neighborhood, he absorbed the rich cultural tapestry characteristic of the old capital—a diversity that would later define his artistic vision.

Parajanov began studying construction at the Tbilisi Railway Transport Institute in 1942, then shifted to vocal studies at the Tbilisi State Conservatory in 1943, while simultaneously training in dance at the choreographic school affiliated with the opera house. After exploring these various disciplines, he ultimately found his calling in cinema, graduating from the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow in 1952.

Even during his formative years, Parajanov's approach to cinema was marked by an obsessive search for a unique visual aesthetic, which is evidenced by his early works—*Moldavian Fairy Tale* (1951), *Andriusha* (1954), *Golden Hands* (1957), *Natalya Uzhviy* (1957), *Dumka* (1957), *Ukrainian Rhapsody* (1961), and *The Flower on the Stone* (1962. Throughout this period, he also created sketches, paintings, and his now-famous collages from whatever materials came to hand, a practice he maintained throughout his life. He had the most distinctive and unique signature.

From 1952 to 1973, Parajanov served as a director at the Alexander Dovzhenko Film Studio in Kyiv, creating films distinguished by unconventional solutions and visionary approaches. However, in 1973 he was imprisoned and only returned to Tbilisi in 1978 and from 1982 until his death in 1990, he worked at the Georgian Film studio.

Parajanov 's five-year imprisonment in a labor camp was widely condemned by Georgian artists and cultural figures. The intercession of French Surrealist poet Louis Aragon played a significant role in securing his eventual release.

Parajanov's feature film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1964) captured universal attention with its striking blend of ethnic authenticity and his signature use of color. The film transformed everyday life into a dynamic spectacle that appeared both pristine and eternal.

As playwright Rezo Kveselava observed, "Everything that Parajanov subsequently created essentially emerges from *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*: *Kyiv Frescoes*, *Sayat-Nova*, *The Legend of Suram Fortress*, *Ashug-Karib*, and others. I witnessed the filming of one scene from ***Sayat-Nova*** (in the old studio pavilion). That was when I first saw him filming," writes playwright Rezo Kveselava.

In 1969, Parajanov created *The Color of Pomegranates* (originally titled *Sayat-Nova*), depicting the life and poetic inspiration of an 18th-century Tbilisi ashugh (folk poet). Rather than employing conventional biographical narrative, the film unfolds through visual associations and symbolic imagery, which made it a target for censors, who accused Parajanov of distorting ethnic traditions and incorporating unacceptable subtexts.

The work stands as Parajanov's most liberated artistic statement, completely abandoning conventional narrative. Divided into short chapters—Childhood, Youth, Love, Creativity, and Death—it represents perhaps the purest expression of his aesthetic vision.

After years of enforced silence, Parajanov realized a long-cherished project in 1984: *The Legend of Suram Fortress*, based on Daniel Chonkadze's story of a youth sacrificed for the construction of a fortress. Through his collage-like imagination, Parajanov brought to life a tale woven with themes of love and betrayal, rendered in contrasting colors and infused with Georgian, Eastern, and Caucasian cultural elements drawn from mythic depths.

The film featured distinguished Georgian actors including Sofiko Chiaureli as Vardo, Veriko Anjaparidze as the elderly Vardo, Dodo Abashidze as Osman Agha, and Levan Uchaneishvili as Zurab, Lela Alibegahvili. Each performance became iconic, preserved in what became known as Parajanov's portraits.

Despite significant interest in the film, some critics accused him of taking excessive liberties with the source material and distorting traditional costumes and customs. Parajanov remained steadfast, however, maintaining that *The Legend of Suram Fortress*, like all his works, was fundamentally an improvisation.

His 1988 allegorical tale *Ashik Kerib* continued this distinctive approach, transforming a narrative saturated with Eastern intonations into a poetic fairy tale marked by vivid colors and sharp contrasts. By this time, European cinema had fully recognized Parajanov's unique artistry, and his work had established itself as a singular phenomenon in world cinema.

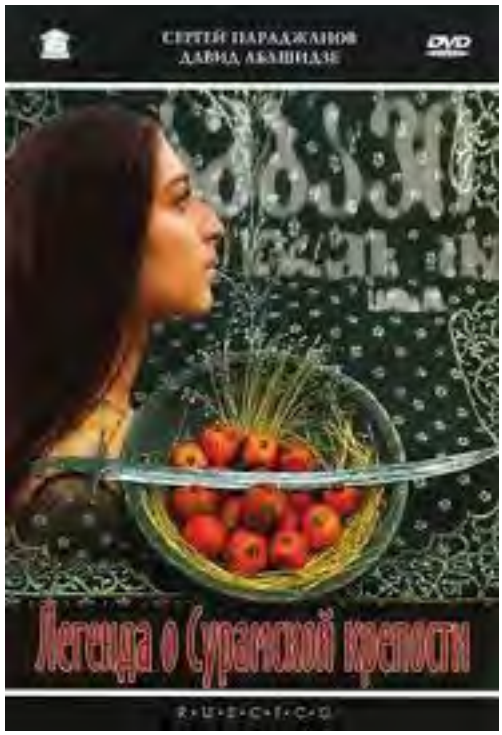
Despite conceiving numerous ideas and scripts, many of Parajanov's projects remained unrealized, including his autobiographical series *Confession*.

Parajanov created what can only be described as painterly cinema. Every frame





The Colors of Pomegranates



reveals his compositional genius, with gradations of dozens of colors each performing a dramatic function. Whether in movement or in static close-up, color and detail combine to create unified emotional landscapes.

As a towering figure of twentieth-century cinema, Parajanov attracted sustained attention at major international festivals including Cannes and Pesaro.

Parajanov died in Yerevan on July 20, 1990, and is buried in the Yerevan Pantheon of Public Figures.

Ashug-Kerib



The vivid, ethnically diverse culture was the main characteristic of Parajanov's work, which underwent a profound transformation culminating in a unified composition in his films.

Major Prizes:

- Sitges International Film Festival, Spain. Grand Prize for Best Direction (1986)
- Rotterdam Film Festival Prize, Netherlands (1986)
- Besançon International Film Festival, France. Prize for Best Sound (1986)
- São Paulo International Film Festival, Brazil. "Critics' Banner" Prize (1987)
-

Films:

The Last Spring (1992) (Confession), Ashug-Kerib (1988)... known as "Ashik Kerib" (1988) (in Azerbaijani), Arabesques on the Pirosmani Theme (1985), The Legend of Suram Fortress (1984), The Color of Pomegranates (1968); originally released under the title Sayat-Nova, Hakob Hovnatanian (1967), Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors (1964)... Eng. Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors (1967) (USA), The Flower on the Stone (1962), Ukrainian Rhapsody (1961), Dumka (1957), Natalya Uzhviy (1957), Golden Hands (1957), Andriusha (1954), Moldavian Fairy Tale (1951).



TENGIZ ABULADZE



1924-1994

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Tengiz Abuladze is one of the most outstanding figures in Georgian cinema—a director whose work introduced new artistic values into national culture. His films are distinguished by a profound philosophical vision of the world and a deep interest in the inner life of the human being. Abuladze's cinema unites poetic, allegorical, and metaphorical modes of narration, which give his films a unique aesthetic quality. Throughout his career, Abuladze consistently sought to defend human dignity, truth, and the ideals of humanism.

Tengiz Abuladze was born on January 31 in the city of Kutaisi. His first directorial experience took place while he was still at school. It was during this period that he met Rezo Chkheidze, who was also staging a performance on the school stage. Thus began a friendship between the two directors that lasted a lifetime.

In 1943, the friends enrolled in the Shota Rustaveli Theatre Institute in the theatre directing program (in the workshop



Magdana's Donkye

of directors Giorgi Tovstonogov and Dodo Aleksidze). After completing their third year of study, they went to Moscow and successfully passed the entrance examinations at the All-Union Institute of Cinematography (VGIK), where they studied in the workshop of Sergei Yutkevich and Mikhail Romm.

In 1955, having returned to Georgia, Tengiz Abuladze, together with Rezo Chkheidze, made his first feature film, *Magdana's Donkey*, based on a short story by the writer Ekaterine Gabashvili.

The action of the film takes place in Georgia at the turn of the twentieth century. The children of the widow Magdana find a dying donkey on the road. They rescue the animal, feed it, and name it Lurja ("Blue Eyes") because of its beautiful blue eyes. The donkey becomes a helper to the poor family. However, this idyll does not last long. Magdana's family is confronted with legalized injustice. In this struggle (unlike in the literary source), Magdana is defeated, and this defeat makes the unjust social environment even more dramatic.

The film depicts the harsh life of ordinary people, social inequality, austere naturalistic imagery, and the heartbreaking fate of its unfortunate characters—elements clearly

influenced by the aesthetics of Italian neo-realism.



The debut film by the young directors, *Magdana's Donkey*, received an award at the Cannes Film Festival. It was the first film from the Soviet Union to gain such significant international recognition and the first to bring major success to Georgian cinema. It was precisely with *Magdana's Donkey* that the period of Georgian cinema's rise and its most vibrant and interesting era began.

In 1958, Tengiz Abuladze directed the feature film *Other People's Children*. The script was based on an essay published in the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, which described an incident in one of Russia's provincial cities, telling the story of a woman abandoned by her husband who raised his children with maternal devotion. Abuladze transferred this tragic story of children abandoned by their father into a Georgian context and once again chose a neo-realist style.

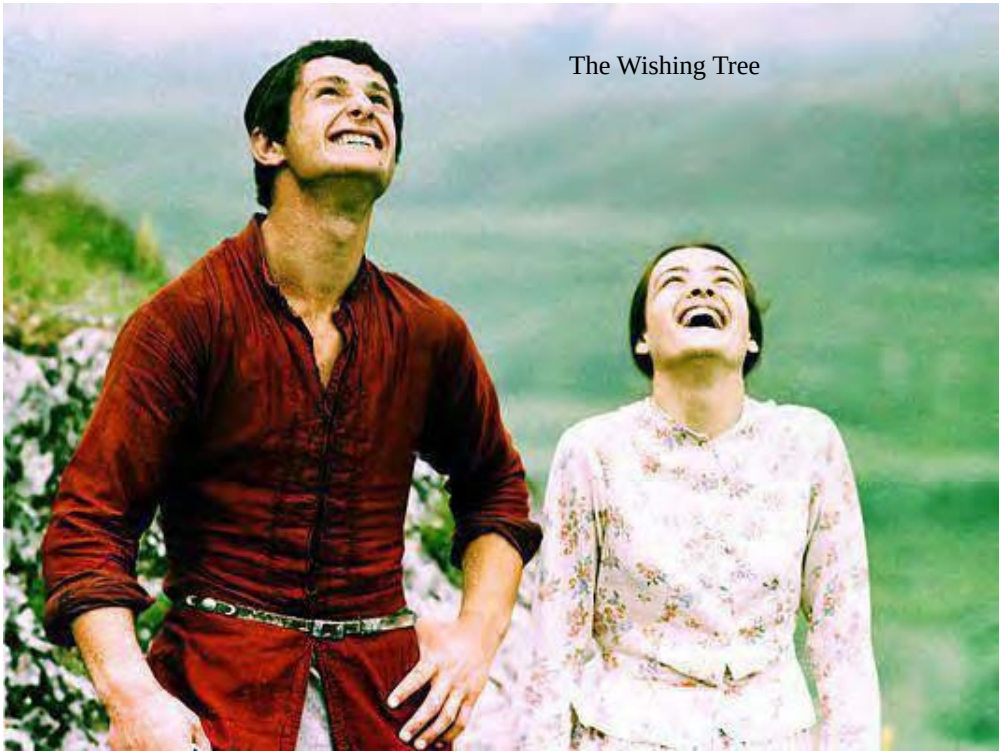
The widower Data lives with his two children. He spends all day at work, while little Gia and Lia wander the streets alone. One day, the children meet a young female student named Nato and become friends with her. Nato's kindness also charms the children's father, and he marries her. However, the family idyll proves short-lived. Data realizes that he cannot suppress his love for another woman, leaves the children, and goes away with her. The offended Nato runs away from home, but the despair of the abandoned children running after the train makes her realize that they are no longer "someone else's children."



Other People's Children

At first glance, this is a sad story, yet it reveals a profound truth: that children are the most tender and sincere beings in the world; that it is possible to love someone else's children selflessly; that love knows no boundaries; and that kindness is a powerful force capable of healing everything.

In 1962, Tengiz Abuladze adapted Nodar Dumbadze's celebrated work *Me, Grandmother, Iliko and Illarion*.



The Wishing Tree

Among Abuladze's films, this is the warmest and most lighthearted. In a small, impoverished village in western Georgia, the orphaned boy Zurikela lives with his elderly grandmother. Their neighbors, the old men Iliko and Illarion, are kind-hearted people filled with humor. They voluntarily take on the responsibility of raising the boy and treat Zurikela as their own son. This peaceful idyll is suddenly shattered by the outbreak of World War II. The village is emptied of its young men. The tragedy of a single provincial village becomes a reflection of the history of an entire nation.

The story of Zurikela, his grandmother, and their neighbors Iliko and Illarion is conveyed in warm, lyrical, and gentle tones. The film speaks of love, friendship, human warmth, and the colorful world of rural life, where the highest values are kindness, loyalty, and humor.

In 1967, Tengiz Abuladze began work on the first film of his trilogy, *The Plea* (the trilogy consists of *The Plea* [1967], *The Wishing Tree* [1976], and *Repentance* [1984]). This film became a cult masterpiece of Georgian cinema.

The Plea is based on motifs from the works of the great Georgian classical writer Vazha-Pshavela.

The traditions of the Caucasian peoples run deep. The Khevsur Aluda remains faithful to pagan customs, yet, having been captivated by the bravery of the Kist warrior Mutsal in a duel, he refuses to cut off the right hand of the slain enemy, as tradition demands. For violating this custom, Aluda is expelled from his community.

While hunting in the mountains, the Kist Joqola encounters the Khevsur Zviadauri, shelters him in his home, and hosts him as a guest. When the Kists recognize Zviadauri as their blood enemy, they seize him from Joqola and killed him on the Kist's grave in

The Plea



revenge. In the mountains, no law is more sacred than hospitality—yet the law of blood vengeance proves stronger.

In *The Plea*, enemies sacrifice their lives to defend one another's dignity. Compassion, self-sacrifice, and the desire to save another become the justification for human existence. The film itself is a desperate plea addressed to God, a hope for the salvation of human souls.



Me, Grandma, Iliko and Ilarion

The Plea is one of the most poetic, philosophical, and emotionally powerful works of Georgian cinema. Through elevated artistic expression and symbolism, and against the backdrop of the conflict between the individual and the community, it conveys the eternal struggle between good and evil, love and hatred, heroism and betrayal.

In 1976, Abuladze made the second film of the trilogy, *The Wishing Tree*. In this work, the director weaves together stories by Giorgi Leonidze, giving the film a psychological and symbolic depth.

At the center of the narrative is the love story of Marita and Gedia. The beautiful Marita is forcibly married to a wealthy villager, although her heart belongs to Gedia. The hypocritical village elders accuse Marita of betraying her husband and publicly punish the "adulteress."

Alongside the tragic love story, a mosaic of village characters unfolds—people illuminated by dreams. Each of them is unique: one worships the sky, another the earth; some are devoted to bodily desires, others to spiritual elevation. This diversity is the source of their charm and individuality.

In 1984, Tengiz Abuladze completed the trilogy with *Repentance*. This was the first film in the Soviet Union to address the previously taboo subject of Soviet political repression.

For a long time, the director searched for a suitable theme. One day, a friend told him a true story from western Georgia: a young man had exhumed the body of a recently deceased high-ranking official—a former Chekist—and propped it up at his gate in protest against injustice. In this story, Abuladze saw the reflection of an entire historical epoch, and it became the basis of *Repentance*.

Abuladze read the completed script to Eduard Shevardnadze, then First Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia, from whom he received permission to begin filming.

At that time, all scripts had to be approved in Moscow. To avoid censorship, the film was registered as a project commissioned by Georgian Television. The security services learned about the film only after the arrest of actor Gega Kobakhidze in 1983, when the script was discovered during a search of his apartment. This marked the beginning of persecution against the film. Authorities demanded that the script be destroyed and the filmed material burned. The director and the film endured numerous obstacles. Eventually, the film was completed, though its release seemed impossible. Abuladze lived in constant fear of arrest.

Once again, *Repentance* found protection in Eduard Shevardnadze, who by then had become Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. During the era of perestroika, on Shevardnadze's recommendation, Mikhail Gorbachev viewed the film. It was decided that allowing the film to be shown would signal political change beyond the Iron Curtain. Thus began the triumphant journey of *Repentance* in 1986, when it was called "the spark of perestroika."

The film is set in a fictional city. The former mayor, Varlam Aravidze, is buried, yet every morning his corpse is found propped up outside his own house. Each time he is reburied, only to reappear again. During an ambush at the grave, his grandson Tornike shoots the "unknown culprit," who turns out to be a young woman, Ketevan Barateli. At the trial, she recounts





Repentance

her family's tragedy and Aravidze's crimes. Shocked by the truth, Tornike commits suicide, and Abel Aravidze himself exhumes his father's body and throws it off a cliff.

Upon its release, *Repentance* received three major awards at the Cannes Film Festival: the Grand Prix of the Jury, the FIPRESCI Prize, and the Ecumenical Jury Prize. Following its success, the irreversible process of the Soviet Union's collapse accelerated. The character of Varlam Aravidze became a generalized image of tyranny, making the film universally relevant even today.

Ironically, Tengiz Abuladze was awarded the Lenin Prize not solely for *Repentance*, but for the trilogy as a whole—*The Plea*, *The Wishing Tree*, and *Repentance*—which collectively addressed the rethinking of a violent system.

Abuladze's work received numerous international awards, as well as state honors, including the Order of Honor (1994), the title of People's Artist of Georgia (1967), and the Shota Rustaveli State Prize (1979). From 1974, he taught at the Shota Rustaveli State Theatre Institute and served as artistic director of the first creative association of the "Georgian Film" studio.

He died on March 6, 1994, at the age of seventy, and is buried in the Didube Pantheon of Writers and Public Figures.

Filmography

- **Dimitri Arakishvili** (documentary, 1952) — Director.
- **Our Palace** (documentary, 1953) — Director, together with Rezo Chkheidze.
- **Georgian National Dance Ensemble** (documentary, 1954) — Director, together with Rezo Chkheidze.
- **Magdana's Donkey** (1955) — Director, together with Rezo Chkheidze.
  Special Prize at the 9th Cannes International Film Festival — *Best Film for an Invented Plot*;
  Honorary Prize at the 10th Edinburgh International Film Festival (1956);
  Gold Medal in the Young Film Directors' Section at the International Youth and Students Film Festival, Moscow (1957).
- **Other People's Children** (1958) — Screenwriter and Director.
  Honorary Diploma at the Tashkent International Film Festival of Asian and African Countries (1958);
  Diplomas from the Finnish Journalists' and Cinematographers' Unions at the Helsinki International Film Festival (1959);
  Diploma at the London International Film Festival of Award-Winning Films and the *Silver Naiad* Prize at the Poretta Terme International Film Festival (both 1960);
  Prize at the Tehran International Film Festival (1965);
  Silver Naiad Prize at the Porta-Terme International Film Festival, Italy (1965).
- **Me, Grandmother, Iliko and Illarion** (1962) — Screenwriter and Director.
  First-Class Diploma at the Bratislava International Film Festival (1964);
  Honorary Diploma at the Tashkent International Film Festival of Asian and African Countries (1958);

Diplomas from the Finnish Journalists' and Cinematographers' Unions at the Helsinki International Film Festival (1959);
Diploma at the London International Film Festival of Award-Winning Films and Second Prize (*Silver Naiad*) at the Poretta Terme International Film Festival (1960);
Prize at the Tehran International Film Festival (1965).

- **Mtatusheti Sketches** (documentary, 1965) — Director.
- **Svaneti Sketches** (documentary, 1965) — Director.
- **The Plea** (1967) — Screenwriter and Director.
  Grand Prix at the 17th San Remo International Festival of Author Films (1973).
- **Museum Under the Open Sky** (1971) — Director.
- **A Necklace for My Beloved** (1971) — Screenwriter and Director.
- **The Wishing Tree** (1976) — Screenwriter and Director.
  Jury Special Prize *Golden Ibex* for Best Direction at the 6th Tehran International Film Festival (1977);
  Grand Prize and Diploma at the 10th All-Union Riga Film Festival (1977);
  Prize at the 21st Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (1978);
  Golden Hugo for Best Direction, Chicago International Film Festival (1978);
  David di Donatello Award, Italy (1979);
  Shota Rustaveli State Prize (1979);
  FIPRESCI Prize at the Cabourg International Festival of Romantic Films (1983).
- **Repentance** (1984) — Screenwriter and Director.
  Three awards at the 40th Cannes International Film Festival:
  Grand Prix of the Jury,
  Prize of the Catholic Jury for Humanism,
  FIPRESCI Prize (1985);
  Awards at the Chicago International Film Festival:
  Best Actor (1987),
  Best Actor,
  Best Cinematography,
  Best Director,
  Best Film,
  Best Screenplay;
  Nika Award, Russia (1988).

ამოვსუნთქავთ

ტანტრიების „ჯვრებია".
„ანბანის წ". „ორნამენტია"
ასობით ფიცარი

სამუზეუმო პანორამები: ნინა
ჯაფარიძე, ციცინო ამირანაშვილი,
ანზორ კვანტალიანი,
ალექსანდრე ჩაჩანიძის
ციცინო ამირანაშვილის
ალექსანდრე ჩაჩანიძის
პანორამები ციცინო ამირანაშვილის
ალექსანდრე ბოხუასის
პანორამები ციცინო ამირანაშვილის
ალექსანდრე ბოხუასის
პანორამები ნინა ჯაფარიძის

ასობით ორნამენტი:
ამოსუნთქავ გამოსახავ,
ის ნიღაბი,
ვხატავ ნიღაბს,
ზოგჯერ პორტრეტს,
ამოსუნთქავ ამოვსახავ,
ორჯერ ამორჩეულიც,
ასევე ავხატავ,
ნიღაბ ავხატავ
და სხვ.

ავტოპორტრეტი
„ამოსუნთქავ ამოვსახავ"
1984 წ.

REZO CHKHEIDZE



1926-2015

Ekaterine Kontridze
Doctor of Art Studies, Film Scholar
Head of the Educational and Research Archive at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

Rezo Chkheidze is a singular figure in the history of Georgian cinema. His name is associated with the golden age of Georgian cinematography, the creation of ideologically "free" films, the dignified international recognition of Georgian film, and the well-earned establishment of the concept known as "the phenomenon of Georgian cinema."

Revaz (Rezo) Chkheidze was born on December 8, 1926, in Kutaisi. His father, writer and public figure Davit Chkheidze—known by the pseudonym Dia Chianeli—was executed in 1937. His mother, left with three young children, was evicted from their home and left to survive on her own.

From childhood, Rezo Chkheidze dreamed of becoming a director. He staged his first performance while still a school student. It was during this period that he met Tengiz Abuladze, who was also directing a school play. Thus, the two talented young men crossed paths, beginning a friendship that would last many years.

In 1943, Rezo Chkheidze and Tengiz Abuladze were admitted together to the directing faculty of the Shota Rustaveli Theatre Institute of Georgia (in the workshop of Giorgi Tovstonogov and Dodo Aleksidze). In 1946, again together, they continued their studies at the film directing faculty of the State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow (under S. Yutkevich and M. Romm).

In 1955, having returned to Georgia, Rezo Chkheidze and Tengiz Abuladze co-directed a screen adaptation of Ekaterine Gabashvili's story *Magdana's Donkey***.**

The story unfolds in Georgia at the turn of the 19th century. Widow Magdana supports her three orphaned children in the city by selling bran. One day, her children find a dying donkey abandoned on a village road. They bring the animal home, feed it, care for it, and, struck by its beautiful blue eyes, name it *Lurja* ("Blue"). The donkey becomes a helper to the impoverished family—but this fragile idyll does not last. Magdana's family soon comes face to face with institutionalized injustice. In this struggle (unlike in the literary original), Magdana is defeated, making the unjust environment even more tragic.

Depicting the harsh lives of ordinary people, social inequality, stark naturalistic imagery, and the moving story of ill-fated characters, the film reflects the aesthetics of Italian neorealism. This tragic story, told with the fresh cinematic signature of young filmmakers, became a kind of manifesto in Georgian national cinema and played a decisive role in shaping its future development. *Magdana's Donkey* was the first film from the Soviet sphere to gain major international recognition and the work that brought Georgian cinema its first major success abroad. The golden age of Georgian cinematography begins precisely with this film.



In 1956, Rezo Chkheidze independently directed the feature film *Our Courtyard***.** The film portrays a traditional Tbilisi courtyard as a kind of microcosm of the country and its inhabitants. People of different ages, temperaments, and inter-

ests live together, sharing their joys and hardships. Among this diverse group, the young people—Tsitsino, Dato, Shalva, Vazha—are central. Having just finished school and standing at the threshold of a new chapter in their lives, they suddenly encounter their first profound emotion: first love. For Georgian audiences, *Our Courtyard* remains one of the most beloved films of all time.

In 1959, the director turned to historical themes and created the feature film *Maia Tskneteli*. At the background of the struggle for national independence, the story follows the valiant "Mate the Boy," who fights against injustice and lawlessness. Mate, a loyal soldier of the great Georgian king Erekle II, participates in many victories and heroic deeds. The whole country knows the story of Mate and his detachment—those who, along with defending the homeland, also fight injustice. But few know that "Mate the Boy," the defender of the homeland, is in fact Maia from Tskneti, a young woman disguised as a man, whom injustice itself transformed into "Mate the Boy."





Another of Chkheidze's highly successful films is *The Father of a Soldier (*1964), dedicated to the theme of World War II. Based on a true story, it tells of the elderly peasant Giorgi Makharashvili, who leaves his native village to visit his son wounded in the war. The focus is not the soldier, but the father searching for traces of his son—and along the way becoming a father to all soldiers. This transformation unfolds before the audience throughout the film. The father ultimately fulfills



Magdana's Donkey

his wish and finds his son, but the mortally wounded young man dies in his arms.

The screen image of the father, portrayed by Sergo Zakariadze, became a symbol of the strong Georgian man and, at the same time, the father of all soldiers.

Another film by Rezo Chkheidze dealing with the subject of war is *Boys of the Smile*, filmed in 1969. It is June 1941. Young graduates of a Tbilisi school are preparing for adulthood—dreaming of a happy future, choosing professions, planning their lives, loving, laughing, singing… But suddenly they learn that war has begun. Yesterday's carefree boys, without hesitation, go together to the front and become soldiers—only one of whom survives to return. Despite its tragic subject, the film radiates warmth, humaneness, and profound love for people.

In 1980, Chkheidze directed the two-part feature film *My Native Land!* (originally titled *"The Raikom Secretary"*). This film narrates the story of a young communist leader, Giorgi Thoreli, appointed as raikom secretary in his native district. Giorgi is an incorruptible, progressively minded "party worker." His home region, once fertile and prosperous—with blooming orchards and abundant vineyards—is now impoverished. Its people have lost faith in justice; mountain villages lie deserted; corruption, irresponsibility, and indifference have drained the region's vitality. Giorgi fights for the revival of his native Meskheti and uses all means to repopulate the abandoned villages with Georgians and restore the once-flourishing "Vaio fields."

The character of Giorgi Thoreli transcends the conventional portrayal of the Soviet bureaucrat; he appears instead as a patriot dedicated to the welfare and renewal of his homeland.

In 1989, Rezo Chkheidze created a nine-episode feature film *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho*, completely different from his earlier works in style, aesthetics, and genre. The series, produced by "Georgian Film" with the participation of Basque television, is an adaptation of Miguel de Cervantes's classic *Don Quixote*.

Don Quixote is one of the most significant works in world literature. Its screen adaptation is the dream of many artists. Few film versions of this masterpiece exist, which makes Rezo Chkheidze's Georgian interpretation all the more remarkable.

The film focuses not only on the comic adventures of the protagonist but also on his inner freedom and dedication to lofty ideals. The story unfolds in a highly stylized environment, where time and geography are entirely fluid. Symbols and archetypes from world culture are consciously blended, and the film incorporates elements of cinema, theater, animation, puppetry, and even ballet. With this work, Rezo Chkheidze and Georgian filmmakers created an extraordinary nine-episode chivalric epic, refracted through the Georgian artistic lens—the miniseries *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho.*

Rezo Chkheidze wrote in his memoirs: *"Judging by my films, the main theme of my work is kindness. My life suggested this theme to me, through the circumstances in which people reveal their nature during times of hardship…"* Indeed, the central and universal theme running through his films is the portrayal of kind people and the sowing of kindness.

Rezo Chkheidze's career spanned many decades. He was an exceptionally talented film director, People's Artist of Georgia (1966), Secretary of the Union of Cinematographers of Georgia (1963–1981),



The Father of a Soldier

Director of the "Georgian Film" studio (1973–2006), founder and artistic director of the Tbilisi Television Film Studio (1969–1973), founder of the film faculty at the Shota Rustaveli State Theatre Institute of Georgia, teacher and professor (1974–2010), laureate of state prizes, recipient of the Order of Honor, and winner of numerous prestigious awards. His contribution to Georgian cinematography is immeasurable.

Rezo Chkheidze passed away on May 3, 2015, at the age of 88.

Filmography

- ***Boris Paichadze*** (documentary diploma film, 1953) – director
- ***Our Palace*** (documentary, 1954) – co-director with Tengiz Abuladze
- ***Georgian Dance State Ensemble*** (documentary, 1954) – co-director with Tengiz Abuladze



Our Courtyard

- ***Magdana's Donkey*** (1955) – co-director with T. Abuladze.
  Special Prize at IX Cannes International Film Festival – *Best Film for an Invented Plot*;
  Honorary Prize at X Edinburgh International Film Festival (1956).
  Gold Medal in the young directors' section at the International Film Festival of Youth and Students, Moscow (1957).
- ***Our Courtyard*** (1956) – director.
  Gold Medal, First Prize and Diploma at VI World Festival of Youth and Students, Moscow (1957).
- ***Maia Tskneteli*** (1959) – director
- ***Treasure*** (1961) – director.
  Main Prize at II Delhi International Film Festival (1961).
- ***Sea Path*** (1962) – director
- ***The Father of a Soldier*** (1964) – director.
  Special Prize at the 10th Cork International Film Festival (Ireland, 1964);
  Honorary Diploma at San Francisco International Film Festival (1965);
  Special Diploma at Thessaloniki International Film Festival (1964);
  Prize at II Rome International Film Festival (1965);
  Capitol Jupiter Award, Rome (1966);
  Lenin Komsomol Prize of the Georgian SSR (1969).
- ***The Boys of Our Yard / Boys of the Smile*** (1969) – director
  Lenin Komsomol Prize of the Georgian SSR (1969).
- ***Saplings*** (1972) – director
  Diploma at Moscow International Film Festival (1973);
  Diploma at Tashkent (Alma-Ata) International Film Festival (1973).
- ***My Native Land! / The Raikom Secretary*** (1980) – screenwriter, director
  Main Prize and Diploma at XIV All-Union Film Festival, Vilnius (1981);
  Lenin Komsomol Prize of the Georgian SSR (1986).
- ***The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho*** (1989) – screenwriter, director
- ***A Candle Lit at the Savior's Tomb*** (2008) – screenwriter, director

კახი კავსაძე და მამუკა კიკალეიშვილი
რეჟისორ რეზო ჩხეიძის ფილმში
ცხოვრება დონ კიხოტისა და სანჩოსი

კინოსტუდია „ქართული ფილმი“,
„მიგელ სანჩეს ინფანტე“
(ესპანეთი). ბასკეთის სახელმწიფო
ტელევიზია. 1988წ.



LANA GOGOBERIDZE



1928

Manana Lekborashvili
Doctor of Art Studies, Associate Professor at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

Devotion to the Theme

People's Artist of the Republic of Georgia (1979)

Translator, writer, educator, politician, and film director Lana Gogoberidze came to cinema directing by a long, yet very interesting path.

She was only 15 years old when, after completing secondary school, she was admitted to the directing faculty of the Tbilisi Theatre Institute (in Giorgi Tovstonogov's workshop). When Tovstonogov moved to Leningrad, the group dispersed. In the middle of the academic year, Lana Gogoberidze enrolled in the Faculty of Philology at Tbilisi State University, and later transferred to the Faculty of Western European Languages and Literature. In

1950, she graduated from the English Language and Literature program. During her student years, she translated French and English poetry—including works by Verlaine, Burns, Whitman, and Tagore. She was especially interested in Whitman. She dedicated both her thesis and, later, her candidate dissertation (1954) to his work.

From 1954 to 1955, she taught the history of ancient literature and Western European literature at the Batumi Pedagogical Institute. In 1955, she became a student of film directing at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow (in Sergei Gerasimov and Tamara Makarova's workshop). Although she studied feature film directing in Moscow, her first works turned out to be documentaries: after returning to Tbilisi, she was required to take part in the film studio's planned productions ("Tbilisi is 1500 Years Old," diploma film, 1959).

Her debut in feature cinema came later: in 1961, with the film almanac *Under One Sky*, consisting of adaptations of three novellas—*Princess Maia* (based on Leo Kiacheli), *The Dove*, and *Fresco* (based on Archil Sulakauri). In these works she already presents herself as a mature professional. *Princess Maia* is particularly noteworthy: in a short screen time, the director manages to create nuanced, emotional characters and a credible dramatic environment. Here, too, she introduces the theme that runs like a red thread through all of her work: woman and her world. Woman and time.

Her next film was also an adaptation—Nodar Dumbadze's *I See the Sun* (1965). It is a thoughtful adaptation and a professionally accomplished film. However, after this work the director turned only to original screenplays, appearing as a co-writer. Except for her next film *Trans**figuration of Jesus***—a script co-written with Nana Khatiskatsi—her permanent screenwriter became Zaira Arsenishvili.



Some Interviews on Personal Matters





Golden Thread

*Trans**figuration of Jesus*** (1968) marked a search for new thematic and genre paths in her work. It was introduced to audiences as an intellectual drama.



Here, one of the director's defining characteristics emerges for the first time: the simultaneous depiction of several characters living side by side, each with an individual life path—but intersecting amid shared problems or emotional states.

This time, the film centers on a vibrant circle of friends, while the burden of the main conflict falls upon a theater director (played by Geidar Palavandishvili) who suffers in search of the right tone for his production. Only after he undergoes a certain personal trial and rises to a new level of moral self-awareness does the creative search find resolution. Through long internal struggle, the protagonist realizes that one cannot preach what one does not practice; that social inertia is destructive both morally and creatively.

These conclusions are delivered to viewers in a ready-made form, giving the film a somewhat didactic tone. Yet its most compelling aspect is its style: vivid characters, inserted novella-like episodes, the rhythm of contemporary urban life captured on the streets of Tbilisi, and a free-roaming camera reminiscent of the French New Wave.

Her next film, *When Hazelnut Was Blooming* (1972), is again focused on contemporary life—with bold, open engagement with acute social and moral issues. The story unfolds among young people, yet the events clearly reveal the moral face of the older generation and the general mindset and way of life prevailing in society. The film is distinguished



When Almonds Blossomed

by its sharply civic, accusatory tone, speaking with publicistic directness about dangerous tendencies within society.

A publicistic tone also characterizes *Several Interviews on Personal Matters* (1979). The intention was to portray a vivid, living image of a contemporary woman. The film's protagonist, Sophiko—a journalist played by Sophiko Chiaureli—is energetic, upbeat, and highly active. She manages to balance her love for her profession and dedication to her work with responsibilities as a homemaker, mother, and wife—until she learns that her husband loves another woman. The family drama leads to deep inner turmoil, but Sophiko remains strong and dignified. She refuses to accept falseness. The directors make it clear that her strength lies in meaningful work—people need her, and in this she finds her happiness.



I See the Sun

Throughout the film, inserted fragments appear—either as interview-monologues or as memories triggered by real situations. The women Sophiko interviews reveal their loneliness, domestic struggles, or emotional wounds. These episodes acquaint us not only with individuals and their sharply personal yet typical problems, but also illuminate the protagonist's own unspoken concerns and inner moods.

The authors' position is expressed in the contrast between personal and public life: personal happiness matters, but if self-realization outside the home causes the family to collapse, this still does not mean one is personally defeated; one may find fulfillment in civic engagement as well.

Despite the somewhat linear message, Sophiko Chiaureli inhabits every situation with complete authenticity. Her portrayal of the contemporary woman proved persuasive and timely—a fact confirmed by major awards (Grand Prix at the San Remo International

Film Festival; FIPRESCI Prize at the Locarno International Film Festival; State Prize, 1980; and others).

The study of women's destinies and their relationship with society continues in *Day is Longer Then Night* (1984). As the director has noted, she has always been interested in the character and spiritual world of the Georgian woman—the mother—who voluntarily, out of moral duty, shoulders great burdens. Such is Eva (young Eva played by Darejan Kharshiladze, older Eva by Tamar Skhirtladze).

Eva's life spans an entire epoch—from pre-revolutionary Georgia to the present day. She survives many hardships, both physical and emotional, yet she never abandons the burden she has taken on, nor does she break. She preserves her moral code, spiritual endurance, and hope for the future.

Again, an epic narrative is followed by a contemporary tale. *Turnover* (1986) is another multi-character film, built as a mosaic of parallel or intersecting storylines. At its center is Manana Iashvili (Leila Abashidze), a once-famous actress who is now alienated from her profession and seemingly from life. Through her we meet the rest: her elderly aunt Mathiko (Megi Tsulukidze); her daughter Salome (Nutsa Aleksi-Meskhishvili) and friends; Manana's former close friend Rusudan (Lia Eliava) and, through her, Andro and Nana (Nineli Chankvetadze), a young woman facing a terminal illness.

These figures emerge as sharply defined and recognizable social types—their characters, experiences, positions, and aspirations differ greatly, yet at certain points their paths intersect, creating the collective picture of life's "turnover." (Tokyo International Film Festival Prize for Best Director, 1987)

In her next film, *Waltz on the Pechora* (1992), the director turns to a particularly painful chapter of her own biography. As she herself has said, this film was fate for her—something she wished to make her entire life. It portrays thirty-seven years viewed through the eyes of a child—motherless, growing up on others' doorsteps—and in parallel, the harsh lives of women exiled to Siberia. These are autobiographical fragments from the director's own experience.



Day is Longer than Night

While this theme is not continued directly, her film *The Golden Thread* (2019) again explores human relationships—

this time between two elderly women who must share a home. One is a writer (Nana Jorjadze); the other a former official (Guranda Gabunia) who once banned the writer's books. Now they live together, still in opposition—but what ultimately matters more: ideology or human feeling, revenge or forgiveness?

Later, the director again returns to the era of repression with her documentary *Mother and Daughter, or Night Is Never Completely Dark* (2023), dedicated to her mother, Nutsa Khutsishvili-Gogoberidze—the first female film director in Georgia. Nutsa Gogoberidze was imprisoned because of her husband and spent ten years in the Gulag. Her films were banned in the Soviet Union, and attempts were made to erase them forever. In the film, Lana Gogoberidze recounts her mother's life, her films, repression in general, and cinema itself—sincerely and emotionally—using preserved photographs, newly discovered footage shot by her mother, and fragments from her own films.

All of Lana Gogoberidze's films belong to the dramatic genre. Therefore, the musical *Commotion in Salkhineti* (1975) may seem unusual in her oeuvre—but only at first glance. Even here, she remains true to herself, using the genre to address a significant social problem, and once again placing a woman at the center.

This time, the director targets a destructive cult of feasting that has taken root in Georgian life. In one small town—Salkhineti—the daily menu has become the main concern of most men. The return of the actress Makro (Nadezhda Kharadze), who seeks to bring spirituality and creativity to the town, disrupts this false idyll, opposing the gourmand leader Vasiko (Kakhi Kavsadze). As always, Lana Gogoberidze holds to an optimistic outlook—Makro's side wins.

With her films and steadfast creative principles, Lana Gogoberidze has firmly established herself in Georgian cinema. Her place may be described as that of an artistic-publicistic filmmaker—with all the strengths and weaknesses this implies. She is defined by an active civic stance, bold and sharp treatment of socially relevant themes, and a determination to communicate her ideas to the audience as clearly as possible.

Her strong civic commitment is also reflected in her public roles: member and chairwoman (1988–1995) of the International Association of Women in Film (KIWI); Member of the Parliament of Georgia (1992–1998); chairwoman of the Georgian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (1996–1999); Permanent Representative of Georgia to the Council of Europe (1999–2006); and others.

Altogether, these qualities form the phenomenon of Lana Gogoberidze—translator, writer, educator, politician, and film director.

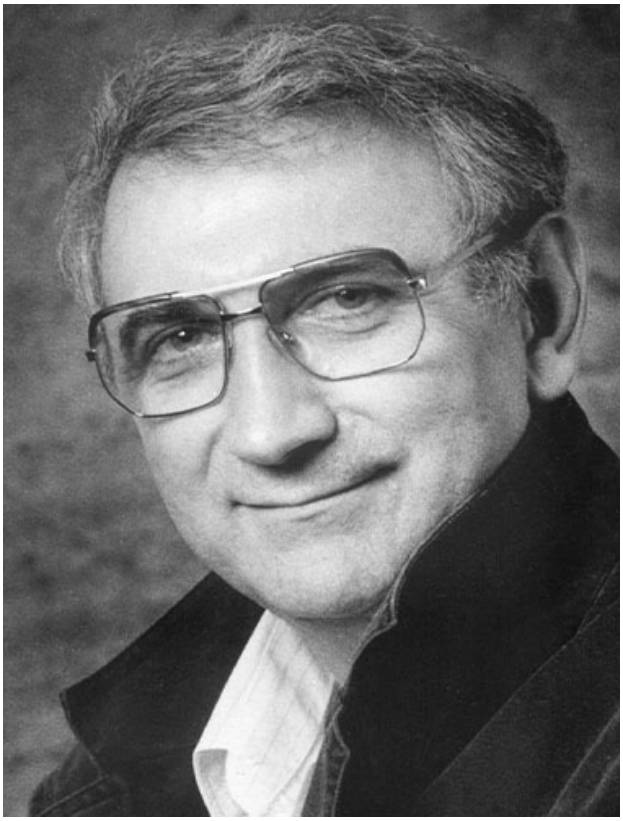
Filmography
As actress:

Conquerors of Peaks (1952)
As director:
Gelati (documentary, coursework, 1958)
Tbilisi is 1500 Years Old (diploma film, 1959)
Under One Sky (1961) – director, screenwriter
I See the Sun (1965) – director, screenwriter
Transfiguration of Jesus (1968) – director, screenwriter
When Hazelnut Was Blooming (1972) – director, screenwriter
Commotion in Salkhineti (1975) – director, screenwriter
Several Interviews on Personal Matters (1979) – director, screenwriter
Letters to Children (1981), TV – director, screenwriter
The Day Was Longer Than Night (1983) – director, screenwriter
Turnover (1986) – director, screenwriter
Waltz on the Pechora (1992) – director, screenwriter
The Golden Thread (2019) – director, screenwriter
Mother and Daughter, or Night Is Never Completely Dark (documentary, 2023) – director, screenwriter, editor

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ELDAR SHENGELAIA



1933-2025

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Georgian cinema of the 1960s–1970s occupies a distinguished place in the history of Georgian film. The fact that this period is still referred to as the "golden age" is no coincidence; it is directly connected with the emergence of a new, talented generation in Georgian cinema.

A new worldview, new subject matter, and new forms—along with corresponding styles and genres—became the unifying and distinguishing characteristics of the generation of the 1960s. A clear aspiration emerged to reflect generalized, philosophical, and eternal problems, with life itself brought to the foreground in its everyday comic and tragic manifestations. This breakthrough was determined



Express-Information

The White Caravan



not only by socio-political factors (related to the so-called "era of conflictlessness"), but also by long-standing traditions that had shaped the national character over centuries.

Eldar Shengelaia is a representative of this so-called generation of the sixties. He created a distinctive genre formula in Georgian cinema imbued with tragicomic intonations, combining folkloric conventions, psychological realism, humor and melancholy, ironic criticism of Soviet reality, and lyrical-philosophical generalization of human existence. In his films, human life is examined only in motion—often quiet, scarcely noticeable, but always directed toward inner heights.

As a student of Sergei Yutkevich's workshop at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK), Shengelaia made his diploma film together with his classmate Aleksei Sakharov. In 1958, the fairy-tale film *Legend of the Frozen Heart* was released. The literary screenplay, commissioned by Kyrgyzfilm, was based on a Kyrgyz legend, although the action was transferred to contemporary times. The authors altered the screenplay so

substantially that the original playwrights, Stanislav Vitkevich and Grigory Yagdfeld, barely recognized it. The eight-part fairy-tale film, which even included animated sequences, was an unusual format for a diploma project. Presenting a feature-length film as a diploma work was unprecedented in the history of VGIK. The second film was shot during an internship at Mosfilm, again with Sakharov, and once more based on a screenplay by the same authors.

In 1960, the children's film *Winter's Tale*, based on Russian folklore, was released. A dreamy child's thoughts are realized as dreams, and he finds himself in a fairy-tale world. Both films drew on folkloric material, and already at this stage the director's aspiration to juxtapose reality and fantasy, the real and the unreal, became evident.

Later, Eldar Shengelaia recalled: "Every artist searches for their own handwriting. My closest friend Lyosha Sakharov and I staged two films in Moscow: *Legend of the Frozen Heart* and *Winter's Tale*. *Winter's Tale* was a kind of approach to the handwriting I later achieved. Evgeny Leonov acted in that film—this was his first role. Then my heart drew me toward the Tbilisi Film Studio. I submitted a request, but for a whole week they refused to let me leave, saying: everyone dreams of getting to Mosfilm, and you want to leave?! I insisted. After a week they signed the request, and I came to Tbilisi. Soon Tamaz Meliava and I, with whom I studied in Moscow, staged the film based on Merab Eliozishvili's story *Roads and Crossroads*."

Having returned to Georgia, Shengelaia chose a qualitatively different stylistic path. He later noted: *White Caravan* and *Mikela* were realistic films, but I had a strong desire to return to my usual style and to reshape it as it happens in art, not as in life."

In 1963, the joint work of Eldar Shengelaia and Tamaz Meliava, the film *White Caravan*, was released. "The rehabilitation of physical reality," "life as it is"—these phrases seemed to become the creative motto of the authors.

The film's plot depicts the difficult and monotonous life of shepherds. The main character Martia's eldest son, Gela, refuses to continue shepherding, abandons the flock, and goes to the city in search of a different life. While struggling against the natural disaster to save the sheep, Martia perishes. The son who returns from the city blames himself for his father's death. Colorless everyday life, indistinguishable days, then years follow. People are imprisoned within the framework of traditions, with their own lives, thoughts, and passions. These frameworks are identical for all shepherds—measured, legalized. Their existence is a struggle for survival, modest and stripped of any desire to escape the ordinary. Thus Gela's protest—"We can't walk this earth like blind people!"—is incomprehensible to the shepherds. They cannot understand why this "blindness" should be rejected, when it is their work and the work of their ancestors.

"Shepherding is one thing, and human life is another," says Gela. Yet his protest is external and superficial. He fails to understand the shepherds' toast; fleeing to the city and abandoning a pregnant woman hardly constitutes the "human life" he seeks. For him, physical escape becomes a symbol of self-assertion and liberation, but the city does not offer refuge, nor does it provide him with a sense of belonging. Perhaps his father's death—his "removal from the path"—might guarantee freedom. Yet this, too, proves illusory. It is precisely Martia's death that opens Gela's eyes: he is his father's fragment, flesh of his flesh.



The Eccentrics



At Martia's grave, a broken, nameless cross is erected. Wandering shepherds bow their heads before it, and the fear of impending death flares in their eyes. Gela is defeated—against himself, against his father, against his beloved, and against his friends.

Soviet cinema, with its prosaic depiction of life and unambiguous moralizing, often offered viewers a peculiar "Soviet" model of duty and honesty. In this context, Gela's protest rendered him a guilty and irresponsible figure. Today, however, the film—based on M. Eliozishvili's documentary essays and materials collected in the mountains—is perceived differently. It is not merely an example of stark realism, but a verdict on an era in which human choice and social givens do not coincide. The given becomes a heavy, invisible burden that deprives individuals of the right to freedom and forward movement. Gela's protest is not a form of moral guilt, but a natural reaction of a cornered personality, transformed into a universal metaphor for the contradiction between personal choice and social predetermination.

White Caravan was nominated for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1964. The decision was made by the Central Committee, and the screening (of course) took place without the directors' participation. Fifty-five years later, in 2019, the film returned to Cannes in the "Cannes Classics" section, restored and digitized.

Eldar Shengelaia's first independent work was *Mikela* (1965), based on D. Kldiashvili's story of the same name. Through this adaptation, the director declared his intention to address serious and eternal themes. From this point onward, beginning with *An Unusual Exhibition*, Kldiashvili's influence became decisive for his work.

The behavior and character of the peasant Mikela Giorgadze are determined by an inseparable fear of ultimate uprooting and extinction, which follows the hero's every action as a leitmotif. There is no room here for humor, neither bitter nor gentle laughter. The short literary text had to be transformed into a cinematic narrative, requiring an adequate form: brevity combined with maximum density, the state, action, and tragedy of the hero. Kldiashvili's dark tones flow into the stream of black-and-white frames.

Off-screen narration announces Mikela Giorgadze's misfortune and, as in the literary source, informs the viewer of the tragedy that befell the family. Mikela had three sons; all three he entrusted to the earth along with their wives and children, and he was left alone with a daughter-in-law and two grandchildren.

Death, symbolized in the opening frames, permeates the entire film. The authorial voice reappears to inform us of the declining health of the elder grandson, Spidona. According to Spidona, "The Lord brought me back from the other world and will take me again after a year." In the old man's face we already read submission to fate and reconciliation with death. His hope is now Nestora, who must save this cursed household. Preparing a grave for the next victim becomes routine for Mikela.

The darkened frame is pierced by the flickering light of a candle, sharply outlining Maia's face and hands. She senses approaching danger. Mikela tends the stove. Autumn rains intensify. Maia prays. The candle goes out, and the defenseless destruction of a small human life becomes inevitable. Mikela stares in horror at the sight. Spidona's hand appears near the collapsed gate. He did not expect Spidona's death yet—the year had not passed…

In spring, little Nestora is brought by cart. Mikela is even more broken, yet still hopes that fate will spare the child.

The story is transferred to the screen almost unchanged, save for a few additions that further intensify the tragedy of Spidona's death. Such is the character of Eka (absent from the story)—Spidona's only companion and witness, the one who reminds him that he is alive and that life is beautiful, if only briefly. Death is inevitable, and the image of a little girl grown out of a woolen dress appears at the grave.

The film's visual language fully conveys the authorial mood. The sparse material environment, strict and ascetic imagery, and emphasis on black and white reinforce the suffocating atmosphere. Characters seized by loneliness and fear of impending death

appear cut off from life itself. Silence dominates—cemetery silence that makes a solitary passerby involuntarily quicken their pace. Mikela becomes a murderer, albeit an involuntary one, and prepares meticulously for this act. For such a person, every prayer addressed to God or fate seems to return as divine wrath.

The film's characters are precise cinematic embodiments of Kldiashvili's portraits. The acting of professional performers G. Tkabladze (Mikela) and Z. Kverenchkhiladze (Maia) is as restrained and ascetic as the film's overall style.



Blue Mountains, or Unbelievable Story

The viewer follows events from an observer's position. From frame to frame, the sense of inevitable movement grows and persists even when the camera shifts from interior to exterior, as sound intensifies the tragic mood alongside the image.

Through visual means, A. Rekhviashvili and E. Shengelaia heighten the drama of Kldiashvili's story, placing the main emphasis on composition and color. Weather (wind and rain), color palette (black, gray, white), and nature (bare, withered trees) create an oppressive atmosphere.

Mikela concludes the first stage of Eldar Shengelaia's creative path—his initial encounter with Kldiashvili's world.

Starting from the sixties, Georgian film comedy undergoes significant transformation. It is enriched with elements of other genres or conversely, itself tries to integrate into other genre structures, which is evident in the work of almost every director working during this period. Comedy is enriched with lyricism, tragic intonations, and if in the thirties *Lost Paradise* differed somewhat from the comedies of that period, D. Kldi-

ashvili's creative style and worldview also deserve credit. Soft, benign humor, which nonetheless gains seriousness of thought and precise social characterization, distinguishes Georgian film comedies, primarily determined by D. Kldiashvili's intonation.

And if *Mikela* is the tragedy of its main character's passions and faith with no room left for humor, in *An Unusual Exhibition* (1968), even though its material is not Kldiashvili's prose, we discover the tragicomic intonations characteristic of this writer. The film was based on Rezo Gabriadze's *Poros' Marble*. Gabriadze's appearance in Georgian cinema also became an event, and his characters once again remind us of that peculiarity, which is called victory over pain with laughter, over hardship with courage, with humor. At the same time, his name is associated with a new understanding of the generic nature of film comedy. Gabriadze's screenplays are not pure comedies; the screenwriter expanded the genre framework and achieved a peculiar synthesis of other genre elements. In his films, the comic and dramatic exist on equal footing, there are anecdotes, symbols, and at the same time the presentation of everyday life occurs in its comic and tragic manifestations.

The film begins with a war scene and only this one episode depicts it, as a hint at time, which becomes the leitmotif of the action. Snowy, sparse forest. Against the background of shell explosions, Aguli takes cover behind one tree or another. The episode is so parodied, the frames so accelerated, that the impression is created as if Aguli is playing at "war games" with an invisible enemy. After another explosion, seeing Aguli sprawled on the snow gives us a kind of relief. His place is with Pipinia and not in war.

Aguli, shell-shocked in the head, returns home to Pipinia's warm hearth. The war ends. In the yard, there is a white marble stone, from which Aguli plans to carve spring's awakening, or the northern lights, but the harsh laws of everyday life and Pipinia's unshakable will place his desires in the realm of eternal dreams. Of course, spring will still come, only at the cemetery. It is precisely here that Aguli's dreams and thoughts about immortal art rest. Here, where ordinary mortals are laid to rest.

The unusual exhibition is the result of the creative passion of an ordinary person, the sculptor Aguli Eristavi. He can be considered a talented sculptor just as much as untalented, though this has no essential significance. What kind of soldier is he who doesn't dream of becoming a general? The craftsman too dreams of true art, protests against everyday life, dreams of creating something special from Poros' marble, but realizes that this struggle brings nothing, since he has a family to feed. By profession as a sculptor, he can only manage to carve ordinary mortals in stone. This is why the exhibition arranged at the cemetery is an ordinary craftsman's exhibition and is unusual only insofar as Aguli's dream of bringing "spring" to life was condemned to death from the moment of conception. An exhibition with which Aguli Eristavi himself built a monument to unrealized dreams.

Simultaneously tragic and comic is the exhibition arranged at the cemetery, which Aguli himself presents. His creations and Glasha play the audience's role. This episode once again emphasizes the authors' amazing imagination, their ability to discover the comic aspects of life behind the most serious moments and thereby show us the tragedy of a life spent in vain.

It is precisely after this exhibition that Aguli decides to gift the Poros' marble to his student, perhaps he will be able to rise above the everyday. The final frame shows the image of a youth soaring in the air and the hope that he will be able to do what his teacher could not.

The following - the seventies - were marked for E. Shengelaia by two milestone films, which, together with *An Unusual Exhibition* and, later, with *Blue Mountains*, are distinguished by clear signs of creative individuality.

It was precisely in the 60s-70s that cinema turned to traditional genres of folklore. During this period, the aesthetics of documentary film that reigned drew cinematographers toward maximum freedom of narration, toward compositional complexity. The rebellion of "details" became the leading tendency. Along with this, "life flow dramaturgy" was exalted, with its essayistic, excessively descriptive, detailed character. Of course, from these positions, the poetics of the parable, its expressive possibilities came under doubt, since it is characterized by moralizing, straightforward didactics; moreover, by its nature the parable is ascetic and distinguished by compositional simplicity, a sparse manner of narration. Straightforward didactics and unambiguous moralizing are alien to Georgian nature, which is why it chose a different version of the parable "with a defined realistic approach" and "with all the richness of soul dialectics." Georgian cinema brought precisely such a parable into its generic orbit, as a means of the author's moral-aesthetic or moral-philosophical reasoning.

"For us it was clear who we had to fight against. The enemy was the Soviet Union's regime. Our struggle took the form of parables. Hemingway says, in art the surface of the iceberg shines, but the most important thing is what's underwater. Where this is not so, there is no art either, today it exists and tomorrow it disappears.

The parable allows this. Censorship, for example, accepted *Eccentrics* as a fairy tale. It didn't understand what was 'underwater,' that is, the striving for freedom, thus the film was released."

In 1974, Eldar Shengelaia's film *Eccentrics* was released (screenplay by Rezo Gabriadze). If in *An Unusual Exhibition* the elements of parable existed in veiled form, in *Eccentrics* the authors turn to this form more boldly and enrich it with folklore, fairy-tale motifs.

After Mizana Bregadze's death, Ertaoz is left with debts and therefore the youth heads to the city with the hope of getting rid of the remaining debtors. This hope is based on the fairy tale *A Pound of Honey*. Mizana, it turns out, besides debtors also had one man who owed him one pound of honey. In the city, fate brings Ertaoz to meet Margarita, who after several oaths on the icon of St. Porphyry makes him fall in love too. However, very soon he becomes the victim of Margarita's love adventures and after the live burial of her lover, prison chief Khuta Odishelidze, is sentenced to ten years in prison. The pound of honey fairy tale ended with Ertaoz only managing to buy a black hen, which will serve the sentence with him, only for seven years. It is precisely in this strange dungeon that Kristepore Mgaloblisvili from Gariqula and Ertaoz Bregadze from Dzuknuri meet each other. Kristepore, like Ertaoz, is a victim of love and all that remains for someone in life imprisonment is to dream of flight.

The seasons change one another. The authors come out from the kvevri only to hint at the season of the year. Ertaoz masters the general scientific provisions of romantic physics, according to which length is

the supervelocity of virtue. Width is an unforgettable memory, height is infinite affection.

The dreaming phrenologists escape from the kvevri, but not through the tunnel dug according to Kristepore's calculations, but thanks to the instability of the prison walls worn out by time. Fate brings the fliers to meet psychiatrist Noshrevan Kuchukhidze, interested in their mental state, Kuchukhidze, for his part, creates all conditions for the patients to establish "the formula of inner fervor." And the result is not delayed.

The film *Eccentrics* by genre characteristics can simply be attributed to comedy. A game is going on, mostly comical, though not one character intends to present themselves as an object of humor; on the contrary, everyone approaches their assigned duty with great seriousness.

The essence of Margarita's life is infinite flight, with almost everyone who knocks on her door. Her husband Tripon is an engineer of a toy train, which moves toward the mountain peak as if the law of gravity didn't exist on earth. Noshrevan Kuchukhidze's scientific-psychiatric achievements are based on Parisian pedagogue's pomegranate enema and "a pill of glucose."

Seemingly, everything is funny, illogical strange propositions, love physics, Margarita's all-sheltering chimney, even Ertaoz's and Kristepore's selfless love. But behind the laughable stands "something" that slowly takes over the screen, though it doesn't hide behind the comic. Perhaps it is melancholy, nostalgia for "eccentricity," dream and elevation. "It was precisely as eccentrics that 'Don Quixotes' with ideals of universal humanity were always baptized, genius people who couldn't fit into the 'normal frameworks' of time and space were called 'eccentrics,' and whose bright thinking could always stand above dark and backward reality."

Odishelidze's kvevri is probably the only one in the world that doesn't echo back what you shout into it, since inside Kristepore and Ertaoz dream and labor.

"You do believe, youth, that I will fly?!" asks Kristepore of Ertaoz.

In the final episode, the village gathered in the ravine looks toward the sky, where from a strange flying apparatus Mizana's debts rain down. However, a song also went as debt, so



Samanishvili's Stepmother

this debt too passes to Ertaoz and it must be paid, too. The folk song coming from the sky is joined by earth's polyphony and thus the heroes seized by flying ideas fly over the world.

Eccentrics, unlike the previous film, is distinguished by a greater dose of conventionality, but here it emerges as a necessity. Conventional images organically merge with the everyday environment and this is natural, since, as G. Asatiani noted, "Georgian character doesn't easily submit to 'conventionality,' doesn't readily accept masks and disguises without hesitation. It's in no hurry at all to tear them off in order to see the naked skeleton of reality, for one main reason: all this ('costume,' 'conventionality,' 'masks') appears to it as a substantial quality of life itself."

And the naked skeleton of life is those meager possibilities that Ertaoz and Kristepore lack for love, for flying to the sky, which is why escape from everyday dullness into a miraculous, colorful world became a necessity for Georgian character.

Only Eldar Shengelaia's and Rezo Gabriadze's people like Ertaoz and Kristepore could, in the social-political atmosphere of the seventies, speak of love, dreams, eternal philosophical problems with lightness, grace and humor – this too was self-sacrifice.

In Soviet reality, many artists had to fight for the survival of their own creations. The viewer was accustomed to watching the laborious work of factory workers on screen, whose dream was limited only to fulfilling the five-year plan. Even lovers explained love to each other with poster-like declarations. Heroes like Ertaoz, Pipinia and Aguli, naturally, wouldn't be met with fanfare. Today the responses of the press of that time sound ridiculous, though then it often determined a film's fate and threatened the prospect of being shelved. "Why is it necessary today to give artistic embodiment to this interesting theme (man's tireless striving toward progress) with material from the distant past and not with examples from our reality. The fantasy and striving for elevation of people in socialist society gives much more material for this same theme. It is incomprehensible to us why young film playwrights and film critics bypass everyday life, the heroic deeds of their own peers and seek material for films in time-worn fairy tales."

This is the period when in Soviet reality the centenary of Lenin's birth, the 60th anniversary of the October Revolution, the half-century jubilee of Sovietization, the 30th anniversary of victory over fascist Germany are celebrated and the XXIV Congress of the Party is held. After *Eccentrics*, completely "inappropriate" for this jubilee whirlwind, preparation begins for the screen adaptation of *Samanishvili's Stepmother*.

In Georgian cinema, *Samanishvili's Stepmother* is the first case of double screen adaptation of one and the same work, and, moreover, a clear example of how classical literature, like any other work of art, is read differently in different times.

Unlike K. Marjanishvili's film created in 1926, in Shengelaia's film two elements collided, the laws of two arts – on one hand, cinema's plastic laws and, on the other hand, those of the word. In the selection of the work for screen, that lawful tendency is already evident which points to the director's need for the classic at the given stage. Over time, the very laws and norms of screen adaptation change and reflect the degree of cinematographic culture's development at each stage. The screen adaptation of classics is always connected with certain difficulties, since

it concerns spiritual heritage and loses its private, narrow character. Classical literature belongs to everyone and each of us experienced it individually: there are as many Kiriles and Platons walking the earth as there are readers of their adventures.

Images of 19th-century Georgian life unfold on screen. D. Kldiashvili's works are primarily stories of human fate, thus, for the film's authors – Eldar Shengelaia and Rezo Cheishvili – a different task came to the forefront (unlike Marjanishvili's film): the environment created in the film, every detail should primarily serve to reveal the inner world of the main characters, to characterize them. In the film everything is spiritualized with classical simplicity and doesn't attract the viewer's attention with its everyday or historical-concrete independence.

On screen appears an Imeretian courtyard enclosed by a wattle fence, with wooden balconies, a room on the mezzanine. The camera (O. Skhirtladze, L. Akhvlediani) approaches the yard from above and moves away again, as if preparing to tell a story. And the story begins thus: Platon's (actor I. Kakhiani) portrait takes the screen and the camera returns again to the Imeretian courtyard, then again to Platon, who is plowing the earth in his small estate. His tired, sad eyes speak of daily care for this household. A second portrait appears on screen – Bekina Samanishvili's (actor V. Chkhaidze). "Someone quite spoiled was our Bekina" – says Kldiashvili and in the frame appears a stout, white-bearded Imeretian dressed in chokha and akhalukhi. His portrait speaks more of self-confidence, steadfastness and arrogance than of an old man saddened by his wife's death. Moreover, Bekina decided to remarry, which threatens Platon with perhaps a rival in this small estate and therefore he himself will try to find a solution. Melano (actor B. Khapava) suggests the idea of a twice-widowed and childless woman (in the story this idea comes to Platon himself) and great effort begins to find a stepmother. Platon himself declares the desire to become a matchmaker and gets Bekina to agree. The journey begun with Kirile ends with finding and abducting a twice-widowed and childless woman, but his effort goes down the drain, Bekina acquires a son, and Platon – a rival in the estate.

"This man. We would actually pity the man if the story itself wasn't so funny" – the writer says about Platon, who for him is a hero full of human dignity. He knows the value of honest labor. He doesn't break from the land for a moment and doesn't take the path of arrogance and ruin like other impoverished nobles. Platon is a tragic hero – caught in a comic situation. Life's perversity, somewhere even fate, which is sharply emphasized in the literary source, turns him into an evil person. Cruelty and relentlessness become habitual for him, but the film's authors removed the sharp colors of relentlessness from Kldiashvili's Platon and subordinated everything to the laws of events and social circumstances. Thus, Shengelaia's and Cheishvili's Platon becomes a much softer, more humane person than Kldiashvili's.

The authors don't give the enraged Platon, angered by the stepmother's pregnancy, the right to act like Kldiashvili's hero, and the film's final frames don't speak of this either. In the story, Platon corners the God-fearing Elena and forces her, along with her five-year-old child, to wander door-to-door at courts. Here the film ends with the division of the household. The authors leave Bekina a way to think and conscience to sting. They preserve Platon's nobility.

In the episode of Platon's stepmother's appearance, the Imeretian folk song "Shalva Chemo" sounds in a mournful tonality and thereby emphasizes even more Platon Samanishvili's impending misfortune. However, the film's hero, unlike the story's hero, more or less comes to terms with his fate.

The change in Kldiashvili's hero's character, as well as the melodramatic transformation of the final episode's tragedy, presented on screen a comedy colored with tragicomic and melodramatic intonations instead of tragicomedy.

There is a big difference between Marjanishvili's Platon and Shengelaia's Platon, whose noble origin in this case interests the director less. For him the primary concern is the ordinary person and the moral, ethical problems connected with him. This is why the screenwriter and director place the main character before many trials. Impoverished existence seems to deprive objects and events of their true purpose. Death is a staged spectacle, marriage is tragedy, and a person's arrival in this world is final destruction.

Platon couldn't manage to stand above everyday concerns, to cope with the existing reality. Between the eternal and the everyday, he couldn't choose the eternal.

In the finale, again a melancholy melody sounds, though it is accompanied by the muffled ringing of bells, as repentance and as a warning for those people who, perhaps, like Platon, will become victims of moral catastrophe.

The merry story of the Samanishvilis is sad. With its softened finale, Eldar Shengelaia's films are distinguished by the most melancholy. *Samanishvili's Stepmother* completes yet another stage in Eldar Shengelaia's creative work. His heroes in *An Unusual Exhibition*, in *Eccentrics*, naturally also in *Mikela* and in *Samanishvili's Stepmother* – are heroes seized by ideas or obsessions and the failure or victory of these ideas becomes the axis of plot development. The Poros' marble, the idea of flying to the sky, the fear of extinction, finally – becoming a matchmaker.

According to D. Kldiashvili, his work is based on an "unusual story." The same is said of Eldar Shengelaia's films. If D. Kldiashvili brings a simple person to the stage, the film's authors follow this path, whose heroes never joke, just like Kldiashvili's.

R. Gabriadze's and R. Cheishvili's Aguli and Pipinia, Mizana and Ertaoz, Kristepore, Platon and Bekina, Kirile are characters rooted in Imeretian character. Their nobility or baseness, romanticism or earthiness – is simultaneously a means of revealing the essence of the tragic and comic. "They not only act, think, experience, but speak in accordance with their social character. All the more the writer uses elements characteristic of the heroes' social-cultural, professional, sometimes regional dialect in their speech."

Shengelaia, Gabriadze and Cheishvili never mock their heroes. On the contrary, their comedy is benevolent and humane. It couldn't have been otherwise, since destructive laughter is alien to Georgian character, which is why instead of satire it uses self-irony and humor as a shield.

The eighties are marked by significant shifts in the country's political life, which followed the so-called "perestroika" (restructuring). "Taboo" themes first appeared in veiled form, and then with their characteristic intensity. The artist exhausted by the syndrome of fear tries to pour out accumulated thoughts all at once and his takeoff often ends with the loss of a sense of moderation.



Soviet reality, which "criticized" bureaucratism, turned out to be its parent and nurturer. The main thing was the peaceful completion of the eight-hour work day and not its content load. The main thing was "quantity" and not "quality."

Was it necessary to condemn these people? I don't know about condemnation, but awakening became a necessity. Before that, probably, only love saved them from everyday inertia, from the absurdity of existence, from emptiness and indifference. And, of course, the above could only be expressed and reflected by an artist whose heroes never lacked authorial empathy.

Blue Mountains or An Incredible Story. People bustling daily in a closed space. Closed space – an unclear literary editorial office. The bustling people are its worthy and loyal employees and also, an old building that has long been tired of its residents. Everyone and everything is a film character. Objects and people, attention is distributed to everyone and no one is emphasized. The number of arrivals from outside is made up of Soso returned from a business trip, a surveyor who arrived by "calling" from Kuparadze, Givi's seekers, Lali's husband and motor-sport president Artem Chachanidze. The circle closed and the good sorceress enchanted it so that we, who remained outside, could see and not desire, though we might hope that someone will break this circle and breathe oxygen-filled air.

So, the young writer Soso, returned from a business trip to the mountains, is satisfied to declare in the editorial office his "Tien Shan," with a great desire to share what he saw and experienced. Colleagues receive multiple copies of the work with one simple goal, to devote a small part of their "valuable" time to what directly concerns them. It is precisely from here that the peaceful "turmoil" begins and the ridiculous "same thing over and over." The director is always rushing to the savings bank; Irodion is on vacation "actually," but doesn't betray Soso and will read; friends "leave it at home"; Vaso is busy taking out "Greenland"; the accountant received bonuses but won't give them out! No one has time, "a new batch of Bordeaux mixture was brought in," "we have a breech in the deficit," "they say about you, you got stuck in the elevator," "Komsi, komsa! My Shuqri" and many more, and not in a day, but for the entire year.

The building collapses – employees and guests run toward the door. In the film's final frame a new building appears, but again the doomed shout of the old tanker Vaso "Take it out!" breaks the hope.

It's funny, but what stands behind this?! Who are the people we're laughing at?

Ertaoz and Kristepore with their "laws of love physics" managed to fly from the archaic kvevri to the sky. But these people couldn't!... There is no desire to escape from monotony, the employees not only fail to see how inert and indifferent they've become, these very qualities have become their form of existence.

Not one of them exists for others, the director for employees, friend for friend, wife for husband, the mysterious Givi for comrades, person for work...

Not one of them does what they should do. Shukri studies French, Irodion eats eggs and prepares for vacation, the director runs to banquets, Soso is in aboveground and underground business trips. Lali is helping her child with studies and is worried about her husband's jealousy. Vaso fusses with "Greenland." The only one who reads something is a worker, though he too is blood of their blood – he too does "something else and not what's required."

And all this spins like the devil's wheel. An entire gallery of heroes is painted before our eyes. Each member of the gallery is different and unique, but they are mechanical cogs of one, enchanted whole. Chaplin's "Modern Times" involuntarily comes to mind. When after a whole day of performing one and the same work, Charlie who came out to the street, inertially perceives the buttons on a passing woman's dress as cogs and tries to tighten them.

"The funny same thing" – repetition – is one of the techniques for creating comedy. In itself, it seems nothing should be funny, but by one and the same behavior of the individual, it turns a smile into laughter, behind which hides people's disconnection, indifference, apparent diligence. And more. The greatest danger... the danger of not having fear, such a life should breed fear, then protest. Then the desire to seek a way out, finally, liberation – the cognition of one's purpose in this world and the conscientious fulfillment of one's duty. The film is a social diagnosis of an era, when changing the "building" won't free one from absurdity if its content remains unchanged - this is precisely why in the final frame "Take it ouuuuut!!!" is heard – "Tien Shan" is still in place.

The political-social events that developed in Georgia in the late eighties and early nineties were reflected in all aspects of life. The collapse of the Soviet system, the declaration of independence and the desire to free oneself from Russia's influence were followed by armed confrontation, defeat and lost territories. In parallel, civil war, illusory victories, the country's intellectual potential drain, extreme material poverty, a society seized by a sense of hopelessness and nihilism, on the verge of starvation. Cinema too more or less tried to show that gloomy atmosphere and the mood of developing events. The environment changed, the hero changed. Georgian cinema lost the romantic and lyrical coloring characteristic of it. It's difficult in this situation to remain faithful to genre, to find a new form of expression appropriate to changes and to convey one's message without disguise.

In 1994, Eldar Shengelaia's next film – *Express Information* was released (based on R. Cheishvili's novel *The Red Flower of A Dog Rose*) with certain allusions to events

taking place in the nineties. However, with a changed formula of laughter, where humor was replaced by irony, absurdity and satirical elements. Socialist society, which was formed on total lies and degradation of values, adapts with difficulty to new times, which should form a different society. However, this is only a declaration of desire, since the system is so firmly rooted and flawed that any change becomes only a facade change.

The film begins with express information announced to us from the TV screen. According to the information, the population was poisoned with the juice of Dog Rose and there is a victim. Independent TV journalists begin the search for the culprit. "The All-Union Program for Fighting Corruption" demands its victim. The main character (actor Z. Kipshidze) is a composite image of two characters, essentially expressing one and the same phenomenon, a symbol of conformism in all times. Even their offices are similar, the work desk and on the wall a portrait of the acting authority, moreover always ready for dialogue and even for turning the portrait, on which the new authority's image is already applied in advance. The film's characters are arranged on a kind of vertical, where their material well-being is determining, maintaining influence over the rules of the chess game in all times and environments. And the "rules" take on a completely absurd appearance: when even death is nothing, when marriage is possible even with the deceased if the notary and cemetery owner are "yours." Everyone steals, and if you steal you must be able to fulfill any orders. The place of conspiracy, disguise and secret deals is the cemetery. Here lots are drawn, here it's determined who should pay whom how much so that peace is maintained. There are hidden cameras everywhere, everything is heard, everything is recorded, everywhere three representatives of the "organs" appear. In parallel – reports from the locations of suspected criminals' actions. Everything resembles one big, laughable absurdity. Those gathered in the conspiratorial apartment make a plan to free Douglas. Part of the project consists of a plan for marriage to the deceased and artificial insemination.

Meanwhile the "blues" become more cultured and come to power. "The Dog Rose case" approaches its end. Everyone who was connected to it, thanks to a wide network of "informers," finds themselves in front of the lens. But the "main one" remains beyond the lens, he won't appear, the system doesn't provide for this. The biggest "informer" jumps up from his seat on the TV quiz show at gunpoint and he won't be the only one! Everyone arms themselves and one shot is enough to find yourself on the front line. However, no one is harmed here. The war transitions into the eye-dazzling colorfulness of fireworks. The "blues" were defeated and their place is taken by a military regime.

From the TV screen again the host informs us of the government's resolution that, proceeding from democratic principles, a general amnesty is declared and everyone who was connected with the Dog Rose case is freed...

The old ones return, the system's traditional wheel spins again. Only the text changes, now everything is disguised with democracy, everything is written off in the name of democracy and from the report we learn that already 107 parties exist. Zaza Levanovich again gives advice to Douglas to organize meetings often, let them talk, argue – this is democracy, "we should do our work, they – theirs."

The investigation turned into a TV show

has ended. But the fight of corruption fighters fighting corruptionists continues. On screen again express information appears. The announcer tells us that in some country in Asia a strange two-headed baby was born and if one head cries, the other at that time laughs. This is Mitrophane's grandchild, an artificially conceived person, who becomes an inseparable symbol of today. The author's direct allusion to today's tragicomedy, to the deformity created artificially, by our own hands.

Express Information in a way continues the line of *Blue Mountains*, and E. Shengelaia continues collaboration with R. Cheishvili. However, the dose of conventionality here is greater, sometimes even excessive. Often the laughable becomes more of an end in itself than a consequence of the current. Soso's (*Blue Mountains*) already illusory protest has been turned by time into the even more fragile protest of Mitrophane's family. In a society filled with corruption and conformism, with reconciliation, nothing changes and the tragic is precisely in this reconciliation, in its mechanistic existence, in the constant circulation created by it.

In 2017, his new film *The Chair* was released—twenty-four years after his previous work—created in a markedly different and transformed political and social environment. Yet even the film's title functions as an open metaphor, echoing themes already articulated in his two earlier films. The protagonist, Giorgi Mchedlishvili (N. Tavadze), is the Georgian Minister for Internally Displaced Persons from the occupied territories. Following electoral defeat and a change of government, he loses everything: his position, the material comfort associated with it, and—most importantly—his power. If *Tian Shan* was one of the central "characters" of *Blue Mountains*, here the animated chair itself becomes a character, attempting—vainly—to prod the former minister into action. The chair helps the hero escape, but can he truly flee the insatiable thirst for power?

The film is a satirical phantasmagoria about power-hungry bureaucrats. While individuals may change—for better or for worse—the bureaucratic apparatus, even when dismantled into parts, remains essentially immutable, capable of reconstituting itself like a transformer. "Has any of our directors dared such a reversal of history? To mock history as injustice? Can you name a Georgian director who can portray contemporary society as emptied of humanity and solidarity, filled with careerists, conformists, and cowards—yet leave every single character, absolutely every one of them, with charm and humanity, condemning no one and delivering no moral sermon?" This is what Eldar Shengelaia achieved in all his films, and this is how he remains in *The Chair*.

Eldar Shengelaia's films create a unified world in which tragicomedy, folkloric poetics, convention, and social critique merge into a fluid whole, forming a unique artistic signature. His characters, seemingly ordinary people, in fact embody fundamental aspects of human nature. They show us that dream and reality never exist separately, and that human nature is always an attempt to preserve dignity, nobility, and inner freedom.

Eldar Shengelaia's final work is the trilogy *Mravalzhamieri* (*Birds*, *The Well*, *The Song*), composed of three cinematic novellas. It stands as a summative filmic text of his creative biography—rich in quotations, at once melancholic and smiling, nostalgic and hopeful—where *mravalzhamieri* becomes a symbol of the continuation of life and of his oeuvre itself, a space in which this experience attains a universal humanistic dimension.

Filmography

1. *Legend of the Frozen Heart* (1957)
Mosfilm, running time: 70 minutes
Directors: Eldar Shengelaia, Alexei Sakharov
Screenplay: Viktor Vitkovich, Grigory Yagdfeld
Cinematography: Konstantin Brovin
Cast: D. Ibraimova, Asanbek (Arsen) Umuraliev, Kasimali Bektenov, Muratbek Riskulov, and others

2. *A Snow Fairy Tale* (1959)
Mosfilm, running time: 67 minutes
Directors: Eldar Shengelaia, Alexei Sakharov
Screenplay: Viktor Vitkovich, Grigory Yagdfeld
Cinematography: Viktor Listopadov, Yuri Skhirtladze
Cast: Igor Yershov, Alla Kozhokina, Klara Luchko, Zinaida Naryshkina, Vera Altaiskaya, Yevgeny Leonov, Nikolai Sergeev, Mikhail Pugovkin, and others

3. *The White Caravan* (1963)
Georgian Film Studio
Running time: 10 reels, 2,688 meters, 97 minutes
Directors: Eldar Shengelaia, Tamaz Meliava
Screenplay: Merab Eliozishvili
Cinematography: Leonid Kalashnikov, Giorgi Kalatozishvili
Production Design: Dimitri Takaishvili, Khristesia Lebanidze
Music: Irakli Gedzhadze
Cast: Imeda Kakhiani (Gela), Ariadna Shengelaia (Maria), Giorgi Kikadze (Vazhia), Spartak Baghashvili (Martia), N. Kalafidini (Petro), Merab Eliozishvili (Balta), Konstantine (Kote) Toloraia (Siata), Davit (Dodo) Abashidze (Dghvira, the driver), Akaki (Kako) Kvantaliani, and others

4. *Mikela* (1965)
Georgian Film Studio
Running time: 5 reels, 1,320 meters, 48 minutes
Director: Eldar Shengelaia
Screenplay: Eldar Shengelaia
Cinematography: Aleksandre (Sasha) Rekhviashvili
Production Design: Khristesia Lebanidze
Music: Irakli Gedzhadze
Cast: Grigol Tkabladze (Mikela), Zinaida Kverenckhiladze (Maia), Mikheil (Mishiko) Khvitia (Spidona), Manana Managadze (Eka), Varlam (Valodia) Tsuladze (Alexei), Kapiton Abesadze (the Priest)

5. *An Unusual Exhibition* (1968)
Georgian Film Studio, running time: 9 reels, 2,579 meters, 95 minutes
Director: Eldar Shengelaia
Screenplay: Revaz (Rezo) Gabriadze
Cinematography: Giorgi Gersamia
Production Design: Dimitri Eristavi

Music: Gia Kancheli
Cast: Guram Lortkipanidze (Aguli), Valentina Telechkina (Glaphira), Vasil Chkhaidze (Pipinia), Davit (Dodo) Abashidze (Shavlegi), Salome Kancheli (the Widow), Julieta Vashakmadze (Tina), Viktor Deisadze (Bonaventuri)

6. *The Eccentrics* (1973)
Georgian Film Studio, running time: 8 reels, 2,159 meters, 80 minutes
Director: Eldar Shengelaia
Screenplay: Revaz (Rezo) Gabriadze
Cinematography: Geno Chiradze
Production Design: Revaz Mirzashvili, Tengiz (Chubchika) Mirzashvili
Music: Gia Kancheli, Jansug Kakhidze
Cast: Vasil Chkhaidze (Christophore), Dato Zhghenti (Ertaozi), Ariadna Shengelaia (Margalita), Boris Tsipuria (Khuta), Abrek Pkhaladze (Noshrevan), Merab Eliozishvili (Triphon), Akaki (Kako) Bakradze (Mizana), and others

7. *Samanishvili's Stepmother* (1977)
Georgian Film Studio, running time: 9 reels, 2,373 meters, 98 minutes
Director: Eldar Shengelaia
Screenplay: Rezo Cheishvili
Cinematography: Lomer Akhvlediani, Yuri Skhirtladze
Production Design: Boris Tskhakaia, Jemal Kukhalashvili, Naum Furman
Music: Gia Kancheli, Jansug Kakhidze
Cast: Vasil Kakhnishvili (Bekina), Imeda Kakhiani (Platon), Nodar Chachanidze (Kirile), Venera Nefaridze (the Stepmother), Berta Khafava (Melano), Shota Gabelaia (Aristo), Salome Kancheli, Akaki (Kako) Bakradze (the Priest), Vasil Chkhaidze, and others

8. *Blue Mountains, or an Unbelievable Story* (1983)
Georgian Film Studio, running time: 10 reels, 2,612 meters, 97 minutes
Director: Eldar Shengelaia
Screenplay: Rezo Cheishvili
Cinematography: Levan Paatashvili
Production Design: Boris Tskhakaia
Music: Gia Kancheli
Cast: Ramaz Giorgobiani (Soso), Vasil Kakhnishvili (Vaso), Teimuraz Chirghadze (Director), Ivane Sakhvarelidze (Surveyor), Sesilia Takaishvili (Accountant), Grigol Natsvlishvili (Irodion), Vladimir Mezvrishvili (Grisha), Otar Guntcadze (Painter), Zeinab Botsvadze (Lali), Darejan Sumbatashvili (Bella), Guram Petriashvili (Husband), and others

9. *Express Information* (1993)
Lileo Arts Studio
Director: Eldar Shengelaia
Screenplay: Rezo Cheishvili, Eldar Shengelaia
Cinematography: Lomer Akhvlediani
Production Design: Dimitri Eristavi, Boris Tskhakaia, Medea Bakradze
Music: Jansug Kakhidze, Vakhtang Kakhidze
Cast: Zurab Kipshidze (Douglas), Mikheil Vashadze (Mitrophane), Nana Shonia (Lali), Tamar Adamia, Maka Makharadze (Nana), Ether Gelovani, Teimuraz Chirghadze (Dabero), and others

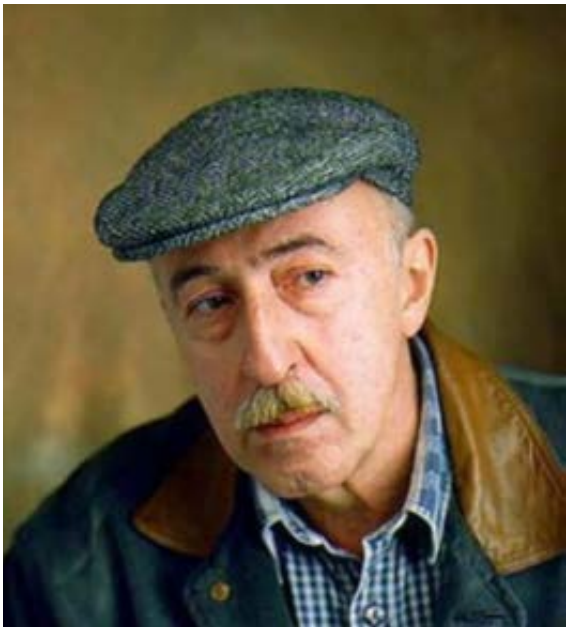
10. *The Chair* (2017)
Blue Mountains Studio, running time: 90 minutes
Director: Eldar Shengelaia
Screenplay: Giorgi (Goga) Tskhvediani, Eldar Shengelaia
Cinematography: Gorka Gómez Andreu, Konstantine (Mindia) Esadze
Cast: Nikoloz (Nika) Tavadze, Nineli Chankvetadze, Ketevan (Keti) Asatiani, Nana Shonia, Natalia Jugheli, and others

11. *Caucasian Trio* (2015)
Cinetech, running time: 100 minutes
Directors: Eldar Shengelaia, Teimuraz Butikashvili
Screenplay: Rustam Ibragimbekov
Cinematography: Gorka Gómez Andreu
Cast: Giorgi (Goga) Pipinashvili, Yuri Stoyanov, Baadur Tsuladze, Sergei Guzeev

12. *Mravalzhamieri* Trilogy (2022)
Blue Mountains Studio
Consisting of three novellas: *Birds*, *The Well*, *The Song*

თეთრი ჭრელები

OTAR IOSELIANI



1934-2023

Tamta Turmanidze
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Grand Master of Parables, Uncompromising Poet

The 1960s represent a special period in the history of Georgian cinema. This was a time when national cinematography learned to circumvent Soviet censorship, to convey its message through the use of parable-like language, with the help of allegories and metaphors, and began to reflect new, significant themes and problems for its time on screen.

It was precisely during this period that a new generation of directors came to Georgian cinema, with their bold experiments in the search for expressive forms, who brought to the screen completely new types of heroes—not ideal-schematic ones. Among the directors of the new generation, Otar Iosseliani occupies a special place.

Otar Iosseliani was born on February 2, 1934 in Tbilisi. Before cinema, there was music and mathematics in his life. Iosseliani first graduated from the choral-conducting department of a music school, and in 1952, from composition courses at the Tbilisi Conservatory. In 1953, he

enrolled at the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics of Moscow State University, where he spent only three years. Perhaps it was precisely this experience that determined that Iosseliani's cinema reaches the viewer with the amazing precision of musical phrases.

In 1961, Otar Iosseliani graduated from the directing faculty of the All-Union Institute of Cinematography, from the workshops of Alexander Dovzhenko and Mikheil Chiaureli. The director's cinema debut took place in 1957, when he filmed the short film *Aquarelle* based on Alexander Grin's story, where the influence of art on people's lives was shown in parable form. The director himself played an episodic role in the film. In 1959, Otar Iosseliani made the documentary film *Sapovnela* (Treasure).

Already after graduating from the institute, in the short film *April* shot by Iosseliani in 1961, the story of a young couple was told in a generalized way, through light, poetic language—a couple whose love is nearly destroyed by filling their own living quarters with furniture on others' advice and through imitation, so that there is no room left for feelings. In this very simply understood parable directed against philistine existence and petty bourgeois mentality, the vigilant official saw only a call against furniture acquisition and the film was banned. As Iosseliani himself said, *April* was a film about how "the desire for conformity kills the most tender feelings in a person—the experience of joy or sadness—and ultimately deprives them of the ability to live."

The fate of *April* was shared by the documentary film "Cast Iron" shot by the director in 1964 about one working day of the workers at the Rustavi Metallurgical Plant.

But the ordeal of the film *Falling Leaves* (literal translation: "For St. George's Day") shot by the director in 1966 is probably the most exceptional case in Georgian cinema, which simultaneously breaks and confirms the view that parable-like language gave Georgian filmmakers the means to overcome all obstacles and avoid Soviet censorship. The story told in the film and then the film's own ordeal are two different and more interesting stories than each other.

The setting of Otar Iosseliani's *Falling Leaves* is a wine factory, and the theme is the production of falsified wine to fulfill the plan or line one's pockets.

Winemaking represents for Georgians part of their own national identity and a source of pride, whose sacred rituals passed down from generation to generation preserve knowledge coming from the depths of centuries and also define national belonging.

It is precisely this fact that Otar Iosseliani, who once dreamed of conducting, emphasizes in the film's overture. With church chanting interwoven into the natural sounds of vintage and wine-pressing frames in the wine press and gradually becoming more powerful, after which he returns the viewer to everyday life filled with noise accompanied by a march.

It was precisely Iosseliani who convinced screenwriter Amiran Chichinadze to move the film's action from a mechanical tools factory to a wine factory, and instead of another production film, "Falling Leaves" appeared—a satire exposing a flawed system.

Everything begins with two recent graduates going to work at the wine factory—Niko, a young man hunched in the shoulders, awkward, with a guilty smile, and the cleanly shaven, well-groomed Otari,

who knows exactly how much of a smile to give to whom.

The wine factory itself seems to live in an established circular motion once and for all—workers joylessly and wearily perform their duties, laboratory workers and technologists don't care at all what quality of wine is bottled at their factory, the main thing is that the plan is fulfilled, the director plays billiards in his office, while his son practices music on an instrument in the same room. An established and accepted way of life once and for all, a closed circle, inside which people are so adapted to the existing situation that they wouldn't even think of offering any resistance.

It is precisely Niko who turns out to be the only person who has the courage to stand up to this terrible situation, to rebel against the closed system, to pour gelatin into bottle #49 and prevent the bottling of wine that has not yet properly settled as Saperavi.

The screen life of *Falling Leaves* was quite difficult—it was banned almost immediately upon release. The party nomenclature did not miss the fact that Iosseliani's film exceeded the framework of one ordinary production film and carried a much deeper message.

An entire campaign was mounted against *Falling Leaves*, provocative group letters were organized in which winemakers demanded the film's removal from screens and destruction.



Another positive characteristic of parable-like language is that with its help, sometimes quite difficult episodes can slip past censorship and its reasoning goes in a completely different direction. For example, the film passed the Moscow barrier without problems; for them, Iosseliani's picture, with its vintage, winemaking, and chants, represented a kind of exoticization of



Falling Leaves

Georgian culture and not socio-political satire.

Ultimately, the film's return to screens was determined by a meeting with Vasil Mzhavanadze, then secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Republic of Georgia. The director was tasked with minor reworking of the film, after which this most important picture for Georgian cinema was assigned third category as an irrelevant film. But despite this circumstance, in 1968 Iosseliani's "Falling Leaves" won the FIPRESCI Prize at the Cannes Festival and the Georges Sadoul Prize from the French Culture Foundation.

As time passes, the perception of the film also changes; the story of one wine factory presented in it is perceived more and more in a generalized and different way, and today the model of the Soviet Union is read in it.

No less controversial proved to be Otar Iosseliani's next film *There Was a Singing Blackbird* (1971). Like "Falling Leaves," it also begins with a kind of overture and contrasting transition. Against the background of Bach's Passion, in an idyllic setting, the main hero sits in a field and creates music, after which the camera moves to the noisy streets of the city, where there is almost no room left.



The film's main hero is the musician Gia Agladze. He dreams of creating some significant musical work, though at this stage he



Once Open a Time There Was Singing Blackbird

plays percussion in an orchestra and is constantly late, barely making it to his own part. Something constantly prevents Gia Agladze from making his dreams come true. It's enough for him to sit down and arrange his music sheets for friends to show up, or for him to remember some unfinished business or forgotten promise and interrupt his work. This is how his time passes—doing trivial things and postponing the most important. So that, in the end, instead of a brilliant symphony from Gia Agladze, all that remains is a music stand attached to the watchmaker's workshop wall, on which the craftsman hangs his hat at the film's end.

At first glance, this is a film about the passage of time and the struggle with it, about how important it is for a person not to "waste" the time allotted to them, to find their own purpose and distinguish between main and secondary matters. But Otar Iosseliani is truly not such a simple and straightforward author. Despite the fact that the director himself noted in every interview that he made a film about a person who spends his energy on trivial matters and wastes time meaninglessly, this assertion of his is quite doubtful, because in reality two different approaches to life are confronted in Gia Agladze's story.

Film critics often compare the director's construction of this picture to a musical fugue, where several themes oppose each other. Such is Iosseliani's film, which on the one hand "reminds us that 'a person comes to this world once and shouldn't waste time on apparent affairs,'" while on the other hand, conversely, expresses the beauty of these apparent affairs, "the unity and harmony of 'individual' voices." Because certainly no one knows what the purpose of human existence is—to find one's own work, purpose, and faithfully follow this calling, or simply to live and enjoy the free flow of life in all its manifestations. Particularly emotional is the film's episode when the main hero looks through a telescope and as if "from outside" looks at his own life—the house, parents, his own room, acquaintances—and this polyphonic existence of his also acquires meaning.

This time the authorities' indignation was caused by the main hero himself, who by his nature should have been an idle and negative character, but looked too sympathetic for this role.

The final point in relations with Soviet cinema officials turned out to be the film *Pastoral* shot by Iosseliani in 1976. If in the first two pictures the director resorted to contrast by opposing the idyllic episodes shown at the beginning with the film's content, here the contrast comes from the title itself, which, with the development of the plot, takes on an increasingly ironic character.

Summer, young city musicians come to one of the villages in Samegrelo for rehearsals. It seems natural that a creative person would want solitude far from the city's noise, in a calmer and freer environment, to do their favorite work. But in reality, there is nothing pastoral or idyllic about the village where the musicians come—in the morning the brigadier runs around shouting to call the collective farmers to work and they senselessly take their assigned places in the cargo truck; in the evening, drunk villagers advise each other on business with quarrels near the canteen; in the house where the city musicians settle there is also constant noise, people seized with the spirit of conformity try to gain maximum benefit from every situation. Here, even the law is conditional—the watchman doesn't give one person the right to mow the collective farm's assigned field, but to another, more influential person, not only says nothing about killing river fish with

dynamite, but also shows him a more convenient place.

The musicians themselves are far from ideal. In the village they exist somehow separately, don't particularly interact with the locals and maintain a polite distance. Even when they go out into nature, they remain strangers to the locality. They don't show much love for or fascination with music either. The composition of the quartet itself is unusual: two violins, a cello, and a xylophone, which is a non-traditionally existing ensemble form. In the film, the director almost doesn't use music as background; it is heard here only from the radio or during the quartet's rehearsal itself. Here too, Iosseliani's signature style was revealed—the musicians play some work that both resembles and is not Brahms or Haydn. The work created and conceived through compilation by composer T. Bakuradze and director O. Iosseliani expresses the musicians' own character.

The city musicians and local villagers remain complete strangers to each other. The director emphasizes the alienation of city and village in one special episode, when the collective farm's cargo truck stops at the barrier and a train passes in front of it. On one side the flag-adorned villagers sitting in the cargo hold and the people looking out from the train windows observe each other as if looking at something strange and incomprehensible.

Despite the fact that Otar Iosseliani's *Pastoral* won the FIPRESCI Prize at the Berlin Film Festival, there was practically no place left for the director himself in Soviet cinema. Moscow gave preference to Georgian light comedies, where Georgians were presented as constantly smiling, merry, and singing good people. Iosseliani's films could not fit into these frameworks at all.

From the early 1980s, Otar Iosseliani continued working in France, where he also created successful films, most of which were marked with awards at various festivals. His films *Favorites of the Moon, And There Was Light*, and *Brigands, Chapter VII* won the Venice International Film Festival's Special Prize for Best Direction in different years. In 2002, the director's film "Monday Morning" received the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. In 2006, Otar Iosseliani was awarded the Order of the Legion of Honour of the French Republic.

But as Iosseliani himself said, despite settling in France, he still made Georgian cinema there too:

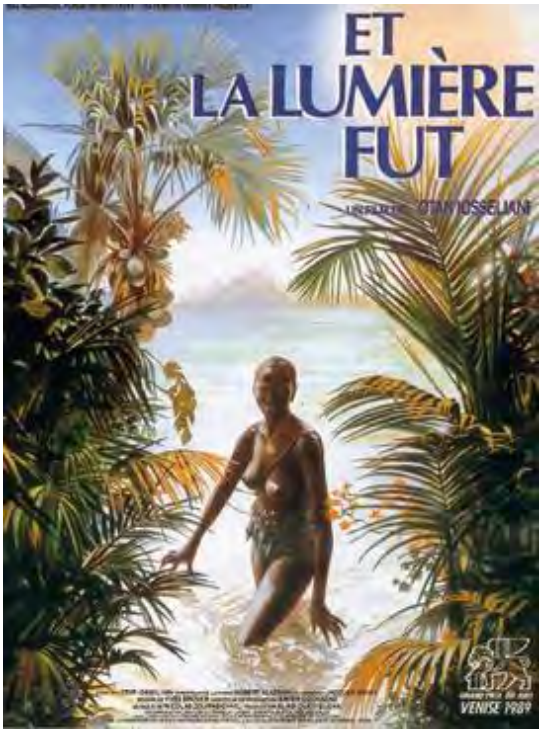
"I think my films are still Georgian. An adult person can no longer become French or American. ...It's well known that all writers and artists who lived in emigration—whether Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky, Dovlatov, or Nabokov—did not lose close connection with their roots.

I am not an emigrant. I hope my cinema is not material based on another culture either. The cultural field between Georgia and Europe is common. We also have the same way of thinking."

Conveying the plot of Otar Iosseliani's films is almost impossible; this is not the usual structure of storytelling, with tying knots, intrigues, vicissitudes, and often, a clearly defined main hero is also less apparent. The viewer may even get an impression of a kind of chaos, where numerous plot movements or characters replace each other, but this is a very well-structured and organized chaos, where each "voice" tells its own story and at the same time occupies its own, exclusively designated place in the film's general resonance. As film scholar Andrei Plakhov writes: "Iosseliani's directorial style is mathematically

balanced, which doesn't prevent it from remaining poetic at all. In *Pastoral*, the absence of plot reaches its peak. Retelling the film's content is almost impossible because there are no heroes in it and seemingly nothing happens. But the mood and transient beauty are captured so flawlessly that it's impossible to stop watching it."

Otar Iosseliani passed away in Tbilisi on December 17, 2023, at the age of 91.



And There Was Light

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Filmography
Short Films

• 1958 — "Aquarelle"
• 1959 — "Sapovnela" (Treasure)
• 1961 — "April" (screenplay author)
• 1964 — "Cast Iron" (screenplay author)
• 1968 — "Old Georgian Songs" (screenplay author)
• 1982 — "Letter from a Filmmaker: 7 Pieces for Black and White Cinema" (Fr. Lettre d'un cinéaste : 7 pièces pour le cinéma noir et blanc) (documentary)

Feature Films

- 1966 — "Falling Leaves" (literal: "For St. George's Day")
- 1970 — "There Was a Singing Blackbird" (screenplay author)
- 1976 — "Pastoral" (screenplay author)
- 1984 — "Favorites of the Moon" (Fr. Les Favoris de la lune)
- 1989 — "And There Was Light" (Fr. Et la lumière fut)
- 1992 — "The Hunting of Butterflies" (Fr. La Chasse aux papillons)
- 1995 — "Alone, Georgia" (Fr. Seule, Géorgie)
- 1996 — "Brigands, Chapter VII" (Fr. Brigands, chapitre VII; screenplay author, editor)
- 1999 — "Farewell, Home Sweet Home!" (Fr. In vino veritas!)
- 2002 — "Monday Morning" (Fr. Lundi matin)
- 2006 — "Gardens in Autumn" (Fr. Jardins en automne)
- 2010 — "Chantrapas" (Fr. Chantrapas; screenplay author, editor)
- 2015 — "Winter Song" (Fr. Chant d'hiver)

მხატვრული ფილმი



„ქართული ფილმი"
1965 წ.

ა რ ი ე ბ ი:
რაფას გიორგობიანი. მარინე ქარცივაძე.
გიორგი ხარაბაძე. ალეკო ქუთათელიანი.
ლილო ალავიძე. ბუხუტი ზაქარიაძე.
ოთარ ზაალიშვილი. ალექსანდრე რომაძე.
ვიოლა დავითაშვილი. რუსუდან კოპალიანი.
გაიდარ წულაძე.

REZO (REVAZ) ESADZE



1934-2020

Ketevan Trapaidze
Doctor of Art Studies, Associate Professor at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

Rezo (Revaz) Esadze is a director from the 1960s generation of Georgian cinema who secured a distinct place within the era's thematic and formal diversity through his pursuit of unconventional and free artistic expression.

Like many directors of his generation, Rezo Esadze enrolled in the directing faculty of the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow in 1964, after gaining one professional experience. Prior to this, in 1956, he graduated from the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics at Tbilisi State University. From 1956 to 1958, he even worked as a secondary-school physics teacher. He was born on February 18, 1934, during a period when Georgian art was absorbing the central ideological directives of Socialist Realism while attempting, as best it could, to find its own authentic voice.



The Nylon Christmas Tree

Yet it was precisely he and his contemporaries who, during the Khrushchev "Thaw," succeeded in fully expressing and showcasing the distinctive qualities of Georgian cinema.

From 1966, Esadze worked at the Lenfilm studio, and from 1972 onward he was employed at Georgian Film as a film director, screenwriter, actor, and artist. He held the title of People's Artist of Georgia. In 2019, in honor of his 85th jubilee, his star was unveiled in front of Rustaveli Cinema.

Even in challenging and complex periods, Rezo Esadze consistently explored and employed the language of poetic metaphor, a hallmark of all his films. Above all, his metaphorical thinking is embedded in subtle details of human behavior: in highlighting the spontaneity of young protagonists, in the natural depiction of their desires, and in the search for beauty within everyday life and routine. Esadze participated as screenwriter, actor, and artist in 122 films. As an author and director, he created 11 films.

The roles he performed are marked by distinct traits, expressive nuance, inner drama, and a fully realized sense of character. For this reason, Rezo Esadze, as an actor, always left a significant mark on the Georgian screen. He appeared in *Nine Days of One Year* (1961), *As Long as Man Lives* (1963), *The Eccentrics* (1973), *City Anara* (1976), *From the Life of Vacationers* (1980), *Some Troubles Are Beneficial* (1984), *The Nylon Christmas Tree* (1986 – as director, screenwriter, actor), *The Time of Our Childhood* (1987), *Repentance* (1986), *Swallows and Sparrows* (1992), *Leonardo* (1993), *The Ceiling, or Material for an Unfinished Film* (1992–2003 – as screenwriter, director, artist, actor), among others.

The Eccentrics and *Love at First Sight* (1977) stand apart from his other works due to their ensemble of characters inclined toward free and spontaneous development. *Love at First Sight* is particularly noteworthy as a cinematic narrative of Tbilisi life, youthful dreams, and gentle emotions shaped from within chaos.

His *Nylon Christmas Tree* also became the subject of numerous theoretical studies and highly positive critical reception. This parable, filmed in the 1980s and set aboard a bus that becomes a symbolic shared space, presented a realistic vision of life and society—one that retains its sharp relevance even today.





Small Town of Anara

The Nylon Christmas Tree functions as a mirror reflecting social truth and cruelty. Yet as time passes, the knowledge and truths of life that emerge from the characters' personalities continue to shape a new, enduring social circle.

Living space is always an active force in Rezo Esadze's films. Whether in earlier or later works, the character of streets, courtyards, balconies, and interiors is so essential to him that the environment in which the heroes exist becomes an animate, functioning presence.

Two films are distinguished by their expressionistic details: *Leonardo* and *The Ceiling, or Material for an Unfinished Film*. Over time, Esadze's artistic vision became increasingly abstracted, with contemporary meaning often visible beneath the surface.

Rezo Esadze's attitude toward reality is dual in nature: aesthetically oriented toward light composition, yet thematically anchored in profound reality and deep emotion.

In 1985, 1987, and 1997, exhibitions of his paintings were held in Tbilisi. His works were also displayed in Munich, Tel Aviv, and Geneva. As a film director, Rezo Esadze sought the same distinctive, unusual dynamics in painting. He authored two poetry collections: *Poems* (2001) and *Steed's Monologue* (2003).

"I began working on *The Ceiling* out of protest; everything seemed to fall apart, and I thought: something has to be done. However I might have made this film, I would still have called it unfinished," Esadze said in one interview—perhaps openly revealing his attitude toward thematic choice. What he was never indifferent to always found expression in his films.

Rezo Esadze passed away on April 18, 2020, in Tbilisi. He was awarded the Order of Honor and, in 1980, received the title of Honored Art Worker of Georgia. Even today, several episodes from *Love at First Sight* are considered emblematic of the cinematic style of the 1960s generation.

Films

• *Nine Days of One Year* (1961) – actor
• *Once* (1962) – director, artist
• *As Long as Man Lives* (1963) – actor
• *Fro* (1964) – director
• *The Eccentrics* (1973) – screenwriter, director, actor
• *City Anara* (1976) – actor
• *Love at First Sight* (1977) – actor, director
• *Tbilisi, Paris, Tbilisi* (1980) – actor
• *From the Life of Vacationers* (1980) – actor
• *The windmill in the Suburbs* (1981), television – director, screenwriter
• *Wedding Gift* (1982) – actor, director (with Rolan Bykov and Alexander Igishev)
• *Red Line* (1983) – screenwriter
• *Some Troubles Are Beneficial* (1984) – actor
• *The Nylon Christmas Tree* (1986) – director, screenwriter, actor
• *Repentance* (1986) – actor
• *The Time of Our Childhood* (1987) – actor
• *Expensive Pleasure* (1988) – actor
• *Celebration* (1989) – screenwriter
• *Swallows and Sparrows* (1992) – actor
• *The Fifth Act* (1992) – actor
• *Leonardo* (1993) – actor
• *The Ceiling, or Material for an Unfinished Film* (1992–2003) – screenwriter, director, artist, actor
• *Wolfhound of the Grey Dog Clan* (2006) – actor (Iliad)
• *A Month Like One Day* (2016) – director







Love at First Sight

ცხრა ძმობილი დედა ერთსა შეჰხვედროდა ციხეებსა ნეილონის ქიბარსა ნაძვის ცხრა

სცენარის ავტორები:
რეზო ესაძე
ავთრან დოლიძე
დამდგმელი რეჟისორი
რეზო ესაძე
დამდგმელი ოპერატორი
ლევან პაატაშვილი
დამდგმელი მხატვარი
თეიმურაზ არჯევანიძე
კომპოზიტორი
ბიძინა კვერნაძე
ხმის ოპერატორი
გენადი კორხოვოი
ქართული მხატვრული ფილმი
კინოსტუდია „ქართული ფილმი"

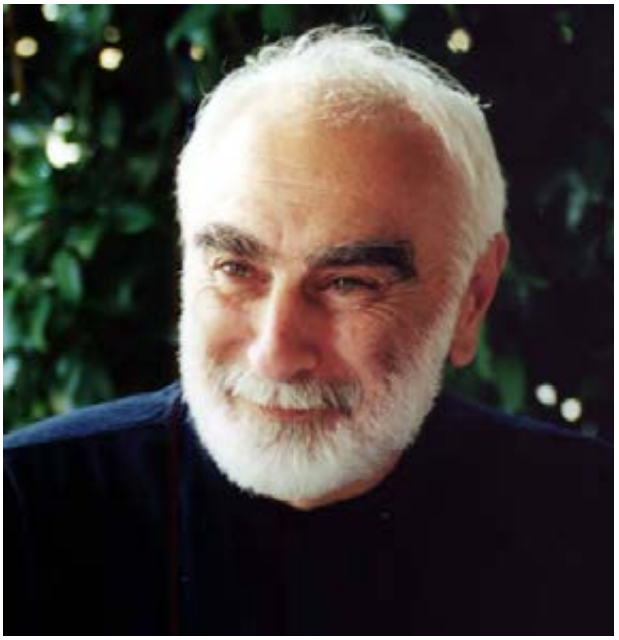
1985

როლებში:
რუსლან მიქაბერიძე
სოფიკო გორგაძე
კობა ჭანტურიშვილი
ზურაბ ყიფშიძე
შალვა ხერხეულიძე
ფაქიზ დვალიშვილი
გურამ პეტრიაშვილი
ინა კალინოვსკაია
ეთერ გელოვანი
ბაია დვალიშვილი
შოთა ქრისტესაშვილი
გივი ჩუგუაშვილი
ლოლა ახალაია
ლერი ზარდიაშვილი
ედიშერ შალალაშვილი
გოგენ ქეიშვილი
მანანა გამცემლიძე
პაპლე ნოზაძე
რუსუდან ქვლივიძე
გოგი ჩხეიძე
მანუჩარ შერვაშიძე
ივარი ფასაძე
ზურაბ ქაფიანიძე
ალექსანდრე ნარიმანიშვილი





MERAB KOKOCHASHVILI



1935

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"The Georgian Cinema Phenomenon"—this is how film scholars refer to the movement created by the generation of Georgian directors of the 1960s, whose work gained international recognition for its originality, poetic metaphors, and distinctive use of cinematic convention. Merab Kokochashvili is an integral figure within this movement, defined by a unique creative vision and an unmistakable artistic signature. His body of work—both feature and documentary—includes *An Old Beech, Door to Door, Holidays, Mikha, Great Green Valley, Farewell, Jako, Three Days of a Hot Summer, The Way, Phenomenon, Nutsa's School, Usui, Wine Cradle,* among others.

Kokochashvili graduated from the directing department of the Moscow All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in 1958. His diploma work, the short film *An Old Beech,* was based on Vazha-Pshavela's story of the same name. Beginning in 1987, he taught at the Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University and at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. From 1978 until the studio's closure





in 2005, he served as artistic director and director at the Georgian Telefilm Studio.

In 1960, Kokochashvili directed the feature *Door to Door* (based on David Kldiashvili's story), merging neorealist aesthetics with distinctly Georgian characteristics.

His children's film *Holidays*, which explores the theme of children's yearning for freedom, as well as the 1965 film *Mikha*, highlight his talent for crafting expressive and authentic characters. The film *Mikha*, like the director's other films, became an example of an actor's natural transformation, in which Zurab Kapianidze delivers a remarkably naturalistic performance.

Kokochashvili's 1967 film *Great Green Valley* profoundly influenced Georgian society, prompting reflection on personal choice and the nature of truth. The film remains a milestone of Georgian cinema—a dramatically balanced and masterfully constructed work that continues to shape national identity. His subsequent films also grapple with moral inquiry and spiritual self-examination.

The theme of choice lies at the core of Sosana's (Dodo Abashidze) inner turmoil in *Great Green Valley* (1967), yet even this struggle is overshadowed by the human longing to live in harmony with nature. Biblical love—central to *Nutsa's School*—is what enables the protagonist Nika (Zaza Papuashvili) to confront an unknown and menacing force. Likewise, in *Three Days of a Hot Summer* (1981), it is the possibility of choice that could have saved those around the main character, Sulkhan (Kakhi Kavsadze), from tragic mistakes.

Kokochashvili's films frequently preceded public consciousness. *Great Green Valley* retains this visionary quality, embodied in

Farewell Jako



Sosana's dramatic declaration that a person must always actively move toward choice.

At the 1968 Yerevan Film Festival, *Great Green Valley* received diplomas for Best Director, Best Cinematography, and Best Actor.

In 1973, Kokochashvili filmed *Farewell, Jako!*, followed in 1976 by *The Peak*, a drama based on the perilous work of mountaineers.

Wherever the theme of choice appears, Kokochashvili's refined artistic vision generates original dramaturgical solutions. *Three Days of a Hot Summer* entered Georgian film history through its portrayal of two characters—distinct yet spiritually connected. The unwavering faith of the idealistic scientist (Kakhi Kavsadze) and the youthful maximal-



Three Days of Hot Summer



ism of Tamriko (Nineli Chankvetadze) form the two central pillars of the film's exploration of moral decision-making.

During the turbulent 1990s, Kokochashvili created *Phenomenon* (1992) and *Georgia Is Ano's, Georgia Is Vano's* (1996), capturing the atmosphere of the era.

Moral inquiry is a defining feature of Kokochashvili's work. *Nutsa's School* (2000)—





Great Green Valley

like *Great Green Valley* in its time—marked a moment of catharsis in post-crisis Georgia. The theme of choice, expressed through the minimalism characteristic of his style, is once again central.

Among his documentary works, the television series *The Way* (1983) is particularly significant. Covering Georgian history from 6000 BCE to the eighteenth century, it is not a dry chronicle of facts and events; rather, through Kokochashvili's narration, it becomes a vivid reflection on identity. The series was awarded the Shota Rustaveli State Prize.

During the 1990s, a period of profound difficulty for Georgian cinema, Kokochashvili turned to psychodrama in his feature work, emphasizing dramaturgy. He has also long expressed a desire to film *Etheriani*—an adaptation of *Abesalom and Eteri*—a project that remains unrealized.

Throughout his career, he encountered challenges. In the 1960s, production of *Mikha* (based on Mikheil Javakhishvili's *Mususi*) was halted by the artistic council. Javakhishvili had only recently been rehabilitated, and Kokochashvili was advised to abandon the adaptation.

In the 2000s, the director continued to produce films, including *Belated Kaddish* (2002), *Variation on the Theme of Othello* (2003), *Usui* (2005), *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* (2006), and *Georgian Mamluks in Egypt* (2006).

In 2025, Kokochashvili filmed *Terzo Mondo*, based on a work by Aka Morchiladze.

Merab Kokochashvili's multifaceted talent continues to play an active role in the development of contemporary Georgian cinema.

Mikha

ამბავი



GIORGI SHENGELAIA



1937-2020

Manana Lekborashvili
Doctor of Art Studies, Associate Professor at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

A Path of Constant Search

Honored Worker of the Republic of Georgia (1979), People's Artist of Georgia (1985), and Shota Rustaveli State Prize laureate for the films *Alaverdoba*, *Pirosmani*, and *A Young Composer's Journey* (1988).

When mapping the creative portraits of Georgian filmmakers, one often notices a common thread—whether thematic, stylistic, or generational. But there are exceptions. Giorgi Shengelaia is one such exception. His work is marked by unexpected turns, making his career a unique phenomenon in the history of Georgian cinema.

Born into a celebrated cinematic family—his father, director Nikoloz Shengelaia; his mother, silent film star Nato Vachnadze; and his older brother, director Eldar Shengelaia—Giorgi entered cinema naturally, first as an actor. Georgian audiences quickly embraced his performances: Dato in Rezo Chkheidze's

Our Courtyard (1957), Giorgi in Mikheil Chiaureli's ***Otar's Widow*** (1958), and later Gogia in Chiaureli's *What You've Seen, You'll Never See Again* (1965).

But his true calling was directing. While already active as an actor, he studied directing at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow—initially in Aleksandr Dovzhenko's workshop, later in Mikheil Chiaureli's after Dovzhenko's death—graduating in 1963. His diploma film was the documentary-fiction hybrid *Alaverdoba*.

With that film, the youngest representative of the 1960s generation did not merely enter Georgian cinema—he burst onto the scene. *Alaverdoba* (1962), based on a story by the talented young writer Guram Rcheulishvili (also of the sixties generation, and taken too soon), became a manifesto of its era. The poetics of the tireless rider racing through fields, the lead character (Guram Phalavandishvili) charged with the force of a purebred horse, an arrow piercing the dome of Alaverdi, the shifting rhythm and montage—together they captured the spirit of the 1960s: not passive existence and comfort, but a drive to create. Its fame came not from the clichéd "condemnation of outdated traditions," a slogan often used to decorate official narratives, but from its genuine energy.

He followed with another short film, again based on literature—this time Mikheil Javakhishvili's story. *The Prize* (1965) again depicts rebellion, but rebellion expressed through refusal—an intimate psychological drama with an entirely different mood.

His first feature film continued the theme of the rebel but introduced yet another shift in genre. *Matsi Khvitia* (1966), adapted from Anton Purtseladze's novel, is a dynamic historical adventure crafted to the rhythm of traditional "do-nana"—one of the finest adventure films in Georgian cinema (FIPRESCI Prize, 10th Bergamo Film Festival, 1967).

Then came *Pirosmani* (1969)—a film with an entirely different rhythm. It visualizes the inner pulse of the artist and distances itself both from Soviet-style celebratory biopics and from conventional biography. Rather than *telling* the life of naïve artist Niko Pirosmani, the film *shows* his world—through his eyes. The frontality, stillness, spatial clarity, and monumentality of Pirosmani's paintings become the basis of the cinematic language. Characters feel as though they have stepped out of his canvases—or vice versa, real life has been absorbed into his painted universe. This powerful interweaving of life and art allows the viewer to feel both the emotional truth of his work and the tragedy of his fate. Remarkably, the role of Nikala is played by a non-professional actor—a celebrated artist Avto Varazi. The film received worldwide acclaim: the Golden Hugo at the Chicago International Film Festival (1973), the Sutherland Trophy of the British Film Institute (1973), and first prize for best biographical film at the Asolo Film Festival (Italy, 1973).

A new turn followed. The same era, the same Tbilisi as in *Pirosmani*, but a radically different film: the classical musical *Melodies of Vera Quarter* (1973). Shengelaia found it intriguing to transplant a foreign genre onto Georgian soil. The viewer enters a stylized, festive version of 19th-century Tbilisi—life elevated into song and dance, shaped by a playful folk-carnival spirit (choreography: Yuri Zaretsky). The plot is simple and conventional—a romantic tale framed by social inequality—but in this carnival world, play is everything.



Matsi Khvitia

Even the conflict between the rich and the poor unfolds as a performance. Vardo and Pavle, as positive and simultaneously lyrical heroes, are less distanced from their own characters; they more perform a role, less play it; in contrast, in the embodiment of negative characters, the playful, carnivalesque element fully triumphs.



Stylistically, the film presents nothing new for world cinema. But without Broadway traditions or the English music hall to lean on—and avoiding



Pirosmani



Everyone Needs Love



the artificiality that plagued many Soviet musicals—he created a lively, charming, irresistible spectacle, whose songs are still cherished today. At the 22nd San Sebastián Film Festival (1974), the film received a diploma from the International Catholic Organization for Cinema for its goodness and optimism.

After the stylized world of the musical, the director turned back toward reality. *The Sands Will Remain* (1976) was filmed in Kakheti, at the construction site of the Alazani Canal. Again, as in *Alaverdoba*, he blended documentary with fiction—real workers, real village residents, real conflicts over land and resettlement. Yet Shengelaia deliberately softens the drama. His interest lies not in sharpening the social problem, but

The Journey of Young Composer



in exploring the moral atmosphere and ethical principles. The film is restrained, contemplative, and loosely structured. As a result, viewers found it harder to engage emotionally. Although it received the State Prize "Chronicle of the Five-Year Plan" in 1977, the audiences and critics stayed indifferent.

Mass audiences, however, warmly embraced *Everyone Needs Love* (1980), co-directed with Mikhail Chiaureli. Although set in contemporary Kakheti, it is no closer to social realism than *Melodies of Vera Quarter*. Conceived as a parodic musical, it follows an energetic sewing-school graduate who arrives in a village with the mission of bringing beauty—and stylish clothes—into everyday life. Around her, the love stories of the villagers unfold, all echoing the title's sentiment: everyone needs love, some fight for it, others mourn about what's lost...

The director's courage—in abandoning what he has just mastered, in switching genres wholly, in flirting with kitsch and broad gags after elegant stylization—commands respect. And then, having gone to that extreme, he returned to a refined cinematic language full of subtext: *The Journey of Young Composer* (1984).

The film specifies a date—1907—although censorship made this choice necessary. For Georgians who know their history, it inevitably evokes the suppressed 1924 anti-Soviet uprising. Yet the filmmakers deliberately avoid any direct allusion. Historical details are suggested rather than highlighted. The film's rhythm, visuals, color palette, portraiture (cinematography by Levan Paatashvili; art direction by Gogi Aleksi-Meskhishvili and Nikusha Shengelaia) create an atmosphere that feels true to both the stated and the implied eras. Ultimately, the film becomes a parable about fear and dignity, about choices and their price, about true versus false heroism—topics universal to many nations and many times. Probably the history of every country knows epochs when exaltation sacrifices sound reason, when cause perishes for pathetic words and effective poses, false heroes appear, intelligence, education, dignity, and morality become superfluous and moreover dangerous. This is confirmed by the Berlin Film Festival's nomination for the "Golden Bear" and the well-deserved "Silver Bear" for best directing.

Then another breath—another unexpected turn. *Khareba and Gogia* (1987) revisits the adventure genre, inspired by the lives of real early-20th-century Kakhetian bandits: Khareba Jibuti and Gogi Kenkishvili, still celebrated in folk songs. Those songs shape the film's tone.

In characterizing this film, the word "genuine" acquires special significance. The film's black-and-white palette and sharply contrasting image breathes with the warmth of the Kakhetian sun. If in "Matsi Khvitia" the film's breathing was given by the rhythm of exhausted horses' hooves clattering, here heavy Kakhetian blood pulses. In the rhythm one feels the breathing of blood-filled, powerful bodies. The scent of a bonfire seems to come from the screen. Shengelaia cast non-professional actors: world-class Georgian athletes (wrestlers Levan Tediashvili, Mikheil Saladze, Avto Maisuradze; cyclist Omar Pkhakadze). They fit naturally into chokha and swordplay, as if born to it.

After *Khareba and Gogia*, the creative pause was longer. Georgia's political life changed with dizzying speed, making reflection and artistic synthesis difficult. Once again, Shengelaia chose an unfamil-



Melodies of Vera Quarter





iar path.

Early reports suggested that his new film would be inspired by philosopher Merab Mamardashvili. Yet by the time *The Death of Orpheus* (1996) appeared, these hints had vanished. The prototype remained only in a few initial strokes. The film portrays an intellectual (played by Zurab Kipshidze) who tries to rise above everyday life but is ultimately dragged into its vortex and destroyed.

The political upheavals of recent Georgian history are easily recognizable in the film's imagery and narrative. Shengelaia cannot remain a detached observer—his civic stance is visible not only verbally but in every visual decision. Yet after the prologue, the film shifts into melodrama, reflecting the criminal atmosphere of the time. The ambitious attempt to merge political drama with melodrama did not fully succeed. The political storyline remains more like a statement than a fully developed dramatic structure; meanwhile, the melodramatic thread lacks emotional intensity, giving the viewer little space for empathy.

Still, this experience did not diminish Shengelaia's appetite for experimentation. This time, he turned to grotesque comedy. *A Train Was Passing* (2005) assembles a collage of unpleasant modern characters and events aboard a train heading to Batumi. The result is uneven—varying in artistic weight and humor—and interestingly, the film bears two titles: the original *A Train Was Passing*, and after the final frame, *The Train Passes*.

Different genres, different forms, different themes—it is almost hard to believe these films all came from the same director. Yet they share something essential: a relentless search, the courage to take unfamiliar roads, and a deep sense of professional responsibility. Among Shengelaia's films are both auteur and popular works, triumphs and lesser successes, but not one is made with cold craftsmanship, cold heart and cold mind. In every film he is present—the artist, complex and multifaceted.

Filmography

Our Courtyard (1957) — actor (Dato)
The Widow Otarashvili (1958) — actor (Giorgi)
The Story of One Girl (1960) — actor (Gela)
Niko Pirosmani (1961) — director
Alaverdoba (1962) — director, screenwriter
What You've Seen, You'll Never See Again (1965) — actor (Gogia)
The Prize (1965) — director, screenwriter
Matsi Khvitia (1966) — director, screenwriter
Pirosmani (1969) — director, screenwriter
Melodies of Vera Quarter (1973) — director, screenwriter
The Sands Will Remain (1976) — director, actor
Everyone Needs Love (1980) — director (co-directed with Mikhail Chiaureli)
A Young Composer's Journey (1984) — director, screenwriter
Khareba and Gogia (1987) — director, screenwriter
The Death of Orpheus (1996) — director, screenwriter
Love in the Vineyard (2000) — director
A Train Was Passing (2005) — director, screenwriter

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ALEKSANDRE REKHVIASHVILI



1938-2020

Maia Levanidze
Doctor of Art Studies, Associate Professor at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

Alexandre Rekhviashvili was born in 1938 in Moscow. In 1962, he graduated from the cinematography faculty of the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow. That same year, he came to Georgia, where together with Giorgi Shengelaia he shot *Alaverdoba*, a seminal film of the 1960s that brought to the screen a dynamic approach to depicting reality and exploring moral-ethical questions. In *Alaverdoba*, Alexandre Rekhviashvili's cinematography was distinguished by striking expressiveness, an active camera, powerful graphic composition, and the "density" of the image, in which an internal energy could be felt. As a cinematographer, he also shot *Mikela* (1965), *Pirosmani* (1969), and *The Dog* (1974). All three films evidenced his capacity for visual thinking, which would later become a hallmark of his individual artistic style.

In 1971, he graduated from the directing faculty of the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography and began working that same year at the Georgian Film Studio, where he shot his first film as director, *Nutsa*, based on Mikheil Javakhishvili's story *The Orphan*. The story of the orphan Nutsa's loneliness, humiliation, and her incompatibility with the world is conveyed through close-ups and long panoramic shots. For the first time, the forest symbol characteristic of Rekhviashvili's work appears as a sign of searching, solitude with oneself, and self-discovery. The forest is Nutsa's organic world, the environment where she can find shelter and escape from the harsh realities around her. It is precisely here that the prince intrudes, violates her, and continues his life as if nothing has happened. But Nutsa's world collapses; the forest as shelter becomes her final resting place. After *Nutsa*, Rekhviashvili makes the film *Green Meadow* (1973), where he continues to experiment, offering striking compositions and exploring the possibilities of color, rhythm, and spatial construction.

In 1979 and 1983, he makes the films *The 19th Century Georgian Chronicle* and *The Way Home*. The plots of both films are straightforward. *The Chronicle of 19th Century Georgia* tells the story of Niko Burnadze, a student who returns to his native village and begins a struggle against the sale of the forest to foreigners. The forest, along with ancestral graves, faces destruction. To save it, Niko begins appealing to various authorities; the village's fate depends on one official's signature. Those interested in selling the forest have Niko killed by hired assassins. Society is dominated by mistrust, hopelessness, and hostility. This theme continues in the film *The Way Home*. The film is set in 19th-century southern Georgia, during a difficult period of national self-determination for the country, an era that produced heroes like the philosopher and writer Antimoz Iverieli. Antimoz, a victim of injustice in childhood, becomes a defender of the people's interests. After being abducted by Turks and taken to Romania, Antimoz returns home to discover that strangers have settled in his house; he has lost his ancestral home, his identity, and therefore begins the search to reclaim his own home, though this path proves difficult and lengthy.

The 19th Century Georgian Chronicle and *The Way Home* are works in parable form, in which symbolic narration within a stylized environment occupies an important place. These two films are connected by a common mood, themes, and symbolism. The main action of both films unfolds in the forest; it is precisely within it that the director depicts different strata of society and their moral-ethical degradation, telling stories of betrayal and devotion. The forest serves as a symbol of the search for oneself, for one's path.

Through his depiction of the 19th-century environment, Alexandre Rekhviashvili addresses the moral-ethical problems of the contemporary world. He portrays not only the inner world of Georgian intelligentsia and peasantry, which is losing its roots and failing to maintain that sacred "knowledge" and traditions that had been passed down through generations, but also the bureaucratic class that has lost its moral compass and national identity, for whom education, traditions, and the country's interests are no longer valuable. In both films, Rekhviashvili introduces books as a symbol of "transmitting and acquiring knowledge." In various shots, we see blank pages washed away by rain and water, indicating society's spiritual emptiness, or



books used for mundane, utilitarian purposes, which also symbolizes the dominance of material values in society. The theme of society's spiritual crisis that appears in *The 19th Century Georgian Chronicle* and *The Way Home* finds a continuation of sorts in his subsequent film *The Stairway* (1986). What's interesting is that in this environment, the director now introduces small elements of "forest" into interior spaces, since in that period's society he no longer sees even a portion of people ready to search for themselves and find a way out of the existing situation.



The Step

The film's protagonist, Alexi, is a young, promising scientist who strives to understand the world. Rekhviashvili divides Alexi's world into several spaces: the family, which should be perceived as a symbol of a person's spiritual peace, a haven—but is instead disrupted. In Alexi's family, with the arrival of a young stepmother, alienated relationships become more acute. Of the three interconnected rooms, the middle room becomes a kind of border, beyond which the worlds of Alexi's father and stepmother exist separately. They stop at the threshold of their respective rooms, communicating with each other through the gap left between the heavily drawn curtains on the doors. Without waiting for an answer, they turn back, and the general phrases voiced into the air seem to distance them even further. In several structurally identical episodes, the conversational topics don't change either, which hints at the monotonous existence of Alexi's family. It becomes clear to us—he is fleeing precisely this nihilism, inertia, and alienated environment. In fact, it can be said that to convey the film's main message, the director builds the narrative on the principle of "repetition," meaning frames of unified structure and content are inserted throughout the narrative. It is precisely through this device that a degree of irritation is achieved, both in the viewer and in the protagonist. Overall, after watching the film, it becomes clear to us that Alexi is fleeing the monotony of life and devalued relationships into an alien world. Alexi is alone, cut off

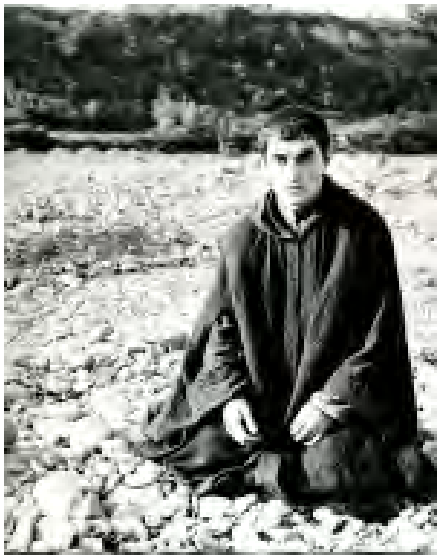
from his roots, because he no longer has the possibility of existing in his own space (his place is taken by the young stepmother, meaning the object of "care" shifts and the father becomes indifferent to his former priority). Alexi is forced to find a "new space"—a new environment. He rents an apartment, moving temporarily to another world. What is this world like? Eclectic, cluttered, multi-compositional, like society itself. In one room coexist varieties of fauna and flora, old books, old dishes, a gramophone, and more. The room is divided into small compositional structures that are transitional, somehow flowing from one compositional structure to another. His world unites in one space both the present and the past. Both the individual and society become bearers of certain markers of the nation's cultural or historical traditions.

Alexi's world, with its chaotic "arrangement" of objects, multi-compositional structure, and diversity of forms and textures, is a carrier of aggressive elements. Having fled from his father's house—from the static quality and monotony of forms, from symmetry—Alexi cannot find spiritual peace even in this cluttered, diverse environment.

If in *The 19th Century Georgian Chronicle* and *The Way Home* the heroes search for a path in the forest to return to themselves, get lost in the search for the right path, approach meaning, and if the stylized world unfolding before them organically contains its heroes—that is, it is perceived by them as a natural environment—Alexi's world is a "civilized forest" that doesn't allow him to fully open up, find his own place, or remain alone with himself. The "civilized forest" of Alexi and the characters existing within it are carriers of already lost feelings and emotions. Here, after all, nature and the primordial world are confined within an unnatural framework, just as the soul, morality, and ethics of contemporary humanity are confined. Despite the fact that Alexi's environment

The 19th Century Georgian Chronicle





The Way Home

is crowded—a man and two women who came to see him, his friend Mito, who is busy growing mushrooms in the basement, the constantly watchful landlady and her timid daughter—they are as alien to him as this entire world; in Alexi's space, they seem to appear suddenly and then disappear.

If in Alexandre Rekhviashvili's early films, a non-specific environment contained and organically absorbed separate "paraphrases" of parables—that is, expressive codes—while in parallel the ideological leitmotifs of the films were assembled in mosaic fashion, in *The Stairway* the parable became the form of the overall narrative. However, the general ideological elements are assembled not through the characterization of a specific environment, but through several different environments: "father's house," "temporary world," "beloved woman's environment," and "the closed space of officials and an elderly scientist"—they seem to be conceived as a kind of stairways in his life. With each new "stairway," he moves further and further from his goals. Because of this, he flees "outside" into open space. If until now the external world appeared through a small window opening, from this moment the director introduces into the narrative shots filmed in natural settings, opening up the closed, stylized environment. On the winding mountain slope, Alexi meets a character coming from afar, a seeker of fate like himself. The stony environment that fills the frame fragments the space, because beyond it lies an uncertain future. In the frame, it resonates as a difficult path full of barriers—the path homeward, toward understanding. Alexi, having fled the city, meets on the road a young boy who has fled from the village. Both characters are fleeing from different spaces—from mundane routine existence, spiritual alienation, and society's indifference.

The satirical parable *The Approach* speaks about 1990s Georgia. From an observer's position, it described current events: cowards, revolutionaries, fanatics who intermingle and create an absurd environment.



Nutsa

From 1993, he makes documentary films: *Triangle in a Circle*, *Return* (2000), *The Last Ones*

(2006), *Igor Sanovich, Sketch for a Portrait* (2008), *Ramaz Chkhikvadze* (2013). In his subsequent documentary films, the author follows the lives of people who found their eternity through merging with the nature existing around them. What's interesting is that in his documentary films, Alexandre Rekhviashvili maintains the position of an external observer; the camera is neutral, at first glance a passive recorder. Here too, he tries to minimize dialogues as much as possible, rejects the device common in documentary cinema of the narrator-author's voice-over text, and completely gives way to the cinematic image.

Thus, Alexandre Rekhviashvili's complex, contemplative cinema stands completely apart, separated from the tendencies existing in Georgian cinema of the 1970s-2000s. His work is characterized by parable form, a stylized expressive vocabulary with chain-coded elements. To "read" them, the camera is meditative, the rhythm of the image is measured, and the multi-compositional structure is sometimes decorative and collage-like. For him, environment and people are elements of one unified system, where meaning creates emotion and feeling. The narrative structure is built with "half-spoken phrases" that are emotionally completed by the viewer. The director's inclination toward a complex visual vocabulary may have been conditioned by his work as a cinematographer. His camera was always distinguished by individuality, a kind of "meticulous" treatment of the frame, and the laconicism and precision of what is depicted.

Awards and Prizes:

- Munich International Film Festival Jury Special Prize for the film "Miaxloeba" (1990)
- Mannheim International Film Festival Grand Prix (1979)
- International Federation of Film Critics "FIPRESCI" Prize (1979)
- German Catholic Church Prize (1979) for the film "The Chronicle of 19th Century Georgia"
- 1998 - Order of Honor for great personal contribution to Georgian cinematography and fruitful creative activity
- 1988 - Honored Art Worker of Georgia

Filmography:

Cinematography work:

- Alaverdoba (1962)
- Mikela (1965)
- Pirosmani (1969)
- The Dog (1974)

Directorial work:

- Nutsa (1971)
- Green Meadow (1973)
- The Chronicle of 19th Century Georgia (1978) - Director, Screenwriter
- The Way Home (1982) - Director, Screenwriter
- The Stairway (1986) - Director, Screenwriter
- Approach (1989) - Director, Screenwriter

Documentary films:

- The Promised Land. Return (2000)
- Russian Palestine (2000, television, Russia) - Director
- Triangular Circle (2001, television, Russia) - Director
- The Last Ones (2006) - Director, Screenwriter
- Igor Sanovich, Sketches for a Portrait (2008, doc.) - Director
- Ramaz Chkhikvadze (2013) - Screenwriter, Director, Cinematographer, Producer

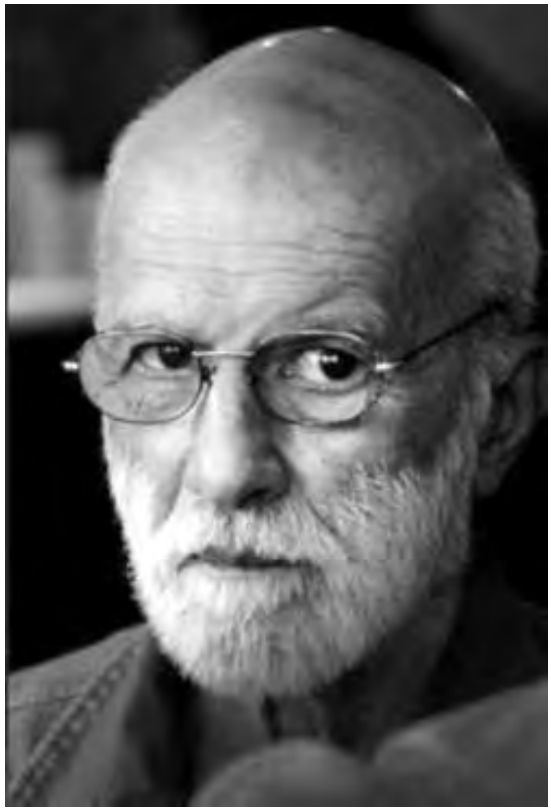


XIX საუკუნის ქართული ქრონიკა

სტენდის ავტორები: ნ. ავთანდილაშვილი, ე. ბერიძე, ე. გაბუნიშვილი, დეკორატორი ჩ. ჩხარტიშვილი, ე. გაბუნიშვილი, დეკორატორი ჩ. ჩხარტიშვილი, ნ. ჯინჭარაძე, დეკორატორი მ. ბაქრაძე, ე. ავალიანი, ლ. ლურსმანაშვილი, ე. ავალიანი, ფოტოგრაფიები: მ. ალექსიძის, ე. ნიქოლაძის, ი. მელიქიშვილის, მ. გელეიშვილის, ლ. სანიძის, ნ. ჩხეიძის, ე. ავალიანის, ნ. ჭანტურიას, ნ. ზარქუას, ი. ავალიანის, ე. ავალიანის, ლ. ბიწაძის, ნ. ალექსიძის და სხვ.

ქიმოსტენდია „ქართული ფილმი“, 1978 წ.

MIKHEIL KOBAKHIDZE



1939-2019

Tamta Turmanidze
Doctor of Art Studies, Assistant Professor at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

A Statement Contained in 120 Minutes

Among Georgian filmmakers of the 1960s, a special place belongs to director Mikheil Kobakhidze, whose creative legacy consists of six short fiction films with a total running time of only 120 minutes. Black-and-white poetic shorts, marked by refined, eccentric humor in which not a single word is spoken and the narrative is carried solely by music and sound—that is the cinematic world of Mikheil Kobakhidze. His films resist any genre classification: they are neither straightforward comedy nor tragedy nor conventional pantomime, though containing the elements of all three. With their plasticity and rhythm of movement, they do not fully conform to the aesthetics of silent cinema either, even if many familiar motifs

appear there. This is exclusively Mikheil Kobakhidze's cinema—his personal genre and form—in which the director's worldview is contained within a remarkably small amount of screen time.

Mikheil Kobakhidze was born on April 5, 1939, in Tbilisi. He received his higher education at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow, in the directing program led by Sergei Gerasimov and Tamara Makarova.

Traces of the director's original vision can already be seen in his first film, *Young Love*, shot in 1961 during his second year at the institute. In this short, a young married couple stands on opposite sides of a wardrobe, hiding and teasing each other. Kobakhidze uses music in the narration, though he has not yet fully incorporated one of the most important elements of his future films—sound. Despite the obviously exaggerated noise within a single room (hopping, biting an apple, footsteps), the characters do not hear each other.

The following year he made *Carousel*, in which a light romantic story unfolds in a sunlit city—a kind of rehearsal for his famous *Wedding*. Here the director ventures into a bold experiment with imagery: objects on screen accelerate, as Kobakhidze imitates the rapid movements characteristic of early silent cinema, while the characters themselves resemble quickly moving marionettes. The film already reveals the distinctive traits of his cinematic language: pantomime, musicality, and poetry.

Kobakhidze's first diploma film was *Eight and a Half* (1964), which Soviet censorship deemed anti-Soviet and destroyed before it could be sent to Moscow. In an interview, the director recalled that the film was banned because a voice from the sky asks people walking along the street, "People, how are you?" and they respond, "We are what we are!" It was after this ban that Kobakhidze conceived the idea for his new diploma film, *Wedding*—which later won three prizes at the Oberhausen International Short Film Festival. He wanted to make a film that would be acceptable to everyone, to receive his diploma, and only afterward return to making the films he truly wished to make.

"Every film is a small experiment for me. When I make a film, I do not think about the viewer, but once the film is made and placed before an audience, naturally, I have a strong desire for it to affect them, to bring them joy, to make them think, and even inspire them." This is how the director himself described his creative work.

Wedding is also a love story, as were his previous two films, but it presents a completely different kind of love. Here the story is narrated entirely through music—it forms the central dramatic line, conveys the personality of the protagonist, reveals his innermost feelings, and follows the shifts in his emotional state. The main character, a young pharmacist played by Gogi Qavtaradze, is somewhat infantile and comical. He falls in love with a girl he encounters by chance on a bus, imagines himself as her husband, but ultimately experiences bitter disappointment—and a comic finale—when, elegantly dressed and holding flowers, he finds himself at her wedding. It is fascinating to observe how the director tells this story through music, how musical themes shift with the protagonist's changing mood, location, and activity. The film opens with the beautiful melody of Filippo Marchetti's waltz, representing the theme of love. Then we enter the protagonist's everyday life, where again the musical narration continues: morning—the chimes of a clock on the radio—city noise entering

through the open balcony—accompanied by a cheerful, humorous melody that expresses his character. He goes to work... and suddenly Marchetti's waltz returns when, after seeing the beautiful girl on the bus, Gogi Qavtaradze's character and everything around him seem to vanish. The only place without music is his workplace: as a pharmacist, his world there is rendered through the sounds of weighing and packaging medicine. Kobakhidze himself noted: "A cinematographer must necessarily understand and feel music. That is the most important thing—the sense of sound and the sense of pause."

In this short film, the director tells a seemingly simple and universally understandable story—about the joy and melancholy of love, about youthful dreams and first disappointment. Kobakhidze's cinema is sometimes compared to that of Buster Keaton or Jacques Tati, to which he once responded: "Tati does not resemble Keaton, and Keaton does not resemble Tati, so how can I resemble them both? Tati is deeply ironic—irony accompanies his every frame. But I try not to build my screenplays on irony. On the contrary, I avoid it in every way." Indeed, Kobakhidze's humor has a different nature: lyricism and sympathy for the character prevail in it. *Wedding*, too—despite the protagonist's disappointment—is full of optimistic humor and cheerfulness. At the end, having accepted his fate and survived his humiliation, the hero continues his journey toward new adventures, holding the same flowers, accompanied by a Russian romance sung by Charles Aznavour.



Umbrella

If *Wedding* still retains close ties to real-



ity—real Tbilisi with its streets, houses, and natural sounds—Kobakhidze's next film, *The Umbrella* (1967), takes us into a conditional cinematic world in which the viewer is granted freedom of interpretation.



Musicians

"I am still amazed that I dared to make *The Umbrella* after *Wedding*. From the very beginning I knew I had to walk a tightrope, and if I failed to cross it, that would be the end of my film career. But that challenge was precisely what attracted me. The film was originally titled *Rain*. In the end, when their umbrella flies away, rain begins and they remain without shelter. At that moment a third character jumps into the rain with an umbrella. From a dramatic point of view this scene would have been very powerful... But the rain in the finale would not have been right, because it would bring the umbrella into the real world and turn it into an ordinary umbrella. But the umbrella is a symbol. I have often been asked what it symbolizes. Everyone can understand the symbolism of the umbrella in their own way. Each person sees the film they create in their own consciousness."



On the Way

The Umbrella is a parable-like narrative. Its main characters are young lovers who live in complete harmony. The young man is a railway switchman who, between train movements, even manages to give a small concert for his beloved by playing a simple melody on the flute. Delighted by his performance, the girl gives him flowers, and nothing seems to threaten their peaceful coexistence. But suddenly a fluttering umbrella in the sky disrupts their harmony, and the lovers lose their tranquility. They chase it, try to catch it, try to move in its rhythm, and suddenly appear to have no time left for each other. The umbrella tempts them, irritates them, hides and reappears. Through the characters' plastic movements and dance-like gestures, the director conveys their personalities and inner states with precision. Kobakhidze also introduces a conflict: a third character suddenly appears, exhibiting a different rhythm and plasticity, and he easily takes possession of the umbrella the lovers desire. He then offers it to the girl, who also touches the alluring object. For a moment, it seems that she has betrayed their love. But the director restores harmony, and the third character continues on his way with the umbrella in hand, accompanied by Bach.

"The director's symbolic-metaphorical thinking manifested itself most clearly in this film. Before our eyes, Kobakhidze animates an inanimate object—the umbrella—and



Wedding



presents it as an independent 'being,' as a symbol. And a symbol is never unambiguous." Here, too, the umbrella signifies something foreign, an unattainable temptation, though each viewer reaches their own conclusion about its meaning.

From film to film, Kobakhidze intensifies the conventionality of his cinematic imagery—the importance of comic effect, pantomime, and eccentricity—and takes all of it to the extreme in his next film, *Musicians*. If in *Wedding* the action still unfolded in real Tbilisi, and in *The Umbrella* a partially conditional environment remained, in *Musicians* there is only a white background.

Kobakhidze shot *Musicians* in 1969. The plot of this 14-minute film seems simple and easily understandable. A lonely man—played by the director himself—quietly plays chess with himself while looking through binoculars into the distance, where he discovers someone as lonely as he is (Gia Avalishvili). Delighted, they run toward each other. Happily, they embrace, dance, play—the game grows into a quarrel, then into a fight, and they part again. Finally, loneliness overwhelms them, and they rush back to one another.

The white background on which the characters move exists outside of specific time and place, giving the story a generalized, symbolic dimension. This graphic cinematic étude conveys the absurdity of conflict and enmity between people. Everything in the film is conditional: the environment is conditional, the protagonists themselves are conditional, yet their emotions and inner states are entirely recognizable to any viewer without a single spoken word.

It can be said that in *Musicians* the director, in a sense, predicted his departure from cinema. In an interview Kobakhidze wrote: "During that period I encountered so much opposition that I expressed my state of mind in the finale of *Musicians*. The last scene—when we suddenly leave the frame—was my farewell to cinema. That is exactly the idea I placed there."

Indeed, in 1969, after the completion of *Musicians*, by personal order of the chairman of the Moscow State Committee for Cinematography, Alexander Romanov, Mikheil Ko-

bakhidze was forbidden to direct films independently. At first he tried to fight back—writing letters to Brezhnev, Gerasimov, and Mzhavanadze. After some time he was allowed to return to the profession in a limited capacity: he wrote scripts for several animated films and helped friends with editing, but he was still not permitted to direct, and his scripts remained unapproved. Then, in November 1983, an airplane hijacking occurred at Tbilisi airport, and among the hijackers was Kobakhidze's son, Gega. In August 1984, Gega Kobakhidze, along with the other hijackers, was executed. After these events, making films in the Soviet Union became impossible for Mikheil Kobakhidze.

He emigrated to France, where after a long silence, in 2001, he shot the short film *On the Road*, separated from his previous work by a 32-year hiatus. The content of the film is as follows: a man burdened with suitcases walks across a vast field. A sudden storm deprives him of all his belongings. He chases after the suitcases—without success. Finally he is left naked. The storm subsides. A ray of light breaks through the sky. The man smiles. And for the first time hears the voice of a bird. In this small parable about burden and liberation, one can recognize the director's entire biography.

In the short span from 1961 to 1969, Mikheil Kobakhidze traveled a creative path that would take most others decades.

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• Ira Kuchukhidze – *"On the Border of the Real and Unreal (Mikheil Kobakhidze)"* – https://georgian-cinema.ge/index.php/ge/2015-04-01-05-55-23/399-2015-07-19-18-50-37

Filmography

1961 – *Music While You're Young*
1962 – *Carousel*
1964 – *Wedding*
1967 – *The Umbrella*
1969 – *Musicians*
2001 – *On the Road*

კს "ქართული ფილმი"
1966

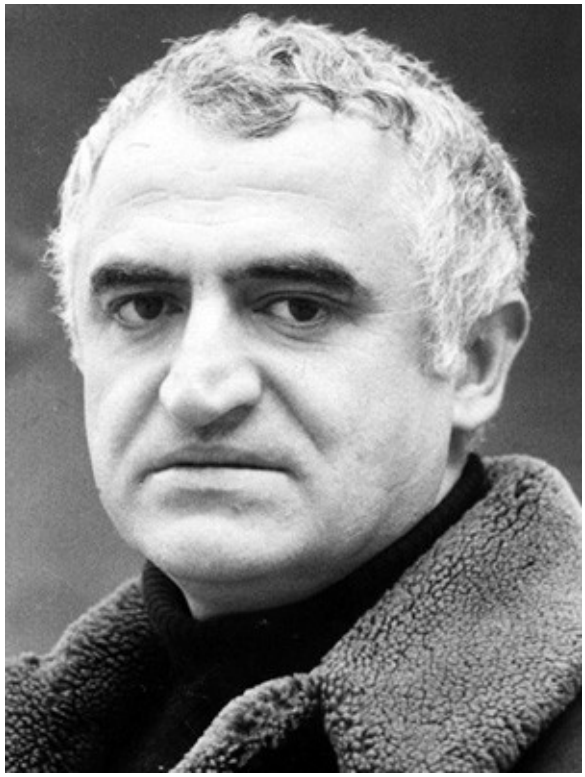


მიხეილ
კობახიძე



ქოლგა

TEMUR BABLUANI



1948

Ketevan Trapaidze
Doctor of Art Studies, Associate Professor at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State Uni-versity

In the second half of the 1970s, a number of young directors graduated from the Film Directing Department of Georgia's Shota Rustaveli State Theatrical Institute (as it was then known; today – Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University). Their interest in cinema introduced themes and concerns different from those of earlier decades. This natural shift brought a new creative atmosphere to Georgian film.

We conventionally refer to them as the "generation of the eighties" – those who entered cinema during this period and, from the very beginning, even in their student works, revealed a distinct perspective toward the world around them.

One of the earliest representatives of this generation is Temur Babluani – screenwriter, film director, and actor in both cinema and theatre.

Temur Babluani was born on March 20, 1948, in the village of Choluri (Svaneti, Lentekhi municipality). He studied in the renowned creative workshop of Tengiz Abuladze at the Film Directing Department of the Theatrical Institute.



As Babluani himself recalls, his path into cinema began when he was invited to act in a film by director Rezo Chkheidze – he played the role of Malkhaz in *The Lads of the Smile* (1969). Later, he appeared as the eagle tamer in *My Dear Land* (1980), also directed by Rezo Chkheidze. That same year, the acclaimed Georgian theatre director Temur Chkheidze staged the television adaptation of Nodar Dumbadze's story *Kukaracha*. Babluani's natural and organically measured portrayal of Murtalo – a character with a criminal past – created a rough yet symbolically powerful image that left a lasting impression across generations: a metaphor of individuality and human spirit.



During his studies, shaped by many new ideas and artistic insights, Babluani developed a strong interest in characters who are lost or marginalized in the contemporary world. He directed two short fiction films based on his own screenplays: *Kidnapping* (1975) and *Flight of the Sparrow**s*** (1979). The dramatic adventure of the film's two protagonists unfolds against the stark social poverty and sharply drawn personalities of the passengers in a crowded train carriage. The faces of Guja and Tripona (played by Guja Burduli and Temur Bichiashvili), emerging from the lowest social strata and going no-

where, are depicted with striking realism. For the first time in Georgian cinema, a conflict in which characters act morally in an extreme situation was presented within a social narrative filled with directness and realistic detail. *Flight of the Sparrows* received a Special Prize at the 11th All-Union Festival of Young Filmmakers in Kyiv in 1980.

Although *Flight of the Sparrows* forces us to confront a harsh reality, every episode still carries a strong belief in human goodness. In 1982, Babluani filmed *Brother* – a work distinguished by its rhythmic editing, dynamic western-style elements, and energetic dramatic form. It won a prize and diploma at the 15th All-Union Film Festival in Tallinn. The narrative depicts a dramatic story set against the background of social conflict, where historical reality intersects with moral struggle – both internal and external.

Babluani possesses a rare ability to notice unusual details in the characters he portrays on screen. This defining quality emerged once again in *Sun of the Sleepless* (1990), a film with semi-biographical undertones. Here, everything connected to the life of a troubled family speaks to fundamental human values. The film received numerous awards: the main prize at the Sochi Film Festival (*Kinotavr-92*), the Grand Prix at the Moscow Festival (*Interfest-92*), and the main prize and diploma at the 1st Republican Festival of Georgian Films in Tbilisi (*Golden Eagle*) – all in 1992; followed by the "Silver Bear" at the 43rd Berlin International Film Festival in 1993. In 1995, the film was recognized with the Shota Rustaveli State Prize.

Alongside his work in France as a director and producer, Temur Babluani is the author of the novel *Sun, Moon and Wheat Field: Manushaka is Waiting*. The novel received the "Saba" Literary Award for Best Debut in 2019.



Director – Filmography

- 1980: *Flight of the Sparrows*
- 1981: *Brother*
- 1990: *Sun of the Sleepless*
-

Screenwriter – Filmography

- 1980: *Flight of the Sparrows*
- 1981: *Brother*
- 1990: *Sun of the Sleepless*

Producer – Film

- 1996: *1001 Recipes of a Loving Cook* – dir. Nana Jorjadze

Flight of the Sparrows

Acting Roles – Film and Television

- 1969: *The Lads of the Smile* (Malkhaz), dir. Rezo Chkheidze
- 1980: *My Dear Land* (Eagle Tamer), dir. Rezo Chkheidze
- 1989: *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho*, dir. Rezo Chkheidze
- 1980: Television film *Kukaracha* (Murtalo), dir. Temur Chkheidze

The Sun of Sleepless

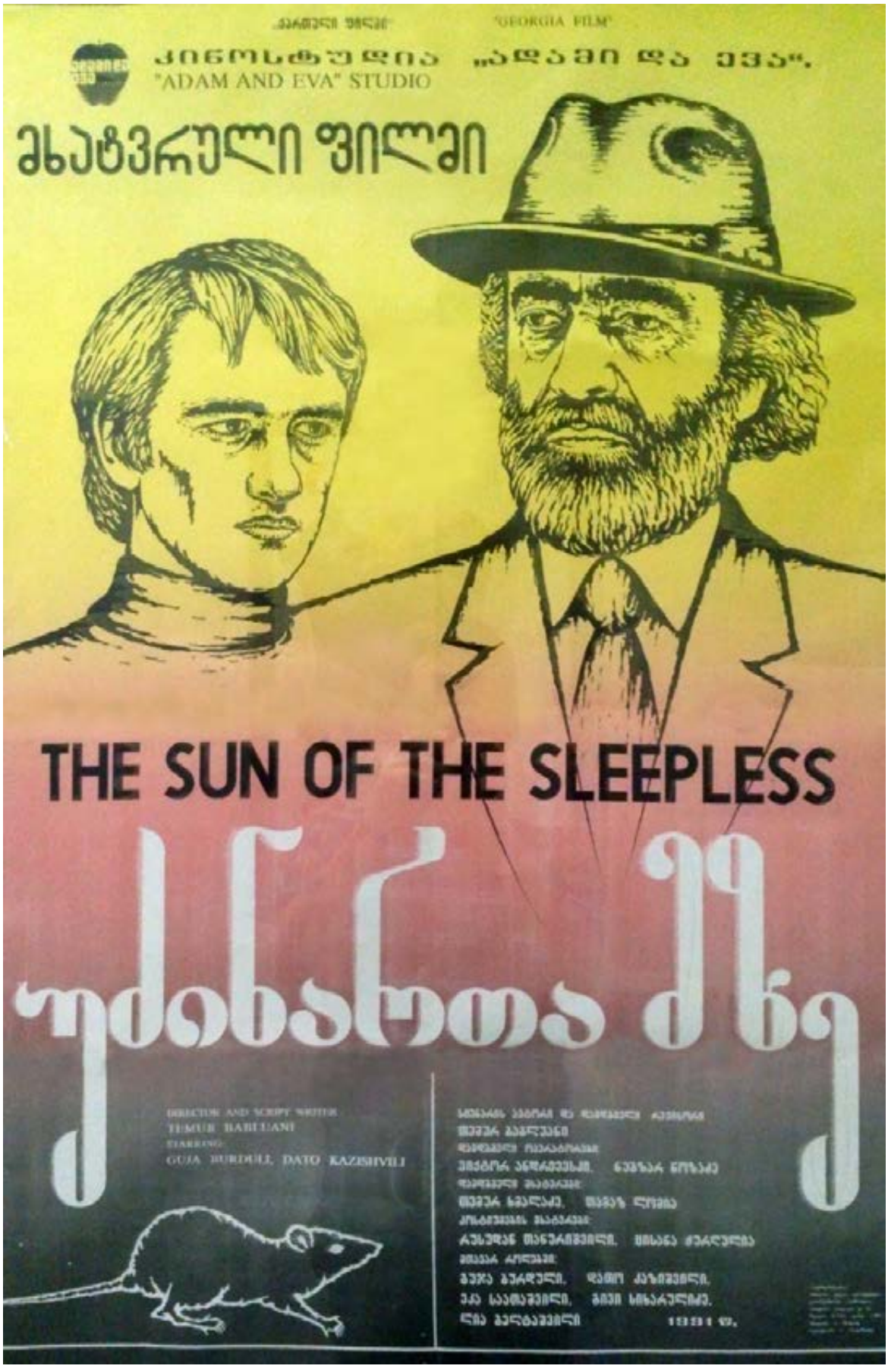




Brother

Awards, Prizes and Honors

- 1980: 11th All-Union Film Festival of Young Filmmakers, Kyiv – Special Prize for *Flight of the Sparrows*
- 1982: 15th All-Union Film Festival, Tallinn – Prize and Diploma for *Brother*
- 1992: Moscow Festival *Interfest-92* – Grand Prix for *Sun of the Sleepless*
- 1992: Tbilisi – 1st Republican Festival of Georgian Films *Golden Eagle* – Main Prize and Diploma for *Sun of the Sleepless*
- 1992: Sochi Film Festival *Kinotavr-92* – Main Prize for *Sun of the Sleepless*
- 1993: 43rd Berlin International Film Festival – Silver Bear
- 1995: Shota Rustaveli State Prize


"GEORGIA FILM"
"ADAM AND EVA" STUDIO
THE SUN OF THE SLEEPLESS
DIRECTOR AND SCRIPT WRITER
TEMUR BABLUANI
STARRING
GUJA BURDULI, DATO KAZISHVILI
1991 წ.

GODERDZI CHOKHELI



1954-2007

Ketevan Trapaidze
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The traditions of Georgian poetic cinema in the 1980s appeared to change direction and began to express themselves through the language of realism. This transformation was natural: a generational shift had taken place. At the same time, it became even more evident that national cinema was driven by artistic searching and the desire for expressive form. Cinematic spaces previously unfamiliar to Georgian film began to emerge—at times the heavy imagery of train stations and railway cars, at times the outskirts and suburban environments.

The arrival of Goderzi Chokheli, a young filmmaker with a distinctive vision, reaffirmed that a poetic approach to themes— even within a painfully realist context—remains one of the defining characteristics of Georgian cinema.

Goderzi Chokheli (October 2, 1954 – November 16, 2007), writer, playwright, and film director, was born in the village of Chokhi in the Dusheti region. He completed the eight-year school in his village and continued his studies at Fasanauri secondary school. In 1972, he entered the Shota

Rustaveli State Theatrical Institute, first in the film studies department, and from 1974 in the film directing program, graduating in 1979. In the same year, Chokheli joined the film studio "Georgian Film" as an assistant director. From 1977 onward, his short stories began to be actively published in newspapers and literary journals.

Mother of the Place (1976) marks Chokheli's debut film. In this short fiction work, employing a narrative style akin to documentary cinema, he depicts one of the most difficult and tragic realities in Georgia: the lives of the few remaining inhabitants of an abandoned village. One of them, a blind elderly man, passes away, and the audience realizes his death only when, one fine morning, he is no longer sitting in his familiar bent posture on the bench outside.

The old woman who lived next door—frail, yet constantly occupied—cannot endure her isolation. She contemplates suicide, but the presence of livestock reminds her that she is still needed, that there are living beings dependent solely on her care. The tragic development of this narrative, and the sight beyond the noose of another similar, half-deserted village rising behind the ridge, embodies a new truth conveyed in silence. *Mother of the Place* is merely the opening chapter of Chokheli's recurring theme: the solitude of loneliness. The next in line was a parable imbued with fatalistic humor and the harshness of mountain life—about a skinny, carefree, lazy Khevsur whose toy gun, once found, will inevitably fire. This is the story of the film *The Lazy Khevsur* (1980).

The narrative rhythm and uncanny authenticity of both films are elements of Chokheli's poetic realism. His characters—whether real mountain dwellers or professional actors—are inseparable from the closed, miniature world of the highlands. In these works, contradictory emo-

The Gospel of Luke



tions and the relentless intertwining of life and death are expressed so naturally that even the most tragic ending is accepted with intuitive inevitability.

The Lazy Khevsur crystallized the essence of Chokheli's central artistic theme: the transience of human existence. After this student film, he went on to direct *People's Sorrow* (1984), *Letter to the Firs* (1986), and *Resurrection Bell* (1988). His worldview, shaped by the mountains—with their symbols, mythological motifs, and the laws of a merciless environment—regards the end of earthly life as though it were a living character. Death, in his films, is symbolically present: at times embodied as a person, at times as a dream, at times as sin itself.

In 1980, his first book *Letter to the Firs* was published and received the award for the year's best debut. Beginning in 1981, it was translated into Russian. Chokheli went on to publish numerous collections of prose and poetry: *Twilight Valley*, *Fish Letters*, *Preserve Me, Mother Earth!*, *Soul's Edges*, *Elections at the Cemetery*. His poetry collection *Pursuing Fate*, and the Italian edition of his stories *Black Aragvi*—later translated into other languages—were also widely read. His novels include *The Wolf*, *The Priest's Sin*, *People's Sorrow*, and *Soul's Edges*.



In total, Goderzi Chokheli created sixteen short and feature films. In addition to those already men-



Children of Sin

tioned, he wrote and directed *Stranger* (1988), *White Flag* (1989), *Children of Sin* (1989), *Doves of Paradise* (1997), *The Gospel of Luke* (1998), *Chained Knights* (1999), and *Fire of Love* (2003).

His books, whose narratives often preserve the structure and spirit of a screenplay, were especially beloved: *Letter to the Firs* (1980), *Twilight Valley* (1981), *People's Sorrow* (1984), *The Wolf* (1988), *Fish Letters* (1989), *The Priest's Sin* (1990), *Preserve Me, Mother Earth* (1991), *Life of the Grass* (1997).

After Chokheli's death, the sad—at times tragic—motifs of his films have become even more universal, speaking more directly to the human condition. As time passes, this defining quality grows ever clearer: the sorrow of a person standing face to face with eternity.

Filmography

- Mother of the Place (1976)
- The Lazy Khevsur (1980)
- People's Sorrow (1984)
- Letter to the Firs (1986)
- Resurrection Bell (1988)
- Stranger (1988)
- White Flag (1989)
- Children of Sin (1989)
- Doves of Paradise (1997)
- The Gospel of Luke (1998)
- Chained Knights (1999)
- Fire of Love (2003)

Prizes

- Grand Prix for *Mother of the Place*, Oberhausen International Film Festival – 1982
- "Silver Nymph" and the International Catholic Church Prize for *Children of Sin*, Monte Carlo Film Festival – 1991
- Special Jury Prize, Japan Film Festival – 1991
- Awards for Best Screenplay and Best Direction at the "Golden Eagle" Festival in Tbilisi – 1992
- Grand Prix for *Doves of Paradise*, "Kinoshock" Festival (Anapa) – 1997
- Prize for Best Screenplay for *The Gospel of Luke*, "Kinoshock" Festival (Anapa) – 1998

ALEKO (ALEXANDRE) TSABADZE



1956

Lela Ochiauri
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Theatre and Film Georgia State University

When the 20th Century Was Ending

Aleko Tsabadze. November 10, 1956. Tbilisi. Film director and screenwriter. In 1982, he graduated from the directing faculty of the Shota Rustaveli State Theatre Institute of Georgia. From 1986, he was a director at the Georgian Film studio, artistic director of the educational studio affiliated with the film studio. In 1995, he took screenwriting courses in New York. From 1992-1997, he lived and worked in Germany and

In Georgian cinema of the 1980s-90s, with the arrival of a new generation of directors, new tendencies emerged, new themes appeared, and new stylistic searches began. The interests of the "80s generation" moved toward discussing a new type of young heroes, their lives, their problems. During this period, poetic-metaphorical cinema "yields" its place to more prosaic cinema. The follow-

ing years represent a continuation of this tendency and a period of thematic-stylistic variations, which continued and culminated with the gaining of independence in 1991, liberation from the "captivity" of the Soviet Union, and the advent of a new epoch in life and art.

However, before that, one of the 80s generation who touched upon these issues very sharply, severely, and relentlessly was Aleko Tsabadze, who showed what indifference, confusion, and faithlessness can lead to, who showed why society is so gravely ill and what its disease is, and who also looked ahead to the future, and whose first feature film met with resistance and condemnation from censors and society. Several years later, Aleko Tsabadze again stirred society with another film, whose life was radically changing according to new political and economic transformations.

Aleko Tsabadze's films *Blot* (black and white) *and Night Dance* (monochrome) resemble each other in their problematics and form, in their visual-plastic expressiveness; what began in *Blot*, what happened then, continued in *Night Dance.* The six-year interval, time itself, intensified the tragic sound; a sharper picture of people's disoriented lives, loneliness, and hopelessness emerged.

In *Blot* and *Night Dance*, everyone lives their own life, and the meaninglessness, heaviness, and hardship of their existence have their own reasons. Connections are broken between parents and children, friends and relatives, neighbors and fellow citizens. This rupture of connections causes the first painful collision with reality, the first cracks in young people's souls, because indifference, loss of interest in one another, and lovelessness can have no other consequence.

The city lives by night life. Night becomes main and essential. The story begins at night and ends at night. Night is a metaphorical bearer of mysteries, passions, anxiety, evil, protection, dispeller of sorrows, time and instigator of crime commission, and many other meanings and circumstances. Here night is everything. It is in souls and in relationships—in streets and houses; night is both irony and the tragedy of human destruction. It is everywhere and nowhere. It controls everything. Night is the film's realm of action. Night is life.

In *Blot*, there are two realms of action—Kisho's room, his world—different from others—a closed but unprotected island, and everything else—the unifying city of the hotel, school, drug addicts' den, and unknown streets.

In *Night Dance* there are also two zones—two basic worlds: the city and the factory. Mose is separated from the rest by his own piece—a mask. Separated from darkened narrow streets, barracks-type houses, unorganized—uncomfortable apartments, abandoned parks, empty corridors, neon-lit shop windows, dusty workshops of the cement factory. In both cases, the city is completely unknown, but each house, each street amazingly resembles familiar cities, houses and yards; many other neighborhoods and their inhabitants. Everything is alienated—the near and the far—resembles a dream.

Blot is resolved through documentary methods of representation; the filming manner, alternation of views, tempo-rhythmic structure, characters' identity, appearance reveal a tendency to strive toward reality. *Night Dance* is built on elements of absurdity and the principle of alienation, each detail of which, expressing harsh reality, serves to solve this task.

In *Night Dance,* time almost doesn't exist—hour, year, everything is conditional; the main thing is night, and night is conditional. It is darkness. "Blot" also doesn't submit to time or place. Here too the clock is stopped, though night has not yet fallen. It is still dusk. A murder occurs at twilight, and the film ends there against the background of unclear noise and curses.

Aleko Tsabadze's 1999 film *Knight of the Order of Loneliness* sharply differs from its predecessors and occupies a distinctive niche in the director's biography. The cinematic picture is about poet Galaktion Tabidze and is built on the "visualization" of his poetry, mixing fragments of his biography.

It is resolved in a unified, clear, settled tonality. The meticulously pure image is refined to the smallest details. This is a world that still preserves its beginning, face, character. Time here is also perceived as if it has not stopped but rather doesn't exist at all and has lost its properties. It took the same form as space, merging with it. Despite the fact that day and night exist here, dusk and bright sun exist, the concept of time is conditional.

Several more years passed, and Aleko Tsabadze again turned to the process of searching for means to repair lost time and broken connections between times, with the film *Renée Goes to Hollywood,* in that time when the film was shot and in the one in which the main character—René Dadiani—attempts to travel.

Through the unity of metaphors and symbols, the director creates a world in which imagination replaces reality; the past comes so close to the present that distinguishing which time it is, which is "real" reality and which is "invented"—is difficult, and crossing the border between these dimensions is impossible. The surrealistic intersection of events and "objects" arranges and articulates new givens and volumes of judgment. René observes everything and shoots with a camera. These frames and strange visions pass into new dimensions independently of him and create a new time-space layer—in the invented or in reality.

What is René searching for—himself, does he want to meet ancestors and solve their mystery, to understand the past, or to study-evaluate the present? His mind, fantasy, universal memory "feeds" from the past—through the materialization of once-occurred historical facts or the animation of old photographs; from what happens and from what might happen. Or perhaps he's looking for a way to where he is not and searching for an exit from the impasse whose end is not visible?! He tries to break through the solid wall of time and space, beyond which (as in the present) many dangers await, where many constantly active mines are laid, which explode one after another with each opening of the next door.

The world is "inhabited by monsters," whom René calls "Yahoos" (citation of Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels") and who physically represent the dregs of society, while in artistic terms metaphorically express spiritual fall and degradation.

What in reality is this strange "game"—between imagination, reality, past, document (the film contains peculiar interpretations of more than one real story or historical figure), invention and mystical (incomprehensible) givens—René's adventure, or the fruit

of his confused (agitated!) mind, phantasmagoric visions? The choice—to break through the wall of time by intensifying imagination, to find what once was and discover the reasons for what happened in society, why spirituality was lost, or what is happening to him himself? The boundary—the edge of madness, or the dividing zone between present and past, reality, conditionality and actuality—in the contradictory journey of knowing the essence of oneself and society, the world? This is precisely the main thing in Aleko Tsabadze's film—an invitation to travel to a foreign land and the right of choice left to us.



Ren e Goes to Hollywood

Again after a long pause, in 2025, Aleko Tsabadze shot the film *Chiaroscuro: Following the Shadow*, in which he again returns, observes and analyzes the problems of society, its various types and fates, parents and children, social circumstances and individual choice, conflicts arising for various reasons and without reason, confrontation, unacceptability and mistakes caused by suspicion and mistrust, issues of crime, in 21st-century Georgia, within existing realities and microcosms. And as always, according to personal experience, personal sensations, and personal attitude toward events.

P.S.

In the cinema of the late 1980s-90s and the last 20 years of the century, after the country's gaining of independence, at the stage of establishing new order (as in the state) and transitioning to a new political formation, the films of the 80s generation shot in Georgia are, on one hand, a farewell to the old epoch and its final chapter, and on the other hand, examples of new possibilities, new views, and new thematics, which later, after overcoming the crisis, were followed by the birth of new cinema.

Dato Janelidze, in the film "The Fortress" (1993, based on Franz Kafka's novel, which relies on biblical plots and themes) continues, complicates, and unifies two main direc-

Blot





tions of Georgian cinema—the metaphorical, mythological stream based on legends and tales, and on the other hand—the connection with contemporaneity, with reality, which in the film is precisely brought to the forefront and transforms into a new artistic reality. The film is a contemporary response to the political events taking place in 1990s Georgia (with an echo to the epoch of repressions of the 1930s) and the resulting internal and external conflicts existing in society. Society's enclosure, the hopelessness of the situation, and the operation of a violent system—are the film's main message and the author's assessment of surrounding reality.

Created on the motifs of Prosper Mérimée's "Mateo Falcone," Mikheil Kalatozishvili's *The Chosen One* (1991) continues this line and, on one hand, depicts the Red Army's

invasion of Georgia in 1921 and the moral-ethical problems of a society split in two, and on the other hand, echoes that civil war, unfolds as its panorama, which was taking place in Georgia precisely in 1991, when the film was created.

Zaza Urushadze's film *Time* (1990) seemingly anticipated time and depicted the situation that developed in Georgia in the subsequent period. The relationship between the crowd and the leader carries much familiar information, evokes various associations, and is not read unambiguously. This is a film about how when people are seized by the desire for plunder and profit, they are ready to sacrifice personal freedom and live submissively to another's will. Such people can be governed however one wishes. When society becomes a faceless mass, any ruler can lead it wherever desired.

What is important and primary for the director is what choices people make and how they behave in extreme situations, when the usual, peaceful or undisturbed flow of life is disrupted and every citizen finds themselves at that boundary where executioners/oppressors stand on one side and their victims on the other.

Temur Babluani's "The Sun of the Sleepless" (1992) is one of the successful and one of the last distinguished works of "new epoch" Georgian cinema, which shows, through harsh, accusatory and "rough" methods, the story of alienation established between people, family members, vanished empathy and indifference in society, which expands from the personal to the social dimension.

Filmography:

- *Georgian Chokha* (1979. Short).
- *Blot* (1985. Tbilisi Student Film Festival, 1st Prize, 1987; Locarno International Festival, 2nd Prize for Best Direction, 1987).
- *Night Dance* (1991. Thessaloniki International Festival, 1st Prize, three main prizes from the Georgian Film Academy, 1997).
- *Knight of the Order of Loneliness* (1999)
- *Russian Triangle* (2007)
- *Renée Goes to Hollywood* (2010)
- *Chiaroscuro: Following the Shadow* (2025)





ზურა
მეგვალიშვილი

ლაქა

ალეკო
ცაბაძის
ფილმი



ქიმო
გლუსიძაძე





GIORGI OVASHVILI



1963

Lela Ochiauri
Doctor of Art Studies, Professor at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

Return to the Parable

Giorgi Ovashvili — screenwriter, producer, film director. Born November 14, 1963, in Mtskheta. He graduated from the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at the Georgian Polytechnic Institute in 1986; from the Faculty of Film and Television at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University with a specialization in film directing in 1996; and completed the directing program at the New York Film Academy in 2006. He currently leads the narrative film directing program at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University.

Ovashvili's debut feature film, *The Other Bank*, tells the story of Tedo, an 11–12-year-old boy displaced from Abkhazia by war. He lives with his mother, while his father remains on the "other bank", in Abkhazia. Driven by childish hope and existential loneliness, he sets off toward



The Other Bank



Abkhazia — toward his father — to find a home of his own, though no one there is looking for him, and no one awaits him. Tedo's fate embodies the trauma, violence, and nightmares that Georgia — and any country torn by war — has endured.

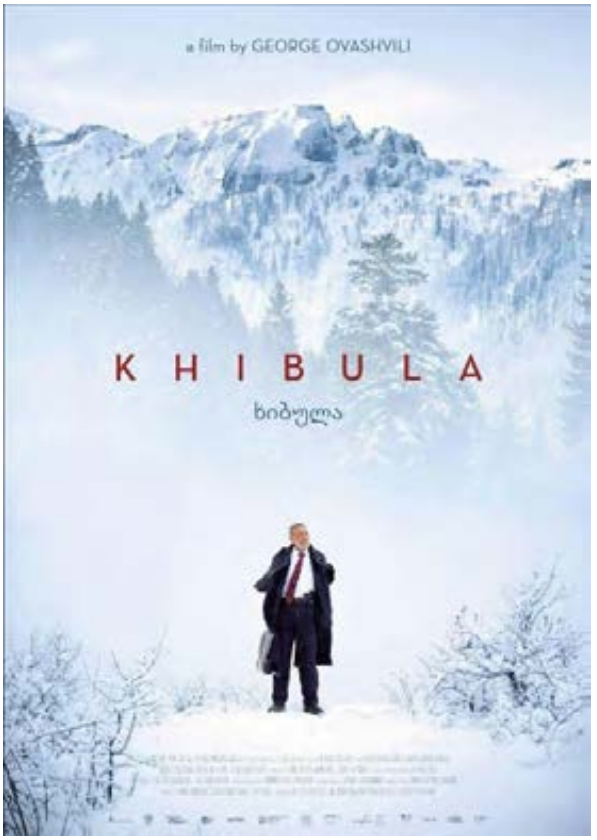
Life in the film unfolds quietly and monotonously, society appears dull and unremarkable — until this seemingly solid chain begins to crack. Tedo attempts to break through the invisible wall of space and time, behind which further dangers lie buried, like landmines that detonate with every new door he opens.

A deserted island, surrounded by river water, bathed in sunlight, cloaked in fog, embraced by dusk and night. Close to the shore — yet reachable only by boat. One morning, an elderly farmer with a weather-beaten face and his freckled granddaughter arrive on this uninhabited piece of land to bring it to life. The first human gesture is instinctive: he tastes the soil, squeezes it into a fist, feeling its strength — a primal act of uniting with the earth. From a furrow emerges a cigarette holder — evidence that someone has been here before.

Thus begins *Corn Island*. The story takes place—figuratively—during the Abkhazian war, on a tiny island in the Enguri River. This speck of land becomes a microcosm of the world. Water — a force that creates and sustains life, nourishes, purifies, and destroys.

The old man and the girl build a reed hut, plant corn, tend it, work tirelessly. Their silent ritual affirms the timeless harmony between humans and nature. Time seems suspended. The cornfield slowly rises, a metaphor for renewal — fragile yet ever-changing life.

As the seasons turn — as spring inevitably follows winter — islands of hope emerge and vanish, only to return again. It is an eternal, continuous cycle that nature and humanity pass through from birth to death. And they leave their trace. The trace of their existence. The island's existence is



both literal and symbolic, as real as the Abkhazian war and as enduring as life that persists after devastation.

Despite the historical context, *Corn Island* transcends its specifics. The narrative becomes universal — a human story of war and peace, violence and coexistence. Like every parable, it has no fixed time or geography. Everywhere on earth (which people cannot divide and which, in reality, belongs to everyone!). We do not know where the boat goes when the grandfather sends his granddaughter away as the floodwaters rise — whether she reaches land or perishes. Yet one truth remains: someone will someday return, plant corn again, work the earth again. The eternal cycle of life endures — nature is indifferent to war, death, and separation. Everything passes. Everything returns. Life alone persists — even if it belongs to others afterward.

Nature, as always, has its own laws. Humans also have their own laws - moral and ethical - which they do not break even in the most extreme conditions, despite the danger of violating personal safety or contradicting attitudes toward events.

Long pauses and extended shots (cinematography by Elemér Ragály) — seemingly minimal yet deeply expressive — reveal a vast, quiet world illuminated by sunlight, moonlight, and lamplight.

Corn Island is not the promised land. Nor paradise. Nor a safe haven. But it is a little of everything and an image of someone settling there with hope and faith. Feeling peaceful and protected, until war disrupts its tranquility. As long as war remains part of life.

When the waters rise, washing away the flourishing soil, when nothing can withstand the surge, a new metaphor enters the film — a peculiar allegory of the flood, a myth with no ending, a myth of a paradise from which humanity has been exiled, yet to which a return always re-



Corn Island



mains possible. Someone will once again find the old man's cigarette holder, the girl's rag doll…

Corn Island breaks through the boundaries of time, transforming a psychological drama with political resonance into a timeless parable.

Ovashvili's subsequent works continue in parabolic form: ***Khibula*** (2017) — an allegorical portrayal of the final days of Georgia's first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, set in a mysterious, symbolic landscape; ***Hostages*** (2023, short) — a reflection on vulnerable childhood lost in the vastness of a hostile universe; ***Beautiful Helen*** (2022) — a portrait of a middle-aged individual's inner crisis followed by the breakdown of their personality and the routine of seemingly peaceful and measured life around them; ***This Is Your Home*** (2025, short) — a meditation on ecological catastrophe, the annihilation of life, and attempts at salvation in a world full of alienated beings.

With the mystical and enigmatic parable-film *My Moon Father* (2025), Ovashvili returns once more to the turbulent 1990s — to the story of a boy, his fractured relationship with society and his father, and tragic events endured, contradictions and overcoming contradictions, the



power of making choices and the struggle to overcome inner demons.

P.S.

A "revived" cinematic direction has emerged in Georgia — the parable. Alongside Ovashvili's œuvre, this renewed form includes Tinatin Kajrishvili's social-mystical *Citizen Saint*; Levan Tutberidze's *Beyond Nine Mountains* and *Moira*; Dea Kulumbegashvili's *Beginning* and *April*; Levan Koguashvili's *Blind Dates*; Sandro Koberidze's *What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?* and *A Withered Leaf*; Kote Kalandadze's *The Drummers*; Soso Bliadze's *Otari's Death*; Zaza Khalvashi's *Name*; and others.

These films abandon didacticism, turning instead to philosophical reflection on contemporary society — its inner world, its values (preserved or lost), and the essence of life itself. The boundary between reality, imagination, invention, and what is "seen" through the director's "inner" gaze

blurs and dissolves. What distinguishes them is – a different vision, attitude toward the world, life, cinematic forms, cinematic language, and expressive means, and freedom from stamps, themes, attachments. These are visual, plastic, physical expressions of the stream of consciousness. The face of life as the connection and reflections of earth, air, and water elements - on earth, in the sky, and in water.

Here, nature confronts its "disobedient children" with rain, cold, wind, and turbulent waters instead of flowers and sunlight. Here, unseen deities communicate through the elements — earth, air, water, and fire — not through comfort and warmth. This is a time of myth transformed — metamorphosis — and of waiting for the world to enter yet another cycle of eternal return.

Filmography:

- ***A Very Small Story*** (1993, short)
- ***The Cart*** (1996, short) — Special Jury Prize, Molodist Film Festival
- ***The River*** (2003, short)
- ***From Sea Level…*** (2004) — New York Film Academy Prize; Special Jury Prize, Odense IFF (Denmark)
- ***At Eye Level*** (2004, short)
- ***Connection*** (2005, short)
- ***The Other Bank*** (2009) — screenplay by Nugzar Shataidze. European Film Academy nominee (European Film Discovery); "Paris Cinema" (France) - main METROBUS prize; Cines del Sur, Granada - main prize "Golden Alhambra"; Seattle (USA) Festival - "Grand Jury Prize" - 2009; Mediawave Film and Music Festival (Hungary) - best film; Mosaico d'Europa (Ravenna) - best film; Cine Pobre (Gibara, Cuba) - Grand Prix; Fribourg Festival - Grand Prix Le Regard D'or ("Golden Gaze"), Audience Prize; DU FILM D'AMOUR (Belgium) - Grand Prix; Tromsø Festival - Norwegian Peace Prize - 2010; and many others)
- ***Corn Island*** (2014) — screenplay by Nugzar Shataidze. Karlovy Vary 49th Festival "Crystal Globe," San Marino Festival prize for best directing, best actress; Montpellier Festival main prize "Golden Antigone," Critics' Prize; prize for best music; Audience Prize and dozens of other prizes at various film festivals - 2014)
- ***Khibula*** (2017)
- ***Beautiful Helen*** (2022)
- ***Hostages*** (2023, short)
- ***This Is Your Home*** (2025, short)
- ***My Moon Father*** (2025, Georgia–Turkey)

სცენარის ავტორები
ნუგზარ შატაიძე
გიორგი ოვაშვილი

სიმინდის კუნძული

გიორგი ოვაშვილის
ფილმი



ალამდარი

ZAZA KHALVASHI



1957-2020

Ketevan Trapaidze
Doctor of Art Studies, Associate Professor, Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

Metaphor and the philosophical dimensions of contemporary cinema often emerge at new turning points in the historical development of national film. Although such discoveries do not necessarily carry equal weight, each one nonetheless transforms artistic thinking for a long time. One such creator of metaphorical, poetic, and deeply sensitive cinema was Zaza Khalvashi—a director marked by a sharp and refined sensibility.

Zaza Khalvashi was born on May 17, 1957, in Batumi, into the family of the Georgian poet Pridon Khalvashi. He graduated from the Faculty of Philology at Tbilisi State University, specializing in Georgian language and literature. He continued his studies in postgraduate literary research, and later enrolled in the film directing program at the State Institute of Theatre and Film of Georgia, graduating in 1983. He worked at "Georgian Film" as a director, at the Batumi State Institute of Arts as head of department, and served as chairman of the Ajara Television and

Radio Department. From 2007, he was the manager of the Ilia Chavchavadze State Drama Theatre of Batumi.

In 1985, at the Georgian Telefilm Studio, he made the film *Time*. In 1990, during the early stages of the crisis period, he created the feature film *Here, With Us*, followed by *Miserere* in 1996. In addition, Zaza Khalvashi worked actively in television cinema: in 2000, he directed three episodes of *Again in the USSR* for Ajara Television, and in 2003, 12 episodes of *The Wolves' Khorum*.

His 2015 film *Solomon* presents the melancholy, metaphorical underside of reality, where the inner world, daily struggles, and emotional depth of its unusually expressive characters become difficult to grasp in their entirety.

After this, in 2017, Zaza Khalvashi created *Namme*—a symbiosis of myth and parable constructed from some of his sharpest and most luminous metaphors. The film was screened in many countries even after the director's passing, and interest in it continues to grow.

The film's plot and its symbolic associations reinforce the universality of the story. In mountainous Ajara, in a remote region, the family of the elderly Ali has for generations protected a mythical fish that heals people. His three sons each seek truth in their own way: one is a Christian priest, the second a mullah, and the third a teacher. Only Ali's youngest daughter, Tsisname—Namme—remains with her father, and she is now obliged to continue the sacred mission.

Namme (Mariska Diasamidze) faces a choice—just as the world does today: either she feels, sees, and keeps this immutable world of refined beauty and peace (the metaphor of truth and faith), or she herself leaves this last untouched island, where the dust, noise, and misfortune of construction—with its felled trees, ruined land, and growing aggression—have not yet arrived.

Motifs of Noah, Moses, the prodigal sons, and many others come together in this small world, where, during a difficult turning point in humanity's recent history in 2017, Zaza Khalvashi depicted the eternal struggle of mind, soul, and body through the sharp poetic metaphors characteristic of him.

The awards and festival screenings of *Namme* speak both to the richness of its themes and the originality of its form, as well as to its rare artistic framework and its ability to present a creative style unlike that of any other filmmaker.

"...According to Dimitri Uznadze, disposition is a person's psycho-physical given that defines the unconscious and constitutes the state preceding the unconscious and the conscious. For Uznadze, disposition is the primary element of the psyche. A film director can turn disposition itself into a film by presenting it through visual forms. The creation, imprinting, and transmission of dispositions in a technological-conceptual form may be said to be the nature of cinema. Cinema, in a way, studies the nature of disposition through observing being. *Namme* is precisely concerned with such dispositions. Its disposition material is both mythological and real. As Zaza Khalvashi explained, he once stepped onto his balcony at dawn in his native village in mountainous Ajara: it had just snowed; at sunrise, a snowflake fell from a branch onto the snow below with a very soft, gentle sound. He realized that the cinematic language could depict such silence. Then, from far away,





Lotto

the mullah's prayer was heard, replaced by the sound of church bells—an ordinary occurrence in mountainous Ajara. Suddenly, two different yet closely connected worlds merged. It was precisely these everyday details and the environment surrounding the director that became the disposition material for this quiet 'technical simulation.' These dispositions inspired the director to revive motifs of Ajarian folklore, within which this self-experienced environment could exist. Art—and particularly cinema—is full of plots arising from tradition, folklore, or religious motifs. But it is rare to encounter a film that presents these motifs purified of exoticization and depicts them with authentic aesthetics and the rhythm of everyday life."

Such reflections once again demonstrate how unified and inseparable the continuity of tradition, folklore, and origins remains in cinema from past to future.

Namme is a transformed form of transitional poetic cinema within the newest period of twentieth-century Georgian directing, bringing together several decades of tendencies: prosaic and poetic cinema in a single visual framework; collective characters marked by silence and reserve; eloquent external details.

Before his death (the director passed away on February 4, 2020), he once again turned to a conditional artistic space and created the film *Lotto*.

The relationship between past and present is one of Georgian cinema's important themes, and Zaza Khalvashi, as an artist with a multifaceted way of thinking, sought the appropriate aesthetic form for exploring it.



Namme



Feature Films:
Time (Georgian Telefilm Studio, 1985),
Here, With Us (Georgian Film, 1990),
Miserere (Georgian Film and Company "Verdzi," 1996),
Again in the USSR (three episodes, Ajara Television, 2000),
The Wolves' Khorum (TV Company "Imedi," 12 episodes, 2003),
Solomon (2015).

Awards:
1. Montpellier Mediterranean Countries International Film Festival, XIV edition — Silver Prize (1992)
2. Munich International Film Festival, Germany — "Arsenal," Best Director (1993)
3. Munich International Film Festival, Germany — "Arre," Special Jury Prize (1994)
4. Babelsberg Youth International Film Festival, Germany — Best Foreign Film (1992)
5. *Miserere* — Riga International Film Festival, Latvia, Special Prize (1977)
6. Batumi International Film Festival — "Golden Eagle," Best Director and Best Screenplay (1997)
7. *Time* — Kyiv International Student Film Festival, Best Documentary Film (1982)

Nominations:
Namme — Palm Springs International Film Festival (FIPRESCI Prize),
Tokyo International Film Festival (Main Prize),
Las Palmas Film Festival (Arimagua Gold Prize),
Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival (Main Prize).
Khalvashi's films have also been screened at the Amsterdam, Locarno, Cottbus, and Annecy International Film Festivals.

Namme


20TH TOKYO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
18TH TBILISI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
23RD VILNIUS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
ნაძე
ზაზა ხალვაშის ფილმი
19 აპრილი

ZAZA URUSHADZE



1966-2019

Ketevan Trapaidze
Doctor of Art Studies, Associate Professor, Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University

Zaza Urushadze (b. October 30, 1966, Tbilisi – d. December 7, 2019) belonged to the generation of Georgian filmmakers emerging in the 1990s and was among the directors who introduced intensely dramatic motifs into Georgian cinema.

Alongside his active creative work, he also played a significant role in the institutional development of national cinema. From 2002 to 2004, he served as Director of the Georgian National Film Center. From 2013 until September 2019, he was President of the Georgian Film Academy.

In 1987, he graduated from the Shota Rustaveli Theatre Institute in Tbilisi. Following his student films *Cataplexy* and *Two Rainy Days*, he made his debut

with *For Those Whose Father Has Left* (1989), based on Jemal Topuridze's story of the same name. Already at this early stage, in his search for sharp character transformations, Urushadze demonstrated an ability to unexpectedly shift and intensify dramatic accents. He wrote the screenplays for all his films. The themes of morality and the difficulty of making choices appear either directly or as subtextual motifs throughout his work.

In 1998, Urushadze made the feature film *Here Comes the Dawn*, where the main character (Zurab Begalishvili), amidst various difficulties, is forced to make double and multiple decisions to save his sick child. The sacrifice of personal interests, emerging from extraordinarily tense and dramatically heavy situations, transitions into a primordial tranquility.

In 2003, Urushadze directed the television series *Hot Dog*, a dynamic detective genre blending sensational crime plots with expressive acting. This detective-crime series (a joint production of Studio Audience and Imedi TV) followed sensational murder cases investigated by police detectives Lekso (Giorgi Kipshidze) and Bidzina (Zhanri Lolashvili).

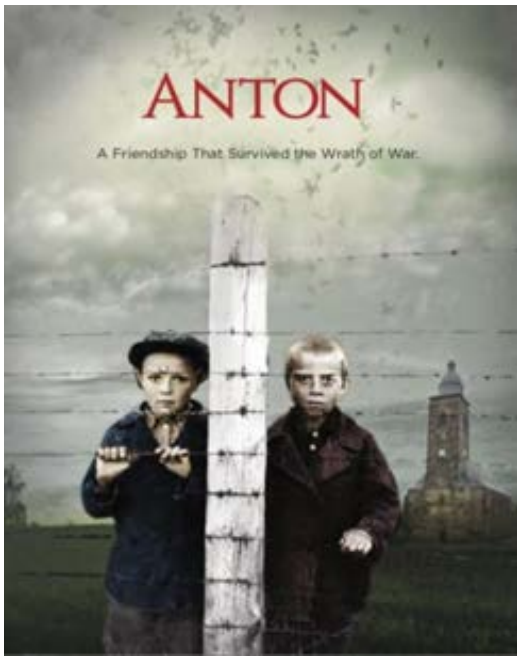
In 2008, as Georgian cinema entered a renewed phase in the 2000s, Urushadze created the feature film *Three Houses* (2008 — director, screenwriter, producer). This film consists of three novellas bound by one metaphor—the journey of a painting through three different time periods—and explores betrayal, loyalty, and the perception of an altered reality.

Three Houses



Tangerines





Antoni

The drama of the first story unfolds within a traditional Georgian aristocratic family of the late nineteenth century (actors Zurab Kipshidze, Zhanri Lolashvili). The intentionally mannered behavior, speech patterns of the era, and specific color mood draw the viewer into a tragic story woven between the imagined and the real. The second novella is set in wartime Tbilisi during World War II: a general dies during a secret rendezvous at a woman friend's home, and now his family—his wife (actors Eka Andronikashvili, Nata Murvanidze)—must confront this truth, acknowledge it, resolve it. The third novella depicts an unexpected drama unfolding in contemporary Tbilisi. All three stories are constructed through color, musical, and metaphorical dramaturgy. For Georgian cinema of this period, *Three Houses* represents a distinctly new form.

Stay with Me



In 2011, Urushadze's melodrama *Stay with Me* premiered in cinemas, followed in 2012 by *The Last Walk*.

In 2013, he directed the Estonian-Georgian feature film *Tangerines*, which was nominated for a Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film and for the Academy Award in the same category. The plot, set during the war for Georgia's territorial integrity, portrays the dramatic relationship—and even more dramatic conclusion—between two wounded fighters: the Chechen mercenary Ahmed (Giorgi Nakashidze) and the Georgian Nika, who find themselves under the same roof in the home of Ivo (Lembit Ulfsak), an Estonian resident of an Abkhazian village.

"This was a place where Estonians had lived for more than 150 years, it was their homeland. Generations were born, fell in love, built lives—and then, in a single moment, all of this came to a halt. At the outset of the Abkhazian war, they had to leave and return to Estonia. The men who remained behind, despite this immensely harsh reality, still try to preserve their human dignity," said Zaza Urushadze about the film.

The story of Estonians living in a peaceful and orderly corner of the world creates a sharp contrast with the violent developments of history. The director's artistic choice allows for a complete revelation of the protagonists' radically distinct personalities. The tragedy of two men of the Caucasus touches upon the most essential human values—compassion and the need to preserve humanity. As in all of Urushadze's films, there is no place for pathos or artificial sentiment. This quality is especially evident in *Tangerines* and in his final film, *Anton* (2019 — director, screenwriter, producer).

The narrative of *Anton* is set in 1919 in a small German settlement in Ukraine and tells of the friendship between two boys, a German and a Jew, whose bond endures over many years in a brutal world. The revolution that shattered the peaceful lives of millions is sharply questioned in this story full of unexpected turns.

Zaza Urushadze's films embody the stage of new Georgian cinema during which genre diversity and artistic experimentation become increasingly prominent.

He passed away on December 7, 2019, and is buried in the Saburtalo Pantheon. A street in Tbilisi bears his name.

Awards
Tangerines

- Winner in two categories at the Warsaw International Film Festival — *Best Director* and *Audience Award*
- Estonian Film Journalists' Award
- Audience Award at the Mannheim-Heidelberg International Film Festival
- Audience Award in Egypt
- Nomination for the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film
- Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Language Film
-

Filmography:

- *I Came* (1981) — actor
- *For Those Whose Father Has Left* (1989) — co-screenwriter, director
- *Here Comes the Dawn* (1998) — co-screenwriter, director
- *Hot Dog* (TV series, 2003–2009) — director
- *Three Houses* (2008) — screenwriter, director
- *Stay with Me* (2011) — director
- *The Last Walk* (2012) — co-screenwriter, director
- *Tangerines* (2013) — screenwriter, director
- *Confession* (2017) — screenwriter, director
- *Anton* (2019) — screenwriter, director


ავტორები
ირმა გელოვანი
ლევან კოპალეიშვილი
ზაზა ურუშაძე
სცენარის ავტორი და
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