

**NAVIGATING ‘NATIONAL FORM’ AND ‘SOCIALIST CONTENT’ IN
THE GREAT LEADER’S HOMELAND:
GEORGIAN PAINTING AND NATIONAL POLITICS
UNDER STALIN, 1921-39**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the interaction of Georgian painting and national politics in the first two decades of Soviet power in Georgia, 1921-1939, focussing in particular on the period following the consolidation of Stalin’s power at the helm of the Communist Party in 1926-7. In the Stalin era, Georgians enjoyed special status among Soviet nations thanks to Georgia’s prestige as the place of Stalin’s birth. However, Georgians’ advanced sense of their national sovereignty and initial hostility towards Bolshevik control following Georgia’s Sovietisation in 1921 also resulted in Georgia’s uniquely fraught relationship with Soviet power in Moscow in the decades that followed. In light of these circumstances, this thesis explores how and why the experience and activities of Georgian painters between 1926 and 1939 differed from those of other Soviet artists. One of its central arguments is that the experiences of Georgian artists and critics in this period not only differed significantly from those of artists and critics of other republics, but that the uniqueness of their experience was precipitated by a complex network of factors resulting from the interaction of various political imperatives and practical circumstances, including those relating to Soviet national politics.

Chapter one of this thesis introduces the key institutions and individuals involved in producing, evaluating and setting the direction of Georgian painting in the 1920s and early 1930s. Chapters two and three show that artists and critics in Georgia as well as commentators in Moscow in the 1920s and 30s were actively engaged in efforts to interpret the Party’s demand for ‘national form’ in Soviet culture and to suggest what that form might entail as regards Georgian painting. However, contradictions inherent in Soviet nationalities policy, which both demanded the active cultivation of cultural difference between Soviet nationalities and eagerly anticipated a time when national distinctions in all spheres would naturally disappear, made it impossible for an appropriate interpretation of ‘national form’ to be identified. Chapter three, moreover, demonstrates how frequent shifts in Soviet cultural and nationalities policies presented Moscow institutions with a range of practical challenges

which ultimately prevented them from reflecting in their exhibitions and publications the contemporary artistic activity taking place in the republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

A key finding of chapters four and five concerns the uniquely significant role that Lavrenty Beria, Stalin's ruthless deputy and the head of the Georgian and Transcaucasian Party organisations, played in differentiating Georgian painters' experiences from those of Soviet artists of other nationalities. Beginning in 1934, Beria employed Georgian painters to produce an exhibition of monumental paintings, opening at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow in 1937, depicting episodes from his own falsified history of Stalin's role in the revolutionary movement in Transcaucasia. As this thesis shows, the production of the exhibition introduced an unprecedented degree of direct Party supervision over Georgian painting as Beria personally critiqued works by Georgian painters produced on prescribed narrative subjects in a centralised collective studio. As well as representing a major contribution to Stalin's personality cult, the exhibition, which conferred on Georgian painters special responsibility for representing Stalin and his activities, was also a public statement of the special status that the Georgians were now to enjoy, second only to that of the Russians. However, this special status involved both special privileges and special responsibilities. Georgians would enjoy special access to opportunities in Moscow and a special degree of autonomy in local governance, but in return they were required to lead the way in declaring allegiance to the Stalin regime.

Chapter six returns to the debate about 'national form' in Georgian painting by examining how the pre-Revolutionary self-taught Georgian painter, Niko Pirosmani, was discussed by cultural commentators in Georgia and Moscow in the 1920s and 30s as a source informing a Soviet or Soviet Georgian canon of painting. It shows that, in addition to presenting views on the suitability of Pirosmani's painting either in terms of its formal or class content, commentators perpetuated and developed a cult of Pirosmani steeped in stereotypes of a Georgian 'national character.' Further, the establishment of this cult during the late 1920s and early 1930s seems to have been a primary reason for the painter's subsequent canonisation in the second half of the 1930s as a 'Great Tradition' of Soviet Georgian culture. It helped to articulate a version of Georgian national identity that was at once familiar and gratifying for Georgians and useful for the Soviet regime. The combined impression of cultural sovereignty embodied in this and other 'Great Traditions' of Soviet Georgian culture and the special status articulated through the 1937 exhibition allowed Georgian nationalism to be aligned, for a time, with support for Stalin and the Soviet regime.

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted or is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma, or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University of similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. The dissertation does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

A version of chapter six of this thesis was published as ‘The Appropriation and Adaption of Niko Pirosmiani in Soviet Art History in the 1920s and 1930s’ in *Pirosmani and Georgian Culture: Proceedings, International Interdisciplinary Conference, Tbilisi, Georgia, 5th-7th November 2013* (Tbilisi, s. n., 2014), pp. 42-50.

Certain ideas presented in thesis were published in the book chapter ‘Ucha Japaridze, Lado Gudiashvili, and the Spiritual in Georgian Painting’ in Louise Hardiman and Nicola Kozicharow (eds), *Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017), pp. 229-63.

The dissertation is 79,938 words in length, including footnotes, but excluding captions, appendices, and bibliography.

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Conventions and Abbreviations

I use the Library of Congress system for transliteration from Russian, with the exception of proper names, which are simplified. For ease of comprehension, proper names ending in ‘ii’ are transcribed using ‘y’ (Anatoly Lunacharsky, not Anatolii Lunacharskii), and proper nouns beginning with ‘soft’ vowels (е, ё, ю, я) are rendered with a ‘Y’ (Yerevan, Yuri, Yevrand). In the interests of providing clear, uncluttered text, soft signs and hard signs are omitted from transliterated words and phrases within the main text and in transliterated references, but are retained in the original Russian quotations, provided in footnotes.

I also use the Library of Congress system for transliteration from Georgian, with some exceptions. I omit all diacritic marks and make no distinction between the Georgian letters ჯ and ჳ; ც and ღ; ჩ and ჭ; თ and ტ; ვ and ვ. Letters ლ and ყ are transliterated as gh and q. ჟ is transliterated as zh. All distinctions are retained in the original Georgian quotation, provided in footnotes. In rendering plurals of transliterated Georgian words I simply add s in place of the Georgian plural marker ‘ebi’ (*kintos*, not *kintebi*). For Georgian names I transliterate from Georgian rather than Russian spellings (Japaridze, not Dzhaparidze, Davit, not David, Dimitri, not Dmitry), except for commonly russified names (e.g. Lavrenty Beria, not Lavrenti Beria). The same approach is applied to Armenian names. Regarding topographical names, I use the Georgian version, unless another rendering is much more widely used (Achara, not Adjaria). The capital of Georgia, known as Tiflis in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was renamed to use the Georgian form, Tbilisi, in 1936. I use these spellings when making reference to the city in each period and the Georgian spelling when referring to the city in general.

Capitalisation is not used in the Georgian language. However, for consistency and ease of reading, proper names transliterated from Georgian are capitalised (Davit Kakabadze, not davit kakabadze), as are the first words of the titles of organisations, institutions, publications etc. (*Sabchota khelovneba* [Soviet Art], not *sabchota khelovneba*), as is conventional in transliteration of titles from Russian.

For names of organisations and institutions with both Russian and Georgian names, I use the name and abbreviation in most common circulation (SARMA, *Sakartvelos asotsiatsia revoliutsionur mkhatvarta*, but GAPKh, *Gruzinskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh khudozhnikov*).

Translations of the titles of Georgian sources are provided in square brackets in footnotes.

Unless otherwise stated, all translations into English of Russian and Georgian quotations are my own.

The following abbreviations are used for organisations, institutions and certain key terms:

Academic Centre	See Glavnauka.
Agitprop	Agitation and Propaganda (<i>Agitatsiia i propaganda</i>), government department by that name.
AKhR	Association of Artists of the Revolution (<i>Assotsiatsiia khudozhnikov revoliutsiia</i> , 1928-1932)
AKhRR	Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (<i>Assotsiatsiia khudozhnikov revoliutsionnoi Rossii</i> , 1922-1928)
AO	Autonomous oblast'; national territory ranked below ASSR in status.
ASSR	Autonomous republic; autonomous territory within a union republic
GAIMK	State Academy of the History of Material Culture (<i>Gosudarstvennaia akademiia istorii materialnoi kultury</i>), 1926-1937. Replaced the Russian Academy of the History of Material Culture (<i>Rossiiskaia akademiia istorii materialnoi kultury</i>), 1919-1926. In 1937 GAIMK was replaced with the Institute of the History of Material Culture (IIMK) of the USSR Academy of Sciences. In 1943 the Institute was transferred to Moscow and a branch (LOIIMK) remained in Leningrad. In 1959 IIMK became the Institute of Archeology of the USSR Academy of Sciences. In 1991 it became the Institute of Archeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Leningrad branch became the Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences.
GAKhN	State Academy of Artistic Sciences (<i>Gosudarstvennaia akademiia khudozhestvennykh nauk</i>), 1921-1931.
GAPKh	Georgian Association of Proletarian Artists (<i>Gruzinskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh khudozhnikov</i> , 1931-1932).
GAPP	Georgian Association of Proletarian Writers (<i>Gruzinskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei</i> , 1921-1932).
Glaviskusstvo	The main administration for literature and the arts under the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (<i>Glavnoe upravlenie iskusstv pri Narkomprosa</i>), April 1928-1933. A special organ within the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, established to provide organizational and ideological leadership in the fields of literature and art. Formally survived until 1933, although following intense criticism from 1928 it

had little authority. From 1930 it became a 'soviet' (council) for literary and art affairs, rather than an 'administration'.

Glavpolitprosvet	Main Political Enlightenment Committee (<i>Glavnyi politiko-prosvetitelnyi komitet</i>), November 1920 - June 1930. Committee established under Narkompros to manage adult political education. Reorganised as a sector for mass work under Narkompros from June 1930.
Glavnauka	Main Administration of Scientific, Scholarly-artistic and Museum Institutions (<i>Glavnoe upravlenie nauchnymi, nauchno-khudozhestvennymi i muzeinymi uchrezhdeniiami</i>), 1921-30. State body co-ordinating research in science and culture in the USSR, initially known as the Academic Centre of Narkompros.
GMII	State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts (<i>Gosudarstvennyi muzei izobrazitelnykh iskusstv imena A. S. Pushkina</i>), Moscow, 1934-present. Known as the Museum of Fine Arts (<i>Muzei izobrazitelnykh iskusstv</i> , MII or MIZIS) 1917-34.
GMVK	State Museum of Oriental Cultures (<i>Gosudarstvennyi muzei vostochnykh kultur</i>). Established in 1918 as <i>Ars Asiatica</i> . Reorganised and renamed as the State Museum of Oriental Cultures in 1925. Renamed the State Museum of the Arts of the Peoples of the East (<i>Gosudarstvennyi muzei iskusstv narodov vostoka</i>) in 1962. Since 1992 known in English as the State Museum of Oriental Art and in Russian as the State Museum of the East (<i>Gosudarstvennyi muzei vostoka</i>), the State Museum of the Art of the Nations of the East (<i>Gosudarstvennyi muzei iskusstva narodov vostoka</i>) or the Museum of the East (<i>Muzei vostoka</i>).
Gosizdat	State Publishing House (<i>Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo RSFSR</i>), 1922-30. Replaced by OGIZ.
IZO Narkompros	Visual art department of the Commissariat of Enlightenment (<i>Otdelenie izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva Narkomprosa</i>), 1918-1920. In 1920 IZO Narkompros was liquidated and its functions divided between other departments of Narkompros.
Izogiz	State Publishing House, Arts section (<i>Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo – izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo</i>).
Komsomol	Communist Party youth organisation.
LIZhVI	Leningrad Institute for Living Oriental Languages (<i>Leningradskii institut zhivyykh vostochnykh iazykov</i>), 1920-27. In 1927 it was renamed the Leningrad Oriental Institute, which closed in 1938.
MIV	N. N. Narimanov Moscow Institute of Oriental studies (<i>Moskovskii institut vostokovedeniia im. N. N. Narimanova</i>), 1922-. Known as the

	Central Institute for Living Oriental Languages (<i>Tsentralnyi institut zhivvykh vostochnykh iazykov</i> , TsIZhVIa), 1920-22. TsIZhVIa was based on the Lazarev Institute, a school of oriental languages founded in Moscow in 1815, known as the Lazarev Institute for the Near East (<i>Lazarevskii Peredneaziatskii institut</i>) following the Revolution.
MOSSKh	Moscow section of the Union of Soviet Artists (<i>Moskovskoe otdelenie soiuzs sovetskikh khudozhnikov</i>)
MII	See GMII.
Narkomnats	People's Commissariat of Nationalities (<i>Narodnyi komissariat po delam natsionalnosti</i>), 1917-1924.
Narkompros	The People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (<i>Narodnyi Kommissariat Prosveshcheniia</i>), 1917-1946. State body managing educational and cultural spheres in the USSR. Transformed into the Ministry of Education of the USSR in 1946. Initially established in 1917 as the Ministry of Education of the Russian Provisional Government (<i>Ministerstvo prosveshcheniia Vremennogo Pravitelstva Rossii</i>) based on the Ministry of People's Education of the Russian Empire (<i>Ministerstvo narodnogo prosveshcheniia Rossiiskoi imperii</i>).
NEP	New Economic Policy, 1921-1928
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (<i>Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del</i>) or Soviet political police, 1934-1946. Known as the Unified State Political Administration (<i>Obedinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie</i> , OGPU) 1932-34. Before that it was the State Political Administration (<i>Gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie</i> , GPU) 1922-1932, which followed the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage, the Cheka (<i>Vserossiiskaia chrezvychainaia komissiiia po borbe s kontrrevoliutsiei i sabotazhem</i> , VChK) 1919-1922.
OGPU	Soviet secret police or All-Union State Political Administration (<i>Obedinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe napravlenie</i>), 1922-1934.
OMAKhR	Youth organisation of the Association and Artists of the Revolution (<i>Obedinenie molodezhy assotsiatsii khudozhnikov revoliutsii</i>). See AKhR.
Proletkult	Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Organisations (<i>Proletarskie kulturno-prosvetitelnye organizatsii</i>), 1917-1932. A mass network of cultural organisations intended to help the working class cultivate their own authentic proletarian culture.

RABIS	Union of Art Workers (<i>Soiuz rabotnikov iskusstva</i>)
RAIMK	See GAIMK.
RAPP	Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (<i>Rossiiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei</i>). Literary organisation originally known as VAPP, All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (<i>Vserossiiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei</i>).
REVMAS	Revolutionary Association of Artists (<i>Revoliutsiis mkhatvarta asotsiatsia</i> , 1928-1931).
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (<i>Rossiiskaia sovetskaia federativnaia sotsialisticheskaia respublika</i> , 1917-91).
SARMA	Georgian Association of Revolutionary Artists (<i>Sakartvelos asotsiatsia revoliutsionur mkhatvarta</i> , 1928-1932).
SSR	Full Union Republic.
VAPP	See RAPP.
VKhUTEIN	Higher State Artistic and Technical Institute (<i>Vysshi gosudarstvennyi khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskii institut</i>), 1927-30. Replaced VKhUTEMAS. The Georgian Academy of Arts was also renamed VKhUTEIN in 1929-1931 in line with the Moscow institution. It was closed in 1931 and replaced with a Faculty of Fine Arts within Tbilisi Pedagogical Institute, and then reinstated as the Tbilisi State Academy of Fine Arts in February 1933.
VKhUTEMAS	Higher State Artistic and Technical Studios (<i>Vysshie khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskie masterskie</i>), 1920-26. Formed through a merger of the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture and the Stroganov School of Applied Arts.
VKP(b)	All-Union Communist Party.
VNAV	All-Russian Scientific Association of Orientologists (<i>Vserossiiskaia nauchnaia assotsiatsiia vostokovedeniia</i>). Established in 1921 under the Commissariat of Nationalities (Narkomnats) for the study of the East, and help inform the Soviet government's policy towards its peoples.
VOAPP	All-Union Union of Associations of Proletarian Writers (<i>Vsesoiuznoe obedinenie assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei</i>), 1928-1932.
VOKS	All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (<i>Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo kulturnoi sviazi s zagranitsej</i>), 1925-1957.

Vsekokhudozhnik	All-Russian Cooperative ‘Artist’ (<i>Vse-rossiiskii kooperativ ‘Khudozhnik’</i>).
VSKhV/ VDNKh	All-Union Agricultural Exhibition (<i>Vsesoiuznaia selskokhoziastvennaia vystavka</i> , 1939-1959) later replaced by the Exhibition of Achievements of National Economy (<i>Vystavka dostizhenii narodnogo khodataistva</i> , 1959-1991). VSKhV and VDNKh were preceded by the First All-Russian Agricultural and Cottage Industries Exhibition (<i>Pervaia vserossiiskaia selskokhoziastvennaia i kustarno-promyshlennaia vystavka SSSR</i> , 1923).
ZAPP	Transcaucasian Association of Proletarian Writers (<i>Zakavkazskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei</i>).
ZSFSR	Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (<i>Zakavkazskaia sovetskaia federativnaia sotsialisticheskaia respublika</i> , 1921-36).

The following abbreviations are used for archives, archival citations and libraries:

GARF	State Archive of the Russian Federation (<i>Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii</i>)
GMINV	Archive of the State Museum of the Art of the Nations of the East (formerly the State Museum of Oriental Cultures, GMVK)
GNM	Georgian National Museum
GTG	State Tretyakov Gallery, Manuscripts Department (<i>Gosudarstvennaia tretiakovskaia galereia, otdel rukopisi</i>)
NAG	Department of Literature and the Arts (<i>Literaturis da khelovnebis ganqopileba</i>), Central Archive of Contemporary History (<i>Uakhlesi istoriis tsentraluri arkivi</i>), National Archives of Georgia (<i>Sakartvelos erovnuli arkivi</i>).
NPLG	National Parliamentary Library of Georgia
RGALI	Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (<i>Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva</i>)
f.	<i>fond</i> (record group)
op.	<i>opis</i> (inventory)
ed. khr.	<i>edinitsa khraneniia</i> (unit)
d.	<i>delo</i> (file)
l, ll.,	<i>list</i> (page(s))
ob.	<i>oborotnaia storona</i> (verso)
kor.	<i>korpus</i> (building)

Introduction

This thesis documents the unique experience of Soviet Georgian painters during the first two decades of Soviet power in Georgia, 1921-1939, focusing in particular on the tumultuous first decade and a half of Stalin's rule, between 1926-27 and 1939, and considering the activities of Georgian artists with particular reference to shifts in Soviet policies, including Soviet cultural and nationalities policies, that took place during that time. This period is selected for study for several reasons. 1926-27 saw the consolidation of Stalin's political power at the helm of the Communist Party. It witnessed his victory over more moderate forces led by Trotsky and Zinoviev, making way for significant shifts in Soviet policy including the abandonment of Lenin's New Economic Policy and its replacement with Stalin's First Five-Year Plan, which emphasised Soviet economic development through rapid industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation and brought with it new imperatives for the cultural sphere. Those years also marked a significant moment in the sphere of Georgian artistic activity. They witnessed the return to Georgia of many of her leading painters following absences that had begun prior to the establishment of Soviet power in Georgia and had continued through the first five years of Soviet rule there, markedly impoverishing Georgian artistic activity and debate during that period. Equally importantly, they also coincided with the establishment of the first proletarian artists' organisations in Soviet Georgia. Together, these events marked the beginning of a period of intense debate and competition between Georgian artists and critics over the appropriate path for the development of painting in Soviet Georgia that extended through the 1930s. This thesis documents those debates and parallel discussions taking place in Moscow and St Petersburg in the same period concerning artistic activity among the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union, examining as the culmination of those discussions a landmark exhibition of Georgian painting which premiered in Moscow in November 1937. The exhibition served as a definitive conclusion to battles that had taken place in the preceding decade to define the appropriate form for Georgian painting. However, as this thesis demonstrates, it was also a grandiose expression of a new relationship between Georgia and the Soviet centre that crystallised at the end of the 1930s as part of a wider reconfiguration of Soviet nationalities policy. 1939 marks a natural chronological end point for this study in that it marks the end of a period of cultural activity in Georgia that was dedicated to the expression and embellishment of that new relationship as Soviet political and cultural priorities shifted again,

this time in response to the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe and the growing threat of invasion from Nazi Germany.

Georgia experienced Sovietisation from a perspective different to that of any other Soviet nation. Her status as the place of Stalin's birth impacted her relationship with Soviet power in complex ways that are explored and elucidated throughout this thesis. At the same time, the combination of the Georgians' longevity as a people (which had existed with a recognisable identity for two millennia), and the unique political circumstances that grew up in Georgia in the decades preceding Sovietisation, produced among Georgians a uniquely developed degree of national consciousness and a strong inclination for national independence. Unlike the majority of the national groups that eventually became constituent members of the Soviet Union, by the first decade of the twentieth century the Georgians had developed a nationalist movement with wide support across all social classes, thanks in part to the coalescence of national and social struggles in Georgia in that period.¹ In the years following the Russian Revolution, moreover, Georgia's nationalist socialist (Menshevik) leadership, which enjoyed strong support both in the countryside and in urban centres, had demonstrated both its viability and its desirability in the eyes of most Georgians by the time that the Red Army took the Georgian capital by force in February 1921. This encouraged opposition to Bolshevik rule and a bitterness about a loss of national independence, despite independence not previously having been a priority of Georgia's Menshevik leadership.

The Armenians were the closest to the Georgians in the sense of their longevity as a people, their advanced degree of national consciousness and their established nationalist intelligentsia. However, while Georgia had existed as an independent state in one form or another until Russia's annexation of Georgia in the early nineteenth century, the Armenians had not. Instead, they had suffered invasions and occupations from the eleventh century onwards that deprived them of a dedicated national homeland right up until 1918 and left their population dispersed across various diaspora. As a result of this history, Armenian nationalists in the first two decades of the twentieth century were unable to mobilise popular support for an effort to regain an independently governed homeland. In the post-revolutionary period, moreover, the immediate existential threat that the Armenians saw in the possibility of attacks by their Muslim neighbours—made all the more pressing by the memory and

¹ See '2. National Revolutions and Civil War in Russia' in Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 1993), pp. 20-83.

trauma of the Armenian genocide of 1914—led them to seek Russian protection rather than reject it.²

The Latvians, in fact, much more closely paralleled the Georgian situation in terms of their success in developing a fully-fledged mass national movement.³ A largely landless, ethnically Latvian peasantry objected to the centuries-long control of their land by German barons in much the same way as Georgian peasants and workers resented the domination of their cities by Armenian merchants. As such, in both cases, class and ethnic identities overlapped and reinforced one another to produce support for national socialist movements that were also directed primarily against oppressors other than the Russians so that class struggles ultimately mobilised the masses in support of national emancipation movements. Nevertheless, there were also fundamental differences between the Georgian and Latvian experiences. Rather than establishing independence, as Georgia did, and then losing it through Bolshevik invasion, for example, many Latvians in 1917 saw their national future with Russia and saw the Bolsheviks as holding the solution to both their ethnic and social grievances.

Unlike the Georgians, the Latvians would likely have become willing members of the Soviet Union had not the German invasion of Latvia in February 1918 ended a brief period of Bolshevik rule there and offered Latvian nationalists an opportunity for independence.⁴ The circumstances of Georgia's forced Sovietisation (and the brief experience of independence that preceded it), however, coloured her relationship with Soviet power thereafter. Unlike in neighbouring Azerbaijan, which was taken by the Bolsheviks almost without resistance in April 1920, or in much of Central Asia, where Bolshevik control was widely welcomed, in Georgia hostility was widespread and resistance initially fierce. In the early years following the establishment of Soviet power, Georgian nationalism presented a serious threat of local insurgence and a real risk to the stability of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics formed in 1922. Though this threat was largely crushed by the end of 1924 following a failed Georgian uprising in August of that year, Georgian nationalism continued to concern Stalin and the Soviet leadership and guide their attitudes to the national question in Georgia throughout the Stalinist era.

The question of how to govern the Soviet Union as a multi-ethnic state, of how to manage the Union's constituent nationalities in order to avoid dangerous separatist

² Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*, pp. 72-76.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-64.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-8. At this time Latvia was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union, only to be invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany from 1941 and then re-taken by the Soviet Union in 1944.

nationalism and maintain the Union's stability and progress towards socialism, was addressed by both Lenin and Stalin before the Revolution and remained a matter for debate throughout Soviet history. Indeed, it was arguably the Soviet leadership's failure to resolve that question that contributed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. But the question was particularly pressured in relation to the Georgian case, so much so that Lenin urged special caution and tolerance in dealing with the Georgian people.⁵ However, as I show in this thesis, under Stalin the special circumstances of the Georgian case did not always lead to the caution and tolerance Lenin advised. Instead, Georgia's relationship with the Soviet centre played out in often unexpected ways, including ways that diminished rather than granted freedoms of national expression. This, I argue, found expression in the management of artistic activity and production in Georgia and had significant consequences for Georgian painters. It shaped their day-to-day activities and defined the ways in which their nationhood was (or was not) reflected in their painting. On that basis, this thesis examines how Georgian painters negotiated the politics of nationality and empire in their responses to Stalinist cultural dictates in light of the particularities of the Georgian case.

Painting in the Non-Russian Republics

Several Soviet art historians and critics have offered accounts of the history of painting in Soviet Georgia. The first of these were published during the period of Stalin's Cultural Revolution as contemporary commentaries on the state of artistic activity in the republic at that moment. Georgian critic Aleksandre Duduchava's *Gruzinskaia zhivopis: opyt sotsialno-esteticheskoe issledovanie* (1930) was the first (albeit slim) book-length study of the artistic climate in Soviet Georgia.⁶ It sought to present the history of Georgian painting, both ancient and recent, through the lens of a modern 'Marxist sociology of art.' It was based on a methodology pioneered by Moscow art theorists such as Vladimir Friche, Ivan Matsa and Anatoly Lunarchsky, which attempted to explain artistic phenomena according to Marxist dialectical materialism.⁷ As such, instead of attempting a comprehensive survey of

⁵ Vladimir Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniia*, vol. 42, p. 362, quoted in Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (second edition) (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994. Original edition: 1988), pp. 210-11.

⁶ Aleksandre Duduchava, *Gruzinskaia zhivopis: opyt sotsialno-esteticheskogo issledovaniia* (Tiflis: Gosizdat Gruzii, 1930).

⁷ For key works in this field, see Vladimir Friche, *Sotsiologiia iskusstva* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1926); Vladimir Friche, *Problemy iskusstvovedeniia. sbornik statei po voprosam sotsiologii, iskusstva i literatury* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1930); Ivan Matsa, *Ocherki po teoreticheskomu iskusstvoznaniuu: stati* (Moscow: Kommunisticheskaia akademiia, 1930); Ivan Matsa, ed, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let. Materialy i*

contemporary and recent Georgian painting, it focussed on four artists whom Duduchava claimed were fundamental to Georgian art's development and whom he presented as embodying the stages of Georgia's historical progress. These were Niko Pirosmiani (Nikala Pirosmianishvili, 1862-1918), the modernist-oriented painters Lado (Vladimir) Gudiashvili (1896-1980) and Davit Kakabadze (1889-1952), and Mose Toidze (1871-1953), a disciple of the Russian realist painters known as the *Peredvizhniki*.⁸ Duduchava's study was essentially an attempt to defend the relevance of its four subjects in the Soviet context by reframing their work through Marxist theory, though, as we will see in chapter three, by the time of its publication the methodology on which it was based was already facing criticism. Duduchava's book was closely followed by Lazar Rempel's *Zhivopis sovetskogo Zakavkazia* (1932). Rempel's volume provided a more systematic and methodical study, focusing on the twentieth-century history of Georgian as well as Armenian and Azerbaijani painting. However, a product of its time, it is sharply polemic in its rejection of 'modernist' and 'unproletarian' currents in Georgian art, which meant anything other than the narrative 'realist' painting championed in Moscow by the Association of Artists of the Revolution (AKhR, 1928-1932, formerly the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia, AKhRR, 1922-1928) and later RAPKh (the Russian Association of Proletarian Artists, 1931-1932).⁹ As is explored in more detail in chapter two of this thesis, Rempel's foremost goal was to demonstrate AKhR's brand of painting to be the only method capable of serving a proletarian, socialist state and condemning artists (and the critics that supported them) who failed to adopt that method. As will become clear, this required creative interpretation of Soviet policy with respect to national cultural difference. Nevertheless, both Duduchava's and Rempel's volumes are important sources of factual information concerning the activities of Georgian artists during the first decade of Soviet power and provide evidence of the divergent stances adopted by two influential critics concerning art in Georgia in that period.

dokumentatsiia (Moscow: Izogiz, 1933); Ivan Matsa, *Tvorcheskii metod i khodozhestvennoe nasledstvo* (Moscow: Izogiz, 1933); M. Arkadev, I. Matsa *et al.*, *O zhivopisi, plakate i skulpture za XV let: sbornik statei* (Moscow: Vsekokhudozhnik, 1934); Anatoly Lunacharsky, *Ocherki marksistskoi teorii iskusstv* (Moscow: AKhRR, 1926).

⁸ Mose Toidze's son Irakli Toidze, also an artist, features more prominently in this thesis than his father. As such, where only the surname is given, reference is to Irakli.

⁹ Lazar Rempel, *Zhivopis sovetskogo Zakavkazia* (Moscow: Izogiz, 1932). Rempel's account also relies on the testimonies of a few local artist-informants, calling further into question the reliability of its information. Rempel comments that the 'author is indebted to the artists and workers of visual art in Transcaucasia for the collection of material for the present work.' [Художникам и работникам изоискусства Закавказья автор обязан подбором материалов для настоящей работы.] He lists as informants the artists G. Grigorian, U. [Ucha] Japaridze, L. Lemanzhava, G. [Grigory] Mirzoev, [Korneli] Sanadze, R. [Ruben] Tovadze [*sic.* – Tavadze], [Davit] Shevardnadze, Sherbabchian. Although, as will be more apparent in chapter two, this list reflects a group of artists holding a wide range of views, Rempel was still obliged to view his subject through their eyes, rather than observing local meetings, debates or exhibitions directly.

They present a snapshot of the discourses surrounding ‘national art’ (artistic activity in the non-Russian republics) in the years of Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan. Many contemporary commentaries published in journals, newspapers and exhibition catalogues in Moscow and Tbilisi constitute important primary material explored throughout this thesis.

Several further accounts of the history of art in Soviet Georgia were published in the Post-War period. The first, *Iskusstvo sovetsoi Gruzii: ocherki po istorii zhivopisi, skulptory i grafiki*, was published by the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1952. This volume is a valuable document, providing copious factual details of artists, works, exhibitions and other key events in the history of Soviet Georgian art. However, appearing in the year before Stalin’s death, it is narrow and dogmatic in its conception of Soviet art, excluding or rebuking key artists that it accused of diverging from the proper creative path. As such, caution must be exercised as regards its reliability. Vakhtang Beridze and Nina Ezerskaia’s *Iskusstvo sovetsoi Gruzii, 1921-70 gg.: zhivopis grafika skulptura* (1975) attempted to correct the imbalances of the 1952 volume.¹⁰ It is especially useful in providing a factual chronology of the activities of Georgian artists in addition to artist biographies and lists of exhibitions, plus an account of the two decades that had passed since the previous publications. It also rehabilitates several key artists whose place in the history of Soviet Georgian art had been denied in the 1952 volume. The volume has significant limitations. It’s vast scope means that it does not examine the career of any single artist or any event in the history of Georgian painting in detail. Restrictions related to the political climate in which it was produced, moreover—the need of the authors to satisfy the Soviet censors by expressing only views and versions of events that were broadly in line with the Party’s own—limited the authors’ ability to broach certain subjects. However, it provides the most balanced and most comprehensive survey of Soviet Georgian painting to date.

For several reasons, Beridze and Ezerskaia’s volume has not been surpassed in the forty years since its publication. Firstly, the art of the Stalin era has attracted little interest among art historians in post-Soviet Georgia. Georgian scholars have tended to focus instead on resurrecting national histories that were denied in the Soviet period, including the flourishing of cultural life and emergence of modernist activity in Georgia that took place in the first decades of the twentieth century, prior to Sovietisation. Secondly, western scholarship on Stalinist culture has tended to concentrate on the major Russian centres, neglecting artistic activity in the Southern and Eastern Soviet republics and regions. Although

¹⁰ Vakhtang Beridze and Nina Ezerskaia, *Iskusstvo sovetsoi Gruzii, 1921-70 gg.: zhivopis grafika skulptura* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1975).

reference to Georgian examples can be found within the existing scholarship, and some work has been carried out in recent years on art in certain of the other Soviet national republics and regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia, no dedicated study of art and politics in Soviet Georgia has been attempted.¹¹ Indeed, in addition to the Soviet sources discussed above, only a handful of scholarly articles concerning Soviet art published since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 have paid more than cursory attention to artistic activity in Georgia and all of these appeared between 1992 and 1994.¹² None of them, moreover, examines Georgian art in detail, and all look at art in Soviet Georgia as part of a wider overview of art in the Soviet non-Russian republics collectively. As a result, they tend to present a sweeping view of the development of Soviet art in the non-Russian republics as lagging behind that in the main Russian centres and generalise about comparatively greater artistic freedoms enjoyed in the non-Russian republics compared with in Moscow and Leningrad.¹³ Matthew Cullerne-Bown, for example, writing in 1992, explained that in the inter-War period, the ‘republics most distant from Moscow retained a degree of cultural autonomy’ that could not exist in Russia. In relation to Georgia specifically, he noted that a ‘number of painters working in Tbilisi’—namely Gudiashvili and Kakabadze—‘not only managed to conserve precious freedoms of style, but also openly rejected the socialist content officially required in the work of all Soviet

¹¹ Jeremy Howard’s *East European art, 1650-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), for example, includes reference to twentieth-century Georgian painters including Elene Akhvediani and Davit Kakabadze. There exists a small but growing body of scholarship concerned with art in the former socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. For a useful introduction to this field see: *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Slovenian artists’ group IRWIN (London: Afterall, 2006). For recent scholarship on art in the Soviet Union’s Southern and Eastern republics, see: Aliya Nurtaevna Abykayeva de Tiesenhausen, ‘Socialist Realist Orientalism?: Depictions of Soviet Central Asia 1930s-1950s’, Thesis (Ph.D), University of London, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2010); Cloé Drieu, *Fictions nationales: cinéma, empire et nation en Ouzbékistan (1919-1937)* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2013); Vardan Azatyan, ‘On the Ruins of the Soviet Past: Some Thoughts on Religion, Nationalism and Artistic Avant-Gardes in Armenia,’ *ARTMargins*, 1 (2012); Vardan Azatyan, ‘Disintegrating Progress: Bolshevism, National Modernism, and the Emergence of Contemporary Art Practices in Armenia,’ *ARTMargins*, 1 (2012) and Boris Chukhovich, ‘Sub rosa: ot mikroistorii k “natsionalnomu iskusstvu” Uzbekistana,’ *Ab imperio*, 3 (2017)

¹² See: Musya Glants, “‘From the Southern Mountains to the Northern Seas’: Painting in the Republics in the Early Soviet Period’ and Milka Bliznakov, ‘International Modernism or Socialist Realism: Soviet Architecture in the Eastern Republics’ in John Norman, ed, *New perspectives on Russian and Soviet artistic culture: 4th World congress for Soviet and East European Studies: Selected papers* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1994), pp. 95-111 and 112-130; Matthew Cullerne-Bown, ‘How Is The Empire? Painting in the Non-Russian Republics’, in Matthew Cullerne-Bown et al., *Soviet Socialist Realist Painting 1930s-1960s: Paintings from Russia, the Ukraine, Belorussia, Uzbekistan, Kirgizia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova selected in the USSR* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1992); Matthew Cullerne-Bown, ‘Painting in the non-Russian Republics’ in Matthew Cullerne-Bown and Brandon Taylor, eds, *Art of the Soviets: Painting, sculpture and architecture in a one-Party state, 1917-1992* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 140-53; Matthew Cullerne-Bown, *Art under Stalin* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1991).

¹³ See Cullerne-Bown, ‘How Is The Empire?’, p. 22; Glants, “‘From the Southern Mountains to the Northern Seas’”, p. 109; Bliznakov, ‘International Modernism or Socialist Realism,’ p. 127.

artists.’¹⁴ This, he implies, could not have happened in Moscow. The farther from the Soviet centre that an artist worked, the greater artistic freedom he or she enjoyed.

Few scholars now would agree with Cullerne-Bown’s assessment of greater ‘artistic freedoms’ experienced outside of the main Russian centres. It is well documented, for example, that terror waged against ‘non-proletarian class elements’ during the Cultural Revolution (1928-31) disproportionately targeted national (non-Russian) intelligentsias. Indeed, Cullerne-Bown’s comments are misleading in a number of respects, as regards the Georgian case. Firstly, with regard to Gudiashvili and Kakabadze, it is true that each continued to produce work in the Soviet period that reflected the formal stylistic experimentation of their work in the 1910s and 20s, and which was sometimes without ‘socialist’ or ‘ideological’ content. However, this was not unique to them as Georgians. Moreover, they did not do so exclusively, without interruption, or without consequence. Both Gudiashvili and Kakabadze faced constant criticism in the press and among Far Left artists and critics in Georgia throughout the late 1920s and 1930s. Furthermore, Kakabadze and especially Gudiashvili did not ‘openly reject socialist content,’ at least not fully or easily. Kakabadze, for example, stopped producing paintings entirely during the Cultural Revolution and in doing so avoided some of the increased pressure facing artists in that period to make works on themes associated with the First Five-Year Plan (such as agricultural collectivisation and industrialisation). He produced only a handful of paintings in the 1930s, mainly landscapes without explicit ‘socialist’ content. But this was possible primarily because he took on work designing for theatre and stage as a way of avoiding the constraints placed on painters. Between 1933 and 39, moreover, he was compelled to produce works documenting Georgian industrialisation, including a series of studies of the construction of Rionges (Georgia’s new hydroelectric power station) (figures 1 and 2). In the 1940s he made several works attempting to demonstrate his compliance with the requirements of socialist realism. In some, he made only token allusion to socialist content. His painting, *Meeting in Imereti* (1942, figure 3), for example, is typical of the trademark semi-abstract landscapes Kakabadze was painting before the Sovietisation of Georgia except for the crowd of people gathered in its foreground bearing red flags and vast banners with the portraits of Lenin, Stalin and Engels. Despite these concessions, however, Kakabadze faced repercussions for his reluctance to adjust his painting, as well as for his continued advocacy of European models of painting through his teaching at the Academy, including being fired from his job at

¹⁴ Cullerne-Bown, ‘How Is The Empire?’, p. 23.

the Academy in 1948.¹⁵ After that, desperate for a means to support his family, he produced a number of canvases that complied with the demands of socialist realism in both style and content. These included *Mining at Kazbegi* (1949, figure 4), *Grain Elevator in Poti* (1949, figure 5) and *The Processing of Gumbrine in the Vicinity of Kutaisi* (1951, figure 6). However, he never regained his post at the Academy. He died in 1952.

Gudiashvili, meanwhile, participated much more fully in the life of Georgia's community of painters, including during the Cultural Revolution. Although he never adopted a convincingly realist style of painting, he produced works on themes of class war, industry and collective agriculture (see *Eviction of the Kulaks*, 1931, and *Zestafoni Works*, 1934 (figures 7 and 8)). He also repeatedly claimed throughout the 1920s and 30s to be striving to correct his ideological and formal 'mistakes'. As the following chapters will demonstrate, Gudiashvili's survival and prominence throughout the Stalin era and later was owed to a series of factors specific to his case and to Georgia that were far more complex than the simple calculation of his distance from Moscow. These included Gudiashvili's professed efforts to adapt and willingness to participate in state-prescribed cultural initiatives as well as the dearth of preferable, proletarian artists with sufficient skill who could take his place in representing Soviet Georgian painting. But they also related to the Soviet leadership's (albeit intermittently) cautious treatment of Georgia's old bourgeois intelligentsia in light of the particularities of Georgia's relationship to Soviet power.

The specificity of Georgian artists' experience of artistic life in the Soviet Union was dictated by a range of factors relating to Georgia's specific relationship to the Soviet centre. Georgia approached Sovietisation as a nation with a developed sense of national identity and a proud history of defending their cultural and religious autonomy and national sovereignty. It experienced Stalin's First Five-Year Plan and Cultural Revolution and the associated drives for agricultural collectivisation and industrialisation as a republic even more peasant and agricultural than Russia. And its relationship to Moscow and Soviet power was defined by Georgia's initial hostility to Bolshevik rule and by the Soviet leadership's policies in relation to Georgia in light of those circumstances. The experience and activities of Georgian artists were impacted by the special status that Georgian enjoyed, in part as a result of the political challenges that the republic represented in the eyes of the Soviet leadership.¹⁶ Unlike their

¹⁵ Ketevan Kintsurashvili, *David Kakabadze: klassik XX veka* (St Petersburg: Arbat, 2002), pp. 137-38.

¹⁶ On Georgia's special status see Timothy K. Blauvelt, 'Status Shift and Ethnic Mobilisation in the March 1956 Events in Georgia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61:4 (June 2009), pp. 651-68 (p. 654) and Timothy K. Blauvelt, 'Resistance, Discourse and Nationalism in the March 1956 Events in Georgia' in Timothy K. Blauvelt and

counterparts elsewhere in the Soviet Union, moreover, they contributed to the cultivation of Stalin's personality cult in the 1930s and 1940s both as representatives of Stalin's homeland and as a nation recently hostile to Soviet rule. Uniquely, they also operated under the supervision of Stalin's right-hand man, the head of the Transcaucasian secret police and later, of the Georgian and Transcaucasian Communist Party, Lavrenty Beria (1899-1953). Beria's interest in harnessing Georgia's cultural sphere as a means of shoring up his own position within Stalin's inner circle had an enormous impact on the day-to-day lives of Georgian painters. For these reasons, as well as Georgia's unique cultural history, ethnic makeup, and cultural climate immediately prior to Sovietisation, artistic activity in Soviet Georgia developed according to a different chronology to that seen in Russia and should be studied with reference to these specific circumstances accordingly.

In recent decades, western and Russian scholars have produced a rich body of research concerning Soviet artists working in Moscow and Leningrad and about important events and exhibitions and the workings of museums and educational institutions there. Huge advances have also been made in building theoretical frameworks through which Stalinist culture can be better understood.¹⁷ Thanks to these contributions, Soviet cultural production

Jeremy Smith, eds, *Georgia after Stalin: Nationalism and Soviet Power* (London: BASEES/Routledge Series of Russian and East European Studies, 2015), pp. 116-128.

¹⁷ Important contributions include Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000. Original edition 1981); Katerina Clark, *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Evgeny Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (trans. by Jesse M. Savage) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Evgeny Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and The Production of History: Museum of the Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman, eds, *The landscape of Stalinism: the art and ideology of Soviet space* (Seattle: Combined Academic, 2003); Andrew Ellis, ed, *Socialist realisms: Soviet painting 1920-1970* (ex. cat.) (trans. Mario Chianese and Jesse M. Savage) (Milan: Skira, 2012); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front. Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978); Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art: In the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China* (New York: Harper Collins Icon Editions, 1990); Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (trans. Charles Rougle) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Boris Groys and Max Hollein, eds, *Traumfabrik Kommunismus: die visuelle Kultur der Stalinzeit* (ex. cat.) (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, c.2003); Hans Günther, ed., *The Culture of the Stalin Period* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990); Hans Günther and Evgeny Dobrenko, eds, *Sotrealisticheskii kanon* (St Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2000); Irina Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1890-1934* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999); Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Christina Kiaer, 'Lyrical Socialist Realism,' *October*, 147 (winter 2014), pp. 56-77; Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, eds, *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (London: Duke University Press, 1995); Christina Lodder, Maria Kokkori and Maria Mileeva, eds, *Utopian reality: reconstructing culture in revolutionary Russia and beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Jamie Miller, *Soviet Cinema: Politics and Persuasion under Stalin* (New York: I. B. Taurus, 2010); Vladimir Paperny, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two* (trans. John Hill and Roann Barris), *Cambridge Studies in New Art History and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) (first edition: 1981); Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Richard Taylor and Derek Spring, eds, *Stalinism and Soviet*

of the Stalin era is no longer dismissed as the kitsch and monolithic state-prescribed ‘propaganda art’ of a totalitarian state, either devoid of interest due to the perceived absence of ‘artistic freedom’ under that state or morally insupportable as a subject of study due to the violence of the regime that it served. We now understand much more than we did about its sources, genesis and evolution. Vladimir Paperny, Boris Groys and others, for example, shed early light on the dialogue between so-called avant-garde culture of the 1910s and 20s and Stalinist culture. Groys’ groundbreaking volume *The Total Art of Stalinism* proposed a new understanding of the latter as in many ways the heir to the former, of Stalinist culture as the realisation of the demiurgic ambitions of the avant-garde for a totalising art that reconfigured reality itself.¹⁸ These works, as well as Sheila Fitzpatrick’s groundbreaking studies illuminating the activities of key Soviet cultural institutions, laid the foundations for a host of more recent histories and theoretical studies.¹⁹ Evgeny Dobrenko, in particular, has helped to explain how Stalinist culture operated in the service of the state as a vehicle through which Soviet reality itself was created.²⁰ Dobrenko, Katerina Clark and others have offered new means for decoding Stalinist culture’s complex symbolic and iconographic schemes. Several scholars, including Christina Kiaer and Angelina Lucento, have examined the activities of a variety of artists and artists’ organisations in Moscow in the late 1920s and early 1930s and both highlighted the role of artists and intellectuals in moulding the development of Stalinist culture and suggested ways in which it might have turned out differently.²¹ Clark, moreover, has demonstrated the surprisingly cosmopolitan roots of Stalinist culture.²² She has decisively challenged previously popular totalitarian models of Soviet culture in which socialist realism was understood as the product of the Party’s (and, personally, Stalin’s) absolute control over all spheres, demonstrating the complicated relationship between the state (Stalin, the Party leadership, and various Party organs) and intellectuals in its evolution. For example, she has shown how even when pronouncements issued from the highest echelons of the Party appeared to resolve the direction of Soviet culture’s development, these pronouncements were often grounded in existing trends and appeared in response to ideas circulating among

Cinema (New York: Routledge, 1993); Emma Widdis, *Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*.

¹⁹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment. Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, 1917–1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*; Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928–1931*.

²⁰ Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*.

²¹ Kiaer, ‘Lyrical Socialist Realism’; Angelina Lucento, ‘Painting for the Collective: Art, Politics, and Communication in Russia, 1918-1932,’ thesis (PhD), Department of Art History, Northwestern University, 2014.

²² Clark, *Moscow*.

Soviet intellectuals.²³ Even after the establishment of socialist realism as the official model of all Soviet cultural production following the First Congress of the Soviet Writers' Union in 1934, a diverse range of positions about what that culture should entail continued to be expressed and debated by intellectuals throughout the 1930s. Though these voices did not necessarily represent outright dissidence or direct challenges to the Party's position, intellectuals retained a degree of independence and agency throughout the 1930s and actively contributed to the evolution of Stalinist culture. Though the Party had the final word, Stalinist culture evolved as the product of symbiotic relationship between the Party and intellectuals, rather than simply as a reflection of intellectuals' capitulation to cultural policies dreamt up by the Party leadership in isolation from contemporary intellectual trends.²⁴

Despite these major advances, however, scholarship on Soviet culture in the 1920s and 30s has continued to focus primarily on Moscow and Leningrad as the two major centres of cultural activity. It remains for greater scrutiny to be applied to cultural activity taking place in the Soviet regions and republics and for this activity to be examined in light of recent advances in the study of Stalinist culture and national politics. This is true of Georgia's case especially in light of both the limited scholarship about art in the republic and Georgia's peculiarity as the place of Stalin's birth. Contributing to this embryonic field of scholarship, and with a view to bridging part of the gap in the study of Stalinist culture at the Soviet periphery, this thesis examines the activities of all those concerned with the production and critique of painting in Georgia in the Stalin era, including artists, critics, Party and government bureaucrats, the Party leadership in Georgia and in Moscow as well as the institutions through which each operated. It documents the various ways in which these figures encountered, engaged with, embodied or responded to the politics of nationhood and empire in the context of Stalinist Georgia at different historical moments with various results for Soviet Georgian painting. In doing so it offers a major new step in updating and expanding the few existing accounts of painting in Soviet Georgia.

Specifically, the combination in this thesis of focused case studies concerning key artists, critics, events and institutions and analysis taking into account recent scholarship on Soviet national politics and Stalinist culture facilitates a re-contextualisation of better-known Georgian artists of the period such as Gudiashvili and Kakabadze. At the same time, it brings to light events, institutions and individuals who are more central to the story of Soviet Georgian painting than any of the best-known Georgian artists and yet have been overlooked.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 29; Clark, Petersburg, pp. 279 and 296-7.

²⁴ Clark, *Moscow*, p. 6.

It documents for the first time the ways in which Beria moulded the experience of painters in Soviet Georgia in the 1930s, shaping both their artistic production and ultimately Georgia's place within the Soviet Union. It also highlights the activities of previously unknown critics including Duduchava and Rempel, as well as Vladimir Chepelev, a leading commentator on contemporary Georgian painting in Moscow in the second half of the 1930s. In doing so it provides the first account of debates that took place about non-Russian Soviet art, including Georgian art, in the 1920s and 30s. Perhaps the most important single event in the history of painting in Georgia under Stalin, the vast Exhibition of Painting, Sculpture and Graphics of the Georgian SSR that opened at the State Tretyakov Gallery (hereafter, the Tretyakov Gallery) in Moscow on 17 November 1937 is here examined for the first time. Meanwhile, examinations of the activities of the key institutions involved in representing Georgian art in Moscow—including the State Museum of Oriental Cultures (*Gosudarstvennyi muzei vostochnykh kultur*, GMVK) and the State Academy of Artistic Sciences (*Gosudarstvennaia akademiia khudozhestvennykh nauk*, GAKhN)—offer a new picture of how Georgian painting was discussed and understood by contemporary commentators. So too do the main periodicals pertaining to artistic activity in Georgia appearing in Tbilisi and Moscow in the 1920s and 30s, most of which are explored here for the first time.

This thesis draws on a vast array of primary sources amassed through extensive research in the archives and libraries of Moscow and Tbilisi including both Russian and Georgian language sources, almost all of which have never been studied before. In addition to material drawn from the contemporary periodical press, sources include the archives of artists' organisations such as the Georgian Association of Revolutionary Artists (SARMA, 1928-32), Georgia's branch of the Association of Revolutionary Artists (REVMAS, 1928-31) as well as AKhR/AKhRR in Moscow. The archives of museums and state institutions from the Tretyakov Gallery to the Museum of Oriental Cultures have also enabled unique insight into the context in which Georgian artists were operating. Materials consulted include exhibition catalogues and reviews as well as documentation concerning displays, acquisitions, exhibitions, research, publicity, inter-institutional collaborations and the planning of exhibitions, lectures and guided exhibition tours. Collectively, this extensive primary research allows new light to be shed on defining moments in the history of Soviet Georgian painting which have hitherto remained obscure.

National Politics in Stalin's Soviet Union

The evidence examined in this thesis makes clear the degree to which artists and critics in Georgia in the Stalin era were concerned with questions of national politics. This was particularly true from 1930, when artists and critics were compelled to interpret Stalin's famous formulation, made at the Sixteenth Communist Party Congress in 1930, describing Soviet culture as 'national in form, socialist in content'.²⁵ This national question was an important issue for the Bolsheviks from the outset. Marxism declared nationalism to be detrimental to the progress of socialism and both Lenin and Stalin considered it a threat to the progress of the international proletariat towards socialism and sought ways to control and limit that risk. By trumpeting slogans pronouncing Soviet nations' right to self-determination (and even, theoretically, secession from the Union) they sought to secure ethnic support for their revolution and differentiate themselves from the oppression and exploitation of subject nations under the Russian Empire and other colonial powers. As Terry Martin notes in his important book on Soviet policy, however, once the revolution was achieved, the Bolsheviks needed a model for governing the new multi-ethnic state that dealt with the national question on a practical level.²⁶ This was provided in the form of a nationalities policy, which was first set out formally in two resolutions passed at a special Central Committee conference in June 1923.

As the policy outlined, instead of attempting to suppress nationalist sentiment by force, the Bolsheviks' unprecedented approach would be to promote systematically the national consciousness of its subject nationalities and, in particular, its ethnic minorities. By encouraging the development of national consciousness among those communities, actively promoting the expression of national cultural difference and providing them with clearly delineated national territories as well as local government bureaucracies, schools and newspapers operating in the local language, the Soviet leadership believed they would satisfy nationalist impulses and avoid the development of more radical separatist nationalisms. At the same time, it was argued, the bolstering of ethnic minorities through these measures would reduce power inequalities between ethnic groups and so reduce the likelihood of

²⁵ I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, vol. 7 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1946–52), p. 138; I. V. Stalin, *Voprosy leninizma* (11th ed.) (Moscow: Politizdat, 1953.), pp. 545-73.

²⁶ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 2. For another useful account of nationalities policy in this period, see Yuri Slezkine 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,' *Slavic Review*, 53:2 (Summer 1994), pp. 414-52.

interethnic conflict. On this basis, the Soviet leadership introduced a policy of celebrating and encouraging cultural difference among its constituent ‘nationalities’.

As Commissar of Nationalities between 1917 and 1923, as well as later, Stalin developed several theses concerning nationalism and the best means of governing the Soviet Union as a multi-nation state. A nation, according to his definition, could be called a nation only when it had certain features. These included a shared national language, culture and ‘psychology’ but also, crucially, a shared national territory (Jewish and other diaspora nationalities, therefore, were excluded).²⁷ Accordingly, within the new Soviet state even the smallest of ethnically divided communities were given autonomous national territories. When it was established on 30 December 1922, the population of the Soviet Union was thus organised into a system of ethnically defined national units. These extended downwards in size and status from large national groups allocated the status of full Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) to Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) and ‘into smaller and smaller national territories’ (autonomous oblasts, national districts, village soviets, collective farms) ‘until the system merged seamlessly with the personal nationality of each Soviet citizen.’²⁸ The use of local languages was encouraged in local education and governance, and administrative powers were devolved to local governments and village soviets.²⁹ The Soviet state thus established many of the characteristic institutional forms of the nation-state, sometimes for ‘national’ communities of only a few thousand people. It even financed the production of books, films, newspapers, museums, operas and folk ensembles in their national languages.³⁰ This process, known as *korenizatsiia* (indigenisation) or *nativizatsiia* (nativisation) was implemented among dominant national groups and minority communities alike, with the intention that each community would be satisfied that its ‘national’ concerns would be best fulfilled under Soviet rule. This programme of active, systematic cultivation of national cultures and of the national consciousness of Soviet ‘national’ groups, which Martin has termed the Soviet Affirmative Action Empire, represented a radical approach to managing diverse peoples within a large multi-ethnic state, a new professedly post-colonial model of empire consolidated through a systematic programme of nation-affirming actions.

Although Soviet nationalities policy applied to all nationalities of the Soviet Union, in practice its implementation differed significantly both at distinct historical moments and with

²⁷ Joseph Stalin, ‘Marksizm i natsionalnyi vopros,’ (1913) in *Marksizm i natsionalno-kolonialnyi vopros* (Moscow: Partizdat, 1934), p. 4.

²⁸ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

respect to individual nationalities. *Korenizatsiia* was instigated across all of the non-Russian nationalities throughout the Stalin era and later. However, it progressed more rapidly among different national groups at different times.³¹ Broadly speaking, in Soviet policy of the 1920s, nationalities belonged to one of two categories. A nation was either ‘western’ and ‘developed’ or ‘eastern’ and ‘backward.’ Western nations were not only those geographically situated in the west, such as Russia and Ukraine, but also nationalities situated elsewhere which were deemed to have a developed degree of national consciousness, including Georgia and Armenia.³² In the years immediately following the 1923 formalisation of Soviet nationalities policy, under the NEP (New Economic Policy, 1923-8), *korenizatsiia* progressed more quickly among ‘western nationalities’ while little progress was made among ‘eastern nationalities’. Among ‘eastern’ nationalities, the creation of thousands of new national territories brought inter-ethnic conflict between neighbouring groups as each sought to avoid becoming national minorities within another group’s territory. Financial problems, moreover, stalled the costly process of setting up new governmental institutions, schools and newspapers in local languages. By contrast, among the developed ‘western’ nationalities such as Georgia, which already had strong educated national elites and institutions, the emphasis was on linguistic *korenizatsiia* and the re-introduction of the use of local national languages in government, schools and the press, which progressed quickly.

In the late 1920s, however, the tables turned. During the Cultural Revolution of 1928-31, terror waged against ‘non-proletarian class elements’ disproportionately targeted national (non-Russian) intelligentsias, compounding expectations that the Cultural Revolution’s emphasis on accelerating progress towards socialism and developing proletarian class-consciousness would make national differences irrelevant. This caused some of those implementing *korenizatsiia* in ‘western’ national territories to pause their efforts. By the end of the Cultural Revolution, moreover, the central authorities were also becoming increasingly concerned that *korenizatsiia* in Ukraine in particular (*ukrainizatsiia*) was encouraging rather than disarming nationalism there. The centralisation of administrative control that accompanied the First Five-Year Plan and Cultural Revolution, moreover, had bolstered resistance within all-Union-level institutions to linguistic *korenizatsiia* on logistical grounds: the more local government institutions operated in local languages, the harder it was for central institutions to communicate with them and supervise their activities. In December

³¹ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

³² The majority were categorised as culturally backward. Only the Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, Jews, and Germans were declared to be ‘advanced’ and categorised as Western nationalities. See Ibid., p 23.

1932, factors including disproportionate resistance to collectivisation among non-Russian nationals and moves in Ukraine to annex majority-Ukrainian territories of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) led the Politburo to issue two decrees criticising Ukrainianisation. These were followed by a wave of terror against Ukrainian and Belorussian nationals accused of counter-revolutionary ‘bourgeois nationalism’, initiating a retreat from *korenizatsiia* across the ‘western’ national republics, including Georgia.³³ By contrast, ‘eastern’ nationalities benefited from a spike in financial support from the centre and *korenizatsiia* accelerated as Stalin’s leadership made their administrative development a priority of the Cultural Revolution, facilitating the industrialisation and agricultural modernisation of those territories and therefore the success of the First Five-Year Plan.³⁴

The two Politburo decrees and subsequent terror campaign initiated major revisions in Soviet nationalities policy, one of the most significant of which was the return to Russians of their right to national self-expression. Until then Lenin’s ‘Greatest Danger’ principle, which declared Great Power (Russian) Chauvinism to pose a greater threat to Soviet power than local nationalism, had dictated that Russians be denied that right in order to avoid provoking distrust towards Russia felt among the nations ‘formerly oppressed’ under Tsarist rule.³⁵ From the early 1930s onwards, not only was the Russian nation’s right to national self-expression no longer to be denied, the Russians would become ‘the unifying force in a newly imagined Friendship of the Peoples.’³⁶ The rehabilitation of Russian culture did not mean an end of *korenizatsiia* among the other Soviet nationalities but it was accompanied by a change in the way nations and national cultures were defined and managed. By the second half of the 1930s it had become clear to the Soviet leadership that governing the 192 ‘nations’ it had established was neither viable nor desirable.³⁷ As a result, nationalities and national territories were consolidated to a more manageable number. Most ethnically divided soviets, villages and districts were disbanded and several autonomous republics were abandoned, as were most national minority schools and institutions (schools and institutions of minority national groups within another national group’s territory).³⁸ Conversely, larger ethnic groups, those with the most developed government bureaucracies and the most developed degrees of

³³ Ibid., p. 26. For more on this see chapter six, ‘The Politics of National Communism, 1923-1930’ in Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp. 211-69.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

³⁵ In practice, with the onslaught of the Great Terror in 1937-8, repressions targeted local nationalisms to a far greater degree than they did Great Power Chauvinism.

³⁶ Stalin, quoted in Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 27.

³⁷ Slezkine, ‘The USSR as a Communal Apartment’, p. 445.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 445.

national consciousness, saw their sovereignty and status strengthened, and were instructed to redouble, not reverse, efforts in building distinct national cultures.³⁹ Nations were defined by their size and longevity and allocated rights and privileges accordingly. Larger, older nations were allocated their own territories and right to self-governance in certain spheres, including the cultural sphere, and political representation in the Soviet centre. Its members had the right to work and be educated in their national language and had greater access to jobs in the government and Party apparatuses both in their own republics and in others. This incentivised each nationality to promote aspects of its cultural identity that demonstrated its longevity and therefore its right to those privileges. Each of the surviving Soviet ‘nations’, including Georgia, was expected to establish, nurture and celebrate its own nationally-defined culture centred around approved ‘Great Traditions,’ giving the central leadership tighter control over expressions of national culture. Under the new slogan of the ‘Friendship of the Peoples’ (*Druzhiba narodov*), moreover, all Soviet nationalities were now required to be familiar with and moved by the national cultures of each of their brother nationalities.⁴⁰ They were required to acknowledge and celebrate their own national culture and that of the remaining Soviet nationalities in conjunction with a shared Soviet cultural identity that was invariably represented through re-appropriated classics of Russian cultural heritage.

Aside from the broader changes in Soviet nationalities policy over time and the differences in its implementation among ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ nations, its enactment with respect to individual nations reflected the nature of that nation’s relationship with the Soviet centre and the opportunities and challenges it represented for the Soviet leadership. In Georgia’s case, there was no comparable Party-led backlash against *korenizatsiia* like the one that took place in Ukraine. Georgia did not present the same political and military concerns since it did not border the Soviet Union’s Western European enemies. It therefore did not fuel the leadership’s paranoia about foreign agents seeking to encourage local nationalism and organise nationalist resistance as a means of destabilising the Soviet Union. Instead, in Georgia, the nationalist threat was home grown. As such, and as this thesis documents, the means of controlling it was different. In the 1930s those means included especially stringent control over Georgian expressions of nationhood and by extension over Georgia’s entire

³⁹ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 432 and Slezkine, ‘The USSR as a Communal Apartment,’ p. 445.

⁴⁰ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 432 and Slezkine, ‘The USSR as a Communal Apartment,’ p. 447. The phrase ‘imagined community’ refers to Benedict Anderson’s field-defining book on nations and nationalism in which he defines nations as communities constructed in the minds of the people who consider themselves to be members. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006. First edition: 1983).

cultural sphere. It is in this light that this thesis considers Beria's involvement in the arts (and painting in particular) in Georgia in the 1930s as well as the selection of Pirosmiani as one of a handful of Georgia's 'Great Traditions.'

National politics and national culture

Since this thesis is concerned with the intersection of national politics and culture in Georgia from the dual perspectives of both the Soviet centre and periphery—of both the political leadership in Moscow and of Georgian artists and critics in Tbilisi as the articulators of their own Soviet national identity—it takes a necessarily two-pronged approach. Firstly, it examines how Georgian painters and critics defined their national culture, how they interpreted Stalin's demand for 'national form,' and how they were able to respond and adapt when the parameters of national form in Soviet art shifted. Secondly, it considers how Georgian art and the Georgian nation were represented by cultural institutions and commentators in Moscow. Of course, not all artists and critics in all contexts are driven by questions of nationality. Nevertheless, the emphasis placed on nationality under the Soviet Affirmative Action Empire and specific directives concerning national form in Soviet art ensured that questions of nationhood were prominent in the minds of Soviet citizens, especially artists. The evidence examined throughout this thesis, moreover, confirms this fact.

Each chapter in this thesis considers how Georgian nationhood and Georgian national culture were represented by artists, critics, politicians and other commentators at different moments in the Stalin era. Chapter one introduces the artists, critics, institutions and publications central to the story of painting in Soviet Georgia in the 1920s and 30s and offers a review of the art periodicals appearing in Tbilisi in those years. In doing so it provides a vital chronological framework for the investigations presented in the subsequent chapters. Chapter two explores how individual critics and influential organisations in Moscow understood the issue of national art, including Georgian art, and represented it to the Soviet public in the 1920s and early 1930s both in written commentaries and exhibition displays. Chapter three shows artists and critics debating the same questions in Georgia over the same period. Chapters four and five then explain how the resolution of these questions evolved in the second half of the 1930s. Finally, chapter six documents how critics represented Pirosmiani's legacy and significance in the 1920s and 30s and how Pirosmiani became one of the foremost symbols of Georgian nationhood and national culture in the Stalinist period

despite his primitive painterly style and connections to the pre-Revolutionary Russian avant-garde.

Each of the individuals and organisations discussed was grappling with an impossible conundrum due to contradictions inherent in Soviet nationalities policy. *Korenizatsiia*—the cultivation and celebration of distinct national administrations and cultural identities—was only a means to an end, not the ultimate goal. In fact, the ultimate goal was the exact opposite: the eventual drawing together (*sblizhenie*) and merging (*sliianie*) of Soviet national cultures into a single unified Soviet socialist national culture without national distinctions. The difficulty was that it was not clear when that *sblizhenie* and *sliianie* should take place, when *korenizatsiia* would cease to be desirable. *Korenizatsiia* was meant to satisfy the non-Russian peoples' desire for administrative autonomy and national cultural expression, to provide them with an impression of their agency as partners in a new kind of federation of nations. Members of each nationality (excluding the Russian people until 1934) had the right to national cultural expression and were actively encouraged to celebrate their national distinctiveness. However, the most enlightened and committed socialists, whether representatives of the Soviet centre or the distant periphery, were presumably ready to embrace the idea of the eventual merger of Soviet nations and creation of a unified Soviet culture that transcended national difference. In that case, did they not become a representative of the Soviet centre, leaving behind that national concerns still occupying the less advanced, backward looking periphery? Similarly, commentators representing the Soviet centre such as Rempel, not belonging to 'formerly oppressed' nations, had no reason to or justification for harbouring attachment to their or others' national cultural difference. Yet Soviet nationalities policy nevertheless obliged representatives of the centre to encourage the celebration of national cultural difference by non-Russians.⁴¹

An aim of this thesis, then, is to examine how Soviet policy, including nationalities policy, was implemented and enforced in practice with respect to Georgian artistic activity and 'cultural heritage'. How was theory played out in practice? Were the goals of the policy achieved, and if so, how? And how did this impact on Georgian artists' lives and works. This line of enquiry is pursued throughout the thesis, but in particular in chapters two, four and five, all of which primarily deal with the activities of Moscow institutions in representing Georgian culture to the Soviet public through their displays and publications. Chapter two

⁴¹ Rempel was actually from Simferopol on the Crimean peninsula, but represented the Soviet centre in the position he took and the institutions he worked for. V. E. Voitov, *Materialy po istorii Gosudarstvennogo muzeia Vostoka 1918-1950: liudi, veshchi, dela* (Moscow: Skanrus, 2003), p. 151.

sheds light on the challenges that arose in the practical implementation of Soviet nationalities policy in Moscow in particular with reference to the display and representation of the art and culture of the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union in Moscow. Chapters four and five give an account of the personal interventions of the Soviet leadership including especially Beria, in the activities of Georgian artists during the mid-1930s. They offer a candid snapshot of the Soviet leadership's attitudes toward both Georgia and the question of national form in Soviet painting at that moment and provide a fresh picture of their hands-on involvement in managing national art as well as the image of Soviet Georgian nationhood. The 1937 Moscow Exhibition of Works of Painting, Sculpture and Graphics of the Georgian SSR, examined in these two chapters, stands as evidence of the successes and failures of their efforts.

In examining these questions, this research has built on and responded to a body of scholarship addressing several distinct questions related to the intersection of national politics and national cultures in Stalin's Soviet Union. Several scholars, for example, have examined how state cultural institutions and state-initiated cultural events in Moscow helped disseminate the Soviet leadership's position concerning the relationships of Soviet nationalities to Soviet power. They explore how nationalities were represented, the extent to which such institutions and initiatives were responding to Soviet nationalities policy or other priorities of the Soviet leadership, and how successful they were in presenting their intended narratives. Francine Hirsch, for example, has shown how the academics of the ethnographic department of Leningrad's State Russian Museum (hereafter, Russian Museum) struggled with contradictory, seemingly incompatible demands placed on them in representing the Soviet nationalities in their displays. They were expected to represent both the distinctiveness of individual Soviet nationalities while also reflecting official Party narratives of those nationalities' modernisation under Soviet governance, particularly in the context of the transformations of Stalin's First Five-Year Plan.⁴² The museum's task was impossible, since exhibits capable of distinguishing one ethnic group from another, such as examples of folk crafts, embroidery, agricultural tools, or national dress, often also carried connotations of the group's perceived 'cultural backwardness'. Equally, evidence of a nationality's modernisation tended in turn to obscure the group's national cultural distinctions.⁴³ Hirsch's study provides an important model, and the ethnographic department a useful point of

⁴² Francine Hirsch, 'Getting to Know "The Peoples of the USSR": Ethnographic Exhibits as Soviet Virtual Tourism 1923-1934,' *Slavic Review*, 62:4 (Winter, 2003), pp. 683-709.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 690.

comparison, for my examinations of the operations of Moscow's Museum of Oriental Cultures and of the 1937 exhibition of Georgian art in Moscow. As in Hirsch's study, my findings are based on extensive archival material concerning the acquisition of exhibits, the planning of displays, guided tours, accompanying lectures, debates and openings, together with visitors books, publicity material and contemporary exhibition reviews. Moreover, as with Hirsch's study, my conclusions show how museum staff and exhibition committees struggled to resolve the practical problems raised by the contradictions and ambiguities at the heart of Soviet nationalities policy.

Greg Castillo's account of the representation of Soviet nationalities at all-Union architectural exhibits in Moscow in the Stalin era provides another important precedent for the research presented in chapters two, four and five of this thesis. He shows how fairs and exhibitions, including Moscow's First Agricultural and Cottage Industries Exhibition in 1923, and the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition (VSKhV) which opened in Moscow in 1939 and was remodelled and re-opened following World War II in 1954, were designed to reflect the central tenets of Soviet nationalities policy.⁴⁴ Castillo's observation that the 'construction of Soviet national identities' by the Soviet centre 'was, in a literal sense, an exhibitionistic pursuit' is the starting point from which I examine the activities of the Museum of Oriental Cultures and the 1937 Moscow exhibition.⁴⁵

In any project examining the representation of one ethnic or national group by another, one must consider the relevance of the study of Orientalism, and the applicability of the model of colonial governance set out by Edward Said in his controversial field-defining thesis on the subject.⁴⁶ Several scholars have debated the relevance of Said's thesis to the study of both Imperial and Soviet Russia's relationship with the non-Russian nationalities under its control, reaching varying conclusions. Nathaniel Knight has argued against the utility of applying Said's thesis to the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union, insisting that the relationship of Russia to her colonial subjects or constituent nationalities was profoundly different to those of Western Europe. He maintains that, unlike nineteenth-century European colonial empires, Russia did not view Central Asia and the Caucasus as an emphatically inferior oriental 'other', irrevocably separate from and subordinate to civilised Russia, nor did Russians conquer and dominate those lands primarily through an orientalist discourse as set out by Said. Instead, the colonised 'subject' was an (albeit backward) member of the

⁴⁴ Greg Castillo, 'Peoples at an Exhibition: Soviet Architecture and the National Question' in Lahusen and Dobrenko, eds, *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, pp. 91-119 (p. 92).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

empire's community of peoples, with the capacity to 'become civilised' and even to contribute to the study of the orient itself.⁴⁷

Others, such as Adeeb Khalid, however, have defended the usefulness of Orientalist theory to the Russian context, warning that by emphasising the uniqueness of Russia's situation as Knight does, we are in danger of impeding meaningful cross-regional comparative studies of orientalism.⁴⁸ Similarly, David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye concludes that even 'if Edward Said's work is not wholly relevant to Russian orientalism, it [nevertheless] raise[s] some interesting questions about the relationships between knowledge and power' which are useful in the Russian context.⁴⁹ Maria Todorova, meanwhile, agrees with some of Knight's objections.⁵⁰ However, she also defends Khalid's argument for the utility of Orientalism in the Russian case 'insofar as it describes power relations in a concrete imperial/colonial context,' and that, furthermore, 'it helps elucidate the specific ambivalence of Russia as both the subject and object of orientalism.'⁵¹ The Soviet leadership, of course, sought to distance itself from the colonialism either of Tsarist Russia or Western Europe, presenting the Soviet Union instead as a post-colonial multi-national state that benefited the nations and nationalities belonging to it, the larger of which at least theoretically maintained the right to secede. True, non-Russian peoples' experience of Soviet rule often had little to do with the narratives presented by the Soviet centre. And (particularly, early) representations of non-Slavic Soviet nationalities at the Soviet centre sometimes borrowed from Western colonial models of representation that effectively 'othered' Southern and Eastern Soviet nationalities, stressing their difference and backwardness and denying them the right to self-representation (such as at the 1923 Agricultural and Cottage Industries Exhibition). Nevertheless, most scholars agree that the Soviet centre's relationship with its non-Russian peoples departed dramatically from the colonial empires of the nineteenth century.

Terry Martin's assessment of the workings of the Soviet Union as a multi-national state and of the implementation of Soviet nationalities policy in the 1920s and 30s stresses the differences between the Soviet Union and the nineteenth-century European colonial

⁴⁷ Nathaniel Knight, 'Grigor'ev in Orenburg, 1851-1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?', *Slavic Review*, 59 (2000), pp. 74-100 (p. 96).

⁴⁸ Adeeb Khalid, 'Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and European History*, 1:4 (2000), pp. 691-99.

⁴⁹ David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian orientalism: Asia in the Russian mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 9.

⁵⁰ Maria Todorova, 'Does Russian Orientalism Have a Russian Soul? A Contribution to the Debate between Nathaniel Knight and Adeeb Khalid,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and European History*, 1:4 (2000), pp. 717-27 (p. 721).

⁵¹ Maria Todorova, 'Does Russian Orientalism Have a Russian Soul?,' p. 720.

empires. In his use of the label ‘empire’ in the context of the Soviet Affirmative Action Empire, Martin asserts that he does not intend to present the Soviet Union as a traditional type of empire, insisting instead that he is ‘emphasising its novelty.’⁵² No other empire, after all, actively cultivated the national cultural distinctiveness of its subject nationalities in the way that the Soviet leadership elected to. Vera Tolz’s study of the activities of Russian Imperial orientologists in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries highlighted continuities in the way non-Russian ethnic groups (especially smaller communities) were represented before and after the Russian Revolution. It showed how the same Imperial Russian orientologists who wrote about and represented the non-Slavic peoples of the Russian Empire and influenced Imperial Russia’s policies towards those communities before the Revolution continued to speak for those groups and influence policy affected them under Soviet rule.⁵³ However, as Tolz and others have shown, these academics also operated with significant freedom from State direction.⁵⁴ ‘They were empire savers who nevertheless strongly supported the demands for self-determination.’⁵⁵ As Tolz notes, key features of Said’s concept of Orientalism are reflected in the pronouncements of these scholars, who ‘insisted on their right and ability to speak on behalf of the peoples of the “Orient”.’⁵⁶ However, the Russian orientologists consistently worked side by side with researchers belonging to the very cultures they were studying. As such, as Tolz concludes, ‘the central tenet of *Orientalism*, defined by Said as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the “Orient” and (most of the time) the “Occident”’, is not readily applicable to their work.’⁵⁷

I am in agreement with these scholars that a more complex political and cultural dialogue between Soviet centre and periphery was at play than can be profitably explained through reference to Said’s model of colonial Orientalism, despite instances (like those which Castillo highlights) in which the power relationship this model embodies resonated with the Soviet experience. Instead, as this thesis documents, political and cultural actors at both the centre and periphery of the Soviet Union were involved in presenting a changing picture of the dynamics of power between the central Soviet authorities and the Union’s constituent

⁵² Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 19.

⁵³ Vera Tolz, *Russia’s own Orient: the politics of identity and Oriental studies in the late Imperial and early Soviet periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 4.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Bruce Grant, ‘Empire and Savagery: The Politics of Primitivism in Late Imperial Russia’ in Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds, *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 292–310 (p. 307).

⁵⁵ Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

nationalities. Soviet nationalities policy and its implementation was guided by a continual negotiation between the Soviet leadership's shifting political priorities and people's responses to them.

Imagining the Georgian Nation

Several scholars have considered how Georgian intellectuals conceived of and articulated their nationhood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and what circumstances and influences fed or motivated particular conceptualisations. Nino Nanava's 2005 doctoral thesis, 'Conceptualising the Georgian Nation: the Modern Intellectual Discourse of Georgian Identity' broaches precisely this subject. There are serious problems with Nanava's text, however, leading one to question the reliability of many of her conclusions. In her chapter on 'Georgian Nation and Nationalism during the Stalin Era,' for example, she sets out 'to demonstrate how the dynamics and inter-relationship between Georgian nationalism and Soviet state nationalism developed during the Stalin era.'⁵⁸ However, she fails to define what is meant by 'Soviet state nationalism', or to situate her discussion in relation to useful existing accounts of Soviet nationalisms and nationalities policies, such as those offered by Martin, Yuri Slezkine and others. She also makes a series of surprising assertions that directly contradict those accounts. In contradiction of Martin's account, for example, she claims that the 'assimilation of smaller nationalities into the mainstream of larger nations was seen as something desirable,' though she does not say who desired this or when, or offer any evidence in support of this claim.⁵⁹ She declares, moreover, that the Soviet leadership, instead of seeking to satisfy national sentiment by encouraging expressions of national culture, re-directed the 'nationalistic grievances' of smaller national groups towards the dominant nationality of a given region, exacerbating inter-ethnic tensions.⁶⁰ A series of confusing, pseudo-psychological explanations for what she views as Stalin's particular victimisation of Georgia are then presented in support of her position. She declares, for example, that Stalin's 'rejection of his Georgianness' stemmed 'from a feeling of inadequacy, during his formative years in Georgia,' though she does not elaborate on the sources of this feeling or its specific

⁵⁸ Nino Nanava, 'Conceptualising the Georgian Nation: The Modern Intellectual Discourse of Georgian Identity,' thesis (Ph.D), University of London, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2005, p. 132.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 133. In the same vein, Nanava declares that 'Stalin favoured the old methods and ruled the Soviet State in the spirit of his Tsarist predecessors.' Nanava, 'Conceptualising the Georgian Nation,' p. 146.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 131.

relevance to Stalin's rejection of his Georgian nationhood or to his policies with respect to Georgia.⁶¹

These statements point to the fact that the chapter (and the thesis) is not really concerned with the dynamics of 'Georgian nationalism and Soviet state nationalism' in the Soviet period. Instead, it is interested in demonstrating the negative impact of Stalinist nationalities policy on Georgia's relations with her neighbours in the post-Stalin and post-Soviet eras and, in particular, on her contemporary ability to establish her rightful 'territorial unity' (extending to Abkhazia and Ossetia).⁶² Meanwhile, rather than elucidating how Georgian intellectuals conceived of their nationhood under Stalin, Nanava offers unsurprising and vague conclusions that both Lenin and Stalin 'left their own mark' on the nationalities question in Georgia, that exiled Georgian Mensheviks in Paris were in favour of Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union, and that outspoken separatist nationalists inside Soviet Georgia faced persecution.⁶³

Nevertheless, despite these problems, the premise of Nanava's thesis—that Georgian intellectuals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries actively constructed conceptions of Georgian national identity and that one should look to their commentaries in order to better understand how nationhood was discussed and conceived of in a given period—is an important point of departure for my own thesis. So too is her hypothesis that they articulated these conceptions by drawing on myths and symbols of Georgia's primordial past and that these myths and symbols then gradually filtered into a popular mythology of Georgian culture.⁶⁴ Nanava offers this hypothesis based on her application of an 'ethno-symbolist' approach to the study of nationalism, after theorists such as John A. Armstrong, Anthony D. Smith and John Hutchinson. This approach acknowledges the modern process of nation formation, yet it also posits the important role of 'collective memories' in creating nations, which are understood, again to use Anderson's phrase, as 'imagined communities', built in the minds of their members, based on 'the image of their communion.'⁶⁵ These collective memories might encompass anything from wars and their heroes to architects, painters, sculptors, poets, musicians and their works, but include, above all, 'idealised memories of a *'golden age'*, or golden ages, of virtue, heroism, beauty, learning, holiness, power and

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 133.

⁶² Ibid., p. 148.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 15 and 155-63.

⁶⁴ See the introduction to Nanava, 'Conceptualising the Georgian Nation,' pp. 8-16.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 9; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6.

wealth, an era distinguished for its collective dignity and external prestige.’⁶⁶ Nanava argues that ‘pre-modern myths and symbols’ related, for example, to Georgia’s twelfth-century Golden Age, and the mythologies of Queen Tamar (who reigned 1184-1213), Rustaveli, Georgia’s fourth-century Christianiser, St Nino, and others ‘played a central role in conceptualisation of the Georgian nation.’⁶⁷

Regardless of the evidence Nanava herself supplies, her hypothesis is played out in the work of other scholars of Georgian history and culture. Harsha Ram, for example, has shown recently how the committedly nationalist Georgian literary modernists of the Blue Horns group (*Tsisperi qantselebi*, 1915-1930) consciously constructed Georgian national identity in the early twentieth century. They did so by rhetorically aligning themselves with Western European Decadence, Italian Futurism and the mystical cognition of the Russian Symbolists’ theurgically oriented symbolism.⁶⁸ In doing so they distanced the Georgian literary tradition from the Russian one, insisting that the influence of Russian traditions of thought and literature could only be detrimental to Georgia’s development. More importantly here though, in relation to Nanava’s hypothesis, Ram explains that Tabidze’s ‘vindication of the Georgian national ethos was essentially mythic’—grounded in a primordially conceived mythology of Georgian nationhood. Tabidze’s ‘account of Georgian culture rested in a timeless set of cultural and aesthetic traits, which history could hamper or obscure but never generate.’⁶⁹ My examination of Georgian artists’ and critics’ discussion of Georgian nationhood and national culture in the 1920s and 30s and in particular in their reflections on the Georgian national character through their commentaries on Pirosmiani’s career, provides further evidence in support of Nanava’s contention, although I strive, like Ram, to situate that new data within the concrete historical context of Soviet national politics and the realities of its impact in Georgia.

A major drawback of Nanava’s proposed ethno-symbolist approach is that it does not take sufficient account of the impact of specific socio-political events and shifts in Stalinist policy, including nationalities policy, on Georgian intellectuals’ conceptualisation of their nationhood. Viktor Shnirelman’s research is more successful in that respect in that it explores how Soviet nationalities policy encouraged ‘national’ intellectuals in the Caucasus to deliberately keep alive artistic traditions that would otherwise naturally have disappeared in

⁶⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *The Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) cited in Nanava, ‘Conceptualising the Georgian Nation,’ p. 9.

⁶⁷ Nanava, ‘Conceptualising the Georgian Nation,’ p. 11.

⁶⁸ Harsha Ram, ‘Decadent Nationalism, “Peripheral” Modernism: The Georgian Literary Manifesto between Symbolism and the Avant-garde,’ *Modernism/modernity*, 21:1 (January, 2014), pp. 334-59.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

order to validate their own nationality's indigenous status. The policy's privileging of groups demonstrated to be authentically indigenous, he shows, encouraged nationalist intellectuals to 'artificially conserve and retain those folk traditions, which, under different conditions, would have failed to survive in the industrial and post-industrial environment.'⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Shnirelman's thesis does not appear to take into account the active, systematic top-down promotion and cultivation of such cultural traditions as markers of national identity that took place under Soviet nationalities policy in the Stalin era. The *korenizatsiia* that took place throughout the Stalin era and (albeit to a lesser degree) in the post-Stalin years, including before Soviet nationalities policy's shift in the mid-1930s towards a more primordialist definition of nations, clearly also drove the artificial preservation of national cultural and folk traditions. National cultural producers were not only incentivised to preserve such traditions by the prospect of demonstrating the nation's indigenous status. They were also systematically provided with funding and administrative assistance to develop cultural and educational institutions through which people were paid to preserve those traditions. Moreover, as I have explored elsewhere, the resultant preservation and celebration of these traditions meant that they remained (or became) a part of people's national self-conception.⁷¹ In agreement with Nanava and Shnirelman, this thesis argues that Georgian painters and other commentators consciously constructed formulae of Georgian 'national culture' and delineated their own version of Soviet Georgian nationhood. The ways in which they did so responded to various socio-political pressures and motivations, including those connected to changing Soviet nationalities policy. However, Georgian artists and other commentators also had agency in how they interpreted the official version of their nationhood dictated by Soviet policy, and how they used and sometimes re-appropriated national symbols to offer their own vision of nationhood in the Soviet context, particularly before and after the height of Stalinist state control over the arts.

A final, important point of departure for this thesis is the small body of recent scholarship highlighting the complexities implicit in the study of empire, nationalism and national identity in the Russian Imperial and Soviet contexts in light of the non-binary network of 'orients' and 'occidents' that such a study must involve. While Georgia may have been part of 'Russia's own Orient', for example, she can also bear the status (and

⁷⁰ Victor A. Shnirelman, *The value of the past: myths, identity and politics in Transcaucasia* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2001), p. 4.

⁷¹ See Jennifer Brewin, 'Ucha Japaridze, Lado Gudiashvili, and the Spiritual in Georgian Painting' in Louise Hardiman and Nicola Kozicharow (eds), *Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017), pp. 229-63.

responsibility) of the occident in her relationship with neighbours considered to be more 'oriental.' In the Soviet context, though Georgia may have been orientalised and othered in discourse emanating from institutions in the Soviet centre, Georgia remained a 'western', 'developed' people under Soviet nationalities policy while the Islamic peoples of Central Asia or even of Georgia's mountainous north were 'eastern' and 'backward. Furthermore, one relationship between one 'east' and 'west' could be used to adjust another. Mark Bassin, for example, has written about the importance that Tsarist Russia placed on its 'oriental' frontier in the Caucasus as a place where her relationship with Western Europe could be reconfigured. Through Russia's introduction of European enlightenment and civilisation in the region she showed her to be civilised and European.⁷² Conversely, Jane Sharp has shown how members of Russia's early twentieth-century artistic avant-garde redefined their identity vis-à-vis the West by aligning themselves with their construction of the art of the 'East', selecting Pirosmiani as a representative of that East.⁷³ By presenting his painting as an example of a non-European modernism that was, like theirs, rooted in the primitive directness they discerned in the art of the East, they sought to redefine themselves as the architects of an alternative to Western European modernism. These examples of how the Russian state and Russian painters respectively sought to shift their identity between East and West constitute useful precedents for this thesis's exploration of how Georgian artists and critics and representatives of the Soviet centre formulated Georgian nationhood between East and West, in particular, in relation to my investigation of the representation of Georgian and other national cultures in Moscow by the Museum of Oriental Cultures and other institutions.

Finally, several further studies offer models for considering how the relationship between Moscow and Georgia were formulated to different ends in the Stalin era. Susan Layton, Harsha Ram and Zaza Shatrishvili, for example, have demonstrated how Russian Romantic writers in the nineteenth century and Georgian writers under their influence reimagined Georgia's position between East and West by constructing visions of empire based on a three-way dynamic involving Russia, Georgia, and the Islamic mountain-dwelling peoples of the North Caucasus.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Bruce Grant's study of how narratives in

⁷² Mark Bassin, 'Russia Between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of Geographic Space,' *Slavic Review*, 50:1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 1-17. See also Brower and Lazzerini, *Russia's Orient* and Jane Burbank and David L. Russel, eds, *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998).

⁷³ Jane A. Sharp, 'Beyond Orientalism: Russian and Soviet Modernism on the Periphery of Empire,' in Rosalind P. Blakesley & Susan E. Reid, eds, *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), pp. 112-33.

⁷⁴ Harsha Ram and Zaza Shatrishvili, 'Romantic Topography and the Dilemma of Empire: The Caucasus in the Dialogue of Georgian and Russian Poetry,' *Russian Review*, 63:1 (2004), pp. 1-25; Harsha Ram, *The Imperial*

Imperial Russian and Soviet literature presented the conquest of the Caucasus as a civilising mission, a gift of civilisation, protection, supervision and assistance given by the Imperial or Soviet centre to its periphery, constitutes an important point of reference for analysing representations of Georgia's relationship to Soviet power.⁷⁵ Grant shows how these narratives of gift giving allowed Russian and Soviet 'colonisers' to bind the Caucasus in their debt and thereby to legitimise their claims of sovereignty over the region and to demand reciprocity, compliance, and even gratitude in return.⁷⁶ This dynamic is particularly relevant to my study of the 1937 Moscow exhibition of Georgian art since the exhibition required Georgian artists both to show their gratitude for Stalin's role in the revolutionary process in Transcaucasia and to demonstrate their artistic and political compliance with the new order.

As the above review of scholarship on Soviet national politics and the expression of national identities in the Soviet context makes clear, nationhood, national identity and national heritage should not be understood as inevitably and naturally occurring phenomena. Instead, they represent categories that are consciously constructed by individual actors, including intellectuals and politicians, to serve particular agendas. Indeed, the articulation of these identities, the delineation of the 'heritage' claimed as belonging to a particular 'national' group, and the nationalistic interpretation of the significance of that 'heritage' in helping to define those identities, often contribute to the process of construction of nations themselves.⁷⁷ Nations, similarly, are not primordially existing entities, but are formed, at least in part, as the product of the articulation of consciously constructed national identities by intellectuals and others actors. They also come into being only in the context of specific conditions and are defined by specific features.

This thesis subscribes to the definition of nations set forth by Benedict Anderson, who describes them as 'imagined communities' built in the minds of their members, based on 'the image of their communion.'⁷⁸ They are communities united based on their members' perception of ties between themselves and the remaining members of their community, often grounded in shared language, culture, history, religion or myths of descent. As Anderson clarifies, however, such communities can be considered nations only when they share certain

Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁷⁵ Bruce Grant, *The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ On this process, see '1. Rethinking Social Identities: Class and Nationality,' in Suny, *Revenge of the Past*, pp. 1-19.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6.

necessary features. As he argues, moreover, they are a necessarily modern phenomenon since they rely on a degree of social communication that only appeared in the modern age with the development of what Anderson calls ‘print-capitalism’ (a phenomenon whereby the popularisation of the printing press combined with the development of capitalist markets encouraged the mass circulation of printed materials in vernacular languages, which facilitated the development of common ‘national’ discourses).⁷⁹ Modern nations, thus, sometimes grow out of already existing pre-Modern ethnic communities, proto-nationalities, or what Anthony D. Smith calls ‘ethnies.’⁸⁰ However, they are not the same entity. As Ronald Suny puts it, modern nationalities ‘are usually larger, territorially more dispersed communities than the ethnies out of which they may have grown.’⁸¹ Crucially, they are also communities that have ‘been successfully organised and mobilised by the work of intellectuals and politicians’ so that they ‘can put forth cultural and political demands that may include autonomy, sovereignty, and independence.’⁸² Nations, or nationalities (Suny uses the terms interchangeably), then, are modern entities, brought into being with the help of intellectuals and other actors who articulate and disseminate particular constructions of nationhood and national identity. But in order for them to constitute a nation, the identities articulated must be adopted and internalised by the broad masses, who can in turn be mobilised in support of shared ‘national’ concerns. The resulting nation may or may not be based on a previously existing, pre-modern proto-nationality or ethnies. However, it is distinct from its pre-modern counterpart in that its ‘imagined community’ is a different one. It is not based on the same image of communion, does not comprise the same group of people, and is not able to mobilise its members in the same way as the ‘imagined community’ constituting the modern nation.

As noted earlier in this thesis, following the Revolution, the Soviet leadership, led by Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, issued a definition of the nation that differed significantly from that set out above. It also later remodelled its definition to reflect its changing political priorities and changing approach to the governance of the Soviet Union as a multi-nation state. Its early definition specified only a shared language, ‘culture’ and ‘psychology,’ as well as, importantly, a shared national territory, as necessary attributes. Crucially, this implied that ethnic groups with a shared language, ‘culture’ and ‘psychology’ could become a nation—with all of the privileges and rights that that status might afford—if

⁷⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 224.

⁸⁰ Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (second edition) (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 21.

⁸¹ Suny, *Revenge of the Past*, p. 13.

⁸² *Ibid.*

given their own national territory and supported in the development of national institutions. It therefore allowed the Soviet leadership to forward its model of a post-colonial multi-nation state in which even small ethnic communities enjoyed national status. In the mid-1930s, however, as Soviet policy shifted towards the consolidation of its numerous national groups into a much smaller number of Soviet 'nations,' the Soviet leadership adopted a primordial conception of nations. Under this new model, national status relied on the ability of a national group to demonstrate its longevity, based on the assumption of continuity between the modern nation and its historical ancestors (ethnies).

The Soviet leadership thus promoted different conceptions of nationhood at different times to serve its changing goals. In its nationalities policy, moreover, it also set out the implications of those conceptions in terms of the status and rights (to territory, degrees of self-governance, for example) of Soviet national groups within the Union. In doing so, it established boundaries within which those groups (including their cultural property and identity) could be discussed and conceived of by intellectuals (even if the policies that it set out were also often informed, in turn, by the positions put forward by intellectuals).

In creating new 'nations' (as it defined them), and redefining conceptual and territorial boundaries between 'nations' (both those newly and previously recognised), the Bolsheviks politicised ethnicity by attaching to it particular rights and privileges. As Vera Tolz and Svetlana Gorshenina have shown, among certain Central Asian 'nationalities,' the national boundaries (conceptual and territorial) demarcated by the Bolsheviks following the Revolution and again with the beginning of the national demarcation of Central Asia in 1924, led to disagreements over the attribution of national cultural identities as well as the rights of those nationalities to claim ownership of monuments of cultural heritage.⁸³ The delineation of those identities and rights of ownership was actively undertaken by a range of actors including, at different times, the central Soviet authorities, local actors, and imperial Russian orientologists (who continued to study those communities and cultures after the Revolution). Each of these parties had their own agenda and their own views on how those identities and rights of ownership should be delineated, leading to different definitions at different times. Before 1924, no clear position was agreed on as to whether monuments should be considered the property of the local population, the Soviet people, or of the whole world; for local actors

⁸³ Svetlana Gorshenina and Vera Tolz, 'Constructing Heritage in Early Soviet Central Asia: The Politics of Memory in a Revolutionary Context*,' *Ab Imperio* (4), 2016, pp. 77-115. The national delimitation of Turkestan, which eventually resulted in the creation of five republics in Central Asia, began in 1924 with the creation of the Uzbek and Turkmen SSRs, the Tajik ASSR within the Uzbek SSR and the Kara-Kirghiz Autonomous Oblast within the Russian Federation, although it was a complex and prolonged process that was completed only in 1936. Gorshenina and Tolz, 'Constructing Heritage,' p. 103.

its was largely clear that they belonged to the local population, but for Russians the question was more ambiguous.⁸⁴ However, somewhat surprisingly, in the first four years following the 1924 delimitation, monument preservation in the region continued to be the responsibility of the same joint preservation committee (Sredazkomstaris) that had operated before 1924, rather than being divided between independent committees for each new territory.⁸⁵ This arrangement was primarily promoted by Russian orientologists, as well as by Sredazkomstaris. As such, it partly reflected Sredazkomstaris's desire to maintain the authority that it already held, as well as Russian orientologists' belief that dividing the committees would lead to a dearth of local specialists able to conduct the necessary preservation work. However, it also reflected 'a particular vision of a "national culture" as, inevitably, a multiethnic endeavour, not a discrete, insulated entity, but a product of complex transnational communications.'⁸⁶ It was only in the early 1930s that independent republican preservation committees were established in Central Asia and a more narrow, ethno-centric definition of national cultures came to be articulated.⁸⁷

Importantly for this thesis, however, the situation was different in the Caucasus. As Tolz and Gorshenina have pointed out, in the first decades of the twentieth century the influential Russian orientologist and linguist Nikolai Marr proposed a vision of the pan-Caucasian culture analogous to the shared culture envisaged by others for Central Asia.⁸⁸ However, unlike in Central Asia, this vision was immediately opposed by representatives of the Georgian and Armenian intellectual elites, who articulated instead narrow, ethnocentric definitions of national communities and cultures and suggested instead the appropriation of specific historical monuments 'for the production of separate Armenian and Georgian national histories.'⁸⁹ As will be evident in chapters two and three of this thesis, moreover, artists and critics in Georgia in the 1920 and 30s, as well as many of those commenting on Georgian art in Moscow in the same period, largely adopted this narrow ethno-centric conception of nations and national cultural heritage without question, as naturally and inevitably existing facts. Indeed, there is no evidence of any artist, critic or other commentator in this period having attempted to define what Georgian national culture or cultural heritage did or did not include. Instead, these figures concerned themselves with

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 103.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 97. In 1924, the committee, Turkomstaris (the Turkmen Committee), was simply renamed Sredazkomstaris (the Central Asian Committee).

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 105.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 109.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 106.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 106.

offering an interpretation of ‘national form’ of Soviet art, which they automatically based on the same ethno-centric conception of the ‘national.’ It was only in the late 1930s when Soviet nationalities policy shifted towards a more primordialist conception of nations based around ‘Great Traditions’ of ‘national cultures’ that the bounds (or at least the key foci) of Georgian ‘national culture’ and ‘national cultural heritage’ were explicitly articulated. For that reason, in tracing debates that took place concerning ‘national form’ in Soviet art, I reproduce the terminology of ‘nationhood,’ ‘national culture’ and ‘national cultural heritage’ as it was used by the figures studied while acknowledging that these terms refer to concepts that are consciously constructed, even if those using them do not acknowledge or understand them to be so.

Chapter outlines

Chapter one provides a fresh account of the artists, critics, and cultural and governmental institutions involved in producing, criticising and moulding visual art in Georgia in the first two decades following Sovietisation, tracing in particular the appearance of proletarian currents in Georgian painting and art criticism in that period. The first comprehensive review of the major artistic and literary journals published in Georgia in the period, it provides a vital chronology for the case studies presented in the subsequent chapters. Chapter two explores the politics and challenges of displaying and discussing ‘national art’—the art of the non-Russian peoples of the USSR—in Moscow in the Stalin era. It considers the attempts of a series of individuals and institutions to present national art including contemporary Georgian painting to the Moscow public, either through museum and exhibition displays or published commentaries. It shows how different institutions struggled to interpret Stalin’s formulation of Soviet art ‘national in form, socialist in content’ as they grappled with the inherent contradictions of Soviet nationalities policy. Chapter three examines the debates that took place between competing artistic factions in Tiflis during Stalin’s Cultural Revolution of 1928-1931, and considers Georgian artists’ responses to the upheavals of the period. It considers in particular the ways in which these debates corresponded to, responded to or departed from those taking place in Moscow in the same period. Chapter four examines how a path for Georgian art was formulated after 1934 in light of the advent of socialist realism and in response to Stalin’s formulation of Soviet culture as ‘national in form, socialist in content.’ This question dominated debates among Georgian artists in this period, including the public meeting of the Georgian Union of Artists held in

1934 in connection with the exhibition ‘Soviet Visual Art of Georgia Over 13 Years.’ It examines the landmark exhibition of Georgian art at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow in 1937. At the exhibition monumental paintings by Georgian artists illustrated on a grand scale Lavrenty Beria’s 1935 pamphlet *On the History of Bolshevik Organisations in Transcaucasia*. The chapter considers the political significance of this exhibition as a demonstration by Beria of Georgia’s alignment with the Soviet centre in the context of the Great Terror (1937-1939). Chapter six, then, analyses commentaries appearing in the late 1920s and 30s concerning Pirosmani’s legacy and his significance for the development of Soviet Georgian painting, and considers the selection of Pirosmani as a ‘Great Tradition’ of Soviet Georgian culture.

Together, these chapters break completely new ground in the study of Soviet art. They present a vast quantity of previously unstudied primary material concerning important but little known Soviet artists, exhibitions and institutions. They contribute new data to the study of Soviet nations and nationalism and to scholarship on Stalinist culture. More importantly, this research introduces and elucidates for the first time a context that still remains wholly unfamiliar to most scholars of Soviet art and culture. It provides the first dedicated study of the activities of artists and critics working in Soviet Georgia in the 1920s and 30s. But it also contributes to a reconfiguration of the study of Soviet art itself by shedding new light on the activities of artists and critics beyond the main Russian centres and the lines of communication that existed between Moscow and Tbilisi as the Soviet centre and periphery. It does not view the Soviet periphery from the point of view of the centre looking out, considering, for example, how Russian artists in Moscow imagined and presented Georgia through their work. Rather, it examines a single Soviet periphery and the experience of the artists and critics belonging to it. By examining Georgian artists’ and critics’ experience as well as the experiences of the Moscow institutions charged with representing Georgian art in Moscow, it contributes to a better understanding of Stalinist culture as an entity that extended beyond the main Russian centres, transfiguring itself in response to its multifarious contexts.

Chapter 1: The Battle for Soviet Painting in Georgia in the 1920s and 30s

This chapter traces the appearance of proletarian currents in Georgian painting during the first decade of Soviet rule and sets out the political and institutional contexts in which they appeared. Over the course of the Stalin era, these currents would gradually evolve into the nationally specific traditions of Soviet Georgian painting whose relationship to wider Stalinist culture and Soviet socialist realism is a focus of this thesis. As such, the history of proletarian cultural organisations in Georgia in the 1920s represents the first stage in the genesis of Georgian Soviet socialist realist painting under Stalin.

In the 1920s, Georgian artists saw their country and the political climate in which they operated dramatically transformed. Some, especially older artists and painters who had trained at the Imperial Academy of Arts in St Petersburg before the revolution, largely ignored Sovietisation, initially continuing to work in the same idiom as they had before the Bolsheviks arrived. Many, however, followed with keen interest the polemics arising in Moscow concerning the appropriate role of the arts under the new Soviet state. Some began to align themselves with particular movements in Moscow and organised themselves into groups according to those positions. Others attempted to create new aesthetic visions that drew on both European modernism and the rich visual culture of Georgia and the East, and argued for the utility of their approaches in the Soviet context. Still others united in artistic organisations that deliberately eschewed both radical experimentation and political engagement.

As in Moscow, the struggle between these groups for Party and government approval and patronage in the 1920s and the dominance achieved by proletarian elements by the end of that decade moulded the foundations from which Georgia's particular tradition of Soviet painting developed. However, these struggles took place in Georgia according to a different chronology to that in Moscow and were rooted in a different balance of socio-political concerns. In Georgia specific priorities came into play, particularly as regards the question of the Georgians' cultural autonomy, the delineation and assertion of what some conceived as a uniquely Georgian aesthetic sensibility, and the issue of the appropriate role of Georgian aesthetic sensibilities or of Georgian 'national cultural heritage' in informing Soviet Georgian cultural production. For many Georgian intellectuals, including artists, national concerns eclipsed class ones, particularly in the 1920s. In that period, concern for the preservation of Georgian national cultural heritage and the assertion of Georgia's cultural autonomy took precedence in the context of the forcible and generally unwelcome occupation by the

Bolsheviks. Following the Revolution, Moscow and Petrograd/Leningrad were sites of unprecedentedly vibrant debate among artists and intellectuals about the role of art under the new social and political order. Entire research institutes were set up in these centres dedicated to defining a comprehensive theory of art and to producing models of art history and criticism appropriate to the new context.⁹⁰ Members of the cultural elite championed various cultural and intellectual projects and competed for patronage for their activities from within the Party.⁹¹ In the Georgian capital, Tiflis, however, the years between 1921 and 1926 saw relatively diminished cultural activity. As we will see later in this chapter, several of the cultural and artistic organisations operating in the city prior to Sovietisation continued to be active after 1921. However, the months leading up to the Bolsheviks' arrival in Georgia also saw a significant exodus of artists and intellectuals leaving Georgia for the West. There were still Georgian painters working in Tiflis, just as there was other cultural and intellectual activity (including that of the Futurists associated with the journal *H₂SO₄*). However, there is no evidence that painters in Georgia at this time were engaged in wide-ranging debates about art and culture comparable to those taking place in Moscow and Petrograd/Leningrad. Many of Georgia's leading painters, moreover, and particularly those associated with European modernist currents, were absent during those years, returning to Georgia only in 1926-7 following stints working and studying in Western Europe. As such, it is only from 1926-27—which also coincided with the appearance of the first proletarian artists' organisations in Tiflis—that there is evidence of serious debates among Georgian artists and critics about the appropriate form for Georgian painting and role of Georgian painters in the new Soviet context.

Despite their integral role in the history of painting in Soviet Georgia, the activities of proletarian artistic organisations in Georgia in the 1920s received little attention in Soviet histories, which skim over their existence, providing only brief factual information—lists of

⁹⁰ These organisations included the Russian (later, State) Academy of Artistic Sciences (RAKhN/GAKhN) and the Art History Department of the Russian Association of Scientific Research Institutes in the Social Sciences (RANION), which were established in Moscow in 1921 and 1924 respectively. For an account of the establishment of these organisations and their efforts to this end, see 'Chapter One: Soviet Art History: Historical Narratives in the Making' in Maria Mileeva, 'Import and Reception of Western Art in Soviet Russia in the 1920s and 1930s: Selected Exhibitions and Their Role,' thesis (Ph.D), University of London, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2011, pp. 44-89, especially pp. 55-62. See also 'RAKhN - The Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences' – a special issue of *Experiment/Experiment*, 3 (1997) and Aleksandr Dobrokhotov, 'GAKhN: An Aesthetics of Ruins, or Aleksei Losev's Failed Project,' *Studies in East European Thought*, 63 (February, 2011), pp. 31-42. A recent Russian-German research project has also published research, primary materials and an extensive bibliography on GAKhN. See <http://dbs.rub.de/gachn/>.

⁹¹ For an account of cultural activity in the 1920s in Petrograd/Leningrad—which until the early 1930s remained the main center of the politics of culture in the Soviet state—and of dynamics between Moscow and Petrograd/Leningrad as the two main (and competing) centres of cultural activity in Soviet Russia in this period, see Clark, *Petersburg*.

members, dates and so on—while post-Soviet Georgian scholarship has tended to focus on the activities of individual modernist artists to the exclusion of proletarian organisations and their activities. Accounts of these organisations, as well as the institutional context surrounding Georgian artistic activity in the 1920s, are therefore scant. Almost nothing has been written, for example, of the institutional affiliations of proletarian artistic organisations in Georgia in the 1920s and 30s, or these groups' aesthetic and ideological positions. Equally, there is to date no written account of the state and Party institutions involved in the arts in Georgia in that period, the debates that took place between artistic factions, or the publications through which they presented their positions.

In light of the pioneering nature of this research and the new ground that it charts, this chapter provides the reader with a basic chronology of these organisations and institutions and their activities, a necessary first step before arguments can be made about the centrality of national or other concerns in Soviet Georgian painting. It introduces the most influential individuals and most important government and Party institutions, artists' organisations and periodicals appearing in Georgia in the 1920s and early 1930s. While this inevitably constitutes, in places, a slightly dry chronology, it also breaks new ground, introducing the reader to swathes of previously untapped art historical resources and often difficult to access materials. But it also analyses these materials to produce the first properly evidenced chronological account of artistic activity in Georgia in that period. It demonstrates for the first time the breadth of that activity and offers a first opportunity to compare chronologies of artistic activity taking place in Georgia and in Moscow and Leningrad. It constitutes the basis of a contemporary historiography of Georgian painting in the 1920s and 30s that not only provides a framework for subsequent chapters of this thesis but also sets the foundations for future research in this much neglected field. This chapter (like this thesis in general) does not claim to provide a comprehensive account of all of the cultural organisations in Georgia, Moscow and Leningrad that were involved in the administration or regulation of cultural activity in Georgia in the 1920s and 30s. There is much more work to be done, for example, on the workings of Narkompros in Georgia in this period in relation to the administration of artistic activity, and on the operations of the Georgian Academy of Arts and National Gallery for example, as well as on other fields of cultural activity taking place in Georgia in the same period. Nevertheless, this chapter sets out to introduce the leading organisations of visual artists (most of which also happened to present themselves as 'proletarian' organisations) active in Georgia in the late 1920s and early 1930s and the journals in which they set out and debated their positions. In doing so, it sets the scene for the account offered in chapter 3 of

this thesis concerning the struggles for power and patronage that took place between these groups during the Cultural Revolution. This account is offered as a vital (though not the only) part of the story of Georgian cultural activity in the Stalin era, and as an important prelude to my examination in chapters 4 and 5 of Georgian painting in the Stalinist 1930s.

Soviet Painting, Socialist Realism and the Georgian Case

The Bolshevik Revolution transformed the circumstances in which artists operated across the expanding territories under Bolshevik and later Soviet control. With the exception of the NEP, under which a market economy was temporarily revived, the Soviet system of governance removed old systems of private patronage and ownership. The state became the arts' sole patron. Doctrines of 'art for art's sake', which had been championed in Russia before the Revolution by groups such as the World of Art (*Mir iskusstva*), were rejected, and artists were encouraged to work for the state in the service of the newly established 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' educating and inspiring the working classes in their progress towards socialism. Indeed, many artists welcomed the Revolution and did not need encouragement to present their views on the role of art under the new Bolshevik state. In Moscow and Leningrad during the 1920s and 30s, artists and intellectuals presented a variety of visions of the new Soviet culture. The Bolshevik leadership, moreover, despite the scepticism of many of its members regarding the more radical undertakings of some of the modernist avant-garde, was keen to gain the broadest possible support among artists, including those belonging to the old bourgeois intelligentsia. For the majority of the 1920s, moreover, the Party was far from monolithic in terms of its cultural patronage. Cultural issues were fiercely debated within the Party, just as were economic and political issues. As Katerina Clark has observed, the Party 'was virtually a mirror of the cultural intelligentsia inasmuch as most factions in the intelligentsia's debates could find sympathisers somewhere in the Party hierarchy.'⁹² Under the new state, the arts were initially to be organised under the Peoples' Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros), headed by Anatoly Lunacharsky, who gave his support to a broad range of artistic endeavours until 1929, when he was forced to tender his resignation.⁹³ However, the highest organs of the Party, including the Politburo and the Central Committee, also concerned themselves with cultural matters, especially

⁹² Clark, *Petersburg*, p. 195.

⁹³ On this period, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'The Emergence of Glaviskusstvo. Class War on the Cultural Front, Moscow, 1928-29,' *Soviet Studies*, 23:2 (Oct. 1971), pp. 236-53.

following the consolidation of Stalin's power in 1926-7. Indeed, cultural questions were given attention within these organs even at the most critical moments of struggle within the Party, as well as during periods of terror and war—an indication of the Party leadership's understanding of the importance of culture as a means of legitimising its regime.⁹⁴

Traditionally, the years of the First Five-Year Plan and corresponding Cultural Revolution have been seen as the period in which the Party's natural choice of model for Soviet cultural production ascended to dominance as the Party leadership abandoned its formerly pluralistic approach to the arts. Militant proletarian organisations such as AKhR and subsequently RAPKh in visual art—alongside RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) and RAPM (Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians) in literature and music respectively—championed a culture that was meant to foreground the proletariat both as its primary subject matter and as its primary producers. In visual art, this movement was increasingly characterised by a mode of painting with stylistic roots in the nineteenth-century Russian realist tradition of the *Peredvizhniki* and a privileging of such 'proletarian' subject matter as the industrialisation and collectivisation drives of the First Five-Year Plan. In the context of the First-Five Year Plan, with its rhetoric of class struggle, these proletarian organisations came temporarily to dominate the cultural sphere. With the accompanying anti-Formalist campaign of 1929-1931, artists and other intellectuals holding any position outside of these most militantly proletarian organisations were accused of failing the proletariat and sympathising with the bourgeois West. Intellectuals were expected to make way for artists, writers and musicians of proletarian origin who, despite their lack of training, were considered more able to produce a genuinely proletarian culture thanks to their proximity to the labour process.⁹⁵

As recent scholarship has shown, these organisations were not necessarily the inevitable forerunners to the Stalinist culture established in the 1930s. Nor were they as aesthetically homogeneous as the above description suggests. Stalinist culture of the 1930s and beyond shared certain characteristics of the militant proletarian culture of the Cultural Revolution period. Points of correspondence, for example, include Stalinist culture's 'realism'—in the sense that it had as its central subject matter a version of everyday Soviet life, which was represented through a 'legible' narrative format that rejected the 'formalist' experimentation of the 1910s and 20s. In visual art this meant a version of figurative 'realist' painting (although the styles and subject matters treated under that umbrella were in fact

⁹⁴ Clark, *Moscow*, p. 81.

⁹⁵ Clark, *Petersburg*, p. 262.

extremely heterogeneous and evolved over time). However, as recent scholarship has made clear, Stalinist cultural production of the 1930s and later evolved based on a much wider range of sources and was much more complex in the way it functioned than its affinities with the culture of the Cultural Revolution would suggest. The Party vastly increased its control over the cultural sphere in the 1930s, and its overwhelmingly powerful role in determining the shape of Soviet culture from that time is undeniable. The resolutions that it issued on cultural matters in this period were decisive in shaping Soviet cultural activity thereafter, and produced a canon of culture that had unprecedented power in shaping the perceptions of Soviet citizens. Nevertheless, the directives that the Party issued were not the product of the will or tastes of the Party leadership (or of Stalin personally) in isolation from existing intellectual trends. Rather, the Party was often acting out existing models suggested in the work of intellectuals, and the directions that they followed often responded as much to popular taste as to other ideological considerations.⁹⁶

From 1927-28, the Party had begun to intensify its battle against ‘alien class elements’—sections of Soviet society it considered to be harmful to the proletariat’s development. Class enemies included supposedly rich peasants (‘kulaks’), who were accused of sabotaging the Soviet leadership’s programme of agricultural collectivisation, and non-proletarian, ‘bourgeois’ forces within the urban intelligentsia. In response to the threat posed by the latter of these two enemies it was resolved that the Party and Narkompros could no longer maintain their neutrality in their patronage of the arts. Narkompros, through its recently established central arts administration, Glaviskusstvo (1928-1933), must now support only ‘socialist, revolutionary art’.⁹⁷ In the visual arts, this increasingly meant support for proletarian organisations such as AKhR. Although the Party had not explicitly granted militant proletarian artists the right to a monopoly over visual art, they nevertheless established a position of dominance that prevented other artists and organisations from competing. In May 1931, a group of young artists from AKhR formed the more militantly proletarian RAPKh, which quickly took control of Vsekokhudozhnik, the cooperative established in 1929 to control the distribution of funds and commissions to artists at that time.

⁹⁶ Clark, *Moscow*, p. 6; Clark, *Petersburg*, p. X (in ‘Preface’) and p. 196.

⁹⁷ Narkompros decree published in *Pravda*, 24 November 1928, p. 4 cited in Fitzpatrick, ‘The Emergence of Glaviskusstvo,’ p. 251. In practice, Glaviskusstvo was primarily concerned with theatrical administration. This was partly because the other arts, by their nature, involved individuals—artists, writers, musicians—rather than entire troupes, so required less organisational supervision and government funding and therefore had less contact with Glaviskusstvo. However, the lesser role of Glaviskusstvo in these spheres also related to the readiness of existing Proletarian art organisations to fill Glaviskusstvo’s managerial position in a given discipline.

In doing so, they made it impossible for their competitors to access commissions and opportunities.⁹⁸ Although debate about the exact form that Soviet culture (including visual art) should take continued both within the Party and among artists, critics and other intellectuals through the 1930s, the events of the Cultural Revolution and the rise of RAPKh dramatically limited the range of models of painting that were considered permissible. The landmark jubilee exhibition ‘Fifteen Years of Artists of the RSFSR’ that opened first at the Russian Museum in Leningrad in November 1932 before reopening in considerably modified form in Moscow in June 1933 spelled out the shift that had taken place in the Party’s stance on visual art.⁹⁹ Although at the time of its initial conception in January 1932, the exhibition was conceived as a survey of the entire breadth of Soviet artistic activity since the Revolution, by the time it opened in Leningrad most of the artists who represented Russia’s radical modernist avant-garde were excluded. Those that were exhibited, such as Kazimir Malevich and Pavel Filonov, were given exhibition galleries that were set apart from the main exhibition spaces so that they were effectively removed from the exhibition’s narrative of Soviet art’s evolution.¹⁰⁰ As a result, moreover, painters advocating an experimental but nevertheless figurative style of painting, including many of the painters associated with the Society of Easel Painters (OSt), were repositioned as the radical, far-left of Soviet painting, leading to attacks in the months following the exhibition’s opening on the ‘formalism’ of their approach.¹⁰¹ When the exhibition re-opened in Moscow, Malevich and the other representatives on the modernist avant-garde were even more marginalised. Their works were consigned to a dimly lit corridor and captioned with a quote, stencilled on the wall, in which Lenin explained that he did not ‘consider works of expressionism, futurism, cubism, and other ‘-isms’ as the highest manifestation of artistic genius. I don’t understand them. They give me no joy whatsoever.’¹⁰² While the Leningrad exhibition had been conceived as an opportunity for the public to familiarise themselves with Soviet art and express their own conclusions about the art that they preferred, the Moscow exhibition clearly set out two

⁹⁸ On these events, see Charlotte Douglas, ‘Terms of Transition: The First Discussional Exhibition and the Society of Easel Painters,’ in *The Great utopia: the Russian and Soviet avant-garde, 1915-1932* (ex. cat) (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1992).

⁹⁹ On this exhibition, see Douglas, ‘Terms of Transition,’ p. 460; Kiaer, ‘Lyrical Socialist Realism,’ p. 58; Masha Chlenova, ‘Staging Soviet Art: 15 Years of Artists of the RSFSR, 1932–33,’ *October*, 147 (winter 2014), pp. 38–55 and Masha Chlenova, ‘On Display: Transformations of the Avant-Garde in Soviet Public Culture, 1928–1932’ (PhD thesis), Columbia University, New York, 2010. For a Soviet account of the exhibition, see A. Morozov, ‘K istorii vystavki “Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let”,’ *Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie* 1 (1982), pp. 120–67.

¹⁰⁰ Chlenova, ‘Staging Soviet Art,’ p. 47.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p. 46.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* p. 51

current and competing directions in Soviet art, both of which are best associated with AKhR/RAPKh. These two poles were represented firstly by painters drawing on the nineteenth-century Russian realist model of the *Peredvizhniki* and secondly by those, exemplified by Petr Konchalovsky, who were characterised as followers of Cézanne.¹⁰³ As painters at either extreme of this spectrum were encouraged to avoid ‘cold, unprocessed naturalism’ and an excessive preoccupation with form and colour (formalism) respectively, the range of permissible artistic styles was narrowed decisively.

Famously, the struggle between opposing artistic factions in Soviet art was brought to an end on 23 April 1932, when the Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party issued its decree ‘On the Reconstruction of Literary-Artistic Organisations.’ The resolution disbanded all literary and artistic groups in favour of single All-Soviet artists’, writers’ and other art workers’ unions, which were to be organised as soon as practically possible. Most artists and critics at the time welcomed the decree, which they hoped would bring an end to the bitter infighting and factionalism of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁰⁴ However, as the case of the ‘Fifteen Years’ exhibition shows, competition over which style of painting represented the correct direction for the subsequent development of Soviet painting continued. A USSR-wide Union of Soviet Artists, moreover, would not be realised until as late as 1957. Nevertheless, the Moscow branch of the union (MOSSKh) was established in 1932, as was an Organisational Committee responsible for helping to organise sister unions across the RSFSR and other union republics. Local unions were established in the main Soviet centres within a few years. A Georgian branch was under organisation in 1932, as were branches in Odessa, Yerevan, Baku and Kazakhstan.¹⁰⁵ Further branches followed across the Soviet Union throughout the 1930s.¹⁰⁶

Then, between 1932 and 1934, in a further move towards the consolidation and centralisation of the Party’s control over Soviet cultural activity in all spheres, socialist

¹⁰³ Ibid. pp. 52-53.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 42.

¹⁰⁵ These dates represent the year that either the leadership board (*pravlenie*) or organisational committee (*orgkomitet*) responsible for the organisation of a new branch was established, as recorded in the documents of MOSSKh’s central office in charge of republican and regional branches of the union. Branches may then have taken several months to be fully operational after that point. For example, one Soviet monograph dates the establishment of the Georgian branch to 1933. See: Beridze and Ezerskaia, *Iskusstvo sovetskoi Gruzii*, p. 46. RGALI, f. 1943, op. 1. d. 193, ll. 150-55.

¹⁰⁶ Many national republics had secondary unions or branches representing artists in autonomous regions and republics within the SSRs. A document from MOSSKh’s archive (undated, but no earlier than 1940) lists twelve branches established in the Ukrainian SSR, twelve in the Kazakh SSR, six in the Belorussian SSR, three in the Azerbaijani SSR, seven in the Uzbek SSR and one each in the Armenian, Turkestan, Tajik, and Kyrgyz SSRs. The creation of the Georgian union of artists in 1932 was also followed by the establishment of a branch of the Georgian union in the South Ossetian autonomous oblast in 1934, in the Achar ASSR in 1935 and in the Abkhaz ASSR in 1939. RGALI, f. 1943, op. 1. d. 193, ll. 150-55.

realism was devised as a universal formula for the production of Soviet culture. In 1934, at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers, socialist realism was presented as the only officially sanctioned method for literature and the arts in the Soviet Union. Speeches presented at the congress by Maksim Gorky, the Union's first secretary, and Andrei Zhdanov, the chief representative of the Party's Central Committee, were followed up with articles in the press. Formulated initially in relation to literature, the principles of socialist realism were thus disseminated as guidelines for the production of Soviet culture. According to the new doctrine, Soviet art was now required to fulfil certain specific, though often rather opaque and deliberately vague criteria. Although it was not a tightly prescriptive aesthetic doctrine, and discussions and debates over how it should be implemented in practice continued through the 1930s, it was governed by a series of concepts to which writers, artists and musicians were expected to adhere.

Above all, they were required to present Soviet reality to the working masses through a 'realist' medium that the proletariat could understand. However, the 'realism' of socialist realism did not envisage a simple, unfiltered, objective reflection of Soviet reality. Such a passive reflection, commonly referred to in the Soviet Union by the negative epithet, 'naturalism', was not realism; as Gorky explained, a 'fact is still not the whole truth; it is merely the raw material from which the real truth of art must be smelted and extracted.'¹⁰⁷ Instead, to use Zhdanov's now famous formulation, socialist realism should present 'reality in its revolutionary development.'¹⁰⁸ In other words, in visualizing Soviet reality, writers and artists would present a glimpse of tomorrow's bright future under socialism as if it had already been achieved in the present. This vision, it was proposed, would facilitate the 'ideological remolding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism.' Writers were thus to become 'engineers of the human soul.'¹⁰⁹

The method of socialist realism was based on several key principles, including *partiinnost* (Party-mindedness), *ideinnost* (ideologically-correct content), *klassovost* (class-content) and *pravdivost* (truthfulness). Together these principles dictated that the reality presented in socialist realist cultural production should embody Party doctrine, communicating a clear class position aligned with the interests of the working people of the USSR. The principles of *pravdivost* and *tipichnost* (typicalness), however, are equally vital to

¹⁰⁷ Maxim Gorky, *Sobrannye sochinenii v 30 tomakh*, 27 (Moscow: GIKhL, 1954) cited in Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁸ 'инженеры человеческих душ.' 'Rech sekretaria TsK VKP(b) A. A. Zhdanov,' I. K. Luppol, M. M. Rozental *et al.*, eds, *S"ezd pisatelei SSSR: Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s"ezd sovetskikh pisatelei (1934): stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1990), pp. 2-5.

¹⁰⁹ 'действительности в ее революционном развитии.' Ibid.

understanding mature socialist realism. In 1952 Georgy Malenkov, a member of Stalin's innermost circle, defined *tipichnost* as 'not that which is encountered most often, but that which most persuasively expresses the essence of a given social force.'¹¹⁰ In other words, it was not the observable facts characterising everyday reality, but the essential truths that could be distilled (or which the Party insisted should be distilled) from observing the transformation of reality under socialism. This, claimed Malenkov, is 'the vital sphere in which is manifested the Party spirit of realistic art.'¹¹¹ The typical, then, was what the Party declared to be the essence of Soviet life, whether that be revolutionary fervour or heroic rates of productivity. This principle was related to Stalin's formulation that what 'is more important to the dialectical method [in Soviet art and culture] is not that which is stable at present but is already beginning to die, but rather that which is emerging and developing, even if at present it does not appear stable.'¹¹² As Boris Groys has pointed out, if we consider that what is dialectically emerging and developing under socialism corresponds to the latest Party policies, it is clear that 'the portrayal of the typical refers to the visual realisation of still-emerging Party objectives, the ability to intuit new currents among the Party leadership, to sense which way the wind is blowing. More precisely, it is the ability to anticipate the will of Stalin, who is the real creator of reality.'¹¹³ Thus, the 'truth' or 'reality' that socialist realism presented was not an objective reflection of Soviet reality or a generalised view of a happy socialist future, but a projection of the reality that Stalin and the Party were in the process of formulating. A successful socialist realist artist or writer was one who demonstrated the alignment of her or his vision of the socialist near future with Stalin's own.

Several scholars, among them Evgeny Dobrenko and Irina Gutkin, have explored the idea that the version of reality created by socialist realist cultural producers was so pervasive that it formed the lens through which citizens perceived and experienced Soviet reality, or even that it was a means of producing reality itself. Gutkin has argued that although socialist realism was not prescriptive in terms of the specific style and subject matter an artist treated, socialist realist language (literary and visual) constructed a vision of Soviet reality through a nevertheless rigidly controlled vocabulary of myths and symbols. This vocabulary was made up of 'a limited menu of positive and negative epithets, depending on whether it signified

¹¹⁰ Georgy Malenkov, *Otchetnyi doklad XIX s"ezdu partii rabote tsentralnogo komiteta VKP(b): 5 oktiabria 1952 g.* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1952).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² I. V. Stalin, *Rech na XIX s"ezde partii, 14 oktiabria 1952 g.* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1951).

¹¹³ Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, p. 51-52.

something belonging to the Soviet future-like world or the old, capitalist world.’¹¹⁴ According to Gutkin’s model, these were established by Party ideologues in speeches and in the press and were expected to be picked up and adopted by cultural producers. Every word of a text, every mark, colour, object, sign and symbol in a painting and every element of every shot in a film was ‘bonded together into a rigid system of politically correct correspondences [...] coded to officially sanctioned mythologems.’¹¹⁵ Through their continual repetition in political rhetoric, literature and visual culture, the people’s cognition of them was automated, such that they served ‘as grids of perception through which [...] so-called reality’ was perceived.¹¹⁶ As Dobrenko argues, moreover, since Soviet reality could not exist without socialist realist cultural production, socialist realism, and its tightly controlled vocabulary of myths and symbols, was the material from which socialist reality was not only represented, but also produced.¹¹⁷ The ‘reality’ produced by socialist realism was so pervasive that it was more ‘real’ than the everyday experiences of Soviet citizens.

As others have noted, the totalising rigidity of socialist realist language (literary or visual) clearly was not absolute. It was possible for symbols to have several meanings, even at the same time, and for socialist realist language to be used ambiguously. Artists and writers could and frequently did harness ‘the multivalence of literature’s [and visual culture’s] iconic signs’ in order to convey meanings that served their own agenda.¹¹⁸ The relatively liberal climate of the post-Stalin years in particular allowed for a looser definition of socialist realism that drew on an increasingly broad range of art historical sources and therefore a more extensive, less controlled vocabulary, offering greater possibility for ambiguity of interpretation. Under Nikita Khrushchev’s government (1953-64), and even more so under Leonid Brezhnev (1964-82), artists could increasingly inhabit a space between artistic conformity and dissent, expanding the boundaries of what official Soviet art could be.¹¹⁹ As I have argued elsewhere, for example, in Georgia, the socialist realist painter Ucha Japaridze was able to construct a vision of life in Soviet Georgia that played on ambiguities afforded by the collision of symbolic systems related to Soviet and Georgian national myths. In doing so, he produced a portrait of Georgia whose closest analogy might be found in the Soviet Village

¹¹⁴ Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins*, p. 68-69.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68-69.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹¹⁷ Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*.

¹¹⁸ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ Susan Reid, ‘10. The ‘Art of Memory’: Retrospectivism in Soviet Painting of the Brezhnev Era,’ in Matthew Cullerne-Bown and Brandon Taylor, *Art of the Soviets: painting, sculpture, and architecture in a one-party state, 1917-1992* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 161-87.

Prose movement in literature during the same period: produced and permitted under the banner of official Soviet culture, his painting appears to gently criticise certain Soviet realities even as it presents a nostalgic and sentimental vision of life in Georgia.¹²⁰

However, even in the most tightly culturally repressive years of high Stalinism, beginning with the Great Terror in 1937 and ending with Stalin's death in 1953, a degree of ambiguity was possible. Moreover, as Clark and others have shown, Party ideology and cultural policy did not appear in isolation, but as a result of a dialogue between the Party leadership and dominant intellectual trends and in response to other factors, including shifting political priorities and public taste: 'Stalin, and the Party cultural apparatus, were indisputably extraordinarily powerful and as the decade [the 1930s] wore on began more and more to actually commission and monitor cultural products ... and to implement their pet schemes, but they were not extrasystemic figures, figures from outside the culture system, but rather picked up and mediated, selectively, some of the dominant currents in the thinking of the time.'¹²¹ Despite the repressive nature of the regime and its cultural policies, artists did retain some degree of autonomy and independence (if not scope for outright dissidence) in the production of their work, albeit, at times, of a very limited kind. Not only that, they played a role in both the genesis and evolution of Soviet socialist realist culture at every stage.

There is a body of opinion that opposes the Stalinist subjectivity argument presented by Dobrenko and others on the grounds that it absolves those complicit in the crimes of the Stalinist state of responsibility for their actions, on the basis that those living under Stalinism were not able to see beyond the lies that the State perpetuated, beyond the reality that socialist realism produced.¹²² Nevertheless, Dobrenko offers compelling evidence in support of his understanding of socialist realist culture as the material of Soviet reality, albeit with certain limitations, and his work is important in this thesis in informing discussion of the personality cult of Pirosmiani in the 1920s and 30s and the ways in which that discussion

¹²⁰ Jennifer Brewin, 'Ucha Japaridze, Lado Gudiashvili, and the Spiritual in Georgian Painting' in Louise Hardiman and Nicola Kozicharow, eds, *Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017), pp. 229-63. On Village Prose, see Kathleen F. Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹²¹ Clark, *Moscow*, pp. 6-7.

¹²² In favour of the Stalinist subjectivity thesis, see Lynne Viola, *Contending with Stalinism: Soviet Power and Popular Resistance in the 1930s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) and Jochen Hellbeck, "Speaking Out: Languages of Affirmation and Dissent," in Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist and Marshall Poe, eds, *The Resistance Debate in Russian and Soviet History* (Bloomington: Slavica, 2003), pp. 103-37. For opposition to this thesis, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks! Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 8-9.

helped to reconfigure Georgia's national identity in the minds of Georgian citizens to suit Stalinist political objectives.

The Old and New Guards: In search of Georgian Proletarian Painting

Painting in Soviet Georgia developed according to a different, though connected, chronology to that in Russia, in response to Georgia's particular relationship to Soviet power, and Georgia's unique cultural history and identity. Georgia, and Tbilisi in particular, being situated geographically at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, has been home to an extraordinarily diverse multi-ethnic population throughout its long history. For centuries prior to the arrival of the Bolsheviks its demographic had incorporated large communities of Persians, Armenians and Russians as well as Georgians and other national groups. The presence of these communities, as well as invasions and occupations of Georgia by powerful neighbours including the Persian, Ottoman and Russian Empires, had inevitably led aspects of neighbouring and occupying powers' cultural traditions (in the arts, literature, religion and politics) to be absorbed and integrated into modern Georgian culture.

Contemporary Russian and European cultural and political movements were introduced to Georgian society as a result of Imperial Russia's annexation of Georgia. From the 1830s, Georgian writers such as Aleksandr Chavchavadze (1786-1846) and Nikoloz Baratashvili (1817-45) produced Romantic visions of a lost golden age of the Georgian nation influenced by Russian Romantic writers from Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov to Tolstoy.¹²³ In the middle of the century a socially and politically engaged Georgian intelligentsia also began to emerge, influenced by the ideas of Russian social reformist thinkers such as Aleksandr Herzen (1812-1870), Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848), Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889) and Nikolai Dobroliubov (1836-1861). Social reforms implemented in Russia in the 1860s under Tsar Aleksandr II, including the abolition of serfdom, as well as news of liberation movements in Hungary and Italy, encouraged Georgia's young intelligentsia to re-evaluate political and social questions at home, including that of Georgia's relationship to her Imperial coloniser.¹²⁴ From these roots modern Georgian social thought and modern Georgian nationalism emerged and a community of Georgian

¹²³ Georgia and the Caucasus also became an important subject of and setting for Russian Romantic Writers. On this subject see Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*. Georgian Romantic writers, however, differed from their Russian mentors in various ways, including in their conceptualisation of Georgia's relationship with her Imperial coloniser. See Ram and Shatrishvili, 'Romantic Topography and the Dilemma of Empire.'

¹²⁴ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, p. 126.

nationalist thinkers from Ilia Chavchavadze to Niko Nikoladze offered competing visions for Georgia's future development.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, Georgia's ties with Russia also facilitated the arrival in Georgia of Russian and European intellectual movements, including European and Russian Symbolist and Decadent movements and the various modernist currents that appeared in their wake. In the 1910s in particular, Tiflis suddenly became a sanctuary for Russian and European artists, writers and intellectuals seeking refuge from the ravages of revolution and war to the north and west. New arrivals joined Georgians and Armenians in forming a newly bustling community of artists, writers and intellectuals, many of whom grouped together in like-minded communities of Futurists, Acmeists and Symbolists, founding journals, holding events and opening taverns where they could meet to discuss the latest movements in European, Russian and Georgian art, literature and philosophy. Well-known Russian artists, writers and intellectuals including Aleksei Kruchenykh, Vasily Kamensky, Igor Terentiev, Yuri Degen, Sergei Gorodetsky and Vera and Sergei Sudeikin all became visitors or temporary residents of this 'fantastic city,' helping it to become a hub of cultural activity.¹²⁵

With respect to painting specifically, artistic activity in Georgia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was characterised by several distinct schools. A group of Georgian painters, some of whom had studied at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in St Petersburg (and in some cases the academies of Munich and Paris) in the latter part of the nineteenth century, painted in styles ranging from crisp academicism (Aleksandre Mrevlishvili) to the looser, more painterly realism of the Peredvizhniki (Mose Toidze and Gigo Gabashvili). The main centre for artistic training in Georgia at that time was the private art school of the Caucasian Society for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, where teaching was eclectic. Instructors included the painters Gabashvili and Ilia Zankovsky (Georgian and Russian respectively), German illustrators Oskar Schmerling and Richard Zommer, and the Georgian sculptor Yakob Nikoladze, student of Auguste Rodin.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ On cultural activity in 1910s Tiflis, see Tatiana Nikolskaia, *'Fantasticheskii gorod: russkaia kulturnaia zhizn Tbilisi (1917-1921)* (Moscow: Fifth Country, 2000); Luigi Magarotto *et al.*, *L'Avanguardia a Tiflis: studi, ricerche, cronache, testimonianze, documenti* (Venice: University of Venice, 1982) and Harsha Ram, 'Modernism on the Periphery: Literary Life in Post-revolutionary Tbilisi,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 5:2 (2004), pp. 367-82. See also John E. Bowl, ed, *The Salon Album of Vera Sudeikin-Stravinsky* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹²⁶ For short biographies of Schmerling, Zommer and Zankovsky, see Roy Bolton, *Russian Orientalism: Central Asia & the Caucasus* (London: Sphinx books, 2009), pp. 72, 100 and 108.

In addition to the school, the Society of Georgian Artists was founded in 1916 on the initiative of painter Dimitri Shevardnadze, who had recently returned from studying at the Munich Academy of Arts. Shevardnadze was a competent painter, mainly of portraits and still life and had experimented while in Munich with various modernist modes, including still-lives in the style of Paul Cézanne and Claude Monet, nudes after Henri Matisse and portraits recalling Vincent Van Gogh and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (figures 9 and 10). However, his primary contribution to Georgian art was in research, conservation and education. Through the Society of Georgian Artists he organised scholarships supporting Georgian artists, including modernists such as Gudiashvili and Kakabadze, to study and work in Europe. He also arranged expeditions to study and preserve Georgia's cultural heritage including conducting archaeological digs as well as studying and making copies of Georgia's ecclesiastical wall painting and architecture. Shevardnadze went on to found the Georgian National Gallery in 1922 and continued to work to protect and preserve Georgian cultural heritage until his death at Beria's hands in 1937. Despite its name, the Society's membership was not limited to ethnic Georgians. Instead it was pluralist both in terms of its members' nationality and their artistic inclinations. At its exhibitions, young artists associated with modernist activity, such as Gudiashvili, Kirill Zdanevich and Elene Akhvlediani exhibited alongside Georgian followers of the Russian academic school including Mose Toidze and Gabashvili and Tiflis-born Armenians including academic painter Amaiak Akopian and modernist painter and sculptor Yevrand Kocharian (Kochar).¹²⁷

The organisation continued to exist after Sovietisation, supporting a broad spectrum of artists including modernist painters, many of whom were returning from several years' studying and working in Europe thanks to the society's support. These artists, including Gudiashvili, Kakabadze, Akhvlediani and Ketevan Maghalashvili, gradually returned to Georgia in the mid 1920s, tempted back to their homeland by the promise of personal exhibitions and teaching positions at the newly founded Georgian Academy of Arts (1922-present). They were faced with adapting to a Georgia vastly different to the country that they

¹²⁷ Alongside the Society of Georgian Artists a Union of Armenian Artists was established in Tiflis in 1916. The Armenian union, more so than the Georgian society, was delineated along ethnic lines and primarily represented artists belonging to Tiflis' still dominant Armenian bourgeoisie. Its artists for the most part were conservative painters who gathered around established masters of the Russian academic school, although its membership also included such figures as Matiros Sarian, the Armenian painter who was successful in the Soviet period despite his admiration for and continued debts to French modernism. However, as the organisation representing Armenian artists, whose relationship with the Soviet centre was governed by a different set of circumstances, detailed study of activities necessarily falls outside of the scope of this thesis. In 1921 the Union of Armenian Artists became the House of Armenian Artists ('AIARTUN'). It continued under that name until the organisation was disbanded in 1930.

had left behind, and returned to a mixed reception.¹²⁸ Though celebrated and defended by some, they faced criticism from other commentators who favoured AKhRR's model. This criticism only increased as the First Five-Year Plan began to be implemented and Party policy started to prioritise class war as a vital factor in the industrialisation and economic modernisation of the Soviet Union.

By 1927-28 AKhRR was achieving dominance in Moscow and its ethos was spreading to the further reaches of the Soviet Union, including Georgia. The first attempt was made to organise a proletarian artists' organisation in Georgia broadly sharing AKhRR's outlook in 1926.¹²⁹ The Bureau of Young Proletarian Artists of Georgia (an independent organisation, but close to AKhRR in spirit) failed to get off the ground. However, the dominance of AKhRR in Moscow was encouraging Georgian artists to follow suit. In 1928 AKhRR, having reorganised as a Union-wide organisation (AKhR), began consolidating an extensive network of branches across the Soviet Union.¹³⁰ A Georgian (later, Tiflis) branch of AKhR, known as REVMAS was established that year under the leadership of Georgian artists Mose and Irakli Toidze (father and son), who had joined AKhR in Moscow the previous year. Then, at the end of 1928, SARMA was founded when a group of young artists defected from the Society of Georgian Artists. Though the association was not formally affiliated with AKhR, its manifesto, published in the local press early in 1930, declared SARMA's allegiance with AKhR's cause. It also denounced the Georgia Society of Artists as a 'distinctly un-modern organisation ... detrimental to the development of Soviet art'.¹³¹ Despite REVMAS's affiliation with AKhR, it was SARMA that did the most to forward AKhR's mission in Georgia. In June 1931 REVMAS was disbanded and absorbed by SARMA.

The Society of Georgian Artists survived until 1929, when it was dissolved in response to criticism, levelled first and foremost by SARMA's leadership, accusing the Society of providing a haven for bourgeois artists whose activities failed to serve the

¹²⁸ Gudiashvili and Maghalasvili returned in 1926, followed by Kakabadze and Akhvlediani in 1927.

¹²⁹ Rempel, *Zhivopis sovetskogo Zakavkazia*, p. 21.

¹³⁰ For an account of the expansion of AKhRR's network between 1924 and 1926, see F. S. Bogorodsky, 'Filialy AKhRR i OMAKhR' in I. M. Gronsky and V. N. Perelman, eds, *Assotsiatsiia khudozhnikov revoliutsionnoi Rossii: sbornik vospominanii, statei, dokumentov* (Moscow: Izobrazitelnoe iskusstvo, 1973), pp. 127-29.

¹³¹ 'определенно несвоевременной организацией'; 'мешает развитию советского искусства.' 'Sakartvelos revoliutsionur mkhatvarta deklaratsia: sakartvelos revolutsiur mkhatvarta asotsiatsiis daarsebis shesakheb' [The declaration of Georgian revolutionary artists: About the establishment of the Association of Georgian Revolutionary Artists], *Kommunisti*, 167 (14 February), p. 6; 'Deklaratsiia revoliutsionnykh khudozhnikov Gruzii,' *Na rubezhe vostoka*, 1, 1930, pp. 117-18; *Rev. mkhatvarta asotsiatsia "SARMA" suratebis gamopena / Vystavka kartin Assotsiatsii Rev. Khud. Gruzii "SARMA" (ex. cat.)* (Tiflis: National Picture Gallery of Georgia, 1930.)

proletariat.¹³² Following its dissolution, its members initially sought the protection of Georgia's branch of the Union of Art Workers (RABIS), supporting themselves on their salaries at the Academy, through teaching in schools or commissions for theatre, film or the press. Facing growing financial and ideological pressure, however, many of those artists, including Gudiashvili (but not Kakabadze), were soon compelled to join SARMA.

In 1931 SARMA split into moderate and militant wings. A militant faction, led by SARMA's former chairman Grigory Mirzoev (1903-1993, figure 9), formed GAPKh (a Georgian branch of the Moscow-based Russian Association of Proletarian Artists, RAPKh), which existed alongside SARMA until the April 1932 decree. Mirzoev was a mediocre graphic artist whose own creative output, as well as his output as a critic, was meagre. Nevertheless, he appears to have been adept in political manoeuvring and wielded enormous power. As well as leading SARMA and GAPKh, in 1931 he was signing resolutions as an 'Inspector' for Georgia's branch of IZO Narkompros (the visual art section of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment), suggesting his authority as the Party's supervisor of Georgian artistic activity.¹³³ Speaking at a SARMA meeting in January 1932, moreover, Mirzoev refers to a previous tenure as a deputy head of Glaviskusstvo.¹³⁴ This appears to have been a role of some seniority, since he claims to have 'led work there' and to have had the right to make decisions concerning which artists to send on field trips.¹³⁵ Due to his limited productivity (and skill) as an illustrator, Mirzoev barely features in the existing literature about painting in Soviet Georgia. Nevertheless, no other artist or critic appears to have wielded comparable administrative power over the activities of Georgian artists in the Cultural Revolution period.

Things were different for Mirzoev following the April 1932 decree. With the establishment of the Georgian Union of Soviet Artists in 1932 he was elected as its chairman. However, the situation for artists and art organisers had changed. The replacement of disparate artists' groups with a network of national and regional unions organised artistic activity into a system that facilitated more consistent and standardised Party supervision. Within the network, decisions and directions adopted by MOSSKh under the supervision of

¹³² Rempel, *Zhivopis sovetskogo Zakavkazia*, p.20.

¹³³ Mirzoev was signing Narkompros resolutions under this title in 1931, although it is not clear how long he held this position or what exactly it entailed. NAG f. 10, op. 1, d. 16, l. 174.

¹³⁴ NAG f. 10, op. 1, d. 25, l. 72.

¹³⁵ 'Вел там работы.' NAG f. 10, op. 1, d. 25, l. 72. Other than archival records highlighting Mirzoev's roles in these organisations, his wider biography is obscure. He published only a handful of articles, all between 1930 and 1932, and only a small number of his works, those reproduced in the contemporary press, can now be identified.

the Party could be disseminated easily and evenly to the local unions. This meant a reduction of power for local administrators such as Mirzoev. Within the next two years, moreover, the advent of socialist realism gave artists across the Soviet Union specific instructions delineating the appropriate method for the production of Soviet art. The power belonging to Mirzoev and other members and leaders of the Georgian Union of Soviet Artists, then, was in interpreting socialist realism's theoretical guidelines, particularly in light of Stalin's declaration that Soviet art should be 'national in form, socialist in content.' Even this interpretation, though, was ultimately subject to Party supervision. This was especially true in Georgia, where Beria had recently come to power. Beria, who had been employed by Bolshevik state security since 1919 and was deputy head and then head of the Georgian branch of the Soviet secret police (OGPU) since 1922 and 1926 respectively, was elected as Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party in 1931, and Party Secretary of the whole Transcaucasian region in 1932. From 1931, Beria cultivated close relationships with Georgia's cultural elite, which he used over the course of the 1930s to intervene in and control their activities. As has been documented by others, for example he coerced certain Soviet Georgian writers (in particular, members of the Blue Horns association) into incriminating themselves by making alliances with Western visitors whom Beria would later declare to be enemies of the Soviet people.¹³⁶ Beria also supervised the Georgian Writers' Union so closely that by the mid 1930s its journal, *Literaturuli sakartvelo* (Literary Georgia) became Beria's personal mouthpiece for the reformation of Soviet Georgian literature.¹³⁷ More pertinently to this thesis, Beria personally supervised the activities of Georgian painters. This, as I document in more detail in chapters four and five, was perhaps the single biggest factor determining the specificity of Georgian artists' experience, and of Georgian artistic production for the remainder of that decade.

Institutional Structures Before and After the April 1932 Decree

Georgia came under Bolshevik control at a moment when government administration of the arts was changing. Since the October Revolution, responsibility for managing Soviet artistic activity had belonged to Narkompros, and in particular its visual art division (IZO). While the Bolshevik leadership was occupied with the more pressing matter of the Russian Civil War, Narkompros and its leader, Lunacharsky, enjoyed relatively free reign from Party

¹³⁶ Donald Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 265-66.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

supervision. Following the end of the Russian Civil War, however, the Party leadership began to pay greater attention to other things. At that time, Narkompros and Lunacharsky suddenly came under fire. They were accused of paying too much attention to the arts at the expense of general education, schools and adult technical and vocational training. In the resulting re-organisation of Narkompros in 1920-21, the arts division was abolished. Its functions were split between Narkompros' other departments dealing with political education (Glavpolitprosvet), technical education (Glavprofobr) and science (Glavnauka). Funding for the arts was also dramatically diminished.¹³⁸

At the same time, the Party was seeking to make greater use of Narkompros in its agitational and propaganda (agitprop) work. The Party needed a large government administration to implement this work, and Glavpolitprosvet, Narkompros' new political education division, was mandated to fulfil this function. It expanded quickly as a result, absorbing more and more government departments and extra-governmental organisations. Through this process, an increasing proportion of artistic activity was subordinated to direct Party supervision. Like other government institutions and commissariats (as well as the Communist Party itself, and organisations like AKhR and MOSSKh), Narkompros was organised as a network of republican and regional offices, which were subordinate to a central administration. Regional and republican branches mirrored the structure of the central organisation. As such, the 1920-21 reorganisation of Narkompros was implemented in unison across each of the Soviet republics and regions. In Georgia, this occurred within months of Sovietisation, and set the context in which artists operated in Georgia almost from day one.

A meeting concerning the local reorganisation of Narkompros was held in Tiflis in the spring of 1921 and attended by the heads of interested sections of the Georgian and Transcaucasian Narkompros administrations, including Glavpolitprosvet and local art divisions, agitation divisions and theatre and fine art sub-departments.¹³⁹ A report, published

¹³⁸ Fitzpatrick, 'The Emergence of Glaviskusstvo,' p. 238. For more on the re-organisation of Narkompros, see 'Towards reorganization of Narkompros' in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

¹³⁹ In Stalinist Transcaucasia, where, between 1921 and 1936, the Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani republics were united and governed under the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (ZSFSR) there was a level of government and Party bureaucracy additional to that elsewhere in the Soviet Union. All administrations operated at Union, ZSFSR and republican levels. The distinctions between them, however, were fluid. The division of responsibility between republican and ZSFSR level government and Party institutions shifted constantly as republican-level communists fought to retain as much local autonomy as they could. At the same time, the distinction between republican and ZSFSR level institutions was blurred by the fact that their representatives and leaders often held posts at both levels.

in the local journal *Khelovneba* ('Art'), set out the new distribution of administrative control sector by sector.¹⁴⁰ In each sphere of the arts a proportion of institutions and administrative functions was transferred to the care of Glavpolitprosvet (or, in the case of educational institutions, to Glavprofobr), while others would remain as they were. Except for education and cinema (which was given its own section), each field was split broadly in two. 'Traditional', 'academic' and 'theoretical' work was to be supervised by a Central State Committee, while practical and agitational functions were transferred to the control of Glavpolitprosvet.¹⁴¹ In visual art, for example, 'competitions, special resolutions ... [and] ... theoretical work' were to remain in the hands of a stripped down IZO department, while 'work of an agitational character' was transferred to Glavpolitprosvet.¹⁴² The same was true of theatre and literature. Traditional theatres (such as the opera, drama and chamber theatres) remained under the State Committee, while revolutionary and proletarian theatres moved to Glavpolitprosvet. Similarly, 'theoretical work' in literature remained in the hands of a literary department, but 'agitational work' as well as 'the technical side' of the state publishing house would be controlled by Glavpolitprosvet.¹⁴³ Though the looseness of these distinctions appears to have left room for some ambiguity in practical terms, they broadly meant that Glavpolitprosvet controlled all institutions with any political position or power to control and harness particular media for the dissemination of its message. The reorganisation of Narkompros thus amounted to both a reduction in the State's financial support for the arts and, simultaneously, a movement to bring the arts more decidedly into the service of the Party. As in Moscow, artistic activity in Georgia that was not explicitly proletarian or revolutionary was allowed to continue, since, as Lunacharsky and others insisted, no single form for proletarian art had yet been settled on. However, priority would be given to the institutions serving the Party under Glavpolitprosvet's umbrella. Georgian artists benefited from relative freedom in terms of the style and content of their painting in the 1920s, but there was little financial support for their work. The ambiguity with which Glavpolitprosvet's jurisdiction was defined in each sphere, moreover, meant that its reach could be readily extended to absorb additional functions and institutions at the whim of the Party. The new priorities of Narkompros were reflected in the selection of Davit Kandelaki as Georgia's first

¹⁴⁰ 'Tskhovreba da khelovneba: khelovnebis ganqobilebis reorganizatsia' ['Art and life: Reorganisation of the Art Department'], *Khelovneba*, 2, 1921, pp. 14-16.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

Commissar of Enlightenment in 1921-30. An economist and specialist in education, Kandelaki appears to have had little if any involvement in the arts.¹⁴⁴

Proletkult in Georgia

One of the first organisations in Soviet Georgia to seek to cultivate specifically proletarian cultural activity, including in the visual arts, was Proletkult. Founded in Russia in 1917 by Aleksandr Bogdanov, Proletkult (a contraction of *Proletarskaia kultura* - Proletarian Culture) was established with the goal of supporting the growing proletariat under Bolshevik rule in cultivating and developing its own cultural forms. This, Proletkult's leaders believed, was the only way to encourage a truly authentic proletarian culture. Unlike the theorists of AKhR and its allies, who would prescribe a model of proletarian art devised by artists and ideologues on the basis of what they believed would be comprehensible to the masses, Bogdanov and his followers sought to enable the working masses to develop their own cultural forms. The organisation grew rapidly between 1917 and 1920, gaining thousands of members over this short period. Through a network of schools and workshops (referred to as 'studios') organised by Proletkult circles across Russia and the territories under Bolshevik control, workers were taught to read, write poetry, novels and plays, act and produce visual art.¹⁴⁵ During that time Proletkult benefitted from state funding for its operation, while being allowed to insist on complete autonomy from the Bolshevik government in its activities. When the Civil War began to draw to a close, however, Proletkult, like Narkompros, came under greater government scrutiny. Lenin in particular was alarmed by its insistence on its autonomy, particular in light of the size of its following among the workers. Measures were taken, initially to make Proletkult answerable to the government, via Narkompros, and eventually to discredit it, both in terms of its practical organisation and its vision for a

¹⁴⁴ Kandelaki studied in Germany before returning to Georgia in Autumn 1921. He was also Commissar of Enlightenment at Transcaucasian level for at least a part of the same period, and, for a time, also head of the Academic Centre under Narkompros in the 1920s. (The Academic Centre was the department of Narkompros that would later become Glavnauka, the Main Administration of Scientific, Scholarly-artistic and Museum Institutions responsible for co-ordinating research in science and culture in the USSR.) See 'Saavaldebulo dadgenileba: revkomis dadgenilebis shesakheb qvela teatris politikuri ganatlebis mtavri sammartvelos gamgeblobashi gadasvlis shesakheb garda akademiuri da sanakhaobiti teatrebisa' ['Decree Resolution: Revkom resolution about the transition of all political theatre departments to the main division of government except academic theatres and shows'] *Komunisti*, 130, 9 August 1921, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ For more on Proletkult in Russia, see Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

proletarian culture.¹⁴⁶ By 1921 Glavpolitprosvet was taking charge of all spheres of political education and was eager to gain control of Proletkult's network as well. Meanwhile, the reduction in available funding that accompanied the reorganisation of Narkompros that year (as well as the introduction of NEP) was financially disastrous for Proletkult. In February 1922 it was forced to implement a radical purge of its network, leaving only 38 local centres intact.¹⁴⁷

Nevertheless, Proletkult continued to operate, albeit in diminished form, right up until the 23 April 1932 decree. Indeed, though it was seriously downsizing in 1922, several new strategic centres were also being organised, including one in Georgia.¹⁴⁸ An Organisational Committee was set up in Tiflis in early 1922 and began work immediately. Members included the Georgian proletarian writers Razhdan Kaladze and Sandro Kuridze, who were later active in the Georgian Association of Proletarian Writers (GAPP, 1921-32) and subsequently in the Georgian Union of Soviet writers, and Russian Proletkultist Vasily Ignatov, who was invited by the Georgian members to help them establish the organisation in Georgia.¹⁴⁹ From 1922, literary and theatre studios met several times a week, including sessions in Russian and Georgian. A Georgian branch of Proletkult was formally established in July 1923.¹⁵⁰ Its presidium had then been elected at a meeting of 321 delegates of Georgian, Armenian, Russian, Ossetian, Turkish, Jewish and other origin in Tiflis on 7 February 1924 and a 'supervisory committee' had also been put in place, chaired by Kaladze.¹⁵¹ The number of delegates attending the February meeting suggests that it had a significant following. In spring 1924 the local Georgian-language journal *Khelovnebis drosha* ('Art Banner'), edited by Kuridze, then published a series of articles announcing Proletkult's achievements in Georgia. A Proletkult *Tekhnikum* (technical training college) had been

¹⁴⁶ In 1919, the first measures were taken to bring Proletkult under Narkompros' control. Despite Lunacharsky's efforts to defend Proletkult's autonomy, on 1 December 1920, a Central Committee resolution 'On the Proletkultists' was published in *Pravda*, discrediting Proletkult's leadership, organisational practice and cultural mission. Mally, *Culture of the Future*, 204.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 218.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 218.

¹⁴⁹ Other members included V. Medzhanov, N. Dubensky, P. Kobakhidze, A. Chkheidze and V. Sutyurin. Kuridze was elected as acting head of the artistic-creative part of the organisation, and Medzhanov as acting head of organisational activity. Ignatov was initially invited to assist as a kind of consultant in the capacity of a 'lecturer-organiser of the creative section', and later became the executive organiser of the organisation's creative studios. NAG, f. 25, op. 1, d. 8, ll. 1 and 6. Kuridze, born Aleksandr Kishvardovich Kuridze, also went by the nickname Sandro Euli ('Sandro the lonely' - in reference to his solitary character) or was referred to using both names together, Sandro Euli-Kuridze.

¹⁵⁰ 'Sakartvelos proletkulti' ['Georgian Proletkult'], *Khelovnebis drosha*, 2, 1924, p. 25.

¹⁵¹ Members included Georgia's Commissar of Enlightenment, Davit Kandelaki as well as Ignatov and the Armenian poet Akop Akopian (Hakob Hakopian, 1866-1937). 'Sakartvelos proletkulti', *Khelovnebis drosha*, 2, 1924, p. 25.

established, it announced, in which 150 students of mainly worker and peasant origin were enrolled, as had a Red Theatre and literary and visual art studios, all of which were operating successfully in Tiflis, training workers in various cultural practices.¹⁵² A short article concerning the visual art studio confirmed the alignment of Georgia's Proletkult organisation with the artistic sympathies of Proletkult in Moscow, which from 1924 had adopted a more defined artistic agenda, aligning itself more explicitly with the artistic left and, in particular, with the Lef group.¹⁵³

In Moscow by the mid 1920s Proletkult, though still active, existed in the margins of cultural life. It found itself unable to recover from the criticism that had been levelled at it at the beginning of the decade.¹⁵⁴ Its position was weakened further by new attacks by proletarian organisations such as AKhRR, RAPP and VOAPP (the All-Union Union of Associations of Proletarian Writers), which expended significant energy in differentiating their conception of proletarian culture from Proletkult's.¹⁵⁵ In Georgia, however, opposition between these groups was less clear-cut. As a much smaller cultural centre, local branches of Party and government bodies as well as independent non-government cultural organisations in Tiflis existed on a far smaller scale than their counterparts in the central administration. As a result, there was more overlap and cooperation between groups that were in opposition in Moscow, and individuals held powerful positions in several government administrations and independent organisations simultaneously. Proletkult's Kuridze was one such figure. Kuridze was a Bolshevik Party member from 1917 and involved in the revolutionary movement in Transcaucasia. He edited the illegal Bolshevik newspaper *Komunisti* ('Communist', 1920-45) in Georgia during Menshevik rule, wrote revolutionary poetry and was instrumental in 1922 in establishing both the Georgian Proletkult organisation and the Georgian Association of Proletarian Writers. However, he also had several government positions. He was the first head of IZO Narkompros in Georgia in 1921, and was employed by the Union of Art Workers in Georgia as editor of its art journal in 1924-5. Although he appears not to have retained these positions through the Cultural Revolution period, in the mid-1920s, at least, his

¹⁵² 'Sakartvelo proletkultis tehnikumi' ['Georgian Proletkult *Tekhnikum*']; D. Konstantinov, 'Proletkultis sakhviti studia' ['Proletkult visual studio'], *Khelovnebis drosha*, 2, 1924, p. 27-28. The need to organise a visual art studio was raised by the committee as early as October 1922. Members initially proposed that Glavpolitprosvet undertake its organisation on their behalf. In November it was noted that a visual art section of Proletkult had been formed, but that it was hampered by the absence of premises from which to work. It is unclear exactly how quickly art studios began after this. NAG, f. 25, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 1 ob. and 3.

¹⁵³ D. Konstantinov, 'Proletkultis sakhviti studia' ['Proletkult visual studio'], *Khelovnebis drosha*, 2, 1924, p. 27-8.

¹⁵⁴ See '8. The Proletkult as Postscript, 1923-1932' in Mally, *Culture of the Future*, pp. 229-52.

¹⁵⁵ Mally, *Culture of the Future*, 232.

various positions of authority must have made Proletkult more visible and relevant than it was in the same period in Moscow (particularly given his ability as editor of *Khelovnebis drosha* to publish swathes of articles in Proletkult's praise).

Kuridze's multiple positions, however, also meant that he was responsible for defending the interests of artistic organisations outside of Proletkult, including those that had little to connect them to the proletariat or the service of its interests. Indeed, Kuridze seems to have supported freedom and heterogeneity of artistic experimentation of Georgia above all, regardless of class concerns—or rather, as the best means of developing proletarian culture. In a report Kuridze gave at the Sixth Congress of the All-Georgian Art Workers' Union (RABIS) in 1926, for example, he petitioned the Union's leadership on behalf of both the Academy of Arts and the Society of Georgian Artists, complaining that government management and investment in the arts was insufficient for their proper development.¹⁵⁶ He commented on the fact that neither the Main State Council for the Arts, nor Glaviskusstvo, had a budget of its own. Both were subject to the whim of Narkompros' general leadership.¹⁵⁷ He condemned the especially great hardship faced by the Society, noting that it had no access to suitable exhibition space.¹⁵⁸ The situation was so dire, he explained, that the Society had rented the gardens of the opera house as a temporary summer space and its members were working outside. It had no material resources, no one to buy the works being produced and not even the minimum satisfactory conditions for work. As a result, young artists with undoubted talent and bright futures were starved of the resources they needed.¹⁵⁹

Keeping up with Moscow: Georgian Arts Periodicals in the 1920s and 30s

The following pages introduce the main periodicals reporting on contemporary developments in the arts in Georgia during the 1920s and 30s and construct through them a chronology of the major political events affecting Georgian artists in that period, and of the contemporary discourses arising in relation to Soviet Georgian art and identity. These periodicals reflect the proximity of art producers and critics in Georgia to shifts in cultural

¹⁵⁶ GARF, f. P5508, op.1, d. 695.

¹⁵⁷ Within the Presidium of Glaviskusstvo only two members were paid as permanent staff—the chair of the presidium and the head of the music division. In the visual arts section, the only permanent budget belonged to the Academy of Arts, and even then the funds were only enough to cover teaching salaries and necessary technical personnel. Despite eighty per cent of the Academy's students being of proletarian origin, the absence of financial support meant that they were 'dragging out a half-starved existence.' 'влачит полуголодное существование.' GARF, f. P5508, op.1, d. 695, l. 137.

¹⁵⁸ GARF, f. P5508, op.1, d. 695, ll. 50-51.

¹⁵⁹ GARF, f. P5508, op.1, d. 695, l. 147.

policy in Moscow, but also shed light on the specificity of the environment in which Georgian artists found themselves.

***Khelovneba* ('Art')**

The most important Georgian-language art journal published in Tbilisi during the 1920s and 30s changed its name, editorship and affiliation several times, reflecting shifts in the organisation of the arts over that period. First appearing in 1921 as *Khelovneba*, the 'social-political literary-artistic and scientific-theoretical journal' of the Georgian Ministry of Culture, it endured, albeit erratically and under a range of titles, throughout the 1920s and 30s. It therefore offers a vital record of artistic activity in Georgia during that time.¹⁶⁰ Its first incarnation, which appeared only twice in 1921 before publication was temporarily halted, was mainly concerned with theatre and literature.¹⁶¹ Following a gap in 1922-3 *Khelovneba* was replaced in June 1924 with *Khelovnebis drosha*. Under Kuridze's editorship, and now as an organ of RABIS, *Khelovnebis drosha* and its successor, *Khelovneba* (1925-6) were broader in scope than the earlier journal, although the weighting of its content continued to reflect that of its membership, who were mostly theatre, film and music performers and personnel, rather than painters.¹⁶² Under Kuridze, *Khelovnebis drosha* and *Khelovneba* reported not only about Proletkult's and RABIS' achievements in Georgia, but also on the activities of Proletkult's allies in Georgia and Moscow, including Lunacharsky and the Russian theatre actor and producer Vsevolod Meyerhold.¹⁶³

In 1927, however, *Khelovneba* was replaced by *Sabchota khelovneba* ('Soviet Art'). Publication changed hands from RABIS to the arts section of Narkompros in Georgia and

¹⁶⁰ The journal's initial title, *Khelovneba* ('Art'), was given to several journals in Georgia in the 1910s and 20s. *Khelovneba: almanaki* ['Art: almanac'] was published briefly in Tiflis in 1910. Iliia Chavchavadze's Society for the Propagation of Literacy in Georgia also printed several issues of a journal titled *Khelovneba* in 1919-1921. These were concerned primarily with new Georgian theatre and literature and published writing by associates of the Blue Horns modernist literary association. Narkompros replaced Georgia's Ministry of Culture soon after Sovietisation.

¹⁶¹ Regular contributors included the Georgian theatre director Akaki Paghava and the writer, playwright, actor and director, Shalva Dadiani. Paghava founded the Akaki Paghava theatre studio (which became the Rustaveli Theatre Institute in 1923).

¹⁶² A graphic published in 1926 put the collective number of fine artists and artist-decorators belonging to RABIS at 141, compared with 585 actors, 300 orchestral performers, 249 technical stage personnel, 219 technical film personnel, 205 teachers, 189 administrative personnel, 137 financial personnel, 123 folk performers, plus a whole section of performers and other personal working in opera, ballet and circuses. *Khelovneba*, 25, 1926, p. 22.

¹⁶³ As well as articles explaining and commending their work, for example, translations of some of Lunacharsky's writings and lectures were provided as appendices. Kuridze also gave space to the activities of experimental theatre directors Kote Marjanishvili and Sandro Akhmeteli and to the Georgian Futurists associated with the journal *H₂SO₄*. See especially *Khelovnebis drosha*, 2, 1924.

editorship was taken over by Aleksandre Duduchava, who was then also the rector of the Georgian Academy of Arts. Unsurprisingly, given Duduchava's interest in Georgian painting, the change produced a significant shift in the publication's focus towards issues of visual art, as the journal began to report on the activities and achievements of the Academy of Arts and debate the Academy's role and responsibilities.

From the end of 1927 until 1931—for the duration of the Cultural Revolution—there was a further gap in publication. During this neither RABIS, IZO Narkompros, REVMAS nor SARMA appears to have had a regular publication in Georgia. This changed only with the appearance of *Proletaruli khelovnebisatvis* ('For Proletarian Art', after AKhR's journal, *Za proletarskoe iskusstvo*), which finally represented the far left wing of painting in Georgia in print.¹⁶⁴ Still published by the arts section of Narkompros in Georgia and during its brief existence (one issue was published in 1931 followed by a further three in 1932) its pages were dominated by far left critics and writers belonging to GAPP and the Transcaucasian Association of Proletarian Writers (ZAPP) and reflected the militant proletarianism of those organisations.¹⁶⁵ In line with the interests and outlook of its editors, the bulk of its content was dedicated to proletarian theatre, music, film and literature. Little room was given to the visual arts. Nevertheless, Mirzoev also contributed several articles, which he used to set out his views on the correct path for the visual arts in Soviet Georgia and criticise those outside of his own militantly proletarian faction within SARMA and, subsequently, GAPKh.¹⁶⁶

The final issue of *Proletaruli khelovnebisatvis* appeared in May 1932, following soon after the Central Committee's decree 'On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organisations'. Already in 1931, both in Moscow and in Georgia, the Party and the government bodies responsible for the arts had begun to step back from the militant proletarianism of the preceding years following Stalin's rehabilitation of bourgeois specialists. Georgian artists and commentators followed Moscow's lead. At SARMA's first plenum meeting in January 1932, for example, artists and critics increasingly reassessed and

¹⁶⁴ In this period, commentary concerning visual art appeared elsewhere, including in the journals of the Transcaucasian and Georgian Associations of Proletarian Writers (ZAPP and GAPP).

¹⁶⁵ Among its editors were the actor and theatre critic Grigol Shavgulidze (chief editor), the secretary of the Georgian Association of Proletarian Writers, Shalva Radiani, the writer and literary and theatre critic Shalva Duduchava, and the prominent theatre critic G. Bukhnikashvili.

¹⁶⁶ G. Mirzoevi, 'SARMA', *Proletaruli khelovnebisatvis*, 1-2, 1931, p. 5; G. Mirzoevi, 'Tsrú damkvrelobis tsinaaghmdég (Sak. khelovn. mushakebis kavshiri oportunizmis chaobshi)' ['Against false shock-work (The Georgian Art Workers' Union in a Swamp of Opportunism)'], *Proletaruli khelovnebisatvis*, 3-4, 1932, p. 29; G. Mirzoevi, 'Sotsialisturi rekonstruktsia da plakati' ['Socialist reconstruction and the poster'], *Proletaruli khelovnebisatvis*, 5-6, 1932, pp. 4-5. The first issue also contains a notice of SARMA's second exhibition at the Georgian National Gallery. It claims that the exhibition will tour to Armenia and Moscow, although no evidence has been found in the course of this research to confirm that this tour took place.

renounced the militancy of previous years.¹⁶⁷ When *Proletaruli khelovnebisatvis* was replaced by *Sabchota khelovneba*, its first issue appearing in February 1932, its editorship and content reflected the changes and continuities resulting from the April 23 decree. Shavgulidze initially continued as editor and many of the regular contributors of the Cultural Revolution period continued to feature on its pages, but their content was markedly more moderate.

There was another gap in publication through 1933-4, after which printing began again in 1935, first, for a single issue, as *Khelovneba*, and then, again, as *Sabchota khelovneba*, which was issued regularly up to 1941.¹⁶⁸ Duduchava resumed editorship between 1935 and 1937 and, as a result, the visual arts began again to receive greater attention.¹⁶⁹ Through 1935-41, *Sabchota khelovneba* responded to the major events in Stalinist culture and politics and reflected their implications for the cultural sphere in Georgia. Beginning in 1935 a series of articles attempted to characterise the new goals for the arts in Georgia following the advent of socialist realism. In 1936, articles covered the campaign against formalism in the arts, which began at the end of 1935 under the recently established Committee for Art Affairs. The Committee oversaw a tightening of central Party control over all spheres of the arts, and the further delineation of socialist realist doctrine resulting in a narrowing of the scope of acceptable artistic activity. Articles in *Sabchota khelovneba*, including Duduchava's twenty-page 'Against Formalism and Simplification,' and a further piece 'Against formalism in music' penned by the head of Georgia's new department for the administration of the arts outlined the principles of the new doctrine and its applicability in Georgia.¹⁷⁰ In 1937, the journal dedicated a special issue to the celebration

¹⁶⁷ NAG, f. 10, op. 1, d. 25.

¹⁶⁸ The single issue of *Khelovneba* was edited by Davit Demetradze, a literary critic and prominent member of the Georgia Writers' Union, whom Beria would employ two years later to lead the trials of dozens of members of the Writers' Union, leading to the arrest and execution of many. Following the trials Beria also had Demetradze arrested and executed. See Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia*, p. 270. Unsurprisingly, under Demetradze's leadership the journal was dominated by the contributions of prominent figures within the Writers' Union at that time, including Davit Rondeli and Bessarion (Beso) Zhgenti, writing on film and theatre. Publication halted in 1941 and resumed only in 1954.

¹⁶⁹ Duduchava continued as editor up until his arrest and execution during the Terror of 1937. At that time editorship was transferred to B. Gagaa, who continued in the role until 1941.

¹⁷⁰ Aleksandre Duduchava, 'Pormalizmisa da gaubralebis tsinaaghmdeg' and Er. Gordeladze, 'Pormalizmis tsinaaghmdeg musikashi' *Sabchota khelovneba*, 3, 1936. This new cultural climate was also reflected visually in *Sabchota khelovneba*. While 1935 issues were heavily illustrated with works that could (and soon would) attract accusations of formalism among critics in Georgia and Moscow, the 1936 issues were now also augmented with colour reproductions of new works being produced for Beria's exhibition. Of five issues published under Duduchava's editorship in 1935, the covers of two feature a brightly coloured works by Korneli Sanadze whose laconic, brightly-coloured illustrations are indebted to Kakabadze and recall Russian painter David Shterenberg's paintings of the same period. Other frontispiece illustrations included one by Severian Maisashvili (a student of Lado Gudiashvili), a colourful painting by Kristepore Giorgadze, *Subtropical*

of Pushkin, reflecting the enormous Union-wide festivities surrounding the centennial of the poet's death and the new status of Pushkin as an emblem of the 'Great Tradition' of Soviet cultural heritage. In this respect, the content of *Sabchota khelovneba* indicates that political and cultural developments in the Soviet capital impacted upon artistic life in Georgia almost as immediately as they did in Moscow.

As the content of *Sabchota khelovneba* and other periodicals contests, differences between the experience and creative output of artists and critics in Georgia and in Moscow arose not from any delay in transmitting or imposing Soviet political and artistic doctrine outside of the main Russian centres. Instead they were driven largely by the different implementation of and implications of Soviet policies (collectively and in various spheres of governance) in Georgia vis-à-vis other Soviet regions and republics. 1936, for example, was a watershed year in Soviet political and cultural life for a series of interconnected reasons related to the introduction of the new Soviet constitution (the Stalin Constitution). The constitution was intended to satisfy public desire for civil freedoms by purporting to give Soviet citizens greater political and civil rights. It was an important element of Stalin's cult of personality, presented as evidence of his genius and of his paternal concern for the rights and interests of the Soviet people. It was part of a marked stepping up of the Stalin personality cult at that time. In practice, however, the constitution actually facilitated a dramatic increase in the Party's and Stalin's personal control over all spheres of Soviet life. The new Committee for Art Affairs and the anti-formalist campaign were just two of its products. Another was the overhaul of the territorial delineation of the Soviet Union in line with revised Soviet nationalities policy. As the introduction to this thesis explained, the revised policy meant increased central Party control over the forms of national cultural expression available to the remaining Soviet nations and the resurrection of the Russian people's right to national cultural expression. It was a fundamental reconfiguration of the relationship between the constituent Soviet nations, with the Russian people increasingly taking the role of senior brother within the newly conceptualised Friendship of the Peoples.

The implementation of these dramatic changes and their implications were different for Georgia and for Georgian artists than they were for Russia and Russian artists in Moscow. In Moscow, Russian cultural producers were newly allowed and encouraged to express a specifically Russian national cultural identity (albeit one that was expressed through prescribed cultural forms and which in many ways overlapped with a Soviet one). They also

landscape, which is closely aligned with Sanadze's painting, and finally Gudiashvili's *Portrait of Niko Pirosmanishvili*, a work that inspired much debate among Georgian artists, as we will be seen in chapter two.

went from having their nationhood denied to being acknowledged as the senior and superior partner in their relations with the Union's other members. By contrast, cultural producers in Georgia saw their ability to express a national cultural identity limited and controlled and their cultural status diminished vis-à-vis that of Russians. Georgia went from being one of the Union's most culturally advanced nations (compared with the multitude of small ethnic groups that became nations with the establishment of the Soviet Union) to being a member of a more homogenous periphery, inextricably separate from the Soviet centre. The new primordialist conceptualisations of nationhood in Soviet policy and the associated focus on celebrating nations' folk traditions emphasised less modern aspects of Georgian culture while the ultimate cultural modernity, measured in mastery of socialist realism, belonged to the Soviet centre. As I demonstrate throughout this thesis, the differences between Georgian artists' experience and that of other Soviet artists are complex but did not reflect any lag in the implementation of Soviet policy or reduction in Party supervision. Rather, the pages of *Sabchota khelovneba* show the latest policies being disseminated and discussed in Georgia as they appeared in Moscow. In Duduchava's first issue in 1935, two articles were quick to address the question of national art and its relationship with classic heritage.¹⁷¹ Beria's commentary on the Stalin Constitution and its specific implications for the Caucasus region appeared on its pages in 1936.¹⁷²

Other Periodicals

In addition to *Sabchota khelovneba* and its earlier incarnations, several other periodicals published in Georgia in the 1920s and 30s provide important documents of the state of artistic activity there and inform subsequent chapters of this thesis. One of the most informative is *Na rubezhe vostoka* (At the Frontier of the East), the literary and artistic journal of the Transcaucasian Association of Proletarian Writers, which first appeared in 1928. It was issued monthly or bi-monthly until the end of 1931, making it especially valuable in providing a record of the artistic environment in Georgia in the years when *Sabchota khelovneba* was not in print. After the April 1932 decree it became the organ of the newly founded Union of Soviet Writers of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and was replaced with a larger-format 'local fortnightly newspaper of literature, criticism and art'

¹⁷¹ See for example Gr. Khevtasi, 'Sotsialisturi realizmi da klassikuri momkvidreobis problema' [Socialist realism and the problem of classical heritage], *Sabchota khelovneba*, 2, 1935, pp. 11-12.

¹⁷² L. Beria, 'ssr kavshiris axali konstitutsia da amier-kavkasiis pederatsia' [The New Constitution of the USSR and the Transcaucasian Federation], *Sabchota khelovneba*, 1936, pp. 1-5.

appearing between 1933 and 1936. It began primarily as a literary publication but included an art section from 1929. This concentrated on music, film and theatre, articles concerning the visual arts and the state of art criticism as well as exhibition reviews. Reproductions of new Georgian painting began to appear from the middle of 1929 and continued throughout the years of its publication. They included articles by leading Georgian art critics including Duduchava and Vladimir Sokol debating the goals of Soviet painting in Georgia in the Cultural Revolution period and assessing the contributions and relevance of Georgian art's most famous representatives.¹⁷³ The 1933-6 issues of *Na rubezhe* are incomplete—the larger newspaper format and slimmer fortnightly editions led them to be less well preserved than copies of the earlier journal so that even the main repositories such as the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia and Georgia's National Archives hold only partial runs. However, these materials, plus the full runs for 1928-31, represent a vast and hitherto wholly untapped resource for historians of Soviet art. In parallel with *Sabchota khelovneba*, articles in *Na rubezhe* charted the changing tides in public discourse about the new Soviet art in Georgia, from the proletarian militancy of the Cultural Revolution period through the advent of socialist realism and the onslaught of the campaign against 'Formalism' in the arts in 1936.

A number of other periodicals appearing in Georgia in the 1920s and 30s also reported on the visual arts. From 1931 the Georgian Association of Proletarian Writers (and then, from 1932, the Georgian Union of Soviet Writers) published a journal, appearing under various titles—*Saliterturo gazeti* ('Literary Newspaper') from 1931 to 1934, *Literaturli gazeti* ('Literary Newspaper') from late 1934 to 1936, and *Literaturuli Sakartvelo* ('Literary Georgia') from 1936 to 1943.¹⁷⁴ By comparison with *Sabchota khelovneba* and *Na rubezhe*, *Saliterturo gazeti* and its later incarnations were much more narrowly focused on literary matters, music and theatre, and gave less space to visual art. Nevertheless, it did publish occasional exhibition reviews and contributions on Georgian visual artists. Much more regular coverage of the visual arts appeared in main, non-specialist, local newspapers, which published frequent exhibition reviews, artist interviews and biographies, and articles and

¹⁷³ *Na rubezhe*'s editors and regular contributors in the Cultural Revolution period included the militant leftist critic Benito Buachidze (chief editor between 1928 and 1931) and Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani writers, playwrights and critics belonging to ZAPP, including Rondeli (between 1928 and 1929), Azerbaijani poet and playwright Suleiman Rustam-Zade (between 1928 and 1929), and later, Radiani (1931-32). For a full list of editors for the period 1928-1932, see K. D. Muratov, *Periodika literatury i iskusstva za gody revoliutsii* (Leningrad: USSR Academy of Sciences, 1933), p. 166.

¹⁷⁴ It was edited by Radiani and Zhgenti from 1932, as part of a board of editors belonging to the Georgian Writers' Union.

notifications concerning visual art in Georgia. These included the Russian-language newspaper of the Communist Party in Transcaucasia, *Zaria vostoka* ('Dawn of the East', 1922-91), and the Georgian-language *Komunisti*. *Komunisti* included a literary-artistic supplement, *Droscha* ('Flag'), between 1923 and 1929, after which it appeared as an independent artistic and literary journal until 1935. The komsomol newspaper *Akhalgazrda kommunisti* ('Young Communist', 1925-90) and the daily evening newspaper of the Georgian Council of Trade Unions, *Musha* ('Worker', 1922-39), also published articles on art matters, although less frequently.

These periodicals constitute a vital record of the genesis of Soviet Georgian painting through the Cultural Revolution and in light of the advent of socialist realism. In the following chapters these records inform detailed studies of pivotal events in the history of painting in Soviet Georgia. The overview presented in this chapter of their content and chronologies and of the organisations who produced them or published in them, however, has already broken new ground. It has demonstrated that Georgian cultural producers, including painters, were responding to the same whims of the Party leadership, the same overhauls of Soviet policy, at the same time as were artists in Moscow. The difference in the Georgian case was that in some respects the implementation and implications of those events were different for artists in Georgia and at the Soviet centre. The impact on artists in Georgia of the Cultural Revolution, the rehabilitation of bourgeois specialists, the advent of socialist realism or the introduction of the Stalin Constitution was as immediate as it was in Moscow, but the consequences of those events were different. Clearly, shifts in Soviet nationalities policy had a different impact on Georgian artists than on artists representing the Soviet centre. But so too did the Cultural Revolution's class war, which had complicated ramifications for the question of national art. Similarly, the Stalin Constitution affected Georgia's status in the Soviet Union's hierarchy of nations. However, it also signalled a stepping up of work on Stalin's cult of personality, which had different implications for Georgian artists than for artists of other Soviet nationalities. Additionally, this chapter has highlighted for the first time the extraordinary degree of influence that a handful of figures held over the working lives of Georgian painters in the 1920s and 30s, above all Mirzoev during the Cultural Revolution and Beria throughout the 1930s. It has introduced the main individuals, organisations, government bodies, and policies involved in defining Georgian artists' experience in the 1920s and 30s, as well as the printed media through which ideas and policies were disseminated, formalised, and consolidated. In doing so it has provided

essential context for the case studies that follow and lays the foundations for future research concerning Georgian painting in this period.

Chapter 2. Representing ‘National Art’: Moscow Institutions and the Art of the Soviet East in the 1920s and 30s

This chapter documents how institutions and individual commentators discussed and displayed the art and culture of the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union, including Georgia, in Moscow in the 1920s and 30s. It considers the challenges they faced as they attempted to understand and interpret Soviet policy concerning the non-Russian nationalities including, in particular, Stalin’s declaration that Soviet art should be ‘national in form, socialist in content.’ There was significant room for a range of interpretations of what would constitute ‘national form’ and for how long it ought to be cultivated. In the 1920s and early 1930s at least, there were no guidelines as to what ‘national form’ in Soviet art should look like or which ‘national’ traits should or should not be encouraged. The only fixed requirement was that form should not interfere with ‘socialist content.’

Korenizatsiia (discussed in the introduction to this thesis) and Stalin’s formula for a socialist culture, national in form and socialist in content, remained a feature of Soviet policy throughout the Stalin era. However, the ways in which those policies were interpreted and implemented altered in response to changes in the Soviet leadership’s other priorities. As Terry Martin describes, Soviet policies can be understood as belonging to one of two categories, hard-line or soft-line: ‘Hard-line policies were the core Bolshevik tasks, whereas soft-line policies were designed to make those policies palatable to the larger population.’¹⁷⁵ Military and economic concerns were thus hard-line priorities, while *korenizatsiia* was ‘a quintessentially soft-line policy’ which meant that it was ‘to be implemented only to the extent it did not conflict with hard-line policy goals.’¹⁷⁶ In painting, accordingly, ‘national form’ was a priority only when the demand for strictly proletarian content was less urgent (before 1928 and after 1931), and was appropriate only where it did not interfere with a painting’s ability to serve the needs of the proletariat. Equally, the task of encouraging, promoting and displaying ‘national art’ was only a priority for institutions and individual commentators in Moscow in periods when they were not required to dedicate their time and resources to more pressing class, social or economic concerns. The shifts between periods when nationalities policy was and was not prioritised therefore had complicated implications for how ‘national art’ and culture were approached, discussed and presented to the public in Moscow. They affected the types of material collected by museums and displayed to the

¹⁷⁵ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 21.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21

public as well as the manner in which that material was displayed and written about. In doing so they affected the narratives those institutions were able to present concerning the Soviet Union's non-Russian peoples, sometimes even inadvertently making it more difficult for institutions to present the vision that the Party desired.

To complicate matters further, contradictory hard- and soft-line policies were sometimes implemented simultaneously. *Korenizatsiia* was carried out by soft-line institutions at the same time as hard-line institutions were moving against it. In Ukraine, for example, *korenizatsiia* (or *ukrainizatsiia*, Ukrainianisation) continued to be implemented in accordance with nationalities policy even as many of those responsible for its implementation were being accused of and arrested for counter-revolutionary 'bourgeois nationalism.'¹⁷⁷ Under such circumstances, the task of commentators on 'national art' in Moscow was to present their interpretation of Stalin's formula honouring the principles of *korenizatsiia* but also appearing to prioritise hard-line policies over *korenizatsiia* whenever necessary. This was not always easy to achieve.

(Not) Representing National Art at the Soviet Centre: The All-Soviet Scholarly Association of Oriental Studies (VNAV) and the Museum of Oriental Cultures (GMVK)

Some of the most prolific organisations and institutions contributing to public discussion in Moscow concerning the art and culture of the non-Russian peoples of the Southern and Eastern territories of the USSR in the 1920s belonged to the field of Soviet oriental studies. The most influential of these were the All-Russian (All-Soviet from 1922) Scholarly Association of Oriental Studies (VNAV, 1921-30) and Moscow's museum of oriental art, *Ars Asiatica* (1917-24), which in 1925 was reorganised as the State Museum of Oriental Cultures.¹⁷⁸

Conceived as the foremost Party organ for Soviet oriental studies, VNAV represented a new school of Bolshevik oriental studies. In contrast to the Imperial Russian school of orientologists still active in the USSR, VNAV sought to apply the methodology of Marxist

¹⁷⁷ On Ukrainianisation and the backlash against it, see '3. Linguistic Ukrainianization, 1923-32' in Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp. 75-124.

¹⁷⁸ *Ars Asiatica* was administered under the museums division of Narkompros from its establishment in 1917 up until 1924. From late 1924 to mid 1925 it briefly became a department of the Museum of Fine Arts (*Muzei izobrazitelnykh iskusstv*, MII), before being restored as an independent institution under Glavnauka and renamed the State Museum of Oriental Cultures (GMVK). In 1936 it was brought under the recently established Committee for Art Affairs of the USSR. Though there were other oriental studies institutions involved in work concerning the cultures of those nationalities, VNAV and GMVK were the most active in terms of formal academic research.

dialectical materialism to oriental studies.¹⁷⁹ According to this method the history of nations' social, cultural and economic development would be explained according to the stages of economic and social development identified by Marx. For this reason, despite being established under Stalin's Commissariat of Nationalities (Narkomnats), the commissariat responsible for domestic national groups, rather than the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (Narkomindel), VNAV was initially concerned primarily with studying the foreign (non-Soviet) East. It was founded with the primary purpose of providing the Soviet leadership with data on the East that could help it to monitor and facilitate revolutionary progress there.¹⁸⁰ A Marxist dialectical materialist method, it was intended, would allow VNAV's scholars to provide revolutionary forces in the East with a narrative of their own political and economic progress that would encourage further revolutionary development.¹⁸¹ This narrative was to be disseminated through an extensive programme of publishing, propaganda tours, lectures and exhibitions, and through cooperation with local revolutionary forces on the ground.¹⁸²

Despite the Association's initial focus on the East beyond the USSR, VNAV also devoted attention to the 'Soviet East', especially in the latter half of the 1920s.¹⁸³ It was

¹⁷⁹ Other schools of orientology existed alongside VNAV in the 1920s, the most significant of which was centred around the Asiatic Museum, a department of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Petrograd/Leningrad. Rather than adopting VNAV's Marxist methodology, members of this school largely continued in the research they had pursued before the Revolution. They published a small amount of research on the art and culture of the peoples of the East in a dedicated journal, *Vostok: zhurnal literatury, nauki i iskusstva*, five large volumes (150-300 pages each) of which were published between 1922 and 1925. However, content was dominated by translations of literary works. Writing on fine art focussed on cultures that particularly interested the Leningrad orientologists, including especially Buddhist cultures, and on historic and applied arts, not contemporary painting. See, for example, S. Dudin, 'Kirgizskii ornament' and V. Krachkovskaia, 'Tatarskoe iskusstvo i byt v Krymu,' *Vostok*, 5, 1925, pp. 164-83 and 213-16. On the activities of the Leningrad orientologists, see 'Chapter 6: Imagining Minorities and Nations in the 1920s' in Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*, pp. 134-167; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union, Culture and Society after Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) and Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1998). On other oriental studies institutions, and Soviet orientology in general, see Michael Kemper, 'Red Orientalism: Mikhail Pavlovich and Marxist Oriental Studies in Early Soviet Russia' *Die Welt des Islams*, 50:3/4 (2010), pp. 435-76 and Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann, eds, *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies* (London: Routledge Contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe, 2011).

¹⁸⁰ Kemper, 'Red Orientalism,' pp. 435-76 (pp. 467-68). Most Soviet scholars refer to VNAV as Lenin's initiative. However, as Michael Kemper has shown, the fact that the organisation was administered under Stalin's Narkomnats, despite the focus of its work being on the Orient outside of the USSR, adds weight to the idea that VNAV was in fact initiated by Stalin in his role as Commissar of Nationalities. On Pavlovich and VNAV, see also Taline Ter Minassian, *Colporteurs du Comintern: L'Union soviétique et les minorités au Moyen-Orient* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1997). On Narkomnats, see Stephen Black, *The Apprentice as Sorcerer: Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917-1924* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994) and V. G. Chebotareva, *Narkomnats RSFSR: svet i teni natsionalnoi politiki 1917-1924 gg.* (Moscow: Obshchestvennaia akademiia, 2003).

¹⁸¹ Soviet historical materialism as a methodology refers to the application of Marxist dialectical materialism to historical processes. It was developed over the course of the 1920s and 30s and formalised by Joseph Stalin in his *Dialectical and Historical Marxism*, published in 1938.

¹⁸² Kemper, 'Red Orientalism', p. 457.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 473.

responsible for producing its own research concerning the Soviet East, which included primarily Soviet nationalities classified as ‘eastern’ under Soviet nationalities policy but also (to a lesser extent, and in certain periods), the ‘western,’ ‘developed’ nations of the Caucasus, namely Georgia and Armenia. It produced research concerning social, economic and cultural subjects, all of which it explained according to a Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialist methodology. But it was also responsible for coordinating the work of all Soviet institutions contributing to the field of Marxist oriental studies. It collaborated with institutions, both in a supervisory role and in order to share resources and expertise and it was primarily in its collaboration with the Museum of Oriental Cultures that it contributed to public discourse about the art and culture of the Soviet Union’s non-Russian nationalities.

Ars Asiatica came into being in October 1918 and opened to visitors on 22 September 1919.¹⁸⁴ For the first few years of its existence, its collection consisted primarily of works of decorative and applied art from beyond the borders of the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁵ From the mid 1920s, however, that changed. After several years of financial precariousness, problems with obtaining and retaining suitable premises and facing repeated external proposals for its liquidation, in 1924 the museum’s leadership reached out to VNAV for support.¹⁸⁶ VNAV intervened on the museum’s behalf, appealing to the head of Glavnauka, Fedor Petrov, who agreed to support it. With Petrov and VNAV’s protection, it was saved from liquidation. However, its profile and responsibilities were altered significantly in the process. Though the museum remained formally independent, VNAV became closely involved in all aspects of its activity. In July 1924 a meeting to discuss the museum’s future development was held by VNAV’s historical-ethnologic department, which also organised a special commission for the study of the art of the East, responsible for its work with the museum.¹⁸⁷ In January 1925 the

¹⁸⁴ Voitov, *Materialy*, pp. 14-16; 20. The museum’s archive is currently closed to external researchers. However, much of the material held in the museum’s archive pertaining to the years 1918-50 is published either in full or in part in Voitov’s volume. See also V. E. Voitov, *Materialy po istorii Gosudarstvennogo muzeia Vostoka: 1951-1970* (Moscow: Skanrus, 2006); V. E. Voitov, *Iz istorii archeologicheskikh ekspeditsii Muzeia vostochnykh kultur v Starom Termeze. 1926-1928 Gg. (Po arkhivnym dannym i publikatsiiam)* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi muzei vostoka, 2001); V. E. Strelkova, *Ekspozitsionno-vystavochnaia deiatel'nost' Muzeia vostochnykh kultur v 1926-1932 gg. (Publikatsiia dokumentov iz arkhiva GMINV)* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi muzei vostoka, 1996); N. S. Nikolaeva et al., *Muzei vostochnykh kultur* (Moscow: [s. n.], 1957); N. S. Sycheva, *Iz istorii izucheniia vostochnykh muzeev v SSSR* (Moscow: 1978).

¹⁸⁵ The museum’s collection, like those of the other new state museums, was made up of objects confiscated from various nationalised state and private collections. See Voitov, *Materialy*, pp. 14-27.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46. VNAV had two main departments—a political-economic department and a historical-ethnologic department. The latter was less politically oriented than the former, and included scholars working in the fields of archeology, ethnography and history. The meeting was also attended by representatives of other oriental studies institutions including the N. N. Narimanov Moscow Institute of Oriental studies (MIV), the Leningrad Institute of Living Oriental Languages (LIZhVI), the department of nationalities under the Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR and the Scientific Research Institute for Archaeology and Natural History.

commission included members of VNAV's presidium, professors Ilia Borozdin and Vladimir Gurko-Kriazhin as well as Leningrad orientologists Sergei Oldenburg and Nikolai Marr.¹⁸⁸ Then, in November, they, together with other VNAV scholars, became part of the museum's provisional research council.¹⁸⁹ When, in December 1925, a new management team was finally announced, it included Borozdin and Gurko-Kriazhin alongside the museum's director, Fedor Gogel, plus Boris Denike, an orientologist from Moscow State University.¹⁹⁰ With the museum's reorganisation, the parameters of its work became closely aligned with those of VNAV. There were to be six departments in place of its original two. Departments of the Near and Far East were to be joined by departments for the Middle East and the Soviet East in addition to a library and archive and a 'Cabinet of the History of Revolutionary and National Emancipatory Movements in the East' (KRD). The Cabinet, led by Gurko-Kriazhin (who was also the head of VNAV's political-economic department), was essentially an organ of VNAV within the museum. Both a research department and an exhibition department, it was housed in several rooms at the museum where its displays were designed to present the history of revolutionary movements in the East to the Moscow public according to the Marxist dialectical model. The department's display materials, which initially came from VNAV's collection, consisted largely of ethnographic objects and auxiliary materials (texts, graphs and photographs) explaining the historical narrative that VNAV's scholars intended to communicate. The department was also meant to include art objects in its exhibitions but in practice these were swamped by other exhibits. The KRD was beneficial to both VNAV and the museum. It provided the association with a means of presenting its particular narrative on the revolutionary movements of the East to the Moscow public and it helped the museum to demonstrate its adoption of Marxist dialectical materialism in its work.

In 1925, then, the museum's activity was brought broadly in line with VNAV's political objectives, serving the Party's agenda in both the foreign and Soviet 'East.' From 1926, however, things changed again. In response to failed communist revolutions in Europe during 1917-21, the Bolshevik leadership gradually abandoned its aspirations towards international global communism, and turned instead to a policy of 'Socialism in One

¹⁸⁸ Oldenburg was the secretary of the Russian Academy of Sciences at that time. Marr, a Georgian-born orientologist now famed for his controversial 'Japhetic theory' connecting the Kartvelian languages of the Caucasus with the Semitic languages of the Middle East, was the head of RAIMK (the Russian Academy of the History of Material Culture). Despite being listed as members of the research council, however, they do not appear to have been closely involved in the museum's work. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48. VNAV scholars B. Zasytkin, F. I Schmidt and A. Bashkirov were also on the new research council.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46-48.

Country'. With this, the priorities of VNAV's and the museum's work shifted towards the nationalities of the 'Soviet East.' The Soviet East department that had been initiated the year before had so far remained largely theoretical. In December 1926, however, new research councils were organised by department. Suddenly there were more researchers attached to the department of the Soviet East than to any other section.¹⁹¹ There was a flurry of research activity. Denike, who by then had taken over as the museum's director, announced in *Izvestiia* that research expeditions were being planned for that year to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, the Tatar ASSR, Azerbaijan and Armenia.¹⁹² Borozdin, Denike and Gogel all published articles on artistic culture in the 'Soviet East' and Borozdin even read a series of lectures on Union-wide radio on the subject of 'The cultural achievements of the Soviet East'.¹⁹³ From this time onwards the 'Soviet East'—which, as I mention above, was conceived of as including a different range of peoples and cultures at different times—was consolidated as the primary focus of the museum's work. Between 1926 and 1928 representatives of VNAV's collaboration with the Museum of Oriental Cultures published research on art and culture of the 'Soviet East,' gave lectures and organised a handful of exhibitions.¹⁹⁴

However, the research of VNAV's and the museum's scholars on the art of the Soviet East in this period examined almost exclusively ancient architectural monuments. The most significant research expeditions undertaken by them in 1926 and 1927 focused on studying ancient Central Asian architecture, including first and foremost the ancient city of Termez in the Uzbek SSR. Objects from Termez accounted for a significant portion of the Soviet East department's acquisitions for those years, and absorbed much of the department's attention.¹⁹⁵ Even where the department's research touched on contemporary artistic culture, it looked primarily at decorative and folk art—decorative carpets and other textiles, wood carving, metalwork and ceramics.¹⁹⁶ At this time, moreover, in line with the definition of Soviet 'eastern' nationalities under Soviet nationalities policy in the 1920s, the majority of attention was given to those nationalities considered to be least culturally and politically developed—minority nationalities living within another nationality's republics, minor

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 68 and 70.

¹⁹² B. P. Denike, 'Muzei vostochnykh kultur,' *Izvestiia*, 13 June 1926, p. 5 cited in Voitov, *Materialy*, p. 66.

¹⁹³ Voitov, *Materialy*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁹⁴ New research on the Soviet East was published in VNAV's journal, *Novyi vostok* (The New East), the museum's journal, *Kultura vostoka* (The Culture of the East) and other newspapers, journals and collected volumes. For a list of publications, see Ibid., pp. 418-28.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 103.

¹⁹⁶ On the department's activities and collections at that time, see *ibid.*, pp. 63-98.

nationalities with ASSR or AO (autonomous republic) rather than full SSR status, and the nationalities of the Muslim Central Asian SSRs. Expeditions to the Soviet Caucasus, for example, and the resulting publications, lectures and exhibitions, tended to be concerned with the Kurdish peoples living in Azerbaijan or the peoples of mountainous Tushetia, Ingushetia, Abkhazia and Dagestan rather than major developed nationalities such as the Georgians or Armenians.¹⁹⁷ This may not seem surprising, given that Georgia and Armenia were classified under Soviet nationalities policy as ‘western’ nationalities. However, Georgia and Armenia were not actually explicitly excluded from the department’s purview, as is evidenced by at least one field trip undertaken to examine Georgian church architecture in 1926.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the limited attention that they received meant that contemporary painting, and especially the painting of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, remained overlooked. Moreover, despite the museum’s representatives claiming to have adopted a Marxist methodology, in practice this often meant only superficial reference to Marxist theory in writing that otherwise maintained a more traditional ethnographic approach. In 1929, for example, VNAV scholars based at the museum published a volume of essays on the artistic culture of the ‘Soviet East’ (which here, extended to ‘developed’ nationalities such as the Georgians and Armenians, although they were not the volume’s main focus).¹⁹⁹ Borozdin, who edited the volume, contributed an introductory essay summarising recent achievements in the study of the art of the ‘Soviet East,’ as well as the artistic achievements of the Soviet East itself. He paid lip service to Marxist sociological methodologies, declaring, for example, a need to approach the study of the artistic culture of the Soviet East ‘armed with a sociological scalpel,’ claiming that research was already being established ‘on a Marxist base’ and that Soviet orientology already stood ‘definitely and decisively on new rails.’²⁰⁰ However, as a reviewer of the book justly complained, there is little evidence of Borozdin’s ‘sociological scalpel’ anywhere in the volume.²⁰¹

Certainly, there was also no attempt to apply such methodologies to contemporary painting in the ‘Soviet East,’ whether belonging to minority, smaller, or Muslim Central

¹⁹⁷ In 1927 plans for a Caucasian exhibition included objects and photographs from Ingushetia, Abkhazia, Khevsureti and Dagestan. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁹⁸ Voitov, *Materialy*, p. 72.

¹⁹⁹ Iliia Borozdin, ed., *Khudozhestvennaia kultura sovetskogo vostoka: sbornik statei A. Bashkirova, B. Denike, P. Dul'skogo, B. Zasykina, V. Zummera pod obshchei redaktsiei I. Borozdina* (Moscow: Akademia, 1931).

²⁰⁰ Iliia Borozdin, ‘Problemy izucheniia’ in Borozdin, ed., *Khudozhestvennaia kultura sovetskogo vostoka*, pp. 7-18 (pp. 9 and 18).

²⁰¹ ‘Za razvertyvanie diskussii po voprosam natsionalnogo iskusstva’, *Brigada khudozhnikov*, 7, 1931, p. 30. The article was published anonymously, but it seems likely that the author was Lazar Rempel, whose contribution to the discussion of national art is discussed later in this chapter.

Asian nationalities or ‘developed’ nations such as Georgia and Armenia. In the closing paragraphs of his introduction, Borozdin made brief reference to contemporary painting, name checking the ‘brilliant canvases’ of Gudiashvili, Kakabadze, Pirosmani and the Armenian painter, Matiros Sarian.²⁰² However, in discussing the artistic achievements of the ‘Soviet East’ in more detail he referred exclusively to examples of folk and applied arts and architecture.²⁰³ Reference to contemporary painters appears to be made only in order to make the remaining writing about ancient architecture and applied arts appear more pertinent. Mentioning contemporary painters claimed for the authors an awareness of the artistic achievements of the Soviet period and of the modernity of socialist culture. Yet Borozdin did not express a coherent position with respect to contemporary painting. He does not declare support for any particular style of painting or artists’ organisation. The contemporary painters mentioned were not discussed in terms of their place in the history of the proletariat’s development, or in terms of their class identity and social contribution. There is no mention of either the socio-political context to which Gudiashvili, Kakabadze, Pirosmani and Sarian’s painting might have belonged or to the treatment of class themes in their work. These painters are highlighted as evidence of the ‘great interest’ that contemporary painters in the republics of Soviet Transcaucasia presented, and Borozdin asserts that their works ‘could serve as decoration in any world art gallery, reminding us of the East’ even as it is acknowledged that the East is presented in their works ‘through a prism of Europeanism’.²⁰⁴ They are praised for their attainment of a degree of professional artistic mastery, which is gauged by Borozdin according to the values of Western European painting. Even while reference to ‘Europeanism’ in Borozdin’s text tentatively acknowledges the criticism those artists were facing at that time for their association with Western European Modernism, they are not evaluated in terms of their narrative clarity and class content, or assessed with reference to their class origins or their place in the progression of history.²⁰⁵

Despite the progressive nature of the Bolsheviks’ professed goals in relation to its ‘East,’ and of VNAV’s purportedly Marxist methodology in serving those goals by supporting the nationalities of the Soviet East in their development towards socialism, the almost wholesale exclusion of contemporary painting from these scholars’ writing reflected an exoticising approach to the Soviet East that aligns it with colonial, Orientalist models for

²⁰² Ibid., pp. 17-18.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁰⁴ Ilia Borozdin, ‘Problemy izucheniia’ in Borozdin, ed., *Khudozhestvennaia kultura sovetskogo vostoka*, pp. 7-18 (p. 17).

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

representing the East. Moscow, as the Soviet centre, was the model for modernity and culturedness in the Soviet Union, even if Russian national cultural expression was suppressed, and easel painting, whether that retaining links with European Modernism or AkhR's brand of figurative painting, was the model of modernity in Soviet art. The negligible attention contemporary painting received in discussion of the art of the Soviet East by the scholars of Borozdin's circle reflected an orientalising impulse: it implied that the nationalities being represented were less culturally developed, more primitive, than those of European Russia. By focusing on examples of folk and decorative arts, which often were not clearly distinguishable from ethnographic objects, the scholarship of Borozdin's circle at the Museum stressed the Soviet East's and its peoples' otherness. Artistic culture was part of a body of material that demonstrated difference: exotic decorative carpets, national dress and musical instruments combined with information about local folk customs and photographs of people with different facial features and darker skin (figure 10) showed how the people of the Soviet East and their way of life differed from those in European Russia.

As Greg Castillo has noted, though it may appear counterintuitive, this perception of the East as primitive and under-developed, was not, in fact, at odds with Soviet nationalities policy. Indeed, the assumption of Russia's developmental superiority and of its civilising duty in the East was a fundamental premise of the policy.²⁰⁶ As such, it does not follow that VNAV's scholars set out deliberately to contribute to a narrative that diminished the developmental and cultural achievements of the Soviet East. Rather, like other central Soviet institutions involved in representing the Soviet East in the 1920s, the starting point of their research and exhibition activity was initially indebted to the colonial academic and exhibition practices of the past. This meant that despite scholars' and curators' intention to reflect the Soviet leadership's theoretical conceptualisation of the USSR as a post-colonial multinational state in which all nationalities were equal in and benefited from their union, the Soviet East still found itself exoticised. This reality was not unique to the Museum of Oriental Cultures. As Castillo has documented, for example, the Ethnographic Department of the Russian Museum in the same period aspired to provide 'a complete picture of everyday life in the USSR'—to offer an image of the peoples of the USSR through which Leningraders and visitors from elsewhere could learn about and feel closer to their fellow Soviet citizens, not further away.²⁰⁷ Yet in reality they inadvertently produced a portrait of 'strange "others"

²⁰⁶ Castillo, 'Peoples at an Exhibition,' p. 95.

²⁰⁷ Hirsch, 'Getting to Know "The Peoples of the USSR",' p. 689.

from distant lands.’²⁰⁸ Similarly, Moscow’s First Agricultural and Cottage Industries Exhibition in 1923 was explicitly designed to embody the central tenets of the recently formalised Soviet nationalities policy in its representation of the achievements of each of the Soviet nationalities, to present the USSR as a post-colonial state in which, though some nationalities were developmentally more advanced than others, all were actively in the process of modernisation, developing cultural and politically.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, in the absence of other models its exhibits were borrowed from western colonial precedents, with results similar to those at the Russian Museum.²¹⁰ Borrowing from the layout of the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle, exhibits demonstrating Soviet Russian modernity were separated from those representing the nationalities of the ‘Soviet East,’ which were gathered in a fairground-like ‘foreign section’ in which those nationalities were portrayed as exotic and primitive.²¹¹ The representation of Russia as developmentally separate and superior to those nationalities was not in itself at odds with Soviet nationalities policy. However, the continuation of colonial practices of representation and of nineteenth-century modes of thinking about the East was responsible for an exoticising and othering of them that failed to honour the policy’s stated principles.

To some extent, the split between the Bolsheviks’ goals in the Soviet East according to Soviet nationalities policy and the exoticising, orientalisising aspects of the GMVK’s and other institutions’ activities also reflected a fundamental disjuncture between the wider objectives of Bolshevism and biases inherent in the discipline of ethnography.²¹² While the Soviet leadership was concerned with fighting manifestations of backwardness among its peoples, ethnographic research and displays were tied up with the traditions, customs and artefacts of the past. Exhibits reflecting national cultural distinctiveness—local traditional handicrafts, agricultural tools, national costume—were also markers of developmental backwardness. As such, there was a direct conflict between the objective of presenting the modernisation of the Soviet non-Russian nationalities on the one hand and reflecting their national cultural distinctiveness on the other. As the director of the Russian Museum’s Ethnographic Department lamented, in the process of modernisation, Soviet nationalities lost their distinguishing ethnographic particularities and the museum lost its means of

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 689.

²⁰⁹ Castillo, ‘Peoples at an Exhibition.’

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 93.

²¹² This was observed in relation to the Ethnographic Department of the Russian Museum in Hirsch, ‘Getting to Know “The Peoples of the USSR”,’ p. 686.

representing them.²¹³ The ethnographic discipline itself thus encouraged institutions to focus on elements of their subject cultures that stressed their backwardness and otherness. Even while they sought to differentiate themselves from their predecessors, VNAV's orientologists and the Russian Museum's ethnographers were educated under and heavily influenced by scholars of the previous generation. Moreover, the focus of their research interests on the smaller and 'least developed' Soviet nationalities, and on traditional ways of life, represented a natural continuation of Imperial Russian ethnography and orientology's focus as much as it was a product of the priorities of the Soviet leadership.²¹⁴

From the end of 1928, the radicalisation of the political sphere under the Cultural Revolution brought about dramatic changes at the Museum of Oriental Cultures affecting the way it represented the peoples of the 'Soviet East.' At this time, in light of the new challenges of the First Five-Year Plan, the Party leadership moved to take much tighter control of cultural institutions, placing Party bureaucrats at their helm to ensure that they best served the Party's objectives. In October 1928 Yan Lidak, a Party member and former NKVD agent, was brought in as deputy director of the administrative-accounting department of the Museum of Oriental Cultures before being promoted to acting director the following February and permanently replacing Denike as the museum's director in April 1929.²¹⁵ Nikolai Tolonsky, another Party member, was also brought in to supervise the museum's 'political enlightenment' (propaganda) work.²¹⁶ Lidak immediately denounced the previous leadership and set about implementing sweeping personnel changes. Within the next three years almost the entire academic staff, until then dominated by VNAV's scholars, was replaced.²¹⁷ Reasons for dismissal invariably cited failure to adopt a sufficiently Marxist stance in their work.²¹⁸ At this moment a new generation of academics, many still students, were vigorously attacking the old generation of Marxist scholars in all disciplines, including art history and orientology. At the same time as VNAV's scholars were being silenced at, and

²¹³ From the late 1920s it was proposed to resolve this quandary by representing each of the Soviet nationalities according to their achievements as a result of the revolutionary process. However, the museum's limited resources meant that this plan was not realised. *Ibid.*, pp. 690; 696-702.

²¹⁴ This almost inadvertently orientalising representation of the Soviet East is also aligned with that observed by Yuri Slezkine in relation to the representation of the peoples of Soviet Union's northern peripheries by writers at the Soviet centre in 'Primitive Communism and the Other Way Around' in Lahusen and Dobrenko, eds, *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, pp. 310-36.

²¹⁵ Voitov, *Materialy*, pp. 99 and 430.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123

²¹⁷ Borozdin and Denike were removed from their positions as head of the departments for the Soviet and Middle East respectively in early February 1930, and Borozdin had resigned from the museum completely by the end of the month. In spring of 1930, Gurko-Kriazhin and Denike were both also purged from the museum's staff. Zasytkin left in July 1930 and Gogel was removed in April the following year. *Ibid.*, pp. 140 and 150.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

expelled from, the Museum of Oriental Cultures, VNAV itself was under attack. By March 1929 it was absorbed into the Communist Academy and, in 1930, a new Institute of Oriental Studies was founded at the USSR Academy of Sciences headed by Sergei Oldenberg, leader of the Leningrad school of oriental studies. The Institute became the centre of Soviet Oriental Studies, and VNAV's scholars were silenced.

Under Lidak's directorship, the task of communicating the Cultural Revolution's narrative of class struggle became the foremost priority, taking precedence over even the most fundamental of the museum's former objectives, including the display of art.²¹⁹ A central task in this respect was in redesigning the museum's exhibition displays. In December 1930, several of the museum's representatives, including Lidak, attended the First All-Russian Museums Congress where almost all of the forty papers presented were concerned with the application of the theory of dialectical materialism to museum display practice.²²⁰ The conference concluded that museum curators should aim to create exhibitions in which their subject 'would be illuminated through the prism of Marx's theory of class struggle and dialectical materialism, and aligned to the interests of the Five-Year plan in all its aspects.'²²¹ Most agreed that this should be achieved by employing a combination of art objects augmented with diagrams, political slogans, photographs and text.²²² Under VNAV's reign, such measures were implemented only in the museum's Cabinet of the History of Revolutionary and National Emancipatory Movements in the East (KRD).

Following the congress Lidak and his team set about implementing the conclusions of the conference at the Museum of Oriental Cultures. Early in 1931 they employed an artist to produce designs for new displays.²²³ The finished displays opened in October and combined works of art with photographs, text and slogans in comprehensively designed exhibits. Display boards in various geometric shapes were arranged in dynamic compositions with

²¹⁹ Other museums involved in representing the peoples of the Soviet East to the Russian metropolitan public faced similar political pressure, Party intervention and challenges in meeting the new obligations placed on them in the Cultural Revolution period. The Ethnographic Department of the Russian Museum in Leningrad faced criticism for failing to reflect the transformation of life in the outlying republics and regions of the Soviet Union. In 1930 its director, Sergei Rudenko, was replaced by Party-member N. G. Talanov and in 1931 a campaign denouncing the former management's 'bourgeois museum methodology' was launched. See Hirsch, 'Getting to Know "The Peoples of the USSR".'

²²⁰ Maria Kokkori, 'Exhibiting Malevich Under Stalin,' in Lodder, Kokkori and Mileeva, eds, *Utopian reality*, pp. 133-151 (p. 139).

²²¹ Ivan. Luppel, ed, *Trudy pervogo vserossiiskogo muzeinogo sezda, protokoly plenarnykh zasedanii 1-5 dekabria 1930* (Moscow: Uchgez-narkompros, 1931), vol. 1, p. 241 cited in Kokkori, 'Exhibiting Malevich,' p. 139.

²²² Kokkori, 'Exhibiting Malevich,' p. 139.

²²³ The museum was closed to visitors at the time following eviction from its former premises in 1929. It reopened with displays based on the artist, N. I. Simon's designs in October 1931. Voitov, *Materialy*, pp. 151 and 163.

headings giving context to each section. Painted murals and blown-up photographs of people in national costume helped to integrate different sections together (figure 11). Displays were clearly related to the central priorities of the Cultural Revolution, the industrialisation and collectivisation drives, class struggle and battle against religion.²²⁴

Notably, during this period, as well as transforming the content and style of the museum's displays, its leadership reiterated repeatedly that the department of the Soviet East and in particular, contemporary artistic activity in the 'Soviet East,' was now the museum's first priority.²²⁵ In the plan for the new displays the department was given double the amount of space as any of the others.²²⁶ This was a complete reversal of previous policies and should have meant dramatic changes for the way contemporary Soviet national painting was represented in Moscow. However, for a series of reasons, the museum failed to produce either displays or significant publications presenting or analysing contemporary artistic activity from any region within the 'Soviet East' for the rest of the Cultural Revolution period. One problem was that it suffered from a dearth of suitable exhibits. The focus of earlier collecting activities had been elsewhere—primarily older objects, works of applied art and architectures, and ethnographic objects.²²⁷ The disruption in the museum's work brought about by its comprehensive change of leadership and the dramatic reduction in its research personnel from the beginning of 1929, moreover, exacerbated and prolonged this problem. So too did the leadership's prioritisation in 1931 of redesigning its displays, which took already limited resources away from the pressing issue of acquiring new works for display. As a result, in 1930, eight out of ten publications issued by the museum's research staff related to the 'Soviet East,' but none dealt with contemporary painting (or any other contemporary artistic activity). Nor did any of the publications for 1931.²²⁸

²²⁴ In 1931 displays included, for example, 'The Work and Art of the Women of the Soviet East'; 'Tsarist Russia—Prison of Nations' and 'The Class Role of Religion in the art of the Far East.' Records of discussions taking place during the planning of the displays confirm the management's single-minded concern with the clarity of the exhibition's ideological message above all else. See *ibid.*, pp. 158-60.

²²⁵ Following a report given by Lidak, a meeting of the collegium of Glavnauka resolved to charge the leadership of the museum together with the museums department of Glavnauka with reworking the museum's objectives based on a resolution stating that the department of the Soviet East and its political, economic and cultural influence on the foreign East should be at the centre of the museum's work. In March 1930, Tolonsky repeated the proposal to re-write the museum's objectives. A report from 1931, most likely written by Chepelev as head of the Soviet East department (although the name of the author is not stated in Voitov's citation), confirms this intention. *Ibid.*, pp. 155; 133 and 138.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

²²⁷ Later, in 1932, Lidak's successor explained that the shortage of examples of contemporary fine art in the museum's collection was the reason for its decision to create a display on women's art, in which the art objects shown were primarily works of applied art including rugs, costumes and other textiles. Similarly, an exhibition 'Contemporary Artists of Transcaucasia' was planned for 1931, but never opened, presumably due to the shortage of exhibits. *Ibid.*, pp. 138 and 168.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 423-24.

In November 1930 the museum began in earnest to work towards resolving the gaps in its collections by contacting local artists' associations, museums and other education institutions in the Soviet Union's Southern and Eastern republics and regions, requesting their participation in the museum's exhibitions.²²⁹ In 1931 an expedition was undertaken to the Dagestani republic and each of the main centres of the ZSFSR with a view to building links with local organisations and negotiating further acquisitions for the museum's collection.²³⁰ The expedition resulted in numerous acquisitions of objects intended for the displays of the department of the Soviet East. However, for reasons that are unclear, the expedition's organisers struggled to acquire suitable examples of contemporary painting during the trip.²³¹ They managed to acquire a handful of paintings and drawings by contemporary Azerbaijani artists, which formed the basis of several exhibitions in the coming years.²³² In Georgia, however, they were able to acquire only photographic reproductions of works by Pirosmiani plus some other photographs and 'agitational materials' (presumably posters and banners).²³³ This limited the museum's ability to present an accurate picture of contemporary art in the 'Soviet East' (either of 'less developed' nationalities of Central Asia and minority nationalities or of 'developed' nations such as Georgia and Armenia), or one that reflected fairly its full breadth. Only towards the end of the Cultural Revolution period, in 1932, following further expeditions and negotiations, did the department open a permanent exhibition including a significant quota of contemporary painting from the Soviet East, and even then many nationalities were represented poorly or not at all.²³⁴ As a result, in this period discussion in Moscow concerning 'national art' came for a time to be dominated by commentators outside of the museum.

The Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR) and the Department for the Study of the Art of the Nationalities of the USSR at the State Academy of Artistic Sciences (GAKhN)

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 138.

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 170.

²³¹ Ibid., pp. 168-69.

²³² Ibid., p. 171.

²³³ Ibid., p. 171.

²³⁴ The exhibition, 'Socialist Construction and National Art' opened on 3 November 1932 and included painting from the Georgian, Azerbaijani, Armenian, Turkmen and Uzbek republics. However, the museum struggled to acquire a representative collection of the contemporary art of the Soviet East throughout the 1930s and 40s. Finally, in 1949 a resolution was passed obliging the Councils of Ministers of each republic to send works for the museum's displays, though even then only some republics complied, and many sent only minor works. Ibid., pp. 194, 388-89.

While, in the second half of the 1920s, VNAV and the Museum of Oriental Cultures struggled to offer a satisfactory representation of contemporary artistic activity in the Soviet East, a handful of other organisations, institutions and individual commentators came to contribute to the discussion of ‘national art’ in Moscow. One of those was the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia and its later incarnation, the Association of Artists of the Revolution (AKhR).

Its predecessor, AKhRR had ambitions beyond the RSFSR—and therefore an interest in contemporary artistic activity in the non-Russian Soviet national republics and regions—from the first years of its existence. From its establishment in Moscow in 1922 it expanded quickly outside the capital, so that there were sixteen additional branches of AKhRR active in the Soviet Union by October 1925, two of which were outside of the RSFSR, in Kiev and Tashkent respectively.²³⁵ By the summer of 1926 that number rose to 34, with a total membership of 650 artists, excluding those in Moscow.²³⁶ Most of its branches were started independently, on the initiative of local artists.²³⁷ However, the central AKhRR organisation in Moscow took care to ensure that those branches’ activities were aligned with its ethos. In October 1925 a Central Office of the Branches of AKhRR was set up to supervise and coordinate the branches’ activities.

In 1928, when AKhRR became AKhR, its Union-wide reach was consolidated further as more and more branches were brought into being and the organisation focused even greater attention on formalising the parameters within which its branches were expected to operate. Its declaration, published that year, spoke of the appearance of ‘a diverse but united current of revolutionary, realistic art of all republics and autonomous provinces of the USSR.’²³⁸ However, AKhR did little to encourage diversity among its national and regional outfits. Instead, in 1928, a comprehensive programme of measures was designed to strengthen and homogenise the network as far as possible. Plans were made for disseminating the central organisation’s ideology and delivering news of its activities to the branches. This was to be done though the dissemination of journals that would be sent to each branch, in addition to bulletins and reports from the central organisation’s meetings. Branches were also encouraged to account for the alignment of their activities with AKhR’s principles by sending

²³⁵ RGALI f. 2941, op. 1, ed. khr. 197, l. 1.

²³⁶ F. S. Bogorodsky, ‘Filiaily AKhRR i OMAKhR,’ p. 127.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 127.

²³⁸ ‘многообразный, но единый поток революционного реалистического искусства всех республик и автономных областей СССР.’ ‘Deklaratsiia assotsiatsii khudozhnikov revoliutsii (AKhR)’ in Gronsky and Perelman, *Assotsiatsiia khudozhnikov revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, pp. 320-21 (p. 320).

the central organisation regular reports on their activities.²³⁹ From its first issue in 1929, for example, AKhR's journal, *Iskusstvo v massy* ('Art to the Masses'), included a section providing news of artistic activity across the Soviet Union, with reports on local branches' exhibitions and events.

Clearer rules according to which local organisations were expected to work were also distributed to each branch in the form of a circular.²⁴⁰ As well as aligning itself broadly with the aims of AKhR in the context of the Cultural Revolution, each branch was expected to meet certain criteria, including realising one annual exhibition, organising its work according to the structure employed in Moscow, establishing and developing youth organisations and working to increase the level of technical mastery among its members. Touring exhibitions arranged by the central organisation were then to be sent to various locations to serve as an example of correct exhibition practice.²⁴¹ These, it was planned, would be sent as a priority to areas where AKhR's movement was weakest, ensuring that the network expanded as evenly as possible.²⁴² At the same time AKhR reserved the right to liquidate local branches or constrict their activities if they failed to conform to meet the central organisation's approval, and established measures for supervising the details of local organisations' work.²⁴³

As the Cultural Revolution's class war intensified in the winter of 1929-30, so too did AKhR's demand for proletarian hegemony and its disregard for national cultural distinctiveness. In 1929, for example, the Uzbek branch of the organisation in Tashkent was liquidated when an inspection by the central organisation confirmed reports that members of the branch were acting in contravention of AKhR's principles.²⁴⁴ But the events in Tashkent were also then used to justify the central organisation's ever more vigilant control over the remaining branches.²⁴⁵ When artists in Georgia proposed to establish a Tiflis branch of AKhR in early 1930, for example, they were subjected to stringent regulation by the central organisation.²⁴⁶ The central organisation demanded that each of the proposed members

²³⁹ P. Kiselis, 'Tsirkuliarnoe pismo tsentralnogo soveta AKhR filialam, vsem chlenam i kandidatam AKhR: biulleten informatsionnogo biuro AKhR, posviashchennogo i Vsesoiuznomu sezdnu AKhR, 1928' in Gronsky and Perelman, *Assotsiatsiia khudozhnikov revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, pp. 306-309 (p. 306).

²⁴⁰ See: Kiselis, 'Tsirkuliarnoe pismo.'

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 308

²⁴² Ibid., p. 308

²⁴³ AKhRR's charter, approved in 1925, set out the right of the organisation's central presidium to liquidate local branches and confiscate any property and monetary assets, subject to approval at a congress. See: 'Ustav Assotsiatsii khudozhnikov revoliutsionnoi Rossii' in Gronsky and Perelman, *Assotsiatsiia khudozhnikov revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, pp. 290-300 (p. 297).

²⁴⁴ See O. Tatevosian's entry for Uzbekistan in a set of reports of the activity of AKhR's branches, in 'Iskusstvo natsionalnykh sovetskikh sotsialisticheskikh respublik,' *Za proletarskoe iskusstvo*, 6, 1931, pp. 22-27 (p. 24).

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ RGALI, f. 2941, op. 1, ed. khr. 197, l. 3.

complete a questionnaire detailing their background, education, and contributions to proletarian artistic activity and cultural-enlightenment (propaganda) work to date before they could be approved.²⁴⁷ Several were refused unless further evidence could be provided in support of their suitability.²⁴⁸ Rather than encouraging national and regional variation, then, AKhR largely ignored the question of national difference and worked actively to minimise local variation.

AKhRR's eighth annual exhibition, in 1926, entitled 'The Life Customs of the Nations of the USSR' (*Zhizn i byt narodov SSSR*), was in many ways emblematic of both the organisation's and widely held attitudes to the Union's non-Russian nationalities at that time.²⁴⁹ It consisted of paintings, graphic works and sculptures made by AKhRR artists, researched and completed during field trips to various towns and industrial and agricultural regions across the USSR. It shared the goals of other AKhRR exhibitions, to showcase the talents and achievements of AKhRR's artists and reflect the organisation's commitment to structured thematic exhibitions that carried educational value for the working masses and engaged as closely as possible with their day to day lives and labour activities. However, like the Ethnographic Department of the Russian Museum, it was also intended to provide a portrait through which visitors could be better acquainted with the lands and peoples of the Soviet Union.²⁵⁰ Notably, however, those lands and peoples were represented almost exclusively by artists belonging to the Soviet centre—to AKhRR's central organisation in Moscow. Although AKhRR did circulate an invitation for local artists' organisations in the non-Russian republics and regions to participate, the works finally displayed in the exhibition were overwhelmingly by artists based in Moscow. There is more research to be done on this exhibition to understand exactly how this came about, and why more artists from outside of

²⁴⁷ Ibid., l. 5.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., ll. 14-14 ob.. In April the office provided the Tiflis branch with a final list of approved candidates and a list of those that would not be approved. Ibid., l. 16. In addition to restrictions placed on the branch's membership, the Central Office also denied a request submitted by the Tiflis branch for the right to publish independently, citing the risk that 'things of an ideologically and artistically doubtful nature could be published.' Such rights could only be granted to branches, such as the one in Leningrad, which had demonstrated a sufficiently strong ideological position. Branches outside of Moscow and Leningrad, including Tiflis, remained 'ideologically weak'. It was suggested that members of the Tiflis branch should instead send reproductions of their works to the AKhR's central publishing department, which would consider them for future publications. RGALI, f. 2941, op. 1, ed. khr. 197, p. 25.

²⁴⁹ *Vosmaia vystavka kartin i skulptury AKhRR: Zhizn i byt narodov SSSR* (ex. cat.) (Moscow: AKhRR, 1926).

²⁵⁰ Lunacharsky declared this to be an objective of the exhibition in a speech at the exhibition's opening. See A. V. Lunacharsky, 'VIII vystavka AKhRR (Privetstvennaia rech na torzhestvennom otkrytii vystavki "zhizn i byt narodov SSSR" 3 Maia 1926 g.)' in Gronskey and Perelman, *Assotsiatsiia khudozhdnikov revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, pp. 224-27 (p. 225-6).

Moscow were not exhibited.²⁵¹ However, several contemporary reviews of the exhibition by influential figures including the Commissar of Enlightenment, Lunacharsky, and the Soviet critic, painter and head of the visual art department of Glavpolitprosvet, Yakob Tugenkhold, suggest an intuitive acceptance of the practice of representing the non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet East through the eyes of the Soviet centre.

In his review of the exhibition, for example, Lunacharsky does not comment on the absence in the exhibition of works by artists from the regions, suggesting an implicit acceptance of the centre's right to speak for the periphery. Tugenkhold criticised the absence of 'authentically national and authentically exotic artists' noting the absence of '[Matiros] Sarian for the Caucasus, P. [Pavel] Kuznetsov for Turkestan, [Konstantin] Bogaevsky for Crimea, [Mikhailo] Boichuk for Soviet Ukraine,' stating that those artists had no opportunities to exhibit elsewhere.²⁵² However, the selection of artists Tugenkhold cites as missing from the exhibition are only the most internationally well-known representatives of artists from each of the republics they represent, or, in Kuznetsov's case, the republic's most famous visiting (rather than native) artist. In calling for 'authentically national' artists, Tugenkhold does not have in mind the breadth of artistic activity taking place in the non-Russian regions and republics of the Soviet Union or the development of proletarian art movements. He is not so much concerned with giving 'national artists' the opportunity to represent their 'nation,' 'national territory' and 'national artistic culture,' as with promoting artists whom he particularly esteemed. His paradoxical phrase, 'authentically national and authentically exotic,' is indicative of this. He wanted a more authentic vision of the East, produced by artists who had a more developed sense of the places, peoples and cultures they presented, but he continued intuitively to view the Soviet East as an exotic other and sought the exotic in its representation. This was more important than the question of whether that image of the East was provided by an artist belonging to the national territory they depicted

²⁵¹ Most of the artists exhibited were from Moscow, Leningrad or from AKhRR branches in Russian towns. Three artists based in Tiflis were included, but all were Russian originally. The exhibition was divided by geographic region represented, except for a 'social-political section' and 'section of formal experimentation.' Despite the huge number of works in the exhibition (1719 in total), coverage of individual nationalities was uneven. Some nationalities were not represented at all. The majority of works exhibited were sketches, mostly landscapes and portraits of local people. Some presented their subjects as modern Soviet citizens dressed in simple practical clothes and engaged in labour activities. Others, however, had an ethnographic quality and presented the local peoples as primitive, gazing in awe at a newly opened canal or sitting barefoot in traditional dress to watch a bride and groom perform a traditional dance. See: *Vosmaia vystavka kartin i skulptury AKhRR*.

²⁵² Tugenkhold quoted in Anatoly Lunacharsky, 'Diskussii ob AKhRR' in Gronsky and Perelman, *Assotsiatsiia khudozhnikov revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, pp. 229-39 (p. 235). Lunacharsky's essay was originally published in 1926 in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition when it toured to Leningrad.

or presented accurately either the region's contemporary industrial, economic, cultural or political development, or its own contemporary artistic development.

Both AKhRR's choice to represent the non-Russian lands and peoples of the Soviet Union through the eyes of the artists of the centre, and Lunacharsky's and Tugenkhold's broad acceptance of this approach, indicate the survival in 1926 of an approach to the non-Russian peoples of the Union that treats them primarily as an object of interest and exotica, rather than as partners in an equal union, able to speak on their own behalf. However, from 1926, Lunacharsky and Tugenkhold were both involved in a new initiative aimed at popularising the art and cultures of the Soviet Union's non-Russian nationalities in Moscow. This initiative was the new Department for the Study of the Art of the Nationalities of the USSR established at Moscow's State Academy of Artistic Sciences (GAKhN) on 20 October that year.²⁵³ At a meeting marking the department's establishment, the main individuals involved in its organisation gave speeches setting out the aims of the new department. Lunacharsky and Tugenkhold as well as Fedor Petrov and the president of GAKhN, Petr Kogan, all spoke. Together they set out the department's objectives in studying the art and culture of the non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet Union, its vision for how that art should develop, how it could best be supported, and why the art of non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet Union—and the study of it in the Soviet centre—was important. Together, their speeches, published the following year along with a selection of articles by other specialists in the new department, provided something like an extended manifesto for the department, from the methodological approaches it intended to employ to the potential practical applications of its research. A further collection of essays published in 1930 then consolidated the positions outlined in 1927, with a few updates and details of the department's achievements in the intervening three years.

Although the department ultimately produced less research on the art of the nationalities of the Soviet East than VNAV and the Museum of Oriental Cultures, and was less active than either those organisations or AKhRR and AKhR in collaborating with artists and other organisations in the non-Russian republics and regions of the Union, it set out a far

²⁵³ The department published details of its achievements and plans in the journal *Pechat i revoliutsiia*. See: *Pechat i revoliutsiia*, 4, 1927, pp. 228-29 and *Pechat i revoliutsiia*, 3, 1928, p. 227. It was announced that the department had forty research staff and four sub-departments for the study of ethnography, literature, material culture and history respectively. See: *Pechat i revoliutsiia*, 4, 1927, p. 228. However, it was acknowledged separately that little research work had been undertaken by this stage, and that the majority of the department's work to date had been 'organisational'. See: B. S. Chernyshev, 'Iz deiatelnosti otdela po izucheniiu iskusstva narodov SSSR,' in Ya. Tugenkhold *et al.*, *Iskusstvo narodov SSSR (Vypusk pervyi)* (Moscow: GAKhN, 1927), pp. 74-80 (p. 75).

more comprehensively theorised position in relation to that study and a more cohesively designed programme of work than any of the other organisations. The position it articulated, moreover, implicitly rejected both the homogenising effect of AKhRR's advance and the Imperial survivals in the museum's and VNAV's highly ethnographic studies and inattention to contemporary fine art. As a result, in 1927 the department was able to organise the only significant exhibition of contemporary art from across the non-Russian republics and regions of the Soviet Union to open in Moscow in the 1920s. Though there were deficiencies in the exhibition in terms of the completeness of its representation of the art of all non-Russian nationalities, it was a more comprehensive display than was achieved by the Museum of Oriental Cultures even in the 1930s.²⁵⁴

One of the central tenets set out by the department was its fundamental support for a diversity of artistic forms in the art of the Soviet nationalities. In this respect, its position was aligned with the foundational principles of Soviet nationalities policy. Throughout the 1927 and 1930 collections of essays, as well as various articles published elsewhere, the department's representatives consistently used this point to draw sharp distinction between the Soviet government's approach to the nationalities under its sway and that of the Russian empire and of western colonial powers. The approach of those powers was characterised as bringing about a forcible levelling out (*'nivelirovka'*) of national cultures with a view to creating a homogenous empire-wide culture. The Soviet approach, by contrast, encouraged the development of the richly diverse cultures of the nationalities it united in a glorious 'bouquet', a harmonious 'symphony' of 'endlessly diverse' cultures. Lunacharsky, for example, refers to diversity as 'the fundamental principle of beauty'.²⁵⁵ Two main rationales are provided for the importance of maintaining this cultural diversity. One was the belief, enshrined in Soviet nationalities policy, that by encouraging 'national cultural expression' the Soviet leadership would encourage each nationality to embrace its ties with the Soviet centre and with other nationalities in the Union. The second, however, related to the potential of a diversity of 'national cultures' as sources informing the cultivation of the new culture of the proletariat. The proletariat, Lunacharsky argued in 1927, did not have its own proletarian

²⁵⁴ For the catalogue, see: Yakob Tugenkhold, *Katalog yubileinoi vystavki iskusstva narodov SSSR* (Moscow: GAKhN, 1927). The exhibition opened in GAKhN's rooms in the building of Central Ethnographic Museum in Moscow. An accompanying exhibition of Soviet folk arts opened at around the same time in the Furniture Museum (*Muzei mebeli*, 1918–1928), a section of the Consolidated Museum of Decorative Arts (*Obedinennyi muzei dekorativnogo iskusstva*, 1924–29), formerly and latterly the State Armory Museum (*Oruzheinaia palata*, 1815–present).

²⁵⁵ Anatoly Lunacharsky, 'Khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo natsionalnostei SSSR' in Ya. Tugenkhold *et al.*, *Iskusstvo narodov SSSR (Vypusk pervyi)*, pp. 9–24 (p. 16).

cultural heritage. A richer and more diverse well of national cultural traditions could provide it with more material from which to draw.²⁵⁶ Lunacharsky and other representatives of the department repeatedly referred to the 1926 census, which had counted a total of 189 Soviet nationalities, to underscore the diversity of national cultures available to enrich the new proletarian culture.²⁵⁷

Various practical measures for maintaining and encouraging that diversity were proposed. In 1927 Tugenkhold stressed the need to oppose the centralising pull of the greater opportunities available to artists in Moscow by improving conditions for them elsewhere, developing local education institutions and increasing opportunities for work within artists' own national territories.²⁵⁸ Writing in 1930 he celebrated successes he observed in this regard, citing examples of artists who were returning to work in their home republics and regions following periods working in Moscow and Paris, as well as the growth of local artists organisations: 'Do we need more proof of the awakening of the USSR to artistic life?'²⁵⁹

The department's representatives also criticised past researchers' exclusive focus on the historical artistic traditions and folk and applied arts. Tugenkhold decried its implicit denial of the existence of skilled professional artists outside of the USSR and the inference of non-Russian nationalities' primitive level of cultural development. He lamented the lack of knowledge of the cultures of the Soviet peripheries at the Soviet centre, regretting that those at the Soviet centre 'did not know that the creativity of the USSR is already growing beyond the stage of "ethnography," that it is already preparing to enter the path of qualified art.'²⁶⁰ He expressed disappointment that previous exhibitions had 'followed our old line,' paying attention to folk crafts—carpets, daggers, and toys—but failing to acknowledge 'the sprouts of new individual art'.²⁶¹ Similarly, Lunacharsky cited a recent argument made by Soviet musicians that folk music was not only not of value for the proletariat, due to its association with peasant and kulak classes, but that its continued practice was actively harmful to the proletariat, dragging it back into the rural past.²⁶² Although Lunacharsky defended the

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

²⁵⁷ The number is quoted twice in Yakob Tugenkhold *et al.*, *Iskusstvo narodov SSSR: sbornik statei i materialov* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1930), pp. 8 and 19.

²⁵⁸ Ya. Tugenkhold, 'K izucheniiu izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva SSSR' in Tugenkhold *et al.*, *Iskusstvo narodov SSSR* (1927), pp. 43-57 (p. 54).

²⁵⁹ 'Нужны ли ещё какие-либо доказательства, сигнализирующие пробуждение СССР к художественному бытию?' Ya. Tugenkhold, 'Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo narodov SSSR,' in Tugenkhold *et al.*, *Iskusstvo narodov SSSR* (1930), pp. 32-53 (p. 34-5).

²⁶⁰ 'не знали того, что творчество СССР уже перерастает стадию «этнографии», что оно уже готовится выйти на дорогу квалифицированного искусства.' Ibid., p. 35.

²⁶¹ 'продолжало старую нашу линию'; 'не угадывались ростки индивидуального искусства' Ibid., p. 35.

²⁶² Lunacharsky, 'Khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo natsionalnostei SSSR,' p. 20-21.

importance of folk and applied arts (including music) as sources on which proletarian art could draw, he did not dispute the validity of their concern, suggesting he was at least sympathetic to it.²⁶³ Contemporary and historical applied and folk arts should be studied, and should be supported practically by taking measures to ensure that craftsmen were supplied with proper access to domestic and international consumer markets, but as Lunacharsky and the department's other representatives made clear, contemporary professional national proletarian art was the priority.

The department proposed its own explicitly formulated (though perhaps deliberately malleable and inclusive) methodology for studying and discussing 'national art.' It proposed what might best be referred to as an integrative approach, combining formal aesthetic analysis with a Marxist sociological approach in order that the art of the Soviet nationalities be understood with reference to both its formal qualities and content and the social and class conditions in which it arose. But this dual model of enquiry was frequently expanded to encompass the personal background, psychology, biography, interests and influences of a given artist as well as of the artist's natural environment, the local climate, living conditions and even natural resources. In Tugenkhold's words:

At the base of this study should be placed two parallel methodologies: formal-stylistic, revealing the fundamental national-artistic forms of one or another nationality, and a sociological method exposing the conditionality of those forms on a given objective environment (climate, natural resources, living conditions, social groupings etc.).²⁶⁴

The question of interpreting Stalin's formulation of Soviet art, 'national in form, socialist in content' was at the centre of the department's discussion of the art of the Soviet nationalities. An iteration of this slogan was even painted on either side of the entrance to the 1927 exhibition, providing the lens through which the exhibition should be viewed.²⁶⁵ But the department still had to explain its interpretation of Stalin's words.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ 'В основу этого изучения должны быть положены два параллельных метода: формально-стилистический, выявляющий основные национально-художественные формы той или иной народности, и метод социалистический, вскрывающий этих форм данной объективной средой (климат, естественные ресурсы, бытовые условия, социальные группировки и т. д.)' Tugenkhold, 'K izucheniiu izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva SSSR,' p. 48.

²⁶⁵ D. F., 'Iskusstvo. Te kotorykh my ne znali (K vystavke 'Iskusstvo narodov SSSR')' *Izvestiia*, 16 November 1927, p. 5.

Representatives of the department attempted to do so throughout the late 1920s. Speeches and articles published in 1927 were initially vague. Kogan, for example, writing in 1927, referred to the department's intention to study the 'ethnic particularities' in the artistic traditions and contemporary artistic practice of individual nationalities, but he did not expand on the form or sources of those particularities.²⁶⁶ Similarly, Tugenkhold talked of the 'regional uniqueness' of Soviet art without expanding on what that might entail.²⁶⁷ His reference to conditions of climate, natural resources, living conditions and social groupings as contributing to a vital "geography" of national creativity' hinted that the particularities of the natural and social environment in which an artist found himself would be manifested in some way in his work, informing regional peculiarities.²⁶⁸ However, it was not clear whether these would be manifested in formal stylistic particularities, narrative content, or through other traits and relationships.

By 1930, the department's representatives had begun to be more explicit in presenting their interpretation of Stalin's formula. Like the methodology they proposed for studying national art, their interpretation of national form and proletarian content in Soviet art was notably broad and inclusive. 'National form,' it was explained, was not to be identified solely in the formal aesthetic characteristics of an individual work or artist's works. It could be discerned in a broad range of characteristics, including nationally specific narrative content, as well as in colour palettes or decorative motifs drawn from national traditions of folk and applied arts. But it could also be observed through evidence of a particular nationality's characteristic attitude to its national cultural heritage, its degree of cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity, its degree of cultural originality, independence or sophistication. One of the department's representatives, for example, spoke of the appearance of 'national styles' of art that could be distinguished by a commonality of artistic form among artists of a single nationality, but also of shared trends of narrative and composition.²⁶⁹ So 'national form' was any visual characteristic or content or any marker or temperament, character or shared experience that appeared to unite painters belonging to a given nationality.

²⁶⁶ 'этнических особенностей.' Petr Kogan, 'Ocherednaia zadacha Akademii,' in Tugenkhold *et al.*, *Iskusstvo narodov SSSR* (1927), pp. 5-8 (pp. 5-6).

²⁶⁷ 'краевому своеобразия.' Tugenkhold, 'K izucheniiu izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva SSSR,' p. 47.

²⁶⁸ «география» национального творчества.' Tugenkhold, 'K izucheniiu izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva SSSR,' p. 47.

²⁶⁹ 'национальный стиль.' Yu. Samarin, 'Sovremennye problemy izucheniia iskusstva natsionalnostei,' in Yakob Tugenkhold *et al.*, *Iskusstvo narodov SSSR: sbornik statei i materialov* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1930), pp. 19-31 (p. 26).

Representatives of the department as well as several reviewers of the 1927 exhibition identified a host of features characterising particular nationalities, which attest to the breadth of sources and features in which evidence of ‘national form’ could be discovered. Tugenkhold, for example, writing in 1930, identified a series of traits observable in the art of particular Soviet nationalities. Among some nationalities he notes a receptiveness to certain contemporary artistic styles and ideologies. In the artists of the Belorussian SSR, for example, he observes an attraction to the artistic styles popular at Moscow’s VKhUTEMAS (Higher State Artistic and Technical Studios) and to Moscow Cézannism—the circle of artists associated with Russia’s Knave of Diamonds (*Bubnovyi valet*) and the artists Petr Konchalovsky and Ilia Mashkov.²⁷⁰ In other cases he points to the influence of climatic conditions on national styles of painting, alluding, for example, to the ‘sunny palette’ of Armenian artists.²⁷¹ He identifies contemporary Ukrainian art as reflecting a unique breadth of artistic styles and remarks on Ukrainian and Georgian artists’ particular debt to their nation’s artistic heritage. As evidence he points to Ukrainian artists’ stylistic dues to Ukrainian ecclesiastical painting and the ‘severe and sharp expressiveness’ of Georgian painting, which he attributes to an attraction to the historical influence of Byzantine and Persian artistic traditions upon Georgian art.²⁷² Tugenkhold and others, moreover, distinguished between nationalities with more and less sophisticated artistic practices, and those at different stages of development. The Chuvash people (a Turkic ethnic group in the Volga region of Siberia) had not progressed beyond ‘AKhRR-provincialism’ as a first stage in their development of national art, where the Ukrainian artistic youth ‘could not and cannot satisfy itself with that first phase of “national” art.’²⁷³

Two reviewers of the 1927 exhibition agreed that it was possible to discern distinguishing national traits and characteristics (although they each found evidence in different places). One, writing in *Pravda*, the main Party newspaper, observed that the work of national artists had ‘developed along various paths’ and usually carried marks of the character of its country, its own particularities.²⁷⁴ The ‘predominance of national colour’ (*kolorit*), moreover, is described as ‘the most valuable of all’ features of national art, indicating that the writer saw national difference as something to be commended and

²⁷⁰ Tugenkhold, ‘Izobrazitelnoe iskusstvo narodov SSSR,’ p. 37.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² ‘суровая и острая выразительность.’ Ibid., рз. 37-38 and 50.

²⁷³ ‘ахрровская провинциализма’; ‘удовлетвориться этой первой фазой “национального” искусства не могла и не может.’ Ibid., p. 46.

²⁷⁴ ‘развивается разными путями.’ F. D., ‘Iskusstvo. Te kotorykh my ne znali.’

encouraged.²⁷⁵ Frida Roginskaia, an influential Marxist critic, advocate of realist painting and future member of AKhR's art history section, noted the appearance in the exhibition of 'the first fundamental lines and ties characterising one or another country.'²⁷⁶ However, she primarily characterises national artistic canons according to common formal, aesthetic qualities and degrees of sophistication, noting, for example, 'the great level of culture and even refinement of Georgian art and of Ukraine, the bold, somewhat carpet-like decorativeness of Turkmenistan, the naturalism of Belarus.'²⁷⁷ The reviewer in *Pravda*, by contrast, paid greater attention to narrative content and its reflection of the particularities of national life. He notes, for example, that the canvases of the Armenian Society of Artists are 'saturated with the mighty fertility of a free working country. Huge stacks of bread. Blooming fruit gardens drenched in heat, red, pink, like alloys of precious gems, peaches, apricots, almonds,' while 'the canvases of Georgia are saturated with the pathos of construction and work.'²⁷⁸

Some observations, then, played into orientalisising stereotypes, even if they had some basis in fact, while others were more grounded in the contemporary themes treated by artists as a reflection of contemporary life under Soviet rule. Each of these commentators appears to view the nationally specific characteristics they observe broadly as spontaneously occurring phenomena dictated either by primordial national identities or socio-economic processes undergone by particular nationalities in their development.²⁷⁹ However, in 1928, Tugenkhold also indicated a need to moderate certain national traits in order to attain the proper national form of contemporary Soviet art.²⁸⁰ For example, he observes that Georgia's cultural heritage is so rich and complex that it 'overloads' Gudiashvili's painting, making it excessively refined and ornate.²⁸¹ Georgian art, he concluded, 'must unravel this whole tangle of layers and influences in order to clarify its modern face.'²⁸² He therefore urged national artists to be selective in taking only what was useful and appropriate from their own and others' national cultural heritage, and to be cautious in adopting features of historical national cultural forms,

²⁷⁵ 'И это преобладание национального колорита, конечно, более всего ценно.' Ibid.

²⁷⁶ 'Только здесь мы можем наметить первые основные линии и скрепы, характеризующие ту или иную страну.' F. Roginskaia, 'Smotr iskusstva narodov SSSR (Miasnitskaia, 21, Vkhutemas.)' *Pravda*, 11 November 1927, p. 5.

²⁷⁷ '... большую культурность и даже изысканность грузинского искусства и Украины, смелую, несколько ковровую декоративность Туркменистана, натурализм Белоруссии и т. д.' Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.; F. D., 'Iskusstvo. Te kotorykh my ne znali'

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Tugenkhold died in 1928. His essay in the 1930 volume was written in 1928 and published posthumously.

²⁸¹ 'перегружает.' Tugenkhold, 'Izobrazitelnoe iskusstvo narodov SSSR,' p. 41

²⁸² 'весь этот клубок наслоений и влияний ... необходимо распутать, для того чтобы выявить свое современное лицо.' Tugenkhold, 'Izobrazitelnoe iskusstvo narodov SSSR,' p. 41.

because of the risk that in drawing on the cultural forms of the bourgeois classes of the past, they would invoke the ideologies of those classes.²⁸³

So within the definition that the GAKhN department put forward, ‘national form’ in Soviet art could be any common feature of the art of a single nationality collectively, or any feature in the art of a single artist in which the influence of either national artistic heritage or nationally specific historical or contemporary contexts could be discerned. It was identified in the art of both the proletarian organisations and national artists associated with modernist movements, as well as in traditional folk arts, applied art and architecture. To begin with they viewed evidence of national difference uncritically, as a positive trait demonstrating the wisdom and success of the Soviet leadership’s treatment of the Union’s non-Russian nationalities. However, from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution period, as class concerns intensified, ‘national form’ increasingly became something an artist selected, and could and should choose not to select when it carried associations of the ideology of enemy classes or obstructed proletarian class content.

Even before the department’s 1930 volume of essays was published, GAKhN was disbanded and absorbed into a new State Academy of Art History (GAIS). Responsibility for studying the art of the Soviet nationalities was transferred to the All-Union Communist Academy.²⁸⁴ During its three years of existence, however, the department presented the contemporary art of the Soviet nationalities to the Moscow public more comprehensively than did any other organisation in the 1920s, and provided a first comprehensively theorised interpretation of Stalin’s formulation of Soviet art, ‘national in form, socialist in content’. With the transition into the Cultural Revolution period, class concerns began to shift the interpretation proposed by the department away from an all-encompassing definition of ‘national form’ to one in which only certain national characteristics were compatible with national art’s class priorities. As the Cultural Revolution’s class war intensified, however, even this more measured approach to ‘national form’ was opposed by another, more radical definition.

²⁸³ Ibid., pp. 50 and 52.

²⁸⁴ B. Sokolov, ‘Iskusstvo narodov SSSR i sovetskaia kultura,’ in Tugenkhold *et al.*, *Iskusstvo narodov SSSR* (1930), pp. 3-18 (p. 17).

The Class War on ‘National Form,’ 1931-32: The Case of Lazar Rempel

In October 1930, a young scholar and *komsomolets* from Crimea joined the research staff of the Museum of Oriental Cultures in the department of the Soviet East.²⁸⁵ Lazar Rempel had served as the head of the Crimean Museum of the Revolution under the Central Museum of Tavrida (the Crimean peninsula) between 1924 and 1928 at the same time as serving as Secretary of the Communist Party’s Crimean Regional Committee, and then moved to Moscow in 1928 to pursue further academic training.²⁸⁶ He graduated from the museums department of Moscow State University’s history faculty at around the same time as he joined the Museum of Oriental Cultures. Rempel remained at the museum until 1932. He was not the most senior researcher working in the Soviet East department at that time. However, he was the only researcher to publish significant research on contemporary painting in the ‘Soviet East’ (under which umbrella, in line with the shift in emphasis within Soviet nationalities policy, he included ‘developed’ nations such as Georgia and Armenia). With VNAV and the GAKhN department both recently having been disbanded, and AKhR all but ignoring questions of national difference in the art of the Soviet nationalities, Rempel’s was the loudest voice in the production of new theory concerning ‘national art.’

Rempel belonged to a generation of Marxist scholars who were militant in their application of Marxist-Leninist theory to their subject. Unlike VNAV and GAKhN, who claimed to analyse the art of the nationalities of the ‘Soviet East’ as a product of the socio-political (class) context to which it belonged, but rarely did, Rempel discussed the development of national art strictly in terms of the stages of socio-economic historical development described in Marxist theory. Rempel demanded that national specificity be acknowledged in the discussion of the contemporary and historical art of the Soviet East, denouncing AKhR’s homogenising approach to the non-Russian artists and branches within the organisation’s network. Though he approved of AKhR’s brand of narrative realism and supported the organisation’s work in helping national artists to consolidate their proletarian base and to clarify their ideological position, he insisted that it should not try to draw local organisations towards itself, ignoring differences in national conditions.²⁸⁷ However, his reasons were not grounded in a wish to celebrate the types of national traits identified by Tugenkhold, Lunacharsky, and the researchers at GAKhN. Instead, Rempel proposed a

²⁸⁵ Voitov, *Materialy*, p. 464.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Lazar Rempel ‘O natsionalnom iskusstve,’ *Brigada khudozhnikov*, 7, 1931, p. 2.

completely new understanding of ‘national form.’ Rather than identifying common motifs and characteristics and viewing them as somehow naturally inherent in a nation’s culture, Rempel explained ‘national’ variation in art (and in the path of development of Soviet proletarian art) as resulting instead from the nationally specific nature of the proletariat’s struggle against its particular class oppressors. Broadly speaking, if the main enemy of the proletariat of a Soviet nationality was a European-oriented bourgeoisie (as Rempel would argue was the case in Georgia), then the ‘national form’ of its struggle against that enemy was different to that of a national proletariat whose primary class enemy was in the formerly dominant classes of a feudal society (such as in Central Asia): the main content of all proletarian art should be proletarian class struggle; its form should vary only in so far the challenges of class struggle varied between national contexts. As he explained:

The content of the national art of the proletariat is the construction of socialism ... [it] is directed against the different reactionary types of content of national cultures, against different national forms, which express the content of those cultures ... The concrete specificity of class directions—the struggle against capitalist tendencies in some cases, against feudal in others, petty-bourgeois in a third etc.—has a huge influence on the variation of creative methods and the particularity of national features in the practice of the national artists of the proletariat.²⁸⁸

In defining national form in this way, Rempel expressly condemned earlier interpretations (such as those expressed by GAKhN’s scholars and the reviewers of the 1927 exhibition) that had sought to identify national ‘distinctiveness’ or national ‘spirit’ through aesthetic qualities, artistic traditions, qualities of light, or thematic content that could be associated with a given nationality. He criticised such formulae of ‘national form’ as ‘racial theory’, alluding to the approach’s implicit assumption of an apparently biologically programmed, inherently existing difference between the cultural sensibilities of one ethnically defined national group and another.²⁸⁹ He also explained how such conceptions of ‘national form’ actively served bourgeois nationalist interests and damaged proletarian

²⁸⁸ ‘Содержанием национального искусства пролетариата является строительство социализма ... [это] направлено против различных реакционных содержаний национальных культур, против различных националистических форм, выражающих содержание этих культур ... конкретная специфичность классовой направленности—борьба с капиталистическими тенденциями в одних случаях, с феодальными в других, мелкобуржуазными в третьих и т. доказывает громадное влияние на различие творческих методов и своеобразие национальных художников пролетариата.’ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

interests. In Rempel's view, national cultural traditions and artistic heritage had to be approached with caution because that heritage embodied the ideology of the proletariat's enemies and former oppressors: it was the manifestation of the specific ideologies that a national proletariat needed to combat. To celebrate those 'national forms' was to celebrate the cultural forms of the proletariat's oppressor and potentially even to empower and encourage resurgence among surviving members of the oppressing classes. To do so, moreover, was culturally to isolate the proletariat of one nation from another. In Rempel's view, bourgeois nationalists, the surviving representatives of the dominant class of formerly oppressed nations, were propagating the notion of distinct national cultures with a view to 'resurrecting the national boundedness and insularity of national culture within narrow ethnographic frames,' in order to divide the proletariat and damage its progress.²⁹⁰

Rempel's criticism of AKhR's efforts to force local branches of its organisation to more closely mirror its own activities and output was thus not grounded in any desire to defend or encourage national form as it was defined by earlier commentators. Instead, he criticised AKhR's insensitivity in this matter only on the basis of the Greatest Danger Principle, which set out the need to avoid Great Power (Russian) Chauvinism (in the form of forced Russification of non-Russian Soviet cultures) at all costs. AKhR should present a tolerant attitude to national variation in contemporary proletarian art, but only with a view to limiting national artists' desire to expand that variation.

While Rempel explains the socio-political roots of the phenomena of national variation in art and clarifies in Marxist-Leninist class theoretical terms how Stalin's reference to 'national form' should be understood, what is less clear is how this interpretation of 'national form' would manifest itself in practice. In his book, *Zhivopis sovetskogo Zakavkazia (Painting of Soviet Transcaucasia)*, Rempel takes virtually all cases that previous commentators might have identified as positive illustrations of national form and explains them instead as examples of bourgeois-nationalist divergence from the proper path of proletarian art. Traits in the work of a painter such as Gudiashvili, for example, which might have been identified by other commentators as indicative of Georgian 'national form'—a highly stylised mode of illustration reflecting the influence of Persian artistic forms on Georgian art, or a mystical mood and deep palette reflecting the proliferation of modern European and Russian artistic and intellectual movements in Georgian culture—were for

²⁹⁰ для восстановления национальной ограниченности и замкнутости национальной культуры в узко-этнографических рамках.' Ibid., p.1. Rempel also repeated these arguments elsewhere. See, for example: Lazar Rempel and Vladimir Chepelev, 'Natsionalnaia arkhitektura v Srednei Azii,' *Iskusstvo v massy*, 8, 1930, pp. 10-11.

Rempel indicative of class ideologies alien to the proletariat. The formal aesthetic particularities of Georgian painting of the 1920s were thus irrevocably aligned class ideologies harmful to the proletariat:

The whole practice of [...] Georgian Menshevism of 1920 provides rich material for characterising the class face of bourgeois nationalism also in material art [...]. Mysticism, Symbolism, Decadence, decay and pornography were dressed up in national clothes. National fascist patriots, the Mensheviks poeticised all that was reactionary, decadent [and] conservative in the heritage of the feudal and bourgeois classes of Georgia. Journals were flooded with Symbolist and Decadent literature, praying to the mystical elements of Baudelaire [and] Mallarmé. In painting—the reactionary aesthetic of the Russian “World of Art” and “Blue Rose”, “Karachokh” (Georgian bohemia)—the national-democratic culture of taverns, wine and cocaine, the aesthetic of deformity and mysticism, the eclectic bouquet of Russian modernism and stylisation, the feudal lexicon of images of abstract futurist “quests”. It was the period of the final creative agony of the artist of the ideas of the outgoing classes, Vano Khodzhbegov, of the last bloodless petty-bourgeois illusions of the famous artist Niko Piroshmanishvili and the sickly expressiveness of the artist of typical national-bourgeois aristocratism and decadence, Lado Gudishvili, so well known to us by his not so long abandoned national democratic practice.²⁹¹

Thus, the permissibility of any kind of nationally specific aesthetic was effectively denied.

Rempel does not deny the value of national artistic heritage *per se*, at least in theory. Instead, he invokes Lenin’s ‘theory of two cultures’ to advocate the critical and selective use

²⁹¹ ‘...вся практика [...] грузинского меньшевизма 1920 г., дает богатый материал для того, чтобы и на материальном искусстве характеризовать классовое лицо буржуазного национализма [...] Мистика, символизм, декадентство, упадочничество и порнография наряжались в национальные одежды. Национал-фашистские патриоты, меньшевики поэтизировали все реакционное, упадочническое, консервативное, что было в наследии от феодальных и буржуазных классов Грузии. Журналы были захлещены символистической и декадентской литературой, молившейся на мистические элегии Бодлеров, Малларме. В живописи – реакционная эстетика русского «Мира искусства» и «Голубой розы», «Карачохская» (Грузинская богема) – нацдемовская культура кабачков, вина и кокаина, эстетика уродство и мистицизма, эклектический букет русского модернизма и стилизаторства, феодального лексикона образов и абстрактно футуристических «исканий». Это был период последней творческой агонии художника идей уходящих классов Вано Ходжабегова, последних обескровленных мелкобуржуазных иллюзии известного художника Нико Пиросманишвили и болезненной экспрессивности художника национал-буржуазного аристократизма и упадочничества Ладос Гудиашвили, столь знакомого нам по его не столь давней нацдемовской практике.’ Rempel, *Zhivopis sovetskogo Zakavkaze*, p. 39.

of the world's cultural heritage.²⁹² Rempel was in favour of the appropriation of all progressive social democratic elements of any national culture. However, because of his almost wholesale and impassioned rejection in practice of all formal aesthetic and stylistic deviations from AKhR style narrative realism, it was difficult to see how these elements would constitute any kind of recognisable 'national form'. Rather, 'national form' was really national content: it was to be found in nationally-specific socialist and proletarian narrative content, in depictions of episodes from the revolutionary history of the nationality in question, or the representation of the particular political, social, economic and cultural achievements brought to that nation by the Revolution. Moreover, as Rempel explains, the 'proletarian content of national art is defined not simply by [its] narrative but by a relationship to reality, which the artist expresses as a representative of class ideology. Those relationships are expressed in art in the unity of content and form.'²⁹³ Thus, since it seems clear that for Rempel the appropriate 'form' for the expression of proletarian content (and therefore for the unity of content and form) was AKhR-style narrative realism, 'national form' was in fact the universal proletarian form of AKhR.²⁹⁴ Notably, as is explored in the following four chapters of this thesis, this question of the unity of content and form remained

²⁹² Lenin argued that two distinct class cultures exist side by side within each national culture. The first is that of the ruling, oppressing class—the bourgeoisie in capitalist society or feudal lords, imperial tsars and other nobility in a feudal society. This is the dominant culture. The second is the progressive social democratic culture of the oppressed classes within those societies, the proletariat in capitalist society or the progressive bourgeoisie under feudalism. These are not manifested as separate and opposing cultures. Rather, progressive social democratic cultural elements exist within the dominant culture of the ruling class. Artists under the dictatorship of the proletariat should select from all world culture only progressive social democratic elements. See: V. I. Lenin, *On Literature and Art* ('Critical Remarks on the National Question') (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967), p. 84, cited in Rempel 'O natsionalnom iskusstve,' p. 1.

²⁹³ 'Пролетарское содержание национального искусства определяется не просто сюжетом, а отношением к действительности, которое выражает художник, как представитель классовой идеологии. Эти отношения выражаются в искусстве единством содержания и формы, в котором «содержание не бесформенно и форма содержательна», при ведущей роли содержания.' Rempel 'O natsionalnom iskusstve,' p. 2.

²⁹⁴ In other articles critiquing contemporary artistic activity in individual republics, Rempel praised the local artists and artists' organisations adopting AKhR's model and eschewing national difference. He mentioned national peculiarities only in terms of nationally-specific challenges related to either social and economic conditions or the negative effect of a nation's pre-revolutionary artistic traditions on contemporary practice. See: Lazar Rempel, 'K sozdaniiu gruzinskogo APKh,' *Za proletarskoe iskusstvo*, 6, 1932, p. 15 and Lazar Rempel, 'Na azerbaidzhanskom izo-fronte,' *Brigada khudozhnikov*, 7, 1931, p. 25. Other commentators reported on and evaluated contemporary national art in the same period, but assessed artistic activity primarily in practical terms—how many artist organisations, training colleges and museums had been established, how many members they had, and how many exhibitions they had produced. They did not present theories for the delineation of national form. However, their silence on national characteristics in contemporary proletarian art suggests that national distinctiveness was not a priority. See: M. Rivkin, 'Izo-iskusstvo na severnom kavkaze' *Iskusstvo v massy*, 9, 1930, p. 26; N. Turkestansky, 'Izofront Srednei Azii – na proletarskie relsy,' *Za proletarskoe iskusstvo*, 4, 1932, p. 14. An exception to this rule is one author, writing in 1930, who maintained that contemporary Uzbek proletarian art should retain links to traditional Uzbek folk art. See: S. Malt, 'Na grani rastsveta: puti razvitiia revoliutsionnogo izo-iskusstva Uzbekistana,' *Iskusstvo v massy*, 8, 1930, p. 12.

a central point of discussion and disagreement among Georgian artists and critics throughout the 1930s.

This chapter has traced the evolution of discourses arising in the Soviet centre surrounding the art and culture of the non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet Union—the question of ‘national art’ in the 1920s and through the Cultural Revolution. Despite being two of the foremost institutions charged by the Soviet leadership with studying, reporting on, representing and influencing activity (including cultural activity) in the Soviet East, the scholars of VNAV and the Museum of Oriental Cultures failed to offer a position on contemporary proletarian national art. This was in part due to individual scholars’ research interests, which were often born out of their training in Imperial Russian ethnographic and Russian orientological practices. It was partly due to the survival of certain ways of representing the East adopted unconsciously from examples in the colonial past. This led curators and researchers to acquire, display and write about examples of historical folk and applied art and to neglect contemporary artistic activity in the Soviet East. This, if anything, indicated to the Moscow public that no significant professional artistic activity was taking place elsewhere in the Soviet Union. Soviet nationalities policy’s division of ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ nationalities based on their political and cultural development, and its prioritisation of minority and ‘culturally backward’ nationalities, also meant that the achievements of larger, developed Soviet nationalities in the cultivation of contemporary national proletarian art were overlooked. When the museum attempted to rectify this problem from around 1930 they found that they lacked the necessary exhibits to be able to fairly represent contemporary paintings from the ‘Soviet East’—then conceived to include ‘developed,’ ‘western’ nations such as Georgia and Armenia—in its displays. Artists and artists’ organisations in the Soviet East, moreover, were not inclined to send the best examples of their work to Moscow, diminishing the quality of their own local museums’ displays.

In 1927-8 commentators in the field of art criticism, including Lunacharsky, Tugenkhold and their colleagues at GAKhN, made the first significant progress in presenting contemporary painting from the non-Russian republics to the Moscow public and attempting to offer an interpretation of Stalin’s formula for Soviet art ‘national in form, socialist in content.’ Soon though, the militant proletarianism of the Cultural Revolution gave rise to Rempel’s rewriting of the discussion of ‘national art,’ rejecting the types of national specificity identified by GAKhN’s critics and condemning the examples of ‘national form’ that they had highlighted as evidence of harmful nationalist sentiment obstructing the progress of the proletarian class.

Chapter 3: Proletarian in Form, Proletarian in Content?: Georgian Painting and the National Question during the Cultural Revolution

This chapter documents debates that took place among artists and critics in Georgia leading up to and during the Cultural Revolution concerning the path of Georgian painting in Stalin's Soviet Union. It investigates Georgian artists' and critics' interpretation of the question of 'national form' in Soviet Georgian art including discussions occurring in Georgia about the appropriate role of Georgia's 'national cultural heritage' in informing Soviet Georgian cultural production. The ways in which artists and critics in Georgia conceived of and conceptualised their national difference in the 1920s and 30s are explored, as is the question of how those ideas found reflection in Georgian painting. As in Moscow, artists, critics and other commentators in Georgia presented divergent views concerning the relevance of nationhood and national form for the production of painting during the NEP and Cultural Revolution. Some, like AKhR in Moscow, ignored these issues completely, either envisaging Georgian artistic production as one part of a homogenous body of Soviet artistic production in which national difference was irrelevant or simply prioritising class or other concerns. However, arguments positing the existence of innate and undeniable Georgian national aesthetic sensibilities were also presented. These were used by artists and critics including Gudiashvili and Duduchava to justify characteristics in their own and others' work that attracted criticism from Far Left camps. On the other side of the coin, Rempel's interpretation of national form in Soviet art as the expression of the challenges facing a nation due to its particular social and political conditions gained traction with other practitioners. In order to trace the evolution of these ideas from the late 1920s through the Cultural Revolution, this chapter sets out to answer a series of related questions. The first of these concerns the extent to which issues of nationhood and national form featured in discussions about Georgian art taking place in Georgia leading up to and during the Cultural Revolution. If a range of views were offered, were those perspectives a prominent feature of discussion about the progress of Soviet Georgian painting? What main approaches to the question can be identified? How did they correspond to a given artist or commentator's stance with respect to other political, ideological, social or aesthetic concerns? How did the views expressed change during the period in question, and why? And how did they respond to changing political conditions in this period, including the shifting status of national politics? How did they relate to the positions put forward by critics and commentators in Moscow or, more particularly, how did the position of Georgian artists and critics as representatives of a

‘western’ but also non-Russian Soviet nation affect the views they expressed. Finally, to what degree were these discussions borne out in the painting produced in Georgia?

The research presented in this chapter relies on extensive primary evidence, the majority of which is examined here for the first time. Archival materials including the transcripts and minutes of meetings held by organisations such as SARMA provide unique insight into the discourses that evolved among artists and critics and the antagonisms that sometimes arose between opposing camps. Commentaries in the local periodical press as well as other contemporary published materials (including monographs, exhibition reviews and catalogue essays) enrich this picture further. Together, this material comprises a first detailed examination of the theoretical debates that took place in Georgia in this period about Georgian painting, based on analysis of published and unpublished primary documentary materials. The chapter presents analysis, above all, of textual sources, as the most instructive evidence for illuminating the theoretical dialogues shaping how national form in Soviet art was treated in Georgia during the Cultural Revolution. Special attention is paid to the efforts of Duduchava to grapple with these issues, since his labours were the most extensive, but also the most troubled in terms of the difficulty he faced in reconciling his position with the political pressures of the age. Painting, by contrast, offers relatively little insight into these debates. The painting produced in Georgia in this period was diverse, and trying to draw conclusions about how Georgian painters collectively envisaged the national character and fate of painting in Soviet Georgia could only lead to oversimplification and to the same impasses that Georgian critics themselves reached at the time. Analysis of visual evidence is therefore reserved for later chapters, where a more valuable and instructive analysis of the chronological evolution of Georgian painting (chapters four and five) is offered. The present chapter reveals the obstacles that Georgian artists and critics faced in attempting to negotiate the political upheavals of the Cultural Revolution and the uniqueness of the Georgian case.

Georgia and the Cultural Revolution

The political context of Georgia in the second half of the 1920s was the product of continuous negotiation between the concerns and priorities of the central Soviet government, the will of the local communists in Georgia and Transcaucasia and the attitudes of the local population. The actions of the local leadership provoked responses and interventions on the part of the Moscow leadership. The policies implemented induced a particular response among the Georgian peasantry, working class and intelligentsia. That response then moulded

subsequent policies as local and central leaderships worked to minimise resistance while ensuring that their wider priorities were served, creating a continuous loop of cause and effect playing out between the central, Transcaucasian and Georgian Party and government bureaucracies and the Georgian people.²⁹⁵ In 1926-27, large numbers of Georgian Communists opposed the consolidation of Stalin's leadership in the Politburo, giving their support to Trotsky and Zinoviev's opposition.²⁹⁶ After Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the Communist Party in November 1927 and the Fifteenth Party Congress in December made opposition to Stalin's leadership incompatible with Party membership, many of the Georgian Communists who had supported Trotsky gave up their positions. From that time, Georgia's political autonomy was vastly reduced. The Georgian Communist Party broadly followed the Stalinist line. The new ruling elite held dual commitments to serving local concerns and maintaining a strong centralised Union, though those who placed the latter ahead of the former increasingly prevailed.²⁹⁷ The ensuing economic integration of Georgia first into the ZSFSR and then into the wider Soviet economy left little control at republican level, and this effect was magnified by 1929, when remaining moderates were purged from the Transcaucasian Communist Party and the Sovnarkom ordered the strengthening of the ZSFSR government apparatus at the expense of republican bureaucracies.²⁹⁸

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Georgia and Georgians enjoyed special status in the hierarchy of Soviet nationalities in the Stalin era. Georgians enjoyed unusual access to opportunities both in their own republics and in the Soviet centre and were accorded special prestige. They were continually lauded as one of the most advanced and cultured nationalities of the Union. This special status, and many of the privileges and concessions that it brought, continued through the Cultural Revolution period. Nevertheless, national politics, and the implementation of Soviet nationalities policy in Georgia, as elsewhere in the Union, were not unaffected by the political upheavals and changing political priorities of the period.

The privileges that Georgians enjoyed have been explained as the consequence of Stalin's own Georgian nationality, which brought Georgia prestige by association. The powerful positions of Georgians such as Beria and Sergo Orjonikidze in the central Party administration are taken both as evidence of the favour Georgians received and as reasons for

²⁹⁵ On this process see chapters 9-12 in Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, pp. 185-291.

²⁹⁶ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, p. 234.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p 235.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 242.

the status they lent to Georgia by association.²⁹⁹ However, as I argue throughout this thesis, the concessions Georgia enjoyed were also driven by the threat that the Soviet leadership perceived in Georgia as a result of Georgians' strong nationalist impulses and their initial resistance to Bolshevik rule. In the Revolutionary period, that threat led Lenin to urge special caution with respect to the Georgians in the hope of avoiding provoking further resistance. Similarly, in 1925, Sergo Orjonikidze, the head of the Georgian Communist Party's regional committee, proposed a plan of special concessions to the Georgian peasantry, including granting peasants the right to buy and sell land.³⁰⁰ Though the central leadership ultimately rejected Orjonikidze's plan, the fact that he proposed it, despite being himself a committed centraliser, indicates that even those pushing to fortify centralised power thought that special sensitivity was necessary in heading off unrest among the Georgian peasantry.

Special concessions for Georgia continued into the Cultural Revolution period. The implementation of Soviet language policy at that time, for example, confirms Georgia's special position. In 1929-30, the scripts of 36 Soviet languages were Latinised. Even Russian was tabled for Latinisation. Georgian is the only script in respect of which there is no evidence of any intention to Latinise.³⁰¹ Where for other Soviet nationalities key national markers such as language and script were subject to negotiation, in Georgia they were considered sacrosanct. Nevertheless, Georgia's continued favoured status did not make the republic immune to the consequence of the First Five-Year Plan and Cultural Revolution for national politics across the Soviet Union. Moderates in the Georgian and Transcaucasian leadership had been reluctant to pursue policies of coercion in the collectivisation drives implemented in Georgia in the mid-1920s. However, once those forces had largely been expelled from the Georgian and Transcaucasian leaderships, by 1928-29, the remaining ruling elite were committed to pursuing the Cultural Revolution's priorities of industrialisation, agricultural collectivisation and Class War through whatever means necessary, including by force.³⁰² Indeed, during the *Velikii perelom* the Georgian and Transcaucasian bureaucracies responsible for enforcing collectivisation and eliminating so-called kulaks fulfilled their objectives with zeal, acting even beyond Moscow's orders.

²⁹⁹ Blauvelt, 'Status Shift and Ethnic Mobilisation,' p. 654.

³⁰⁰ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, p. 229.

³⁰¹ This trend continued at the end of the 1930s. By then, linguistic *korenizatsiia* was becoming a lesser priority. As a result the Russian language assumed a dominant position in all of the non-Russian republics. Georgia and Armenia were the only exceptions. *Ibid.*, pp. 199 and 393.

³⁰² Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, p. 239.

Moreover, when Stalin's 'Dizzy with Success' article signalled that the collectivisation and anti-kulak campaigns should be slowed, local bureaucracies were initially reluctant.³⁰³

The new economic and political priorities of the First Five-Year Plan and Cultural Revolution had a marked impact on the implementation of Soviet nationalities policy. The principles of Soviet nationalities policy remained unchanged. National cultural autonomy was still to be supported and promoted as a means of disarming more dangerous manifestations of nationalism. Indeed, though many expected that the new priorities of the First Five-Year Plan would lead to the reversal or abandonment of Soviet nationalities policy, Stalin insisted that the Cultural Revolution should bring about a flourishing of nations. The logic was that concessions to national culture were all the more necessary in the new context in order to ease resistance to enormous upheavals in all other aspects of national life. As a result, *korenizatsiia* was to be accelerated. In practice, however, this only happened among certain nationalities. Among the Soviet Union's 'eastern' nationalities, affirmative action *korenizatsiia* programmes benefited from the additional financial investment that came with the First Five-Year Plan. However, among 'western' nationalities such as Georgia, which already had established government and other institutional infrastructure in place, the focus was on linguistic *korenizatsiia*, which was negatively affected by the conditions brought about by the Five-Year Plan. In practice, the economic goals of the First Five-Year Plan and the Cultural Revolution's class war took priority over all other matters, including the implementation of Soviet nationalities policy, particularly where conflict arose between different priorities. The collectivisation of agriculture, which in turn would facilitate industrial and economic development (and therefore also defensive capability) was prioritised at the expense of certain aspects of the less pressing and more speculative *korenizatsiia* initiative. For example, ambitious production targets led several central Soviet departments to oppose local linguistic *korenizatsiia* in Ukraine on the grounds that it hindered centre-republican communication and therefore diminished both productivity and control. At the same time, growing concerns that *korenizatsiia* might actually have been encouraging rather than limiting local nationalism among developed 'western' nationalities such as Ukraine and Georgia led to a further reduction in *korenizatsiia* in those republics.³⁰⁴ As Martin and others have shown, while Soviet nationalities policy remained unchanged and official rhetoric spoke of a continuation of *korenizatsiia*, attacks launched in Ukraine in particular against those who were employed to implement *korenizatsiia*, many of whom were purged from their positions

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 249.

³⁰⁴ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 178.

and arrested and even executed, signalled that *korenizatsiia* should be slowed. Two Politburo decrees criticising Ukrainianisation in December 1932 formalised this position, and comments made by Stalin the following year confirmed that the criticism applied to other Soviet nationalities, leading to the wholesale revision of Soviet nationalities policy in 1933-34.

Broadly speaking then, for most of the Cultural Revolution period, there was a contradiction between the theoretical continuation of the principles of Soviet nationalities policy on the one hand and the space available for national cultural expression and autonomy on the other. Despite the continuation of Soviet nationalities policy in theory, the activities of Stalin's Politburo, in particular its terror campaigns against the implementers of *korenizatsiia* initiatives, and its disproportionate attacks against national (non-Russian) bourgeoisies, precipitated a gradual shift away from *korenizatsiia* that was reflected in a revised Soviet nationalities policy from 1933.

It was against this backdrop that discussions about national art and the role of national artistic heritage in the production of Soviet art took place in Georgia. As chapter two of this thesis demonstrated, these discussions were shaped not only from above, via the policies and signals emanating from the Politburo and central and local government. They were also moulded by individual actors and organisations in the cultural sphere, both in Moscow and Tiflis. From the end of the 1920s, the growing dominance of proletarian cultural organisations and their supporters in Moscow increasingly came to be mirrored in Georgia. AKhR's influence, together with its network of organisations, was quickly expanding outside of the RSFSR. Prioritising the promotion of what it viewed as proletarian cultural forms, it paid little attention to questions of national artistic tradition, or national form in Soviet art. Local proletarian organisations, such as SARMA, broadly followed suit. Thus, cultural organisations gaining dominance even at the start of the Cultural Revolution were straying from the officially held principles of Soviet nationalities policy in their attitudes to local artistic activity long before the government itself began to signal a retreat from the policy. What this amounted to was a fundamental contradiction between the theoretical position held by the Soviet leadership and that promoted and accepted by the most powerful forces in the cultural sphere in Georgia. Georgian artists and critics sought to negotiate these contradictions in a range of ways.

Proletarian in Form, Proletarian in Content?: Negotiating the Theory and Practice of Soviet Nationalities Policy in Georgia during the Cultural Revolution

One of a handful of critics active in Georgia in the late 1920s, Duduchava was the first to pay serious attention to contemporary Georgian painting.³⁰⁵ As the rector of the Georgian Academy of Arts in 1927-30 and the editor of *Sabchota khelovneba* for 1927, he was respected among artists in Georgia as the transformations of the Cultural Revolution and First Five-Year Plan began to be implemented.³⁰⁶ He set out his views on ‘the correct path’ for painting in Soviet Georgia, as well as on the appropriate approach for Georgian (and, more broadly, Soviet) art criticism, in his book on Georgian painting, *Gruzinskaia zhivopis*, and in a number of articles published in local periodicals. In his first article as the editor of *Sabchota khelovneba* in 1927, he summarised the tasks standing before Georgian art critics and cultural commentators. Ostensibly, he argued for the wholesale adoption of a more Marxist approach in Soviet art criticism, including in Georgia.³⁰⁷ In this he was responding to a growing intolerance for non-Marxist approaches in all spheres of cultural and scholarly activity. However, Duduchava proposed a particular application of Marxist theory. A member of the old intelligentsia and supporter of experimental modernist-oriented painters such as Gudiashvili and Kakabadze, he belonged instinctively to the formalist school of criticism. However, facing increasing pressure to assume a more Marxist position, he, like many formalist critics in Russia, sought a way to reconcile Marxist and formalist criticism.³⁰⁸ He claimed Russian art historians such as Friche, Matsa and Luncharsky and the sociological approach to art history and criticism developed by Friche in particular as important influences on his thinking. However, at the same time he rejected aspects of their work, arguing that

³⁰⁵ Other art historians such as Georgy Chubinashvili (1885-1973), who is widely referred to as the father of modern Georgian art history, were active at that time. However, their research was concerned primarily with medieval Georgian art and architecture.

³⁰⁶ The Academy was in a state of flux in this period, undergoing several reorganisations and changes of name in the space of a few years. Established in 1922 as the Georgian Academy of Arts, in 1929-31 it became the Higher Art and Technical Institute, based on Moscow’s art institute of the same name - *Vysshiĭ khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskii institut* (VKhUTEIN), 1926-29, formerly VKhUTEMAS, the Higher Art and Technical Studios - *Vysshiĭe khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskiiĭe masterskiiĭe*, 1920-26. In 1931 it was closed and replaced with a Faculty of Fine Arts within Tbilisi Pedagogical Institute, but was reinstated as the independent Tbilisi State Academy of Fine Arts in February 1933. The institution’s current full title is the Apollon Kutateladze Tbilisi State Academy of Arts after its Rector of 1959-72, the painter Apollon Kutateladze.

³⁰⁷ Aleksandre Duduchava, ‘Sabchota sazogadoebrioba da chveni zhurnalĭs amotsenebi’ [‘Soviet Society and the Tasks of Our Journal’], *Sabchota khelovneba*, 1, 1927, p. 1.

³⁰⁸ Duduchava’s synthesis of sociological and formal methods of analysis was not without recent precedents. Maria Mileeva has noted the existence of a tendency for Russian formalist art historians in the 1920s to attempt to reconcile their approach with Marxist theory in light of ideological pressure, citing as an example Boris Arvatov, ‘O formalno-sotsiologicheskome metode,’ *Sotsiologicheskaiia poetika* (Moscow, 1928), pp. 29-32. Mileeva, ‘Import and Reception of Western Art in Soviet Russia,’ p. 68.

Friche's sociology of art, in which problems of visual art are analysed with reference to the socio-political context to which they relate, should make up only part of the correct art historical methodology. This part, he contended, was valuable only in combination with analysis of 'the empirical facts of art,' which he maintained were to be explored by means of formal analysis—the analysis of painting in terms of its fundamental aesthetic components, including line, colour, tone, volume, materiality. He termed this approach 'socio-aesthetic,' a marriage of Friche's sociology of art and formalist aesthetics.³⁰⁹

By combining a Marxist view of the historical development of Georgian painting with formalist analysis of works of art, Duduchava hoped to demonstrate his alignment with Marxist theory while retaining a model of art criticism that continued to evaluate painting in terms of its aesthetic qualities, not simply as historical document. In doing so, he aimed to maintain the primary importance of artistic quality, which he found in high technical skill combined with painterly experimentation and innovation. He saw experienced painters such as Kakabadze, Gudiashvili and Mose Toidze as Georgia's most valuable force in painting and hoped to provide a theoretical framework through which they could be defended against the attacks of the far-left militant proletarian organisations that sought to discredit them. Nevertheless, a series of inconsistencies, contradictions and logical dead ends in the arguments he presented, some of which resulted from the challenges posed by his attempt to reconcile Marxist and formalist theory, undermined his ability to discuss those artists, or the development of Georgian painting, coherently. At the same time, they caused him to broach central issues of national form in painting and the role of national artistic heritage in Soviet art in particular ways.

Duduchava's monograph, in which he presented these arguments in detail, was divided into seven chapters, plus an author's preface. Chapters one and two set out the book's two main theses. The remaining five chapters were then devoted to what Duduchava viewed as the key figures or moments in the recent history of Georgian painting. Pirosmiani was examined in chapter three, followed by Gudiashvili, Kakabadze and Toidze in chapters four to six, and a final chapter examined recent developments in Georgian stage design. The idea appears to have been that the hypotheses set out in the earlier sections of the book would be applied to and proven through these examples. In practice, however, weaknesses in the links Duduchava drew between social context and aesthetic values as well as inevitable challenges

³⁰⁹ Duduchava, *Gruzinskaia zhivopis*, p. 3.

arising from his attempt to reconcile two fundamentally opposing worldviews ultimately undermined his arguments and invited his critics to dismiss them.

The first two chapters of Duduchava's monograph dealt with fundamentally different problems, and in doing so revealed much about Duduchava's vision for Soviet painting and the question of national art and artistic heritage. In the opening chapter, Duduchava presented his evaluation of the tasks of Soviet painting under the Cultural Revolution and his view of the characteristics and qualities that Soviet painting needed to foster in order to fulfil those tasks. He discussed Soviet art in general terms, without reference to national specificity. In that chapter he stressed the importance of maintaining diversity in painting, in both the subjects treated by artists and the formal artistic styles considered appropriate.³¹⁰ What was of primary importance in Soviet painting, he contended, was the expressiveness of an artist's work—the ability of an artist to produce something convincing, compelling, and able to incite an emotional reaction in the viewer. He acknowledged the duty of artists in the Cultural Revolution period in organising the thoughts of the masses, and of artistically formulating a new way of life toward which the proletariat could strive.³¹¹ However, only by focusing on painting's expressivity and emotional impact could artists hope to achieve that goal. For that reason, he insisted, it was necessary to support diverse forms of painting in terms of both subject matter and style. This would facilitate the production of art with enough expressive power to fulfil these duties. By extension of this position, Duduchava warned of the danger of subjugating all art to the industrial goals of the First Five-Year Plan and of limiting subject matter to the depiction of industrialisation. Acknowledging art's importance in reflecting the progress of the period's rapid industrialisation, he insisted on the need for painting to show a range of aspects of Soviet life.³¹² In the same vein he warned against prioritising ideological narrative over artistic mastery and technical quality. He criticised AKhRR's painters for ignoring these issues, the result of which was the dry documentation of reality 'limiting any ability for inculcation and impact.'³¹³ While Duduchava acknowledged the importance of ideological narrative he insisted that narrative would be ineffective without the artistic means sufficiently expressive to have a tangible emotional impact on the viewer. Without that,

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 12.

³¹² Ibid., p. 13.

³¹³ 'лишенный всякой способности внушения и воздействия.' Ibid., pp. 19-20.

‘there is a lack of compellingness and expressiveness, the progressive possibilities of our reality are not revealed, the class substance of the thing depicted is not revealed.’³¹⁴

Importantly, Duduchava located the source of art’s expressiveness specifically in the basic components of painting identified by formalist critics, painting’s elemental vocabulary of colour and line. He described, moreover, the way in which those elements affected the viewer in terms of an emotional response rather than a rational, intellectual one:

Soviet painting, whether it be a portrait, poster [or] popular print, in the Cultural Revolution pursues the task of deepening the social character of our feeling, of strengthening human will towards revolutionary activity and widening our understanding of reality. That task is resolved in painting with its specific weapon: the play of colour and dynamic line.³¹⁵

Duduchava went on to clarify that colour and line fulfil a social function only in combination with narrative content. However, his reference here to the potential of colour and line as art’s main weapon in arousing an emotional response in its viewers, in deepening their feeling and strengthening their will, clearly implied that Duduchava saw colour and line as acting directly on the viewer, at a deeper, direct emotional level. It suggests that emotional impact was achieved, at least in part, through painting’s formal makeup, independent of narrative content. Narrative or symbolic content was secondary—a means of channelling the emotional power of colour and line into a concrete message, into the creation of pathos.

In this first chapter, Duduchava spoke in general terms about Soviet art as a whole. However, by foregrounding expressivity as a vital feature of Soviet art, and relating it directly to painters’ mastery of formal aesthetic means, he developed a position that he could use to defend experimental modernist-oriented painters such as Kakabadze and Gudiashvili. These painters were indisputably more experienced, more knowledgeable and more comprehensively educated than the artists of the younger generation. As such, he could position them as experienced innovators whose painterly mastery could offer solutions for producing the emotional impact that Soviet art needed in order to captivate and inspire the Soviet masses. As he spoke in this chapter only in general terms, Duduchava refrained from

³¹⁴ ‘отсутствует убедительность и выразительность, не раскрыты поступательные возможности нашей действительности, не вскрыта классовая сущность изображаемого.’ Ibid., p. 21.

³¹⁵ ‘советская живопись—будь то портрет, плакат, лубок—в культурной революции преследует задачу углубления социальной характеристики нашего чувства, укрепления человеческой воли к революционной деятельности и расширения нашего познания действительности. Эта задача разрешается живописью своим специфическим оружием: игрой красок и динамикой линии.’ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

directly juxtaposing those artists' wealth of experience against the younger, less experienced and less skilled proletarian painters attached to SARMA. However, his criticism of AKhRR applied implicitly to SARMA's younger, Far Left painters. Moreover, the absence of those younger artists from Duduchava's book attests to the lesser importance Duduchava attached to those artists, particularly since the volume claimed to examine the 'highlights' (*osnovnye momenty*) in the history of Georgian painting.

Having made his case for variety and quality in Soviet painting, Duduchava moved on in the second chapter of his book to the discussion of Georgian painting in particular. The chapter, which is twice as long as most of the others, was dedicated to the historical development of Georgian art from the medieval period up to Russia's annexation of Georgia at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Duduchava's devotion of so many words to historical Georgian painting reflected the importance in his view of national artistic heritage in the production of Soviet Georgian painting. Significantly, it also underlined an absolute separation in his thinking between Georgian and Russian painting and between Soviet Georgian painting and Soviet painting elsewhere in the Union. Soviet Georgian painting, Duduchava contended, could be understood and supported only with reference to the history of Georgian painting. As he declared, 'the contemporary visual art of Georgia cannot be sufficiently well understood without a retrospective view on its past, on its historical roots.'³¹⁶ There is nothing particularly exceptional about Duduchava's stance in this respect. Indeed, that ancient and medieval architecture and art constituted the main component in a nation's historical and cultural 'heritage' was a standard view in the 1920s.³¹⁷ However, notably, Soviet Georgian painting was presented not first and foremost as Soviet painting, differentiated by nation as a secondary consideration, but instead as the most recent stage in the development of a Georgian national tradition.

It was in this chapter, using examples from medieval Georgian painting and also Byzantine art (as an important influence on the Georgian tradition), that Duduchava set out to explain and justify his proposed socio-aesthetic methodology. His aim was to demonstrate the existence of direct causal relationships between socio-political context—defined and described in terms of Marxist-Leninist theory—and the appearance of formal aesthetic traits in painting. One might expect that by demonstrating such a connection Duduchava hoped to be able to explain and justify characteristics in the work of contemporary painters such as

³¹⁶ 'современного изобразительного искусства Грузии нельзя достаточно понять, без ретроспективного взгляда на его прошлое, на его исторические корни.' *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³¹⁷ On the conception of 'national cultures' in this period, see Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-23* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), p. 168-69.

Kakabadze and Gudiashvili as the inevitable result of their socio-political environment. If aesthetic form was directly dictated by socio-political context, then the artist could presumably be freed from some of the responsibility for the formal resolution of their work. However, inconsistencies and contradictions in the ways he described those relationships, as well as a tendency towards over-simplification, undermined both Duduchava's thesis about the relationship between socio-political context and aesthetic form, and its application to contemporary Georgian painting. This in turn moulded the way he broached issues of nationhood and national difference in their work and practice and the way in which Duduchava's arguments were received and critiqued by his contemporaries.

In his discussion of medieval Georgian and Byzantine painting, Duduchava argued for the impact of socio-political conditions on formal aesthetic characteristics as direct, one-directional and occurring at societal level. Social conditions dictated form automatically, inevitably and directly. He negated the agency of the individual artist to respond to social conditions in diverse, consciously constructed ways. For example, he explained the defining quality of colourfulness (*krasochnost*) that he perceived in Byzantine art as the visual manifestation of the Byzantine Empire's extensive contacts with Persia and other neighbouring eastern states. Those powers, he explained, doused the Byzantine court and clergy in such luxury and richness that it inevitably found its way into the art produced in that context.³¹⁸ He explained the quality of stillness, the 'numbness' and 'stupor' he perceived in the human figure in Byzantine art as the result of the socio-political nature of feudal society. Economic stagnation under those conditions, he reasoned, prevented the free growth of industrial forces and delayed the economic progress of the empire. The feudal nobility was not industrially productive. It was a 'consumer-only class' of 'inner complacency' and outer greatness. Thus, Duduchava concluded, 'that whole atmosphere of the inner economic stagnation of the country and the external "glitter" of the feudal nobility resolved the thematic of the art of the Byzantines in tones of stillness.'³¹⁹ The qualities of Byzantine art Duduchava identified were the inevitable and direct product of the socio-political conditions under which they appeared.

Duduchava drew similar connections with regard to medieval Georgian painting. Georgian ecclesiastical fresco painting to a significant degree imitated the Byzantine tradition, diverging from it only in certain particularities of style and content. As such, one might expect Duduchava to have acknowledged the cross pollination of artistic influence that

³¹⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

³¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 48-49.

came about as a result of the Byzantine Empire's influence in the kingdom of Iberia (also called Kartli, present day west Georgia). However, after highlighting formal characteristics uniting medieval Georgian and Byzantine painting, those characteristics—its static quality, two-dimensionality and 'mathematical exactness'—were instead explained in Georgia's case principally as the result of socio-economic conditions. Not only that, the same formal characteristics were explained as arising from a different set of circumstances to those they were said to have arisen from in the Byzantine tradition. The static quality Duduchava discerned in Georgian painting was explained as the result of economic and cultural stagnation. Duduchava did acknowledge that Byzantine artistic traditions, and in particular the 'frontalness' of Byzantine art, its rejection of depth and illusionistic perspective, were important influences on Georgian painters. However, he went on to attribute the 'mathematical exactness' and stillness he observed in Georgian painting not to Georgian painters' artistic debts to Byzantine painting as an aesthetic model, but to a limitation on artistic freedoms caused by the requirement placed on Georgian fresco painters to conform to Byzantine artistic formulae.³²⁰ What Duduchava presented was not a simple cross-pollination of artistic styles, nor was it a consistent relationship between socio-political conditions and their aesthetic manifestations. In both Byzantine and medieval Georgian art, economic stagnation was said to dictate formal stillness. But in Georgia, formal stillness was also the visual manifestation of a constriction of artistic freedoms. Whether this constriction arose from socio-economic conditions or not, this relationship does not embody the same direct and inevitable causation between socio-political context and formal aesthetic features that Duduchava had described in relation to Byzantine art.

When Duduchava came to discuss nineteenth- and twentieth-century Georgian painting, inconsistencies in his argument became clearer still. He proposed, for example, a connection between the use of tone in painting and bourgeois society. He observed that tone began to appear for the first time in Georgian painting in the nineteenth century. He hailed this as 'the great conquest of the bourgeois period' since tone, he argued, was a valuable tool in creating expressivity in painting.³²¹ He explained its appearance as the result of the development of capitalist trade in Georgia. He reasoned that trade capitalism facilitated the development of industrial forces, which in turn created new lines of patronage beyond the Georgian nobility. This encouraged the greater proliferation of easel painting as a medium that was both better suited to the new class of patrons (it was small, portable, suitable for

³²⁰ Ibid., pp. 74-75.

³²¹ 'великое завоевание живописи буржуазного периода.' Ibid., p. 82.

middle class interiors) and better able to exploit the possibilities of tonality, including in achieving greater depths of emotional expression.³²²

The relationship that Duduchava discerned between social conditions and formal aesthetic means here departs from the direct and inevitable causal relationship observed with respect to Byzantine and to some extent medieval Georgian art. Duduchava explains tonality in painting produced in bourgeois societies not as the natural and inevitable manifestation of socio-political circumstances, but instead as the result of a protracted sequence of causes and effects. With reference to Byzantine or medieval Georgian art, social and economic conditions had directly corresponding aesthetic markers. In relation to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by contrast, social conditions dictated aesthetic traits through a chain of historical events and their consequences. The disparity between these two models demonstrated the vagueness of the logic on which both are based, but also undermined the universal pretensions of Duduchava's thesis, and its potential authority in explaining and evaluating contemporary Georgian painters. Moreover, Duduchava and Friche, as two critics attempting to apply a similar methodology in the analysis of art, presented wholly divergent interpretations of the significance of certain formal characteristics. This demonstrated the flimsiness of Duduchava's method and the ease with which it could be employed to produce a variety of conflicting conclusions. While Duduchava positioned tone as an inherent characteristic of bourgeois painting, Friche interpreted it entirely differently, as a reflection of opposition and conflict arising between any two classes within the society in which the painting was produced.³²³ Duduchava firmly refuted Friche's stance. Yet the dispute only served to highlight that neither offered scientific or systematic means of demonstrating the relationship they identified. Instead, Duduchava contradicted Friche's interpretation simply by insisting:

Tone appears in a peaceful environment as a result of an intimate perception of things as a result of a need for the decorativeness of bourgeois apartments and salons and therefore does not reflect the social essence of the contrast of the "third estate" and feudal nobility. That form of perception dialectically harmonises with the "anarchical-individualistic socio-economic way of life of the bourgeoisie".³²⁴

³²² Ibid., p.82.

³²³ Vladimir Friche, *Sotsiologia iskusstva*, cited in Duduchava, *Gruzinskaia zhivopis*, p. 85.

³²⁴ 'Светотень появляется в мирной обстановке в результате интимного восприятия вещей, в результате необходимости убранства буржуазных квартир и салонов и поэтому е отражает социальную сущность контраста "третьего сословия" и феодальной знати. Эта форма восприятия диалектически гармонирует с

As well as diverging from the interpretation proposed by Friche, Duduchava himself offered more than one explanation for the appearance of tonality in bourgeois painting and drew a range of disparate conclusions about its significance and implications, each of which called into question the validity of the last. For example, Duduchava attributed its appearance to social and industrial developments that facilitated the democratisation of patronage and thus the market for easel painting at a practical level. However, he also alluded to a relationship between the appearance of tone in bourgeois painting and the characteristics of the physical environment in which bourgeois artists worked. As he explained, the ‘intimate corners’ inhabited by bourgeois artists—domestic interiors, studios and salons—dictated the greater proliferation of easel painting because of the medium’s suitability for bourgeois interior decoration. At the same time, he argued that those environments encouraged a new emphasis on tone in painting because of the play of light that is produced by such interior spaces. Such effects lead artists to use light and shade to communicate the spatial distance of objects depicted in painting rather than resorting to more linear means.³²⁵ In all of these cases, tonal painting arises hand in hand with easel painting itself. But was it by creating conditions for the growth of a market that socio-political conditions facilitated the rise of easel painting, and tonal painting? Did the domestic environment of those new patrons contribute to the market for easel painting and therefore greater tonality because easel painting naturally leant itself to greater tonality? Or did the new physical environment in which painters found themselves encourage both greater tonality and the greater proliferation of easel painting due to the effects of the light they produced and the scale of the spaces respectively?

These questions were further complicated by an additional argument Duduchava made about tonality in painting and its appearance under the conditions of bourgeois society. Duduchava posited that tonality as a formal quality in painting was especially effective in ‘the transmission of human expression.’³²⁶ In discussing this idea, Duduchava clearly had in mind European Romantic painting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with its emphasis on exploring the emotional and psychological depths of the human condition and its use of small dark spaces, directional lighting and heavy chiaroscuro to generate psychological drama. He referred by name to the dark, brooding portraits of Rembrandt, a source of

“анархо-индивидуалистическим, социально-экономическим бытом буржуазии”.’ *Gruzinskaia zhivopis*, p. 86.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³²⁶ ‘подача экспрессии человека.’ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

reverence and inspiration for painters in the Romantic era. Such discussion leads one to ask, did the practical circumstances of new bourgeois patrons, their tastes and lifestyle, bring about the rise of easel painting, which, as a medium, happened to lend itself to the use of tone and thus naturally encouraged artists to gravitate towards more emotionally expressive and psychologically intense imagery? Or did the brooding, reflective mood of the age in the Romantic era as well as in Georgia at the *fin de siècle* bring artists to easel painting, and to the use of tone, as a medium suited to expressing emotional and psychological intensity? The range of relationships Duduchava observed thus drew him inevitably into cyclical arguments whereby the explanations offered for the proliferation of easel painting or for the appearance of particular formal characteristics in painting were also offered as evidence of the very social circumstances from which they were said to have resulted.

These issues affected not only the effectiveness of Duduchava's thesis in the abstract, but also its strengths when applied to the discussion of contemporary Georgian painters, the question of the national form of Soviet painting, and the role of national artistic heritage. With respect to Gudiashvili, for example, Duduchava proposed that the socio-political conditions in which the painter had worked in the Menshevik Georgia of 1918-21 dictated the social contexts that he depicted, which in turn determined the formal stylistic means he deployed. For Gudiashvili, Duduchava claimed, the formal stylistic debts apparent in his painting, in particular, to Byzantine and Persian traditions, were selected in response to the demands of the subject matter he treated. He explained:

The methods of Byzantine-Persian art [employed in Gudiashvili's painting] were dictated by a need for the comprehensive elicitation of the expression of the classless kinto. The "structure" of that expression, as a conglomeration of psychological phenomena—will, character, mood—was in substance "alogical" and therefore, for its physical manifestation, demanded the "logical" destruction of proportions of the physical organism [...] The Byzantine fresco and the "graphic" zigzags of the Persian miniaturists in formal terms fully answered the bohemian character of the expression of the kinto. In that way, the character of the theme also defined the formal means.³²⁷

³²⁷ 'Методы византийско-персидского искусства были продиктованы необходимостью всестороннего выявления экспрессии деклассированного кинто. "Структура" этой экспрессии, как сгустка психологических явлений—воля, характер, настроение,—была по существу "алогична" и поэтому для своего физического проявления требовала как будто "логического" нарушения пропорций физического организма. Божемному характеру экспрессии кинто, формально всецело отвечали византийская фреска и "графические" зигзаги персидских миниатюристов [...] Таким образом, характер тематики определил и характер формальных приемов.' Ibid., pp. 126 and 129.

The themes that Gudiashvili treated were thus taken to justify the formal means that he employed. However, Duduchava also made the same argument in reverse—Gudiashvili's preference for particular formal aesthetic means, he said, dictated the subject matter he chose to treat:

The artist's inclination towards the idealisation of the past, [his] withdrawal into that past, is explained exclusively by Gudiashvili's wish to find the appropriate theme to which he could apply and justify the [artistic] means of Georgian wall painting, under the influence of which the artist Gudiashvili grew.³²⁸

Gudiashvili's interest in the Persian and Byzantine traditions and his appropriation of formal stylistic features from those traditions were said by Duduchava to be the reason for Gudiashvili's interest in choosing bourgeois, bohemian Tiflis as his primary subject matter. Yet at the same time those same social conditions were presented as the source of the formal stylistic characteristics of his work.

In discussing the work of Gudiashvili and other Georgian painters in the period since the Sovietisation of Georgia, a completely new set of assumptions again were applied. The apparently inevitable relationships Duduchava had discerned between socio-political conditions and artistic styles in earlier periods did not apply to contemporary Georgian painters. Painterly form was not dictated by socio-political context, but consciously selected by artists irrespective of their environment. For example, despite Duduchava's characterisation of tone as a natural feature of bourgeois painting, he also insisted that those class origins should not prevent contemporary Soviet painters from exploiting its expressive potential.³²⁹ There could be no discussion of the kind proposed by Friche about the social contrasts and oppositions that tonal contrasts might represent, since under the dictatorship of the proletariat, he reasoned, such social contrasts had been eradicated under socialism.³³⁰ As such, tone was thus cleansed of any negative social associations when employed in the Soviet context, and was transformed into a valuable weapon in Soviet artists' arsenal. Duduchava

³²⁸ 'Склонность художника к идеализации прошлого, уход в это прошлое, объясняется исключительно желанием Гудиашвили найти соответствующую тематику, к которой можно было бы применить и оправдать приемы грузинских стенописцев, под воздействием которых рос художник Гудиашвили.' Ibid., pp. 130 and 133.

³²⁹ Ibid., p. 86.

³³⁰ Ibid., p. 86.

amended or abandoned his thesis where necessary, manipulating the argument to serve his particular agenda. This allowed him to preserve tonal painting for Soviet art.

Nonetheless, Duduchava maintained the principles of his thesis where possible. In his evaluation of Gudiashvili's painting he was able to defend the painter's formal means as appropriate to the subject matter that he treated, without making the more contentious claim that those means were also appropriate to the Soviet context. In this way Gudiashvili could be praised and validated for his work to date, produced primarily in the context of a capitalist society, and excused from blame, even while Duduchava aligned himself with dominant far-left voices calling for new formal means and content to suit the new Soviet context. However, the new social conditions under the dictatorship of the proletariat required a renewal of both thematic content and formal artistic means. And contemporary themes, based on contemporary social conditions, would dictate the new creative means.³³¹

It is here that Duduchava referred directly for the only time in his book to the question of a Georgian 'national form' of Soviet painting. Rather than describing this form in positive terms, he noted instead that Gudiashvili's existing formal painterly means could not constitute a Soviet Georgian national style. Instead, he predicted, the appearance of new thematic content and new creative means in the painter's work would 'unravel the tangle of oriental influences in the atmosphere of which the work of Gudiashvili grew.'³³² In this way Gudiashvili would attain the appropriate formal means for Georgian painting in the Soviet context. Gudiashvili's art would have to rid itself from what was often viewed in Moscow in the 1920s as markers of Georgian national form—from the tangle of oriental influences in his painting—in order to arrive at a true Soviet national style.

Despite Duduchava's defense of modernist-oriented Georgian artists such as Gudiashvili, the above prediction aligned him with arguments that would be made by Rempel two years later, locating national form not in positive aesthetic traits but in the specific social (and the related artistic) challenges facing proletarian artists of a given nationality. This was confirmed by Duduchava's contrasting characterisations of bourgeois and proletarian art. He described proletarian painting as logical, mathematical, linear, ascribing to bourgeois art, by distinction, a 'passive,' 'sensitive,' 'hedonistic' and 'emotional' worldview.³³³ Such descriptors, attached to bourgeois painting, evoke the particular strands of European modernism that had taken root in Georgia in the 1910s and early 1920s. They alluded to the

³³¹ Ibid., p. 134.

³³² Ibid., p. 134.

³³³ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

Symbolist and Decadent currents that claimed a prominent place in Gudiashvili's painting and in the poetry and prose of the Blue Horns literary society. If it was by eliminating those qualities that Gudiashvili's painting would become appropriate to the new Soviet context, then Duduchava appeared to agree with Rempel: Soviet national painting would achieve its correct form by eradicating characteristics previously viewed by other commentators as constituting its 'national form,' since such markers were both hangovers of earlier feudal and capitalist societies and evidence of excessive and harmful nationalism.

On the same grounds, Duduchava hesitated to endorse the suitability of Kakabadze's painting in the Soviet context. He lauded Kakabadze as a master, and attached great importance to his work as an innovator of new painterly means. He discerned originality in Kakabadze's representation of spatial depth, for example, observing Kakabadze's ability to communicate volume and depth not through any kind of perspectival device, or with an illusionistic reduction of detail in the receding distance, but instead by using a patchwork of saturated colour fields. This, Duduchava concluded, was a first in landscape painting, and secured Kakabadze's status as an innovator. Nevertheless, he criticised Kakabadze's disinterest in applying or adapting his formal aesthetic experiments to industrial themes and historical events.³³⁴ As a result, it was yet unclear whether Kakabadze's work had useful application in the Soviet context.³³⁵ Duduchava hinted at the possible industrial applications of Kakabadze's painting, for example in the production of textiles. In this respect, he declares that thanks to Kakabadze's experimentation, 'completely new paths are opening up in ornamental art.'³³⁶ However, his search for alternative uses for Kakabadze's painting clearly suggested that its value as easel painting remained under question.³³⁷ It was only by reverting to a formalist model of assessment that he was able to reserve judgement as to 'whether such a combination of colour and line' as found in Kakabadze's painting could ultimately be employed to help 'reveal the inner psychological world of the Soviet person.'³³⁸

Duduchava was attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable in his effort both to synthesise Marxist theory and formalist aesthetics and to negotiate the diverging theory and practice of Soviet nationalities policy in the context of the Cultural Revolution. As Rempel would in 1932, Duduchava searched for a way to maintain the theoretical position established by Soviet nationalities policy, even while the political imperatives of the Cultural Revolution

³³⁴ Ibid., p. 153-54.

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 154.

³³⁶ 'открывается совершенно новые пути для орнаментального искусства.' Ibid., p. 157

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 157.

³³⁸ 'выявить ли такое сочетание красок и линии внутренний психологический мир нового человека.' Ibid., p. 153.

were limiting tolerance for ‘national’ concerns (including a right to diverge from the artistic canons promoted by organisations from the Soviet centre), especially where they were seen to conflict with class objectives. Inevitably any such attempt could have little success.³³⁹

Responses to Duduchava

Various commentators were quick to critique Duduchava’s book and the stances he set out. Vladimir Sokol, the only other prominent Georgian critic contributing to discussion about contemporary Georgian painting at that time, bluntly dismissed Duduchava’s attempt to reconcile Marxist theory and formalist aesthetics as ‘to put it mildly, completely unsuccessful.’³⁴⁰ In early 1931, at the time of reviewing Duduchava’s book, Sokol supported realist painting of the kind proposed by AKhR in Moscow, which treated proletarian subjects, industry, agriculture and scenes from modern Soviet life. His assessments of the activities of SARMA and REVMAS, published in two reviews in late 1930, attest to his commitment to that position. He described the contents of REVMAS’s 1930 exhibition as well as recent AKhR exhibitions as ‘alien-to-us, petty-bourgeois art,’ and criticised individual contributors to REVMAS’s exhibition for various failings.³⁴¹ His primary criticism was that their works lacked the correct (or any) ideological content, or that they failed to deliver that content in comprehensive and compelling ways.³⁴² He was much more approving of SARMA’s efforts, commending the organisation for the content of the works its members produced. He was pleased to find that in SARMA there were ‘no “neutral” or “apolitical” artists chaining themselves in our days to still life, landscape and non-representationalism.’³⁴³ The organisation was achieving the goal it had set out in its declaration earlier that year of becoming an ‘organiser of the proletarian psyche’ and ‘active participant in socialist construction.’³⁴⁴

³³⁹ ‘только первая попытка социально-эстетического анализа грузинской живописи.’ Duduchava was well aware of the problems with his own thesis, asking repeatedly in his author’s preface that it be evaluated only ‘as a first attempt at a socio-aesthetic analysis of Georgian art.’ Ibid. p. 10.

³⁴⁰ ‘мягко выражаясь, совершенно не удавшейся.’ Vladimir Sokol, ‘Zhivopis: Melkoburzhuaznye tendentsii v gruzinskom iskusstvoznanii: v diskussionnom poriadke,’ *Na rubezhe vostoka*, 1, 1931, pp. 95-102.

³⁴¹ ‘чуждого нам мелкобуржуазного искусства.’ Vladimir Sokol, “‘AKhR” i “OMAKhR”’, *Na rubezhe vostoka*, 9-10, 1930, p. 120.

³⁴² Sokol, “‘AKhR” i “OMAKhR”’, p. 120.

³⁴³ ‘нет «нейтральных, аполитических» художников, прикладывающих в наши дни натюр-мортами, пейзажами и безпредметничеством.’ Vladimir Sokol, “‘SARMA”’, *Na rubezhe vostoka*, 9-10, 1930, pp. 118-19 (p. 119).

³⁴⁴ ‘организатором пролетарской психики’; ‘активным участником социалистического строительства.’ Ibid., p. 119.

Sokol's position was clear. Soviet painting should educate and inspire the Soviet people by delivering a clear and compelling vision of the socialist transformation of Soviet society using a narrative realist mode of painting. And Soviet critics should assess painting based on those criteria, considering painting's historical development in light of Marxist theory. As such, he commended Duduchava for attempting to move Georgian art criticism towards a more Marxist methodology but nevertheless condemned Duduchava's approach as 'materialism from above'—a failed attempt to superimpose a Marxist narrative on to what remained essentially formalist criticism.³⁴⁵ Sokol highlighted many of the inconsistencies and contradictions in Duduchava's text that I have discussed here. He scorned Duduchava's argument connecting socio-economic 'stillness,' or stagnation with stillness as an aesthetic feature of Byzantine and medieval Georgian frescoes, complaining that 'one could continue noting similar material forever.'³⁴⁶ What Sokol's comments amounted to was a rejection of the utility of formalist analysis. He praised Duduchava's endeavour to leave behind a purely formalist method and to attempt to embrace Marxist theory, but concluded that it was impossible to reconcile the two endeavours.³⁴⁷ He described Duduchava's attempt to do so as 'a perversion of Marxism.'³⁴⁸

A Marxist art historian must not blindly use the material of art historian-formalists. A sociologist-Marxist compares, analyses, substantiates, clarifies and explains the origins not of separate parts, or features, or sides, or elements in painted works of the order of line and colour, but looks at a work of art as a whole, as a concrete oneness, and as the result of the defined class-conditioned reality of a defined class in a defined stage of its historical development. Implacable hostility to formalism should become a device of a sociologist-Marxist in Georgian art.³⁴⁹

By January 1932, when SARMA held its first and only official public meeting to assess recent developments and achievements in Soviet Georgian art, a more generous and

³⁴⁵ '«Сверхматериализм».' Sokol, 'Zhivopis: Melkoburzhuaznye tendentsii,' p. 97.

³⁴⁶ 'Можно бы без конца продолжать выписку подобного материала.' Ibid., p. 100.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

³⁴⁸ 'извращении Марксизма.' Ibid., p. 101.

³⁴⁹ 'Нельзя марксисту-искусствоведу слепо пользоваться материалом искусствоведов-формалистов. Социолог-марксист сравнивает, анализирует, обосновывает, выявляет и объясняет происхождение не отдельных частей, или черт, или сторон, или элементов в живописном произведении, в роде линий и красок, а все художественное произведение рассматривает в целом, как конкретное единство и как результат определенной классово-обусловленной деятельности определенного класса в определенный этап его исторического развития.' Ibid., p. 99.

forgiving evaluation of Duduchava had begun to emerge. Many took issue with the same aspects of Duduchava's criticism that Sokol questioned earlier, including what was viewed as his excessively generous treatment of and attention to old generation painters such as Gudiashvili and Kakabadze.³⁵⁰ Some artists reproached Duduchava for paying insufficient attention to young Georgian painters, and sculptors complained that by addressing only painting he had unjustly neglected their discipline.³⁵¹ Mirzoev, who was outspoken in expressing his disapproval of Kakabadze's painting during the 1932 plenum, was critical of Duduchava's evaluation of Kakabadze. He disagreed with Duduchava's readiness even to contemplate any applicability of Kakabadze's painting to the Soviet context.³⁵² However, there was a general sense among Georgian artists of Duduchava's authority and contribution to Georgian art, which seems to have countered the seriousness of the errors identified. With the exception of his opposition to Duduchava's assessment of Kakabadze, Mirzoev was strikingly complimentary and conciliatory in his approach to Duduchava. Rather than highlighting the methodological inconsistencies in Duduchava's monograph, Mirzoev ignored them, picking out instead only the aspects of Duduchava's criticism with which he could agree. He praised Duduchava's account of SARMA's appearance for its accuracy, despite the brevity of Duduchava's attention to the organisation. He even refuted the charges of formalism levelled at Duduchava, despite Duduchava himself referring to his own approach as a synthesis of Marxist and formalist methodologies. He wrote:

Perhaps for some comrades, as unfortunately became apparent particularly at the last plenum of proletarian writers, comrade Duduchava is not an authority. Perhaps Duduchava is accused of formalism, but I know that he took active part in the battle against formalists, against ideologues of all inclinations in questions of the art of painting in our Georgian reality and battled actively against them. We also have a battle on our theoretical front and comrade Duduchava, who is one of those theoreticians, one of those writers who systematically stands for our work and helps

³⁵⁰ NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 25, l. 174.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² He reminded the meeting that since a central feature of Soviet painting according to a recent Central Committee resolution was in figuration (*obraznost*) the 'formal achievements' of Kakabadze's 'imperial, bourgeois art' could have no application in the context of the Cultural Revolution. NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 25, l. 65.

us, has waged that battle. We repeat again that to accuse comrade Duduchava of formalism is wrong, since he waged an active struggle against formalism.³⁵³

Duduchava was not a formalist, but a committed Marxist dedicated to supporting the type of proletarian painting Mirzoev, SARMA and AKhR promoted. This, Mirzoev insisted, was the case, regardless of how Duduchava represented his own position, and irrespective of the marriage of formalist and Marxist analysis that Duduchava had, by his own admission, promoted.

Mirzoev's uncharacteristic defence of Duduchava was symptomatic of a general shift evident throughout the SARMA plenum away from the denunciation and recrimination of 'bourgeois' or un-Marxist practices observed in Sokol's criticism of Duduchava's monograph, towards a policy of reconciliation, transformation and redemption. It was inspired by the central Soviet leadership's wider retreat from the policies of the Cultural Revolution from the middle of 1931. By that time it had become clear that the Cultural Revolution's attack on bourgeois specialists and the promotion in their place of often under-qualified Communist intellectuals had created a desperate shortage of even partially qualified workers.³⁵⁴ In light of this reality, in July 1931 Stalin gave a speech reversing the previous policies and rehabilitating the bourgeois specialists.³⁵⁵ For artists and critics in Georgia, this meant that bourgeois artists such as Gudiashvili but also critics such as Duduchava, rather than being dismissed or rebuked, were to be assisted in taking an appropriate Marxist position. In this way former enemies and deviants could be brought into the service of the Soviet apparatus. By the same measure, in defending and redeeming Duduchava, Mirzoev could protect himself from criticism concerning his own previous attacks on the bourgeois intelligentsia. As a result, even Rempel, who declared in his own monograph that he disagreed with much of Duduchava's analysis, nonetheless respectfully expressed surprise

³⁵³ 'Может быть, для некоторых т. т., тов. Дудучава не авторитет, как это к сожалению дало себя чувствовать особенно на последнем пленуме пролетписателей. Может быть т. Дудучава обвинят в формализме, но я знаю, что принимал активное участие в борьбе с формалистами, идеологами всех уклонов в вопросах искусства живописи в нашей грузинской действительности и боролся активно с ними. Мы имеем борьбу и на нашем теоретическом фронте и борьбу эту провел т. Дудучава, который является одним из тех теоретиков, одним из тех писателей, которые систематически стоит за наше дело и помогает нам. Еще раз повторяем, что обвинять т. Дудучава в формализме нельзя, т.к. он вел активнейшую борьбу с формализмом.' Ibid., ll. 67-68.

³⁵⁴ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, p. 257.

³⁵⁵ On the halting of the Cultural Revolution and rehabilitation of the bourgeois specialists, see, for example: Sheila Fitzpatrick, '10. The Restoration of Order: new policies in education, 1931-1934' in *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 212-34. For Stalin's speech, see I. V. Stalin, 'Novaia obstanovka—novye zadachi khoziaistvennikov na stroitelstvakh. Rech na soveshchanii khoziaistvennikov, 23 iunia, 1931' in I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, vol. 12 (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1951), pp. 55-59.

that even Duduchava, a comrade ‘far from chauvinism,’ should be susceptible to the theoretical and ideological mistakes that Rempel had identified.³⁵⁶ Rempel, like Mirzoev, took pains to present Duduchava as a committed communist aligned with the struggle for proletarian art, ignoring evidence to the contrary.³⁵⁷

When one turns to questions of national form in Soviet art, of national cultural expression and artistic heritage, the positions expressed by most Georgian artists and critics departed from those expressed by Duduchava in 1930 or Rempel in 1932. Theoreticians such as Rempel and Duduchava found it necessary to acknowledge the official stance set out in Soviet nationalities policy, which insisted that national cultural forms were still to be celebrated and supported, even while they comprehensively reformulated what national cultural form would constitute. However, for the most part, Georgian artists and artists’ organisations either avoided the subject or presented stances that were actively at odds with Soviet nationalities policy. Although REVMAS was officially affiliated with AKhR, it was SARMA that most closely emulated AKhR’s positions. Its declaration followed AKhR’s faithfully. It demanded that art should ‘become the organiser of the minds and will of the masses’ and that artists should integrate themselves into the new Soviet life, visiting collective farms and factories and working hand in hand with the Soviet people.³⁵⁸ It paid little attention to national difference, referring to Georgian art in broad terms applicable to Soviet art in general and focussing discussion on Soviet art’s universal class objectives in the service of the proletariat. This was surely encouraged by AKhR’s own disregard for national differentiation in its management of its network of national outposts. Issues of national difference were a distraction from more pressing class priorities.

However, SARMA’s declaration also set out the organisation’s explicit opposition to the principle of Soviet art’s national specificity. It criticised what it called the ‘national isolationism’ of the Georgian Society of Artists, declaring that SARMA, by contrast, would

³⁵⁶ Rempel, *Zhivopis sovetskogo Zakavkazia*, p. 76.

³⁵⁷ The authority that Duduchava and, to a lesser extent, Sokol thus maintained was something of a double-edged sword. It meant that responsibility for guiding Georgian artists in their theoretical understanding of the tasks of Soviet art was placed on their shoulders and, accordingly, they could easily be blamed for Georgian artists’ theoretical and ideological failings. One artist complained, for example, that during the SARMA plenum that Duduchava spoke only later in the meeting and not at the start. Duduchava, he felt, should have set out the theoretical groundwork on which the rest of the debate could be based. The same responsibility placed on Duduchava, however, led another artist to argue that Duduchava should have been expelled from the SARMA’s presidium for failing to direct young artists appropriately. ‘Sakartvelos revolutsiur mkhatvarta asotsiatsiis I plenumis stenografiuli angarishi’ [Transcript of the First Plenum of the Association of Revolutionary Artists of Georgia (SARMA)], NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 25 ll. 1-200 (ll. 112, 174 and 179).

³⁵⁸ ‘должно стать организатором психики и воли масс.’ ‘Deklaratsiia revoliutsionnykh khudozhnikov Gruzii’ *Na rubezhe vostoka*, 1 1930 pp. 117-18 (p 117).

unite artists of all nationalities working in Georgia.³⁵⁹ For SARMA's leadership, nationality was immaterial in Soviet art. Certain statements in the declaration seemed to acknowledge some degree of difference in national contexts, but this was not deliberate. For example, it stated:

We know that for the creation of new forms, above all, new creative material and the use of old forms are necessary. Critical analysis and the reworking of past culture are vital. We will fight against slavish submission to the forms of the old culture, of their adoption without criticism, and imitation of them, and copying. A critical attitude towards the culture of the past and the use of it does not mean further imitation of it.³⁶⁰

A critical adoption of appropriate aspects of historical artistic forms was a largely undisputed principle of Soviet art practice, grounded in Leninist theory. However, reference here to a slavish submission to old forms and past culture hinted at specifically 'national' forms and 'national cultural heritage', rather than the old forms of world culture. The idea that an artist would be inclined towards slavish submission to a past culture implied a specific well of cultural forms towards which an artist might instinctively gravitate—namely, his or her own 'national cultural heritage.' The attachment many Georgian artists, including Gudiashvili, expressed towards their 'national cultural heritage,' made reference to it here clearly implicit. Georgians' attachment to notions of that heritage, and of their national identity in general, had been strengthened by the long history of challenges to Georgian sovereignty, unity and cultural identity. This attachment was then bolstered by the politicisation of nationality and the formalisation of distinct national cultural identities under Soviet nationalities policy. And it was this attachment that was viewed by Far Left forces as the source of objectionable elements in many artists' work. Often what was classed as formalism in their painting—any stylistic means that diverged from a commentator's vision of painterly realism—was conflated with 'national' influences and attributed to 'national' sources. Whether it was Gudiashvili's debt to Persian miniature painting or to various European modernists, both influences had contributed to a tradition of painting that had

³⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 118.

³⁶⁰ 'Мы знаем, что для создания новых форм, прежде всего, необходим новый творческий материал и использование старых форм. Необходимы критический анализ и переработка прошлой культуры. Мы будем бороться против рабского подчинения формам старой культуры, против их принятия без критики, подражания им и эпигонства. Критическое отношение к культуре прошлого и использование ее не означает еще ее копирования.' 'Deklaratsiia revoliutsionnykh khudozhnikov Gruzii,' pp. 117-18.

flourished in independent Menshevik Georgia, of which Gudiashvili was a representative. Gudiashvili's painting in that period, and the collection of influences bound together in it, were all part of the old culture that SARMA charged Georgian artists to approach with caution. By warning in their manifesto of the risks of paying excessive attention to such past cultural forms, SARMA's leadership sought to minimise the significance of its artists' nationhood, their national cultural heritage or the national socio-political conditions in which they existed. This helped to justify reduced tolerance for such deviations from their vision of a universal Soviet proletarian realism, though, paradoxically, the same comments betrayed their authors' awareness of the particularity of the Georgian case.

The only alternative perspective on the question of national form and national heritage in Soviet Georgian painting was offered by Sokol, in an article he published in early 1930 discussing thematic content in contemporary Georgian painting.³⁶¹ His attention to this question did not feature prominently in the article: neither the question of national form nor any formulation of national artistic characteristics was discussed explicitly. However, the author did acknowledge the particularity of the socio-political conditions in which Georgian artists were working and, importantly, considered their implications. In doing so, he offered a conceptualisation of national form that differed not only from Duduchava and Rempel's efforts to negotiate the contradictions of Soviet nationalities policy during the Cultural Revolution but also from AKhR's and SARMA's ultimate rejection of the policy's principles. It also anticipated ideas about national form in Georgian painting that gained currency in later years.

Sokol began his article by stating emphatically, as did his colleagues in SARMA and AKhR, that the central narrative of Soviet art must begin and end with the revolutionary struggle and achievements of the Soviet proletariat.³⁶² As was clear from his reviews of SARMA and REVMAS's achievements, he saw little value in works not specifically treating socialist subjects. From those reviews it was also clear that he opposed the kind of national form in Georgian painting that entailed the incorporation of stylistic features from traditions that had historically influenced Georgian painting. He disdainfully described the work of one painter contributing to the REVMAS exhibition as 'some kind of brown sauce with Bengali illuminations.'³⁶³ However, he also specified that artists must take into account existing variations in the lives of workers and peasants that they portrayed and from whom the works

³⁶¹ V. Sokol, 'Tematika sovetskoi zhivopisi,' *Na rubezhe vostoka*, 1, 1930, pp. 109-114.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³⁶³ 'в каком-то коричневом соусе с бенгальским освещением.' Sokol, "'AKhR" i "OMAKhR",' p. 20.

were made.³⁶⁴ This, he explained, was vital if an artist was to ensure that the works produced were comprehensible, relevant and therefore of interest to those people.³⁶⁵ The explanation Sokol gave regarding the particular conditions to which a worker or peasant might respond emphasised the diversity of workers' and peasants' experiences of life in the Soviet Union: to be effective, artists should reflect the particularities of life in the given industry, location or, implicitly, of a given nation. Georgian artists must produce a vision of Soviet life to which the Georgian masses could relate. Additionally, and importantly, Sokol hinted at the relevance of cultural traditions and national popular mythologies in moulding the prism through which people of a given nationality viewed and understood painting, and therefore in determining how artists should work.

An artist should take into account all shades in the ideology of the worker-peasant masses, all the remnants of the traditional representations about honour, comfort, heroism, duty, love etc., so that the theme of his picture is not a blind incursion into the ideology of the masses.³⁶⁶

Soviet art, he believed, should be adjusted to reflect the particularities of Soviet life in different regions of the Union. What is striking, however, is Sokol's reference to the representation of honour, comfort, heroism, duty and love. In referencing these qualities, Sokol was drawing on a powerful and pervasive mythology of the Georgian nation—a vision of Georgia and Georgians held firmly in the minds of Georgians themselves. As others have demonstrated, the clear sense of national identity that Georgians held in the early twentieth century was built to a significant degree on the nation's rich literary tradition. Both medieval chronicles of Georgian history, such as 'The Life of St. Nino,' and certain celebrated works of fiction, notably Shota Rustaveli's epic poem, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* (*Vepkhistkaosani*), are great wells from which Georgians have historically drawn ideas about their character as a people.³⁶⁷ Importantly, values of honour, heroism, duty, love were prominent qualities celebrated in the protagonists of those tales, which were full of chivalrous, brave, honourable knights and beautiful but also resolute and loyal queens and princesses. They embodied a very specific set of qualities and values that were inseparable in

³⁶⁴ Sokol, 'Tematika sovetskoi zhivopisi,' p. 114.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 111.

³⁶⁶ 'Художник должен учесть все оттенки в идеологии рабоче-крестьянской массы, все остатки традиционных представлений о чести, комфорте, героизме, долге, любви и т. д., чтобы тема его картины не была слепым вторжением и идеологию массы.' Ibid., p. 114.

³⁶⁷ See Nanava, 'Conceptualising the Georgian Nation.'

the minds of most Georgians from Rustaveli's poem (a text so entwined with Georgians' self image that it has been described as a 'moral codex of Feudal Georgia') and so with a firmly held popular mythology of the nation.³⁶⁸ Sokol's insistence that Georgian artists should take into account these images suggests that he was beginning to think about a national form of Soviet Georgian painting that was based not on geographic, climatic or social conditions, but on a particular conceptualisation of the character of the Georgian nation itself. This was a new idea, which explains why it was presented as tentatively as Duduchava presented his own thesis, with the caveat that this was not the final word in the discussion, and an invitation for artists to offer their response.³⁶⁹ However, as we will see in the following chapter, it was an approach to the question of national form that, for a number of reasons, gained currency over the course of the 1930s and later.

In following the commentaries of Georgian artists and critics from the end of the NEP, when the first serious attempts were made in Georgia to broach theoretical questions about the nature of Soviet Georgian art, through the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution, several things are apparent. Firstly, it is clear that Georgian critics found it necessary to adjust their commentaries in light of the shifting political contexts of the Cultural Revolution. Critics dealt with these challenges in a range of sometimes unexpected ways, with varying degrees of success. Duduchava, a member and defender of the old intelligentsia, followed in the footsteps of colleagues in Moscow in struggling to find a way to defend his allies in the face of the increasing dominance of AKhR and SARMA, but failed to find a convincing way to reconcile his own values with Marxist theory.

Secondly, though Soviet nationalities policy and its *korenizatsiia* programmes were continued throughout the Cultural Revolution, at its height this constituted little more than a theoretical obstacle that commentators representing the Soviet centre had to navigate. It was necessary to find a way to support national cultural autonomy in theory while simultaneously demanding that national artists submitted to an increasingly homogenous vision of Soviet art in practice. Within Georgian artists' organisations such as SARMA and REVMAS, questions of national difference were either avoided or condemned as actively harmful to Soviet art, as the period's all-consuming class war necessitated that class concerns were prioritised above

³⁶⁸ N. Berdzenishvili, *Sakartvelos istoriis sakitkhebi* [Questions of Georgian History], Vol. V, (Tbilisi, 1966) cited in Nanava, 'Conceptualising the Georgian Nation,' p. 45.

³⁶⁹ The title of Sokol's article was qualified with a footnote reading: 'By way of discussion. The editorial board invite artists to have their say on the merits of the author's position.' In Russian: 'В порядке обсуждения. Редакция приглашает художников высказаться по существу положений автора.'

all else and that artists of all nationalities were united in that pursuit. The period's combative atmosphere of accusations and recriminations prevented serious theoretical discussions about the nature of painting in Soviet Georgia with the exception of the efforts of a handful of commentators, who fully expected their tentative solutions to be rebuked. Before any consensus could be reached, the Party leadership in Moscow signalled that the bourgeois intelligentsia were to be rehabilitated, and the field of play shifted. Excessive nationalism was still to be opposed, but the 'old specialists' were to be supported and encouraged to adapt rather than censured and dismissed, and this meant greater acceptance for formal artistic means that were tied to a particular national cultural identity or rooted in national cultural traditions.

Chapter 4: Georgian Artists, Beria and the Exhibition of Painting, Sculpture and Graphics of the Georgian SSR in Moscow in 1937

Artists across the Soviet Union experienced a dramatic change in their political and professional environment at the beginning of the 1930s. The transition from the First to the Second Five-Year Plan at the end of 1932 and beginning of 1933 brought new political imperatives affecting Soviet artists. The April 1932 Central Committee decree disbanding all artistic and literary organisations changed the way artists could access commissions, exhibition opportunities, materials, accommodation and studios at the same time as increasing the Party's control over their activity. MoSSKh, the Moscow section of the future USSR Union of Artists, was established in 1932 to facilitate the organisation and supervision of artists' activities. Sister unions were then established in the Soviet regions and republics over the course of the 1930s, providing a centralised network for supervising and directing Soviet artists' activities. The vast majority of Soviet artists joined the new unions since they offered the only means of accessing opportunities for work. The advent of socialist realism in 1934 formalised a new set of boundaries within which all Soviet artists were required to work. Speeches and reports explaining the new doctrine were published and disseminated throughout the Soviet Union and lectures and debates were organised by local artists' unions and art education institutions. This ensured that artists and critics throughout the Soviet Union's regions and republics understood the new doctrine.

However, situations varied not only between centre and periphery but from one region or republic to another and for many reasons the Georgian case was unique within this diversity. And the specificity of the Georgian case was at no time more pronounced than it was in the 1930s, thanks to Beria's rise to power in Georgia and Transcaucasia. Beria's ascent to power in the region in the early 1930s dramatically differentiated the experiences of Georgian artists from those of their colleagues elsewhere in the Soviet Union. Indeed, as this chapter contends, it was by far and away the single most significant factor distinguishing Georgian artists' experience and their production in the 1930s. The following pages explore how Beria's activities and interactions with Georgian artists defined their experience and production in that period, and consider how and why those interactions and their consequences were specific to Georgia, despite Beria's responsibility for the entire Transcaucasian region.

The most fundamental point to consider in understanding the impact of Beria's activities on Georgian artists is the matter of the means through which he gained and

maintained his power – namely, through the committed and energetic cultivation of Stalin’s favour and of his own indispensability. Unlike Stalin, Beria was not a life-long devotee of the Bolshevik cause. He did not give over his teenage years to fighting for the establishment of Bolshevik power in the Caucasus region. Indeed, he began his career in the 1910s working in state security not for the Bolsheviks but for the Mussavat government, which was opposing the Bolsheviks in Baku. He joined the Bolsheviks only following the Red Army’s capture of Baku on 28 April 1920, when he managed to avoid arrest to become an agent of their secret police organisation, the Cheka. Nevertheless, upon joining the Cheka, Beria rose quickly through the ranks. By 1926 he headed the Georgian successor to the Cheka, the OGPU, and he was in charge of both Georgian and Transcaucasian secret police organisations by spring 1931.³⁷⁰

Beria’s extraordinary ascent to these positions was not the result simply of exceptional good fortune or talent (though the ruthlessness he demonstrated in his work for the secret police certainly recommended him to Stalin). Instead, his acquisition of power was aided by a personal relationship with Stalin that went far beyond Stalin’s appreciation of Beria’s voracity in eliminating sources of possible counterrevolution and suppressing voices of nationalist dissent. Beria expended great effort in cultivating this relationship throughout the 1920s, recommending himself to Stalin as a devoted advisor and even, at certain times, bodyguard.³⁷¹ His closeness to Stalin allowed him to bypass his competitors and superiors in the secret police by enabling him to convince Stalin to distrust them and promote him in their place. It was the foundation of Beria’s success in the secret police.

In the 1930s, Stalin’s patronage continued to be vital to Beria’s success and survival. It facilitated his ascent to power, first as Georgian and then also as Transcaucasian Party Secretary in the early 1930s, and allowed him to retain that power until his further promotion as the head of the NKVD (the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs or Soviet secret police) in Moscow in 1938. In this period, one of the primary ways in which he reaffirmed his loyalty and worth to Stalin was through his contribution to the development of the leader’s Cult of Personality. It was in this endeavour that Beria’s activities most greatly

³⁷⁰ After joining the Cheka in Baku, Beria became involved in the Bolshevik revolts taking place in Menshevik controlled Georgia. By 1922 he was deputy head of the Georgian branch of the Cheka’s successor, the OGPU. He led the brutal suppression of the Georgian nationalist uprising in 1924, after which his ruthlessness in dealing with the Georgian situation led to his appointment as head of the secret police division of the Transcaucasian branch of the OGPU. Through skilled manoeuvring, he then succeeded in ousting each of his superiors in the Georgian OGPU to become its head in 1926, at the age of just 27. In April 1931 he also succeeded in persuading Stalin to make him head of the Transcaucasian OGPU, in place of Stanislav Redens. He then headed both the Georgian and Transcaucasian organisations simultaneously.

³⁷¹ Knight, *Beria: Stalin’s First lieutenant*, p. 45.

affected Georgian artists. Beria's contributions to the cult were so grandiose that they co-opted all sections of Georgia's literary and artistic intelligentsia (including actors, musicians, dancers and other performers), as well as historians, archivists, veterans of the Civil War and members of the public. Under Beria's direction, the production of the cult came to occupy the overwhelming majority of these communities' time and professional activity. It was to be their first priority, and compliance in this regard was ensured through close and constant supervision.

Maximising Georgia's cultural resources, Beria sponsored a wide variety of major contributions to the cult in Georgia. He presided over the establishment of Stalin's birthplace museum, which opened in Gori in 1935. Then, in the second half of the 1930s, he commissioned and supervised Georgian writers in the publication of several volumes of poems and reminiscences in Stalin's praise. And in the late 1930s and 1940s he oversaw a series of biographical films about the leader from Mikhail Romm and Dmitry Vasilev's *Lenin in October* (1937) to Mikheil Chiaureli's *The Great Dawn* (1938) and later *The Vow* (1946) and *The Fall of Berlin* (1949).³⁷² Arguably his greatest contribution to the cult, however—and certainly that which had the greatest direct impact of Georgian painters—was his text, published in 1935, *On the History of Bolshevik Organisations in Transcaucasia*. The manuscript, which re-wrote the history of the revolutionary period in the Caucasus to exaggerate Stalin's role in bringing about the Bolshevik victory, immediately became a central text of the Stalin cult. It was first presented by Beria in a two-day-long lecture read at a meeting of the Transcaucasian Party organisation in July 1935 and was immediately serialised in *Zaria vostoka* and *Pravda* and published as a slim, stand-alone volume. It was

³⁷² The Museum of Stalin's Birthplace opened in Stalin's hometown of Gori in 1935 at Beria's behest. It became a site of pilgrimage for thousands of workers from all over the Soviet Union in the late 1930s. The same year a collection of supposedly spontaneous reminiscences of workers who remembered Stalin from his activities in the revolutionary period were published in *Zaria vostoka* on Beria's instruction, before being published as a book in several collected editions. They appeared in 1935 and 1936 as *Velikii vozhd i ichitel: rasskazy starykh rabochikh o rabote t. Stalina v Zakavkazi* (Tbilisi: ZKK VKP, 1936), reissued as a luxury edition in Tbilisi in 1937 and published in Moscow as *Rasskazy starykh rabochykh Zakavkazia o velikom vozhde* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1937). Another volume, *Georgian Verses and Songs about Stalin*, published in Tbilisi in 1937, was the product of an instruction to the Georgian Writers' Union obliging every Georgian writer to contribute. See N. Mitsishvili et al., *Gruzinskie stikhi i pesni o Staline* (Tbilisi: Zaria vostoka, 1937). Beria also carefully supported Georgian filmmaker Mikheil Chiaureli in making many of the most important films of the Stalin cult in the late 1920s and 1930s. Judith Devlin, 'Beria and the Development of the Stalin Cult' in Geoffrey Roberts (ed.), *Annual of the Irish Association for Russian and East European Studies* (special edition: 'Stalin: His Time and Ours'), 1, 2005, pp. 26-48 (pp. 35-36 and 39). It has also been suggested that he coordinated the collection of material for the publication of Stalin's *Collected Works* in the late 1930s. Bertram Wolfe, *Three who made a Revolution: A Biographical History* (London: Penguin, 1966), pp. 512, cited in Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant*, pp. 55-57 and Devlin, 'Beria and the Development of the Stalin Cult,' p. 33.

printed and distributed in several large editions and translated into dozens of languages for consumption inside and outside of the Soviet Union.

As Beria later admitted, the text was actually ghost written by a team of historians under his supervision, despite being presented as his own work at the time of publication. It was the first product of a larger initiative for the production of the cult, which began with Beria's establishment of what was initially known as the Stalin Institute, but which from 1934 was rebranded as the Tbilisi branch of the Institute of Marx-Engels-Lenin, IMEL. The Institute, which was established in February 1932, employed a staff who were tasked with researching—or rather inventing or embellishing—an official history of the Bolshevik movement in Transcaucasia, and of Stalin's personal career and achievements there.³⁷³ It was a major operation, to which significant resources were dedicated. According to one source, by autumn 1934 as many as 47 historians and archivists were employed full-time at the Institute, of whom many were dedicated specifically to producing Beria's *On The History*.³⁷⁴

On the History was significant for Georgian artists because it would become the focus of their activities in the 1930s. The text, though a sizeable project demanding considerable resources in its own right, was just a first stage in a more ambitious endeavour. It was only the raw material, the bare narrative for the Party's official version of Stalin's role in the history of Bolshevik organisations in the region. As other scholars have shown, in Stalinism, ideology was not simply theorised and history not simply written. It had to be assimilated by its target audience as representing their reality. And this was accomplished using culture. Cultural production visualised the reality constructed by the regime and brought it into material existence. For this reason, Soviet reality, and history, could not exist without it. Socialist realism not only depicted Soviet reality (and Soviet historical reality), but created it.³⁷⁵ For Beria's text to be absorbed and assimilated as fact by ordinary Soviet people, for its narrative to become their historical reality, it needed to be translated into and disseminated through the appropriate media.

In general, the appropriate medium for the production of reality in Stalin's Soviet Union was in the maximal synthesis of all available media. Socialist realism co-opted all

³⁷³ David Brandenberger, 'Stalin as Symbol: a case study of the personality cult and its construction' in Sarah Davies and James Harris, eds, *Stalin: A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 249-70 (p. 256-57). Beria was not without competitors in his efforts to produce a biography of the Soviet leader, but he succeeded where others failed. See Brandenberger, 'Stalin as Symbol.'

³⁷⁴ In a bitter letter to Orakhelishvili in September 1934, one of Beria's competitors in the production of Stalin's biography, Ivan Tovstukha, gave the number of people engaged in research at the Tiflis Institute as 47. See Miklos Kun, *Stalin: An Unknown Portrait* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), p. 52.

³⁷⁵ See 'Chapter 1: Socialism as Will and Representation' in Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, pp. 1-74.

media in broadcasting the Party's vision of Soviet life (and Soviet history) to the Soviet people in order to saturate cultural life and thereby displace the people's lived experiences with that vision.³⁷⁶ The mass media together with painting, sculpture, architecture, cinema, theatre and music all presented and reaffirmed the same vision until that vision was assimilated as reality. Nevertheless, individual aspects of Party ideology, including initiatives contributing to Stalin's personality cult, relied more heavily on some media than others.

In the case of Beria's text, many media were involved in translating its content into reality. Endless poems, novels and 'artistic biographies' penned by Georgian writers throughout the 1930s repeated the narrative of Beria's text as well as its rendering of Stalin's excellent character.³⁷⁷ However, all of the media employed were organised around a single central focal point—the Exhibition of Painting, Sculpture and Graphics of the Georgian SSR that opened at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow in November 1937. More precisely, they were focused around a single section of that exhibition (occupying four halls out of a total of eight). This section was titled 'On The History of Bolshevik Organisations in Transcaucasia' after Beria's text and comprised as a series of large narrative history paintings relating episodes from Beria's history. This display provided a centrepiece around which other media pivoted. Guided tours, press coverage in newspapers, journals and stand alone publications (catalogues, albums, commemorative books), as well as radio programming and public lectures were all called on to repeat, embellish and distribute—and thereby to make material—the ideology presented in Beria's text and visualised in Georgian artists' paintings.

Beria and The Arts in Georgia

Beria's interactions with Georgia's painters (like the activities of Georgian painters in general) are much less well documented than are his dealings with other sectors of Georgia's artistic intelligentsia.³⁷⁸ Georgian and Anglophone scholars have preferred to focus attention on Soviet writers more often than Soviet painters, while Soviet scholars could never have the distance or freedoms necessary to explore Beria's interventions in the arts with any

³⁷⁶ As I discuss in chapter one, there were limits to the totalising purview of socialist realist culture. The Party's vision of Soviet reality was not invented by Party leaders without the involvement of intellectuals and those in the cultural sphere. The statement above is therefore a characterisation of how socialist realist culture was intended to operate in theory, not of its absolute achievement of these goals in practice.

³⁷⁷ Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia*, p. 267.

³⁷⁸ For an account of Beria's dealings with Georgian writers, see Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia* and Donald Rayfield, 'The Death of Paolo Iashvili,' *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 68:4 (1990), pp. 631-64.

seriousness or critical perspective. As such, only one scholar has given more than passing attention to the Georgian exhibition in Moscow in 1937. Judith Devlin's article on Beria's contributions to the Stalin cult devotes several pages to the exhibition and its organisation. It is extremely valuable in gathering together the basic details of the exhibition, and assesses some evidence of the official Party response to the exhibition in Moscow.³⁷⁹ However, Devlin's analysis of the exhibition is limited by both the length of the piece and the primary evidence on which it relies. Devlin characterises the exhibition as an unparalleled success, pointing to a range of evidence in support of this conclusion. She highlights the existence of a copy of the elaborate three-volume celebratory album of reproductions from the exhibition in Stalin's personal archive as a confirmation of the leader's approval.³⁸⁰ Praise for the exhibition expressed by Moscow artists and by the Tretyakov Gallery's Party Secretary is held up as further evidence of success, as is the exhibition's effectiveness, as perceived by Devlin, in launching the careers of Georgian artists.³⁸¹

However, these conclusions are based primarily on records from the Tretyakov Gallery's archives and on material from the Moscow press. They do not take into account more complicated realities that Georgian sources reveal. Planning documents and transcripts of meetings of the Georgian Artists' Union between 1934 and 1938 expose a more detailed picture of the negotiations that went on behind the scenes in bringing the exhibition to fruition. In doing so they contribute to a more ambivalent impression concerning the success of the exhibition and its impact on Georgian artists. They provide the means through which to broach questions that have yet to be given the proper attention. For example, why did Beria draw only on Georgian artists in the production of the exhibition when he might also have co-opted artists from the other Caucasian republics? Why did other republics not attempt exhibitions comparable to the Georgian one? And what did the Georgian exhibition signify when considered in terms of Soviet national politics? What did the production of the exhibition and the finished result, including the vast coverage it received in the press and other media, express with regard to Georgia's place in the Soviet hierarchy of nationalities? How did it embody or reflect Georgia's relationship with Stalin and Soviet power? What were the consequences of Beria's interventions in Georgian artists' activities when

³⁷⁹ See Devlin, 'Beria and the Development of the Stalin Cult,' pp. 37-39.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 38. Jan Plamper notes that in the 1920s and 30s Stalin only visited the 1929 AKhR exhibition and possibly the 1933 exhibition dedicated to the fifteenth anniversary of the Red Army. Jan Plamper, 'Georgian Koba or Soviet "Father of the Peoples"? The Stalin Cult and Ethnicity' in Balázs Apór *et al.*, *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships: Stalin and the Eastern Bloc* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 123-40 (p. 129).

³⁸¹ Devlin, 'Beria and the Development of the Stalin Cult,' pp. 38-39.

considered with respect to the principles of ‘national form’ and ‘socialist content’ that were meant to govern socialist realist cultural production?

A more detailed look at the exhibition, drawing evidence from the archives of the institutions responsible for its realisation, including the Georgian Artists’ Union and the Tretyakov Gallery, makes clear that Beria’s project had several interrelated but distinct objectives. It was responding to a demand not for just any contribution to the Stalin cult, but for one responding to priorities that were continually evolving, and to shifting relationships between Georgia and Moscow, between Georgia and Stalin and between Stalin and Beria.

Producing the 1937 exhibition

Officially, Georgian painters were involved in the project from early in 1934, almost eighteen months before Beria’s *On the History* was presented to the public. A decree was issued by the Central Commission of Narkompros in Georgia on 3 February 1934 setting out details of a future exhibition of Georgian painting in Moscow and delineating what needed to be done. By that time, however, work had already begun on preparing works for the show and designating responsibility for its realisation. A commission had been set up for the purpose of organising the exhibition.³⁸² As chairman and deputy chairman of the Georgian Artists’ Union, Duduchava and Mirzoev were put in charge of organising Georgian artists in the production of work to be shown.³⁸³ They were charged with developing a thematic plan for the exhibition, creating a concrete plan for the production of works, and communicating the plan to the remaining membership of the Artists’ Union. Each was required to speak at a special meeting of the Union, to explain to artists the themes and objectives of the exhibition and the arrangements for producing works and receiving payment. Then, once work was underway, they, and a commission under their leadership, were to provide artists with consultation ‘on ideological-creative questions.’³⁸⁴ The Narkompros decree set out the basic expectations for the exhibition. It specified that it would be large: 350 works (250 paintings, 50 sculptures and 50 graphic works) would be needed. 60 existing works, it noted, had already been accepted for the exhibition, and a further 25 would be acceptable following a

³⁸² NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 43, l. 44.

³⁸³ Ibid., l. 43.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., l. 43.

degree of re-working. This left a deficit of 265. With a view to producing the required works it named 89 Georgian artists who were to be sent on research fieldtrips around Georgia.³⁸⁵

Notably, the February 1934 decree did not make Beria's history the central focus of preparations for the exhibition. Instead, it detailed two tranches of fieldtrips to be planned for winter-spring and summer periods for the production of works on broader themes, from industry, defense, culture and education to agriculture, tourism and construction. Specific fieldtrips for the preparation of works related to Beria's history went unmentioned. Perhaps this was because Beria's text was yet to be finalised, or perhaps it was felt Georgian artists should develop their skill in producing other works for the wider exhibition before focusing on the more important and complex historical paintings required to illustrate Beria's history. It might have been that the works relating to Beria's text were to be researched as part of other trips (many of the locations of key episodes from Beria's text took place in what, in 1934, were important centres of industry, agriculture and trade, and so the destinations for fieldtrips on those themes). Or perhaps the greater quantity of works required on the broader themes of socialist construction, compared with the smaller number of more complex works required for the section of the exhibition illustrating Beria's text, dictated the way the fieldtrips were organised: in the final exhibition, Beria's *On the History* display constituted only 65 of the 300 works making up the exhibition as a whole.

Whichever the case, the February 1934 Narkompros decree and other planning documents did, however, make clear the special import of paintings pertaining to Beria's text. The decree, for example, mentioned a special 'bonus fund' that would be allocated for works on the subject of Stalin's role in the revolutionary movement in Transcaucasia, reflecting the theme's special importance.³⁸⁶ A draft thematic plan for the exhibition listed 'Stalin's role in the revolutionary movement in Transcaucasia' as the subject of the first of five talks to be given at the first plenum of the Artists' Union and as the first of four thematic divisions in the exhibition (the others being socialist construction, cultural construction, and military defence in Georgia).³⁸⁷

By the summer of 1934, a significant collection of works depicting episodes from Beria's text had been produced, of which many were shown as part of the exhibition, *Soviet Visual Art of Georgia for 13 Years*, which opened at the Georgian National Picture Gallery in Tiflis in May 1934. The exhibition, which was the first of its size to be produced since the

³⁸⁵ Ibid., ll. 40-1.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., l. 43.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., l. 32.

establishment of the Georgian Artists' Union the previous year, was presented as a retrospective account of Georgian painting since 1921 (although in reality few if any works exhibited predated the Cultural Revolution).³⁸⁸ The majority treated staple themes of the First Five-Year Plan—collective farms, kulaks, tea plantations and Georgia's two new hydroelectric power stations, ZAGES and RIONGES. Several, however, were dedicated to the Revolutionary and Civil War era, and, in particular, to Stalin's activities in Transcaucasia. Some even depicted episodes that would appear in Beria's text the following year, and many were early iterations of canvases ultimately shown in the Moscow exhibition in 1937.³⁸⁹

At the time of the 1934 exhibition's opening, it is clear that Beria's project had yet to consume Georgian artists' attention in the way that it would between 1935 and 1937. During a public debate hosted by the Artists' Union in connection with the exhibition, several works on what came to be referred to as 'the Stalin theme' (meaning works illustrating Beria's history of Stalin's activities in Transcaucasia) were discussed. However, they were evaluated only in terms of their general merit. There was no specific discussion of Beria's history, or of any systematic project to create a body of paintings illustrating his text. Some time between then and the spring of 1935, however, work on Beria's project began to crystallise. At some stage in 1934 Beria held a first official meeting with Georgian artists and representatives from the Stalin Institute to discuss the production of works depicting episodes from his text. This meeting appears to have been the stimulus for an acceleration of work on the Stalin theme.³⁹⁰ Several artists, speaking following a second meeting in April 1935, described how the two gatherings transformed their working practice so that they were focused fully on producing works on that theme.³⁹¹ Around this time, on 4-6 April 1935, the First Plenum of the Georgian Artists' Union was held in Tiflis.³⁹² Unlike at the debate held in connection with the 1934 exhibition, at the plenum Beria's project was the central point of discussion. It was the first general meeting of the Georgian Artists' Union since the Union's establishment,

³⁸⁸ See NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 35, and Al. P. 'Khudozhniki Gruzii za 13 let,' *Zaria vostoka*, 6 May 1934, p. 4.

³⁸⁹ Mose Toidze's *Stalin at Tskhaltubo* and *The Speech of Comrade Stalin at the Funeral of S. Tsulukidze* and Apollon Kutateladze's *The Shooting of a Bolshevik Demonstration at the Aleksandrovsky Palace* were early incarnations of works that would appear in the 1937 exhibition. Other works on the Stalin theme in the 1934 exhibition included V. A. Krotkov, *Comrade Stalin: Leader of the Chiaturi Uprising* and *From the Revolutionary History of Comrade Stalin*; E. I. Berdzenishvili, *The Illegal Work of Comrades Stalin, Enukidze and Ketskhoveli*, Kh. Giorgadze, *The House in Gori Where Stalin was Born and Lived*. See *Sakartvelos sabchota sakhviti khelovnebis tsameti (13) tseli - katalogi: Sovetskoe izoiskusstvo Gruzii za trinadtsat (13) let - katalog (ex. cat.)* (Soiuz sovetkikh khudozhnikov Gruzii, Tiflis, 1934).

³⁹⁰ Mose Toidze noted the transformation that had taken place in his work following this first meeting with Beria. 'Tov. L. P. Beria u khudozhnikov,' *Na rubezhe vostoka*, 20 April, 1935, p. 1.

³⁹¹ It is not clear exactly which artists attended the first meeting. A select group, including Toidze, Mirzoev, Krotkov, Kutateladze, and Tavadze attended the second. See 'Tov. L. P. Beria u khudozhnikov.'

³⁹² For the full transcript of the plenum, see NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 54.

and since introduction of socialist realism the previous year. Yet far more attention was paid to Georgian artists' new responsibility for producing work on the Stalin theme than to the more general theoretical formulation of socialist realism. Duduchava, as the newly elected chairman of the Union, gave the plenum's opening address.³⁹³ He offered brief discussion of the theoretical bases of socialist realism and its meaning for Soviet artists. However, the emphasis of his report made it clear that Beria's project would now define Georgian artists activities.³⁹⁴ Artists were not formally or explicitly obliged to take on the Stalin theme. However, the great honour and responsibility attached to the task was impressed upon them, as were the material advantages of doing so. The Stalin theme, it was stressed, was given to Georgian artists not as a directive, but as an honour and privilege.³⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Duduchava also referred to it as a 'political and artistic examination,' making clear that Georgian artists would be judged (both individually and collectively) according to their contribution to Beria's project. His entreaty to artists to 'think deeply about how they will depict the life and work of our great leader,' moreover, sounded like a warning.³⁹⁶ By the middle of 1935 it appears to have been clear to all that working on the Stalin theme was advisable, if not obligatory. Almost all practising Georgian artists—notable exceptions including Kakabadze and Gudiashvili—produced works for the exhibition, or for Beria's section of the exhibition.³⁹⁷ As demonstrated by the chorus of gratitude that poured from artists during the meeting and in the press for the honour of being allowed to take on the Stalin theme in their work, artists were either genuinely inspired to produce works illustrating Beria's history or knew that it was advisable to appear to be.

If fear of the negative consequences of failing to fulfil Beria's demands was the stick driving Georgian artists to take up the Stalin theme, it was accompanied with a myriad of

³⁹³ Yakob, Nikoladze, who chaired the meeting, spoke before Duduchava, but only briefly. *Ibid.*, ll. 1-46.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 7-46.

³⁹⁵ This sentiment was repeated by both Duduchava and Bukhnikashvili (the rector of the Academy of Arts in 1932-36 and head of the art history section of the Artists' Union). *Ibid.*, ll. 40 and 78.

³⁹⁶ 'Должны [...] глубоко продумать, как они изобразят жизнь и деятельность нашего великого вождя.' *Ibid.*, l. 46.

³⁹⁷ Although Kakabadze was not included in the exhibition, he was compelled to begin painting again following six years of working in other spheres after his return to Georgia in 1927, producing works on industrial themes including the construction of RIONGES, a new hydroelectric powerstation, in 1933-34. He was also included in lists of artists to be sent on fieldtrips to prepare works for the exhibition and was made part a commission representing the cultural-propaganda division of the Georgian Communist Party's Central Committee for the organisation of the 1937 exhibition. NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 43, ll. 40 and 45. Gudiashvili was even more closely involved in the exhibition's organisation. He was on the same commission as Kakabadze but was also made responsible for the exhibition's 'artistic formulation,' although he does not appear to have produced works on the Stalin theme. Instead, he retained favour through a combination of pronouncements of his admiration for Beria and Stalin, cooperation in administrative and official roles (he was among the delegation of art workers received at the Kremlin in January 1937).

carrots. The most obvious of these was the opportunity for paid work. Closing his remarks at the 1935 plenum, Duduchava directed those ready to take up work on the Stalin theme to report at the Stalin Institute the following day, where they could ‘conclude an agreement’ with the institute and received an advance for their work. Outside of this opportunity, commissions and materials were scarce. In such an environment, it is easy to imagine that the chance to obtain immediate advance payment, apparently without any competition or stipulation regarding experience, would have been an attractive prospect. The amounts paid as advances for commissions and fieldtrips, moreover, were far beyond what Georgian artists could expect for other work. For example, the 1934 Narkompros decree set out that advances would be paid at a rate of 1,500, 1,000, 750 and 500 roubles depending on the status and skill of the artist in question. A further 1,000 roubles were allocated per artist for fieldtrips.³⁹⁸ And this was just the initial remuneration. At a meeting of the Artists’ Union in 1938 artists discussed individual commissions of as much as 9,000 roubles that had been paid for works prepared for the Moscow exhibition.³⁹⁹ The sums paid to Georgian artists for works on the Stalin theme remained lower than those paid to artists in Moscow: in 1937, two parallel competitions launched in Moscow for portraits of Stalin offered 15,000 and 20,000 roubles respectively to the winning painter.⁴⁰⁰ However, those invited to participate in the Moscow competitions were among the Soviet Union’s most experienced artists, and were significantly more skilled than the majority of Georgian painters at that time (some Georgian realist painters, such as Japaridze, acquired comparable skill, but not until the 1950s and 60s). The sums available to Georgian artists for works contributed to Beria’s project were many times greater than those that they were used to competing for. For comparison, the majority of the works acquired by Narkompros from the 1930 SARMA exhibition were valued at between 100 and 200 roubles.⁴⁰¹ For those tasked with coordinating the exhibition’s organisation, the exhibition had the potential to be even more lucrative. Mirzoev, for example, was paid 160,000 roubles for in a single year—a sum so vast relative to Georgian artists’ usual remuneration that he donated a quarter of it to the Georgian Artists’ Union’s ceramics factory in an attempt to justify the figure.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁸ NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 43, l. 42.

³⁹⁹ These figures were quoted by artists during a meeting of the Georgian Artists’ Union in 1938. See NAG f. 10, op. .1, ed. khr. 100, ll. 195 and 136. In 1938 canvases produced for the exhibition and acquired by the Georgian National Picture Gallery were valued by the gallery at figures ranging from a few hundred roubles to around 5,000 roubles. NAG f. 10, op. .1, ed. khr.144, ll. 1-13.

⁴⁰⁰ Jan Plamper, *The Stalin Cult: A Study in the Alchemy of Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 172-74.

⁴⁰¹ NAG f. 10, op. .1, ed. khr. 13, l. 126.

⁴⁰² NAG f. 10, op. .1, ed. khr. 100, l. 100.

In addition to the monetary rewards available, Beria's project was attractive as an opportunity to exhibit in Moscow, to gain recognition and access to further opportunities in the Soviet capital. Other material benefits were also promised to artists working on Beria's project. Those artists working on the project, it was promised, were to be prioritised in the allocation of apartments, studios and materials.⁴⁰³ Although some evidence suggests that not all such promises were fulfilled, many benefitted from the provision of additional workspace. In 1935 the Georgian National Gallery was even closed for this purpose. It was temporarily transformed into communal studios for artists working on the Stalin theme.⁴⁰⁴

Beria made a series of gestures aimed at demonstrating his personal concern and appreciation for Georgian artists. For example, he gave over the city's former Persian consulate building to be made into a 'house of artists', where members of Georgia's artistic intelligentsia would be able to go to meet, work and socialise.⁴⁰⁵ Artists contributing to Beria's project were celebrated in the local press. In autumn 1935 a double-page spread in *Sabchota khelovneba* presented the passport-style photographs of artists who had taken up commissions on the Stalin theme under a heading reading 'Artists working on the theme of "How the Leader Evolved"' (figure 12).⁴⁰⁶ There was no accompanying article about individual artists or works. It was simply a roll call of the artists that had pledged their involvement in the project. Artists were honoured just for committing to take part. Reports on their progress, interviews and reproductions of their works followed in subsequent issues.⁴⁰⁷

The Georgian exhibition as a Stalinist *Gesamtkunstwerk*

The four halls of the exhibition dedicated to Beria's text were only one part of a larger exhibition. Four further halls presented contemporary and pre-Soviet Georgian paintings, sculpture and works on paper. Portraits of Stalin and scenes from his life also hung in these rooms, but the display here was distinct and separate from the more cohesive scheme of the

⁴⁰³ Artists took every opportunity to praise Beria publically for improving their living and working conditions. See, for example: L. Gudiashvili, 'Ovladet' Metodom Sotsialisticheskogo Realizma.' *Na rubezhe vostoka*, 1 May 1935, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁴ Vl. A. Keshelava, 'Khudozhniki sovetsoi Gruzii - k predstoiashchei vystavke gruzinskogo iskusstva,' *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, 11 November 1937, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁵ NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 54, l. 202.

⁴⁰⁶ 'Mkhatvrebi romlebits mushaoben temaz: "rogor qaligdeboda gelada,' *Sabchota khelovneba*, 5, 1935, [n. p.]

⁴⁰⁷ Reproductions of Mose Toidze's *Stalin talking with peasants in Tskhaltubo* and Irakli Toidze's *Comrade Stalin at RIONGES* appeared in *Sabchota khelovneba*, 1-2, 1936, n. p.

Beria section. Portraits were hung alongside literary illustrations and works presenting contemporary life, industry and agriculture in Soviet Georgia.⁴⁰⁸

The Beria display was the real focus of the exhibition. It occupied almost the entirety of the overall attention given to the exhibition in the press.⁴⁰⁹ Works reproduced in the printed volumes accompanying the exhibition—the catalogue and an additional album appearing in 1938—came almost exclusively from its halls.⁴¹⁰ At the most basic level, the display's primary objective was the same as that of all Stalinist culture: it was designed to make material the reality that the Party declared to be real. In its specific case, it was to make material the history and the image of Stalin that Beria's text presented. The methods and media used to accomplish these goals, however, shed light on the breadth and complexity of Beria's goals in producing it, on its implications for Georgian artists' careers and its role as a reflection of Georgia's place in Stalin's Soviet Union.

Beria's display opened by introducing visitors to the main protagonists of his story. The first hall was hung with portraits of revolutionary leaders. Sculptures (full length and busts) of Stalin and a bust of Lenin set the two leaders apart from the rest. From there, visitors progressed through the next three galleries, hung with paintings presenting episodes from Beria's history. These were arranged in chronological order and were accompanied by further busts of Stalin appearing in each hall. The exhibition then concluded with more painted and sculptural portraits, this time of members of the current Politburo, including Stalin, Beria, Orjonikidze, Kaganovich, Kirov and Kuibyshev. Visitors were met with successive episodes of heroism purportedly having taken place in Stalin's dramatic early revolutionary career, framed by portraits of Bolshevik leaders 'then and now'. Works depicting Stalin as the leader of illegal activism in Transcaucasia of the 1890s and 1900s were followed by canvases presenting Stalin's attendance with Lenin at the April Conference (the first open conference of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party) in April 1917. One showed Stalin in 1931, visiting the construction site of RIONGES (the hydro-electric power station built on the Rioni river in North West Georgia between 1928 and 1934) while a final

⁴⁰⁸ For further details concerning the contents of that part of the exhibition, as well as the Beria display, see *Vystavka proizvedenii zhivopisi, grafiki i skulptury gruzinskoi SSR: katalog* (ex. cat.) (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1937).

⁴⁰⁹ E. Melikadze referred to this part of the exhibition as the 'main part' ('основный раздел') in his album dedicated to the exhibition. See E. S. Melikadze, *Iskusstvo gruzinskoi SSR* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1938). It was referred to in the same way repeatedly in the press. See Boris Ioganson, 'Khoroshee nachalo' *Pravda*, 22 December 1937, p. 3 and L. Agonov, 'Vystavka gruzinskogo iskusstva,' *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, 23 November 1937, p. 2.

⁴¹⁰ 36 of the 46 works reproduced in Melikadze's 1938 album dedicated to the exhibition were of works from the Beria display. Similarly, only three of the works reproduced in the exhibition's catalogue were from other halls of the exhibition. In both cases works from the Beria display were list first.

work showed the leader in 1937, welcoming a delegation of happy Soviet Georgian citizens to the Kremlin.

The choice of painting—and specifically of a large-scale exhibition of narrative history painting—as the medium through which to produce the reality woven in Beria’s text was telling. For most of the 1930s oil painting was the master medium of the Stalin cult, the medium through which the key images of Stalin were primarily formulated and gradually canonised.⁴¹¹ By the time of the exhibition’s realisation in 1937, the preferred means for the creation of Stalin’s image had begun to shift from painting to cinema. Films by Chiaureli and others created the images of Stalin that fixed themselves in the minds of Soviet citizens above all others. Stalin (and earlier, Lenin) famously pronounced cinema to be the most important of the arts. It corresponded more fully than any other medium with the concept of the Stalinist *gesamtkunstwerk* due to its ability to synthesise literature, theatres, music and the visual image in a single medium.⁴¹² Cinema communicates through all of these means, acting on all of our senses, to immerse us in its reality. This made it more convincing, compelling and effective for the production of reality than any other medium. Arguably a close second, however, were the Stalinist thematic exhibitions of the late 1930s, and Beria’s Georgian exhibition in particular. Others have discussed the Georgian exhibition as alike and conforming to the format of other major thematic exhibitions of that era. In fact, however, Beria’s exhibition was among the first of its genre.⁴¹³ Most comparable exhibitions took place after it. As such, I would argue, it is important as a model for, rather than a sister to similar exhibitions of the period. This is particularly true in terms of its conception as a total work of art. Unlike other exhibitions, the Georgian exhibition was based around a particular narrative text. It followed a specific and finite period of Stalin’s revolutionary career. For this reason, the Georgian exhibition, more than any other exhibition of the period, exemplified a new genre of thematic biographical-historical exhibition. This had particular advantages for the way the exhibition operated, and for its value as a contribution to the Stalin cult. The biographical-historical narrative that ran through the exhibition tied the individual works in it together more cohesively than in other thematic exhibitions since visitors followed the story of a single character at the centre of the exhibition—Stalin—from the beginning to the end of

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² For discussion of cinema’s synthesis of the arts, see Evgeny Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and The Production of History: Museum of the Revolution* (trans. Sarah Young) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 4.

⁴¹³ Devlin, for example, notes that the subject matter of the Georgian paintings was allocated to artists by higher Party authorities (in this case by Beria, via IMEL) as ‘was customary in the big exhibitions of the late 1930s in Moscow,’ although Beria’s exhibition was among the first of such exhibitions, and likely contributed to the establishment of that custom. Devlin, ‘Beria and the Development of the Stalin Cult,’ p. 37.

the exhibition. Because each work followed on chronologically from the one preceding it, individual canvases were linked by the overarching historical progression that they traced. Passing through the exhibition was like turning the pages of a history book. The narrative progression that they followed transformed individual works showing discrete episodes into a much larger, more impressive, and more effective story.

In this way the exhibition behaved in a similar way to the new wave of biographical-historical film that appeared in Soviet cinema in the 1930s, and would come to dominate in the post-War years. This genre included films in which, as in Beria's display, Stalin was the main protagonist, but also films about historical and even quasi-mythic leaders such as Aleksandr Nevsky. As Dobrenko has argued, whether they followed Stalin's career or those of other historical leaders, they were designed to legitimise the leaders they portrayed. In doing so, by association, they legitimised Stalin's leadership. As such, the 'biographical film is a true machine for the distillation of myth into history and history into myth.'⁴¹⁴ The Stalinist biographical film made fictional leaders into concrete historical figures and mythologised historical figures so that they became allegories of a generalised idea of a legitimate leader. That legitimacy could be transposed onto Stalin through analogy.

The section of the Georgian exhibition dedicated to Beria's text belonged to the same genre. It, like these films, was not strictly biographical, in the sense that it was not concerned with personal or spiritual aspects of Stalin's experience as a person. Instead, the Stalin in Beria's text—and so, in the exhibition—is the generalised embodiment of qualities and relationships that legitimised his leadership. The exhibition then made this mythologised, part-fictional Stalin real by not only disseminating and visualizing the messages of Beria's text, but by saturating the public's consciousness with those messages through continual repetition both inside the exhibition itself and in the publicity surrounding it.

The exhibition was also similar to these films—and to cinema in general—in its synthesis of media, and the resulting way in which visitors experienced it. For example, a series of measures were designed to make visitors' experience of the exhibition as immersive and interactive as possible. Some of these measures related to the display itself—the scale, arrangement and composition of the works shown. All of the works in the Beria display were large, many in excess of six square metres. They filled the field of vision of those standing before them. In doing so they were better able to immerse visitors in the reality that they presented. Yet it was not only through the works' scale that visitors were drawn into the

⁴¹⁴ Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and The Production of History*, p. 67.

action in the scenes presented. Of the works that survive for us to examine, either in original or in reproduction (and this is the vast majority since large numbers of works from this section of the exhibition were widely reproduced at the time), all share striking compositional commonalities.⁴¹⁵ As in almost all Stalin cult images, Stalin, unsurprisingly, is the focal point of every composition, usually occupying a space at the very centre of the composition. Almost without exception, he is delivering a speech, either to a large crowd of workers or peasants or to a close circle of fellow revolutionaries. All faces are turned towards him, listening attentively to their leader and mentor. More notable in terms of the viewer's experience though, is that in almost every case the viewer finds him or herself at eye-level with the figures in the scene, standing shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the crowd. The frequent inclusion of figures standing and sitting with their backs to the viewer in the foreground of these canvases added to the sense that the viewer was standing among them, listening to Stalin in person.

This compositional conceit is commonplace in Stalin cult images of the 1930s. However, it is striking to find it employed in every single one of the surviving canvases from Beria's display. In K. Gzelsivhili's *Stalin in his Young Years* (figure 13), an adolescent Stalin even makes direct eye contact with the viewer looking in, as if inviting us to join in his conversation. In Japaridze's *Comrade Stalin, L. Ketskhoveli, and A. Tsulukidze* (figure 14), each of the three men faces out towards the viewer, as if acknowledging the viewer's presence. An empty seat pulled out at the nearside of the table around which they are gathered invites us to join them.⁴¹⁶ Similarly, in Irakli Toidze's *Comrade Stalin at RIONGES (1931)* (figure 15), Stalin is shown talking with peasants in front of the construction site of the new power station. One peasant gestures behind himself and appears to be directing Stalin's attention towards the viewer. The others look out at us with warm, familiar smiles. The implication appears to be that we, the viewer, are their friend and colleague. Faced with Toidze's canvas, we are not only standing among Stalin's immediate audience: we are being invited to step forward to greet the benevolent-looking leader and receive his gratitude for our contributions to the construction of socialism.

⁴¹⁵ The vast majority of the works presented in the Beria display can be found in either Melikadze's, *Iskusstvo gruzinskoi SSR* or the exhibition's catalogue.

⁴¹⁶ The same devices appear in I. Vepkhvadze's *Comrade Stalin Gives a Speech at the Funeral of A. Tsulukidze (1905)* (figure 17), Vepkhvadze's *Comrade Stalin with his Comrades in Arms*, Valerian Sidamon-Eristavi's *Comrade Stalin at the Demonstration of Baku Oil Workers (1908)*, Apollon Kutateladze's *Conversation of Comrade Stalin with Achar Peasants (1902)*, V. Krotkov's *Georgian Delegation at a Reception at the Kremlin (1937)* and S. Nadereishvili's *Comrade Stalin unmasks Mensheviks at a Demonstration in Chiaturi (1905)*. (If not stated, dates unknown, although all c. 1934-37)

It is obvious from the consistency with which this device was employed that individual artists did not elect to use it spontaneously. Instead, they were clearly encouraged to do so. Indeed, we know that artists were closely supervised in their work for the exhibition. From the earliest stages of production commissions were initially agreed in consultation with the team of historians responsible for producing Beria's history at IMEL. The degree of detail included in the guidance given to artists at this stage is unclear, but it is possible that it included instructions on composition. Once preliminary sketches had been completed, they were then presented to Beria and the IMEL researchers in private viewings. Artists were given feedback on all details of their work.⁴¹⁷ The scale of the works in the exhibition was undoubtedly also prescribed. In interviews in the press and during meetings of the Artists' Union several artists commented that they were instructed to make their works bigger, or cited the required size of the works as the source of challenges to completing them.⁴¹⁸

Long, minutely scripted guided tours, conducted in large groups as well as in more intimate parties of 3-5 visitors, made the experience still more immersive. They were a huge component of the exhibition, as vital as the paintings hanging in it.⁴¹⁹ They lasted between one and a half and two hours and followed a prescribed route around the exhibition, pausing over particular works. Guides then introduced the works and explained their narrative and significance based on pre-prepared information. The length and number of the tours conducted, as well as the number of guides employed and the extensiveness of their training, confirm the importance attached to them by the organisers. Planning documents, for example, tell us that as many as 60-70 guides were employed for the Georgian exhibition alone, plus a further 10 'instructors' whose specific role is not detailed but who may have been responsible for training the other guides.⁴²⁰ Their training included as many as 12 lectures, 10 excursions and 190 hours of seminars, and thousands of tours were given. One guide

⁴¹⁷ Several Georgian artists are quoted in the press describing Beria's feedback and instructions for the improvement of their works, including Apollon Kutateladze, who noted that Beria's feedback on one of his sketches included 'detailed analysis of the whole composition of my sketch.' See 'Tov. L. P. Beria u khudozhnikov.'

⁴¹⁸ Speaking in 1935, Duduchava noted, for example, that Krotkov had already re-painted one of his works on the Stalin theme on a larger scale in response to instructions given by Apollon Kutateladze, (who was then a member of the presidium of the Artists' Union's and one of the first to begin working on the Stalin theme). NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 54, l. 107. In 1937, just before the Georgian exhibition opened in Moscow, painter and secretary of the Georgian Artists' Union Vladimir Keshelava noted that many Georgian artists had never painted such large-scale works as those commissioned for Beria's exhibition. The task of re-working initial sketches, he wrote, occupied Georgian artists for a full year. Vl. A. Keshelava, 'Khudozhniki sovetskoi Gruzii.'

⁴¹⁹ State Tretyakov Gallery, Manuscript Department (hereafter, GTG), f. 8, op. 3, ed. khr. 641, l. 1. See also 'Na vystavke gruzinskogo iskusstva,' *Izvestiia*, 21 November 1937, p. 4.

⁴²⁰ GTG, f. 8, op. 3, ed. khr. 144, l. 66.

counted 838 excursions conducted in the first five weeks of the exhibition opening.⁴²¹ Long daily opening hours, from 10am until 9pm, allowed them to fit them all in.

The instructions and scripts given to the guides are preserved in the archives of the Tretyakov Gallery. Thanks to their degree of detail and frankness as internal planning documents (as opposed to publicity materials), they reveal the political objectives of the exhibition more clearly (and more reliably) than any other document of the exhibition. The instructions given to guides began by listing the tours' dual objectives. The first was 'to make concrete the knowledge of the viewer about the life and revolutionary work of comrade Stalin, about the history of the Party [and] the revolutionary struggle of the Bolshevik organisations in Transcaucasia in connection with the general revolutionary struggle in Russia.'⁴²² A primary goal of the tours was to solidify Beria's history in the minds of the exhibition's visitors. A second objective was then to 'demonstrate the growth of the culture and art of the Georgian nation, on the basis of the brotherhood of the peoples of the Soviet Union, facilitated by Leninist-Stalinist politics in the national question.'⁴²³

As the content of the scripts demonstrates, the order in which these objectives were listed reflected their relative import in the eyes of the exhibition's organisers. The exhibition was a demonstration of the achievements of Georgian artists; acknowledging this aspect of it had several advantages. It satisfied Georgian artists' desire for recognition and encouraged them to seek to develop their skill. It appeased Georgians' national pride by singling Georgia out for a unique honour and by giving Georgian artists opportunities in Moscow that were denied to those of other nationalities. At the same time, a grand display of Georgian artists' progress and success was valuable to the Party leadership as it could be presented as evidence of correct nationalities policy. Yet both of these advantages were secondary considerations. The primary objective was in communicating the content of Beria's text, of embedding Beria's fictionalised biography of Stalin as fact in the minds of the exhibition's visitors. The description of the exhibition offered in the concluding section of each tour as 'a first attempt to give the people of the USSR a biography of the beloved leader in works of art,' gave the fundamental truth of what the exhibition was.⁴²⁴ It was, first and foremost, biography, made material—made real—in art. It was valuable as evidence of the correctness of Leninist-

⁴²¹ 'Vystavka iskusstva gruzinskoï SSR,' *Pravda*, 22 December 1937, p. 3.

⁴²² 'Конкретизировать знания зрителей о жизни и революционной борьбе большевистских организаций в Закавказье в связи с общей революционной борьбы в России.' GTG f. 8, op. 3, ed. khg. 641, l. 1.

⁴²³ 'Показать рост культуры и искусства грузинского народа на основе братства народов Советского Союза, обеспеченный Ленинско-Сталинской политикой в национальном вопросе.' *Ibid.*, l. 1.

⁴²⁴ 'первая попытка дать народом СССР биографию любимого вождя в произведениях искусства.' *Ibid.*, l. 42.

Stalinist nationalities policy. However, the greater priority was in presenting Beria's account of Stalin's leading role in the revolutionary struggle in Transcaucasia and, in doing so, maintaining and embellishing Stalin's legitimacy as leader.

Several aspects of the content, style and structure of the tours confirm these priorities. For example, one is struck by the dearth of analysis of the works of art present in their scripts, relative to the quantity of biographical and historical information and ideological doctrine offered by the guides. Within the tours, the works presented functioned as points of stimulus from which the guide would narrate the historical episode they depicted. These narratives were often lengthy, involving protracted digressions praising Stalin or celebrating Soviet achievements. Sometimes they stayed close to the narrative of the picture. However, they were frequently only loosely connected to the picture's subject and made little reference to the works displayed beyond the identification of their basic subject matter. Paintings were little more than visual aids accompanying guides' dramatic re-telling of the historical episode they depicted, or points of stimulus from which to speak about the success of particular policies or to enthuse about Stalin's excellent character. On occasions where the scripts did refer to specific features of or devices employed in a canvas, they did so almost exclusively to serve one of three main objectives: first, to emphasise features that helped stress the drama of the episode depicted and spotlight the heroism of Stalin's activities; second, to highlight features that could be interpreted (however tenuously) as evidence of Stalin's personal virtues (and of the Soviet people's adoration of Stalin in light of those virtues); or third, to showcase features that provided an opportunity for the speaker to repeat other messages of the Stalin cult.

The fact that the tours were designed to highlight the messages of the cult is not surprising: Beria's text and the exhibition were major contributions to the Stalin cult. However, the extent of the tours' contribution to the visitor's overall experience of the exhibition highlights their important function—equal to that of the paintings themselves—as one component of the exhibition as a Stalinist total work of art. The guides drew out the messages of the Stalin cult present in the works themselves. But they also implanted into the exhibition (and into the works) ideological content that was arguably otherwise absent. The guides provided the visitors with a 'correct' interpretation of the exhibition, and of specific works, whether that interpretation was genuinely drawn from the works (and intended by the artist) or not. For example, presenting V. Krotkov's painting, *Comrade Stalin – Organiser and Leader of Workers' Social Democratic Circles in Tbilisi (1898)* (figure 16), guides were instructed to explain that:

Krotkov's picture immediately makes us sense the illegal character of the meeting. In contrast to M. Toidze's picture, where the movements of the people are broad [and] light is streaming everywhere, the artist's very brushstrokes create the impression of movement; in Krotkov's picture everything creates an impression of closedness and caution. Dark colours; the dark walls of the room, the fire, the figure sitting with his back to and concealed from the viewer and the illuminated faces of the group gathered around the table, at the same time as the whole room drowns in gloom; the composed, calm poses of those seated; the composition constructed around a circle – all this strengthens the impression of closedness and conspiracy. In the depth of the room near a window stands a lookout making sure that no one can sneak up on the meeting.⁴²⁵

The observations made here were accurate. The guide's description drew out the drama that was present in the picture. However, this description also contributed its own dramatisation, through the theatricality of the language used, as in the repetition of 'closedness' alongside words such as 'caution' and 'conspiracy' and the evocative nature of phrases such as 'drowning in darkness'. The narration's gothic imagery embellished a mystical, nightmarish quality in the work, bringing to life the danger inherent in the revolutionaries' illegal activities and in doing so implicitly highlighting their heroism in the face of that danger. The visual image was made more compelling through its combination with the performance of oral story telling. If the exhibition display was like a vast, walk-through textbook, the tours transformed its pages into scenes of a film, brought to life through dramatic narration. Quotes from the main protagonists even provided the dialogue.

The guides' narration not only highlighted that which was explicitly present in the work. It generated additional ideological content and told visitors that it was already there. In Krotkov's painting, for example, guides were instructed to observe that 'the simplicity and persuasiveness of his [Stalin's] speech is well felt in the simplicity and persuasiveness of his

⁴²⁵ 'Картина художника Кроткова сразу дает почувствовать нелегальный характер собрания. В противоположность картине М. Тoidзе где широки движения людей всюду разлитый свет, самый мазок художника создают впечатление динамики; в картине Кроткова все создает впечатление замкнутости и настороженности. Темные краски; темные стены комнату, огонь, закрытый от зрителя сидящей спиной фигурой и освещающий лишь группы собравшихся у стола, в то время как вся комната тонет в мраке; содержанные, спокойные позу сидящих; композиция, построенная по кругу—все это усиливает впечатление замкнутости и конспиративности. В глубине комнату у окна стоит "дозорный" следящий, за тем, чтобы никто не мог незаметно подкрасться к собравшимся.' GTG f. 8, op. 3, ed. khr. 641, l. 14.

image.⁴²⁶ The assertion claimed to draw evidence from Stalin's pose and dress about the content of the speech he was delivering, and instructed viewers that they were also observing that evidence.

The guide's instructions in relation to Krotkov's *Georgian Delegation at a Reception at the Kremlin* (figure 18) went beyond the drawing out ideological content that could be inferred from the work presented. Rather, guides deliberately misrepresented the content of Krotkov's painting to give it greater ideological currency. Krotkov was not explicit about precisely which Georgian delegation and which Kremlin reception it depicted. This allowed guides license to offer their own interpretation. They explained to visitors that the delegation depicted in Krotkov's work was made up of 'those who fought in the struggle for Soviet power in Transcaucasia.'⁴²⁷ This designation allowed the picture to serve neatly the objectives of the exhibition and of the Stalin cult in general. As an image of a Kremlin reception, it aligned the work with the exhibition's celebration of the history of Bolshevik revolutionary activity in Transcaucasia. It affirmed a line of continuity between the contemporary Party leadership and those who actively fought for the establishment of Bolshevik power in Transcaucasia, echoing a continuity between Stalin the revolutionary and Stalin the leader that the exhibition was intended to cement. At the same time, by showing members of the contemporary Politburo applauding the revolutionaries and vice versa, Krotkov's work followed the pattern of the legitimisation of the leader through the representation of the people's attachment to him, and his dedication to them. However, for several reasons it seems unlikely that Krotkov's painting was indeed intended to represent the delegation identified in the tour's script. Among the delegation presented in Krotkov's work, all appear to be young—no older than 40. This would have made them no older than 20 at the time of the October Revolution. This fact in itself does not exclude them from having been involved in the Civil War in Transcaucasia. Beria, after all, was only 18 in October 1917 and was involved in the Civil War as a state security agent (though not for the Bolsheviks until after 1920). However, the apparent age of the delegates does make them too young to have been involved in Bolshevik agitation much before 1917, or to have attended many of the demonstrations depicted in the Georgian exhibition, the majority of which took place between 1895 and 1908. Around half of those depicted, moreover, are women. If one compares the delegation in Krotkov's picture to works in the exhibition depicting the

⁴²⁶ 'Убедительность и простота речи товарища Сталина хорошо чувствоваться в убедительности и простоте его образа.' Ibid., l. 15.

⁴²⁷ 'те, которые боролись в борьбе за советскую власть в Закавказье.' Ibid., l. 41.

demonstrations of 1895–1908, those in attendance at the demonstrations are almost exclusively men, and appear at least as old in 1895–1908 as those in the Kremlin delegation do in 1937. The men and women in the Kremlin delegation, moreover, are particularly smartly presented. The men have stylish, neatly quaffed hairstyles and the women are glamorously dressed, some with delicate neckties, blouses and fitted skirts. Although smart attire is of course to be expected at such an occasion, the delegation is particularly glamorous. The man and woman standing nearest to the viewer, for example, boast such striking good looks that they could easily be stars of the cinema or stage. All of this suggests that Krotkov more likely intended to represent the delegation of art workers—artists, musicians, performers and directors—who were welcomed to the Kremlin on 14 January 1937, not a delegation of Georgian revolutionaries.⁴²⁸ The art workers’ delegation was the only Georgian delegation to have received significant attention in the press at the time of its taking place. It also made sense as a subject for the exhibition given the exhibition’s second stated objective of demonstrating the flourishing of Georgian national art and the correctness of Soviet nationalities policy. The reception marked the end of the ‘*Dekada*’ festival of Georgian culture in Moscow, whose aim was to do exactly that. And although it is not possible to definitively identify individual artists and performers within Krotkov’s delegation, the group broadly resembles those pictured in a photograph of the art workers’ delegation that was published in *Izvestiia* to mark the occasion (figure 19). If Krotkov did intend to depict the art workers’ delegation, the tours went beyond highlighting pertinent content in his work. They presented to visitors content different to that which the painter intended.

⁴²⁸ The delegation depicted do not look dissimilar from the Georgian art workers delegation, whose photograph taken during their visit to the Kremlin was published with the article ‘Talanty sotsialisticheskoi Gruzii’ in *Izvestiia*, 14 January 1937, p. 1.

Chapter 5: The Great Terror and 1937 exhibition as a statement of Georgian submission under the ‘Friendship of the Peoples’

Chapter four highlighted several of Beria’s objectives in producing the exhibition. This chapter considers the reach of the exhibition beyond the gallery. The first looks at coverage of the exhibition in the press and across other media, considering how this coverage functioned as an extension of the exhibition itself. It explores analysis of the exhibition that appeared in print and was expressed during meetings between Georgian artists and their hosts in Moscow, and proposes a re-evaluation of the way in which we understand and gauge its success. Subsequent sections interpret the exhibition as a grand statement in refiguring relations between Georgia and Moscow, and consider it as a reflection of the violence of the Great Terror in Georgia. Based on these investigations, they offer a first thorough and evidence-based explanation for Beria’s decision to use only Georgian artists in the production of his exhibition, and why the Georgian exhibition was the only Stalin cult exhibition of its scale and cohesion to represent artists belonging to a single Soviet nationality.

‘Despite a Series of Substantial Insufficiencies’: Reception of the exhibition and its significance

Coverage of the exhibition in the periodical press, in related radio programmes, public lectures and in several dedicated publications, disseminated the messages embedded in the exhibition to a far wider audience than the 20,000 who visited it in person. In the context of Stalin’s Soviet Union (and in particular at the height of the Great Terror), the coverage of the exhibition through each of these media, including formal exhibition reviews, did not represent a personal, individual, unmediated response to or evaluation of the exhibition on the part of a particular writer or speaker. Instead, they were part of an institutionalised ‘reception’, mediated by the Party and government. Responses to the exhibition such as reviews, interviews and other press notices were penned by and attributed to individual actors (visitors, artists, critics and the general public), but managed by the Party and government via the organs disseminating them.⁴²⁹ In that respect they are better understood as an extension

⁴²⁹ For discussion of ‘reception’ in the Soviet context, see Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1997) and Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Writer: Social and Aesthetic Origins of Soviet Literary Culture* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2001).

of the exhibition itself. They represent additional media through which the intended messages of the exhibition were communicated.

Testament to that is the remarkable fact that most of the coverage of the exhibition in the press and in dedicated publications repeated the structure and content of the tours, prioritising the same key messages and even delivering them using the same set phrases. For example, the exhibition's catalogue and a series of reviews in the press uniformly echoed the tours in dedicating the majority of their space to summarising Beria's history. Like the tours, they make only brief reference to the works shown in the exhibition and claim the Georgian exhibition as evidence of correct nationalities policy only as an aside, usually appearing after more pressing points. Longer pieces related Beria's history in greater detail, taking all opportunities to inject other messages of the Stalin cult, declaring the unparalleled social justice of the Stalin Constitution or celebrating the flourishing of friendship between the peoples of the USSR under Stalin's leadership. These 'responses' to the exhibition were in fact extensions of it. In that sense, they can be used as a gauge of the success of the exhibition only in so far as their positive evaluations of the exhibition suggested that the messages that the Party had earlier approved to be delivered through the exhibition remained the party line by the time it opened.

Indeed, Beria's involvement in the production of the exhibition made criticism of it all but impossible—certainly dangerous—while Beria retained Stalin's favour.⁴³⁰ This meant that only one aspect of the exhibition could be legitimately criticised, and that was Georgian artists' individual and collective successes and failings in fulfilling Beria's task and realising his vision. It is this part of the coverage of the exhibition, and themes that recur in it, that can shed new light on aspects of the exhibition and its objectives that have yet to be understood. In particular, they reveal the significance of the exhibition as a reflection of a shift in relations between Moscow and Georgia.

A number of messages concerning Georgian artists' successes, failures and duties in producing the exhibition—and producing Stalin's image more generally—appeared consistently throughout coverage of the exhibition. One such message was the repeated

⁴³⁰ Of course it may be that those publicly commenting on the exhibition genuinely held Beria and his contributions to the exhibition in the high regard that their commentaries expressed. As Clark and others have shown, even in this period, at the height of the Great Terror, intellectuals found ways to retain a degree of independence of expression, however small. However, as we will see, the reviews of the exhibition were so uniform in their representation of both the exhibition and Beria's role in it that they appear to reflect close adherence to the Party line. Moreover, the repression in 1937 of members of the Georgian cultural sphere who came into opposition with Beria, including Duduchava, Dimitri Shevardnadze, and the Georgian theatre designer Petre Otskheli, attests to the danger associated with such activities.

declaration of the joy and honour that Georgian artists felt at being given the opportunity to take on a theme of such greatness as that of Stalin's life and career. Another was the assertion that the adoption of that theme had produced a natural elevation of the quality of Georgian artists' work: Georgian artists were so inspired by Stalin's work that their technical mastery had been instantly advanced. A kind of divine inspiration was implied, even as Beria's generous 'guidance' was also acknowledged as a source of the same improvement and that improvement was broadly defined as closer alignment with socialist realist principles. These claims were quickly followed by the recommendation that all other Soviet artists follow the Georgians' example. In his review of the exhibition in *Izvestiia*, for example, critic Evgeny Kriger wrote that:

One must welcome the bold plan of the Georgian artists, attempting in their recent works to approach the reflection of the image of the great leader of the revolution. With this they have infinitely expanded the bounds of their work and it is necessary to say that many of them, in the process of that responsible and complex work, have grown internally, become mature masters [and] have enriched their artistic means and possibilities.⁴³¹

Georgian painter and secretary of the Georgian Artists' Union, Vladimir Keshelava, writing in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* just before the exhibition opened, noted that 'one could recount numerous comments made by artists about their work on the greatest of all themes. They all talk about the high creative growth.'⁴³²

Moscow painter Boris Iogansson also noted that the theme of Stalin's life 'elevated, inspired and excited the painters of Georgia,' commenting that:

The wonderful initiative of the Georgian masters inspires the passionate wish to continue their work. It is for the first time in visual art that the great importance of the historical theme has been so broadly and fully revealed [...] You feel the necessity of still more fully portraying the activity of comrade Stalin right up to our time. It is also

⁴³¹ 'Нужно приветствовать смелый замысел грузинских художников, пытающихся в своих последних работах подойти к отображению образа великого вождя революции. Тем самым они безгранично расширили границы своего творчества, и нужно сказать, что многие из них в процессе это ответственной и сложной работы внутренне выросли, стали зрелыми мастерами, обогатили свои художественные средства и возможности.' Evgeny Kriger, 'Pervye vpechatleniia,' *Izvestiia*, 18 November 1937, p. 4.

⁴³² Vl. A. Keshelava, 'Khudozhniki sovetskoi Gruzii.'

vital in the near time to raise the question about the organisation of a whole series of exhibitions dedicated to the history of the Bolshevik Party, dedicated to the life and struggle of the great Lenin [and] his outstanding students—Kirov, Ordjonikidze, Dzerzhinsky, Sverdlova [and] Frunze. In these exhibitions the heroic history of the Party of Bolsheviks will be revealed in living, concrete, moving images.⁴³³

An album published by E. Melikadze, the organiser of the Georgian exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery, celebrating the Georgian exhibition echoed this sentiment:

Georgian artists have implemented a wonderful initiative—in this is their huge merit. Soviet artists of all nationalities should seize that initiative and create Bolshevik art, reflecting the great battle for socialism. Georgian artists have laid a wonderful beginning. Despite a series of substantial insufficiencies, defined for the most part by their past enthusiasm for formalist art, their pictures have benefited working people and above all Soviet art. In that is the great merit of Georgian artists. Soviet artists of all nationalities should seize the initiative of the artists of Georgian and create Bolshevik art reflecting our great Stalinist epoch.⁴³⁴

The belief that Georgian artists' example should be taken up by all Soviet artists was repeated throughout the coverage of the exhibition.⁴³⁵ However, as is immediately evident from Melikadze's comments, although coverage was full of praise for the exhibition and talked of its huge artistic and, especially, political significance, this did not preclude criticism—sometimes outright disparagement—of Georgian artists' technical proficiency or

⁴³³ 'Прекрасный почин грузинских мастеров вызывает горячее желание продолжить их дело. Чувствуешь необходимость ещё полнее изобразить деятельность товарища Сталина вплоть до наших дней. В ближайшее время поднять вопрос об организации целой серии выставок, посвященных истории большевистской партии, посвященных жизни и борьбе великого Ленина, его выдающихся учеников—Кирова, Орджоникидзе, Дзержинский, Сverdlova, Frunze. В этих выставках героическая история партии большевиков будет раскрыта в живых, конкретных, волнующих образах.' Ioganson, 'Khoroshee nachalo.'

⁴³⁴ 'Грузинские художники сделали замечательный почин—в этом их огромная заслуга. Советские художники всех национальностей должны подхватить эту инициативу и создать большевистское искусство, отражающее великую борьбу за социализм. Грузинские художники положили замечательное начало. Не смотря на ряд существенных недостатков, определившихся главным образом их прошлым увлечениями формалистическим искусством, картины их принесли трудящимся и прежде всего советскому искусству большую пользу. В этом большая заслуга грузинских художников. Советские художники всех национальностей должны подхватить инициативу художников Грузии и создать большевистское искусство, отражающее нашу великую сталинскую эпоху.' Melikadze, *Iskusstvo gruzinskoi SSR*, p. 15.

⁴³⁵ Indeed the sentiment was repeated at least three times in a single full-page spread dedicated to the exhibition, titled 'Vystavka iskusstva gruzinskoi SSR,' *Pravda*, 22 December 1937, p. 3.

mastery of socialist realism. Even Melikadze, who was in charge of the exhibition's organisation at the Tretyakov Gallery, was writing about the exhibition's success in spite of Georgian artists' substantial insufficiencies, not because of their skill. And this sentiment was widely echoed elsewhere. Chepelev, who gave a series of public lectures at the gallery and published several articles on Georgian art in connection with the exhibition, described the Georgian artists represented as 'various in terms of their talent.'⁴³⁶ One Moscow artist, Pavel Sokolov-Skalia, moreover, spoke to the exhibition's success 'despite the varied artistic level of individual works,' and expressed the hope that 'Georgian comrades study nature more and more closely, as it appears today. They should make their painterly language more accessible and appropriate for a mass audience.'⁴³⁷

Critic and soon-to-be director of the Tretyakov Gallery, Vladimir Kemenov, was more critical still. He lamented that Georgian artists had not made better use of advantages that he claimed they enjoyed over classical European history painters, for example, thanks to the teachings of Marx, Lenin and Stalin and in light of the advent of socialist realism.⁴³⁸ He named a series of Georgian artists in whose work he discerned 'the heritage of formalism,' conceived of as any departure from a realist treatment of subject, and complained that Georgian artists should have made greater efforts to emulate the famous nineteenth-century Russian history painter Vasily Surikov.⁴³⁹ He repeated the sentiment expressed by others, that Georgian artists had taken an important step in laying the foundations for further work on the development of Soviet history painting, and Soviet painting specifically on the history of the Party and revolutionary and Party leaders. For that reason, he insisted, 'criticism of the works of Georgian painters does not in any way diminish their merit.'⁴⁴⁰ Following extensive and specific criticism of Georgian artists' work, he concluded—echoing Melikadze's phrase almost exactly—that it was in taking those first steps that Georgian artists' 'great [and] serious merit' was to be found.⁴⁴¹

The narrative of the grand success of the exhibition presented through all media, then, was not dependent on and did not signify a positive assessment of Georgian painters' skill,

⁴³⁶ 'различные с точки зрения их таланта.' V. Chepelev, 'O peizazhe sotsialisticheskoi Gruzii,' *Iskusstvo*, 1, 1938, pp. 21-34 (p. 21.)

⁴³⁷ 'Несмотря на различный художественный уровень отдельных произведений'; 'нужно пожелать грузинским товарищам больше и пристальнее изучать свою природу такой какой она выглядит сегодня. Они должны сделать свой живописный язык более доступным и массовым' P. Sokolov-Skalia, 'Kartiny gerioicheskoi borby Bolshevistskikh organizatsii Zakavkaze,' *Pravda*, 22 December 1937, p. 3.

⁴³⁸ Kemenov, 'Vystavka gruzinskogo iskusstvo i sovetskaia istoricheskaiia zhivopis.'

⁴³⁹ 'Последствие формализма.' Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ 'Критика произведений грузинских живописцев нисколько не умаляет их заслуг.' Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ 'Большая, серьезная заслуга.' Ibid.

technical mastery, or alignment with the principles of socialist realism. The exhibition's absolute success could stand side by side with Georgian artists' significant failings, and with their accepted inferiority to the artists of the Soviet centre. The two things were not seen to be at odds with one another. Indeed, although Devlin has noted the exhibition's role in launching the careers of Georgian artists beyond the borders of their own republic, in fact the vast majority of praise given to artists and works in the Georgian exhibition was enjoyed by a handful of recipients. Apollon Kutateladze's *Political Demonstration of Batumi Workers under the Leadership of comrade Stalin (in 1902)*, for example, and Toidze's *Comrade Stalin at RIONGES* were picked out as highlights in almost all public assessments of the exhibition.⁴⁴² A handful of works, including these two, were discussed and reproduced by reviewers and commentators with great frequency while others were barely mentioned. While most canvases drew little attention, Toidze's *Comrade Stalin at RIONGES* was reproduced in tens of thousands of postcards and posters. Not only that, it was further popularised as the adornment of various consumer paraphernalia, including a line of metal cigarette cases into which a version of Toidze's composition was embossed.⁴⁴³

Despite Devlin's suggestion that the exhibition helped to launch artists' careers, moreover, the Georgian artists who stood to benefit from positive coverage of it were for the most part already relatively well established. Toidze and Kutateladze, for example, were already living in Moscow when the exhibition opened. Kutateladze had been there on and off since 1930, leading the construction of the Caucasian display at the city's Ethnographic Museum, the Museum of the Peoples of the USSR, from 1933.⁴⁴⁴ He had been a member of MOSSKh since 1933.⁴⁴⁵ And Toidze was sufficiently well known in Moscow to be accepted to the membership of AKhRR as early as 1927. It was in that year that he painted the first version of his famous and much-celebrated canvas, *Ilych's Lamp*.⁴⁴⁶ At the same time, Georgian-born Armenian painter Dmitry Nalbandian enjoyed enormous success as one of the

⁴⁴² See, for example, Evgeny Kriger, 'Istoriia, voploshchennaia v zhivopisi,' *Iskusstvo*, 1, 1938, pp. 3-18 (p. 18) and Duduchava, 'Vystavka gruzinskogo iskusstva v Moskve,' *Izvestiia*, 17 October 1937, p. 3.

⁴⁴³ A. Gabuniia, 'Sovremennoe gruzinskoe narodnoe tvorchestvo,' *Iskusstvo*, 1, 1938, p. 39.

⁴⁴⁴ The museum (*Muzei narodov SSSR*) existed between 1931 and 1948. Before that it was known as the Central Museum of Ethnology (*Tsentralnyi muzei narodovedeniia*), 1923-31. In 1948 the museum was absorbed into the State Ethnographic Museum (*Gosudarstvennyi Etnograficheskii Muzei*), which was renamed The State Ethnographic Museum of the Peoples of the USSR. The State Ethnographic Museum had been founded in 1923 based on the collection of the Ethnographic Department of the Russian Museum. On Kutateladze's movements, see N. Gudiashvili, *Apollon Kutateladze* (Tbilisi: Zaria vostoka, 1957), p. 15. It is noted that Kutateladze was working at the Museum of the Peoples of the East in 1933 in Igor Urushadze, *Ucha Dzhaparidze* (Tbilisi: Zaria vostoka, 1958), p. 27.

⁴⁴⁵ Gudiashvili, *Apollon Kutateladze*, p. 22.

⁴⁴⁶ Both artists also had works in major collections in Moscow long before 1937. For example, GMVK acquired three of Toidze's works on historical-revolutionary themes in 1934. See Voitov, *Materialy po istorii Gosudarstvennogo muzeia Vostoka 1918-1950*, p. 231.

Stalin's first court portraitists, despite having only one work in the Georgian exhibition and receiving little attention in connection with it.

Controlling Georgia: The 1937 Exhibition and the Demise of Duduchava

The absence of correlation between the success of the exhibition and the success of individual contributing artists was in part a reflection of the exhibition's priorities. The dissemination of the content of Beria's text and the other messages of the Stalin cult was a more pressing objective than the demonstration of Georgian artists' development, even as evidence of the success of Leninist-Stalinist Nationalities Policy. However, it also reflected a further objective of the exhibition with regard to Georgia and Georgian artists: it embodied the exhibition's contribution to the reconfiguration of Soviet nationalities policy in the late 1930s, and in particular the reconfiguration of Georgia's relationship with the Soviet centre. Beria's project, and the practical process of producing the exhibition, brought an unprecedented degree of central Party control over cultural activity in Georgia, via both Beria's personal interventions and the consultation organised through IMEL. Georgian artists were not only provided with a limited choice of subject matter from which to choose in the production of their works. Those subjects they could select contributed to a cohesive scheme of works. This meant the Party organisation, through Beria, had control over not only the content of individual works, but also over an image of Georgian art, and Georgia, collectively. The transformation of the Georgian National Picture Gallery into a collective studio for artists working on the project, moreover, ensured unmatched efficiency and convenience in facilitating constant supervision.

However, as the tragic fate of Duduchava, the much besieged chairman of the Artists' Union, demonstrates, it was not only through this supervision that Beria tightened controls over Georgian artists' activities. Others have shown how, from the early 1930s, Beria gave power and positions of authority to Georgian writers of whom he did not approve. He did so in order to allow those writers to incriminate themselves, either by producing work that could later be deemed to be anti-Bolshevik, or by accepting jobs that led them to associate with those that Beria would later condemn as enemies of the people. This allowed Beria to

accumulate evidence that was later used to justify their repression in the Great Terror.⁴⁴⁷ Sadly, this was also Duduchava's fate.

Duduchava's writing on Georgian art, including that presented in his monograph, *Gruzinskaia zhivopis*, attracted much criticism in the Cultural Revolution period for its defence of painters such as Gudiashvili and Kakabadze, whose work continued to defy the demands of increasingly powerful artists' organisations to adopt a more conservative, realist approach. After 1934, Duduchava published a series of articles explaining and endorsing socialist realism as the new method for the arts in the Soviet Union.⁴⁴⁸ However, in those endorsements he also maintained positions that left him out of step with (or that did not anticipate) shifts in policy that would take place over the course of the 1930s. These included changes in the implementation of nationalities policy as well as the intensification of hostility towards evidence of communion with European modernism in Soviet art. Although his pronouncements about the role of national cultural heritage in the progress of Soviet Georgian painting, for example, did not contradict Soviet nationalities policy in word, in practice they made Duduchava vulnerable to accusations of excessive and dangerous nationalism. Moreover, they left him exposed to accusations of 'bourgeois nationalism' since, as we saw in chapter three, in the Cultural Revolution period national form in Georgian art came to be frequently synonymous with European modernist deviations. In addition to this, throughout the 1930s Duduchava continued to defend the Georgian artists who were most closely associated with European modernism in Georgia, and continued to give these artists attention at the expense of younger Georgian artists. In a review of the 1934 exhibition, for example, though he acknowledged complaints of the remnants of 'formalism' in Gudiashvili's work, he reserved particular praise for artists associated with more experimental approaches to painting, such as Irina Shtenberg or Akhvlediani, while many younger and leftist painters were named only in passing, as having been represented in the exhibition.⁴⁴⁹

Positions of authority and responsibility given to Duduchava in the mid-1930s not only made it possible for him to continue to express his views on Georgian painting, but obliged him to do so. Despite the controversial views he expressed in his writing, he was made chairman of the Georgian Artists' Union in 1935, and reinstated as editor of the union's

⁴⁴⁷ See Rayfield, '29: Beria's Holocaust' in *The Literature of Georgia*, pp. 261-270, and Rayfield, 'The Death of Paolo Iashvili.'

⁴⁴⁸ See, for example, A. Duduchava, 'Sotsialisturi realizmi da klasikuri memkvidreobis problema' [Socialist realism and the problem of classical heritage], *Sabchota khelovneba*, 2, 1935, pp. 13-32.

⁴⁴⁹ A. Duduchava, 'Novye temy—novye kraski: vystavka "Khudozhniki sovetsoi Gruzii za 13 let",' *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, 17 September 1934, p. 1.

journal, *Sabchota khelovneba*, the same year. In addition, he was made deputy head of the Georgian Administration for Art Affairs, the government body responsible for all of the arts in the republic.⁴⁵⁰ These positions necessitated that Duduchava express himself publicly on the subject of Georgian art, both in print and during lectures and public meetings—all of which were routinely transcribed and recorded for later reference. Several other posts, moreover, compelled him to address specific issues. As well as his chairmanship of the Artists' Union, for example, he was put in charge of a section of the union dedicated specifically to 'classical heritage'.⁴⁵¹ This position was surely the reason for the comments and even dedicated articles on the subject that appeared under Duduchava's name in the mid-late 1930s.⁴⁵²

These roles and their obligations made it almost impossible for Duduchava to avoid incriminating himself. Yet his further selection to head the commission for the organisation of the 1937 exhibition raised the stakes to a far higher level. Despite the proclamations of the exhibition's great success across all major organs of the press Duduchava was arrested within a few days of its opening and shot on trumped up charges soon afterwards.⁴⁵³ On 28 November, less than two weeks after the opening, a special plenum of the Georgian Artists' Union was held at which artists took turns to condemn Duduchava's leadership of the Union as well as the theoretical positions he had expressed. Moris Talakvadze, Duduchava's former boss at the Georgian Administration of Art Affairs, declared that Duduchava had 'approached the study of classical heritage in a hostile way' and condemned his 'irresponsible' leadership of the Artists' Union, and anti-Leninist and anti-Stalinist views.⁴⁵⁴ A further fifteen artists and administrators then spoke to distance themselves from Duduchava and denounce him on any grounds that they could think of. A series of artists spoke of Duduchava's lack of compassion and unwillingness to hear or attend to their concerns, cooking up stories about how Duduchava would hide away in his office and refuse to receive them.⁴⁵⁵ Others declared that he held secret meetings to which they were not admitted, allocated funds and opportunities in contravention of Sovnarkom resolutions and refused support to young and

⁴⁵⁰ This role is alluded to in A. Duduchava, 'Vystavka gruzinskogo iskusstva v Moskve.' p. 3.

⁴⁵¹ 'V soiuzе sovetskikh khudozhnikov Gruzii,' *Na rubezhe vostoka*, 1 June 1935, p. 10.

⁴⁵² See Duduchava, 'Kartiny khudozhnikov Sovetskoi Gruzii' and 'Sotsialisturi realizmi da klasikuri memkvidreobis problema.'

⁴⁵³ Duduchava is on a list of people in the Georgian SSR being tried in the court of the military collegiate of the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union, dated 22 November 1937. Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, 24.413.19. <http://stalin.memo.ru/names/index.htm>, accessed 16/7/2013.

⁴⁵⁴ 'вражески подходил Дудучава к изучению классического наследства.' NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 100, l. 37.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., ll. 41-42 and 65.

struggling artists whose confidence he destroyed with excessively severe criticism.⁴⁵⁶ One accused him of renegeing on promises to provide artists with opportunities for respite, including visits to sanatoria, and failing to offer financial transparency with regard to the running of the union.⁴⁵⁷ There is no evidence in any of the earlier transcripts, to suggest that any of these accusations were just. Indeed, there is also no definitive proof that they were not. However, up until his arrest, Duduchava had been treated with great respect by most members of the Artists' Union. As such, these sudden recriminations represent a dramatic *volte-face* on the part of Duduchava's former colleagues that appears to indicate either their absolute faith in the justness of the Party's repression of Duduchava and eagerness to share their own evidence of Duduchava's guilt, or their fear of the consequences of failing to do so.⁴⁵⁸

The repression of Duduchava served several functions for Beria. It eliminated a voice that was often at odds with (and so could challenge or compromise) the position of the Party and it worked as a warning to the Georgian artists that remained, limiting any risk of dissent. Perhaps more importantly, it also allowed Duduchava to become the perfect scapegoat, to whom both the failings and hardships of Georgian artists could be attributed. This made it easier to acknowledge failings in the exhibition and its planning and organisation and allowed artists to voice complaints about their own experiences while maintaining absolute reverence for Beria and his involvement in the exhibition, regardless of whether the approval for Beria expressed was genuine or appeared under duress. All failings were Duduchava's and all successes were Beria's. A whole series of artists offered comments and stories to this end. Mose Toidze, for example, speaking at the 1937 plenum, claimed that he had appealed to Duduchava about the need for better studios for artists working on the exhibition, but that Duduchava had chosen not to communicate this need to Beria. This, he was sure, was in spite of the fact that Beria would undoubtedly have met the artists' needs without hesitation, had he been properly informed.⁴⁵⁹ Musing over why Duduchava had failed to inform Beria of this need, Toidze concluded that perhaps 'he deliberately didn't do it, or in this his character was to blame.'⁴⁶⁰ Duduchava was either indifferent to Georgian artists' efforts or had been

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., II. 42, 47 and 65.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., I. 8.

⁴⁵⁸ As Clark and others have shown, not all Soviet intellectuals who contributed to Stalinist culture in the 1930s should be understood as simply capitulating to pressure placed on them by the Party leadership. However, the stark reversal of the positions expressed by Georgian artists and critics concerning Duduchava between the SARMA plenum of 1932 and the Artists' Union meetings of 1937 and 1938 seems to indicate that in this case, capitulation to Party pressure played a role.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., I. 18.

⁴⁶⁰ 'он это умышленно не сделал. (*sic.*) или в этом виноват был его характер.' Ibid., I. 18.

actively sabotaging them. Despite Beria's generous encouragement, Toidze declared, Georgian artists' progress had inevitably been hindered by the fact that 'our former chairman was not only an enemy, but also ungifted, and [was] the most spineless person, who did not take a single question to its conclusion.'⁴⁶¹

Others took a similar tack. Mirzoev, for example, blamed Duduchava for challenges Georgian artists had faced in preparing the exhibition. He related how a generous and benevolent Beria had acknowledged that history painting required long periods to produce and demanded that Georgian artists be allowed plenty of time to create such works. According to Mirzoev, Beria had declared that a month or two could not be sufficient to produce an adequate history painting, suggesting instead that artists first took month-long fieldtrips to prepare preliminary materials from nature and citing Russian history painters who frequently spent three years on a single canvas.⁴⁶² Flouting Beria's directions, however, the leadership of the Artists' Union had given artists only three months to complete their commissions, and threatened them with having to return advances paid to them if they failed to finish on time.⁴⁶³ Duduchava had needlessly and deliberately placed unreasonable demands on Georgian artists that had limited the quality of the works they could produce, and he had done so in contravention of Beria's will.⁴⁶⁴

This version of events avoided blame being directed at Beria, while also discrediting Duduchava. At the same time, it allowed artists whose works had been criticised to be redeemed. Where there were objectionable elements in certain artists' canvases, they could be blamed at least in part on Duduchava's improper ideological and artistic leadership, as well as on his poor (and even deliberately disruptive) management of preparations for the exhibition. Following the elimination of Duduchava, freed from his influence, artists would naturally correct earlier errors. By joining in the denouncement of Duduchava they could distance themselves from those errors and demonstrate that they were already on the path to redemption.

⁴⁶¹ 'БЫВШИЙ наш руководитель был не только врагом, но ещё бездарным и самым бесхарактерным человеком, который не доводил ни один вопрос до конца.' Ibid., l. 17.

⁴⁶² Ibid., l. 96.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., l. 96.

⁴⁶⁴ Duduchava's misdeeds continued to be contrasted against Beria's benevolence throughout the meeting. Another artist, for example, complained that Duduchava had come to him in the middle of the night and demanded that he increase the size of his canvas from 1.2 to 2.2 metres and that the work be completed within ten days, only for the size stipulation to be lowered later. The artist in question, by the name of Kirakazov, claimed that Duduchava had been deliberately trying to exclude him from the exhibition and had refused to allow him to appeal directly to Beria on the matter. Ibid., l. 109.

Other aspects of the exhibition, and the events and press coverage surrounding it, also embodied, and contributed to, a reconfiguration of relations between Georgia and the Soviet centre, and between Georgian, Russian and Soviet culture. For example, stars of the exhibition such as Apollon Kutateladze and Toidze were showered with praise. Yet even they did not escape criticism. Moreover, the praise they enjoyed was restricted by certain caveats and qualifications, including implicit assumptions about Georgian artists' inferiority to their more experienced and skilled Russian counterparts. Georgian artists were junior partners in that relationship, on whom Moscow artists could impart their greater wisdom. This was broadly in line with the shift in Soviet nationalities policy in the latter half of the 1930s towards the notion of a 'brotherhood', and later 'friendship of the peoples' of the USSR, in which the Russian people was a senior partner. The scale of the Georgian exhibition and the press attention and events surrounding it, however, was a louder, more determined and more explicit expression of that reconfiguration than that experienced by other national groups.

A reception and 'creative discussion' hosted by Moscow artists at the Tretyakov Gallery and attended by Georgian artists on 2 April 1938, for example, expressed the formalisation of those new relationships.⁴⁶⁵ The meeting was attended by senior members of MOSSKh as well as key figures from the Tretyakov Gallery, including Melikadze, Kemenov, Iogansson and Sergei and Aleksandr Gerasimov. Representing Georgian artists were Kutateladze and Toidze.⁴⁶⁶ The meeting had a generally congenial, even celebratory tone, with a continual flow of pleasantries between Russian and Georgian parties. However, while Melikadze and Kemenov, who spoke first, were positive about the exhibition itself, they were critical, even condescending, in their evaluation of Georgian artists, including Kutateladze and Toidze. Melikadze began by pondering the reasons for the exhibition's popularity, particularly since, he observed, not all the works exhibited were 'genial' (*genialnye*).⁴⁶⁷ In light of that observation he concluded that the exhibition's popularity stemmed from the fact

⁴⁶⁵ The meeting was organised to mark the closing of the exhibition in Moscow before it moved to the Russian Museum in Leningrad, where it opened on 30 May 1938. For the full transcript of the meeting, see RGALI, f. 2943, op. 1., ed. khr. 172. The transcript is undated. However, several articles in the press confirm that date and surrounding events. See 'Gruzinskie khudozhniki v Moskve,' *Izvestiia*, 1 April 1938, p. 4; 'Gruzinskie khudozhniki v Moskve,' *Pravda*, 1 April 1938, p. 4 and 'Vystavka khudozhnikov Gruzii,' *Pravda*, 31 May 1938, p. 6.

⁴⁶⁶ The records of the meeting do not specify whether it was Mose or Irakli Toidze that attended the meeting, nor did the discussion definitively indicate that it was one or the other. However, since Irakli Toidze and Kutateladze were widely heralded as the two stars of the exhibition and both were living in Moscow, it can be assumed that it was Irakli that attended.

⁴⁶⁷ RGALI, f. 2943, op. 1., ed. khr. 172, l. 5.

that ‘our people thirst to see their leader, [and] their revolutionary past, in visual art.’⁴⁶⁸ The exhibition was popular, then, not because of the special talents of Georgian artists but in spite of their deficiencies.

Similarly critical evaluations flowed from Melikadze, who observed matter-of-factly that ‘there are insufficiencies in the exhibition. Our press has already pointed them out and [they are] known to all comrades.’⁴⁶⁹ Georgian artists themselves, he noted, had acknowledged repeatedly that work on the exhibition had helped them to curb certain ‘formalist mistakes.’⁴⁷⁰ Yet, in spite of this apparent progress, Melikadze chose to use his speech to highlight the Georgian artists whose works were rejected from the exhibition for embodying those same mistakes.⁴⁷¹ As a whole, he concluded, Georgian artists had overcome many shortcomings, but ‘nevertheless, there are still mistakes, there are still defects.’⁴⁷² He goes on to lament that ‘some pictures are weak in the drawing’ and complain that ‘one could give many examples where an artist has not finished [his or her painting, and] has not created an individual, typical, collectivised image.’⁴⁷³

Following Melikadze, Kemenov praised Toidze and Kutateladze’s works as worthy of being considered among the best works of Soviet art. However, his assurances that he offered this praise ‘not [just] because they are present here’ introduced the idea that this was exactly the reason for his comment.⁴⁷⁴ Moreover, his observation that ‘there are also other comrades whose works could be considered not bad’ damned with the faintest of praise.⁴⁷⁵ Kemenov then concluded his shorter address by condemning the ‘older generation of [Georgian] artists who were seconded overseas’—meaning, implicitly, artists such as Gudiashvili, Kakabadze and Akhvlediani—as irredeemable in the contemporary context.⁴⁷⁶ Those names ‘are not here [in the exhibition], and could not be here.’⁴⁷⁷ He made this claim despite the fact that Akhvlediani and Gudiashvili, both of whom belonged to that group of artists, had several

⁴⁶⁸ ‘Наш народ жаждет видеть в изобразительном искусстве своих вождей, свое революционное прошлое.’ Ibid., l. 5.

⁴⁶⁹ ‘На выставке есть недостатки. Наша пресса указывали и всем товарищем известно.’ Ibid., l. 7.

⁴⁷⁰ ‘Формалистические ошибки.’ Ibid., l. 7.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., l. 8.

⁴⁷² ‘Тем не менее, ошибки ещё есть, дефекты есть.’ Ibid., l. 9.

⁴⁷³ ‘Некоторые картины слабы по рисунку’ and ‘Можно привести много примеров где художник ещё не доработал, не создал индивидуального, типичного, обобщённого образа.’ Ibid., l. 10.

⁴⁷⁴ ‘не потому, что они здесь.’ Ibid., l. 11.

⁴⁷⁵ ‘Есть и другие товарищи, работы которых можно было бы считать неплохо.’ Ibid., l. 11.

⁴⁷⁶ ‘старшее поколение грузинских художников, которое было командировано за границу.’ Ibid., l. 11.

⁴⁷⁷ ‘Здесь нет этих фамилии и очевидно быть не может.’ Ibid., l. 11.

works in the exhibition.⁴⁷⁸ Kemenov's comments, in their vagueness, were a warning for all those belonging to or connected with the 'older generation' of Georgian artists, which euphemistically encompassed all whose painting strayed from the narrowest definition of realism. In a final address, Igor Grabar cemented the critical and condescending tone of the meeting by offering advice to Kutateladze on improving his work. After acknowledging that the artist had produced 'interesting things,' Grabar criticised a degree of artificiality, decorativeness and 'lack of consciousness' that he claimed weakened Kutateladze's painting.⁴⁷⁹

In their responses, Kutateladze and Toidze then confirmed the dynamic of superiority that the previous speakers' comments embodied, talking with self-effacing reverence for Russian artists and the Russian artistic tradition. Beginning his address, for example, Kutateladze delicately explained that he knew not to take all of his Russian colleagues' praise at face value, since he understood that comradely politeness bound them to be kind.⁴⁸⁰ This proposition, moreover, was not refuted by his Russian colleagues but met with laughter that gently acknowledged that what Kutateladze said was true. Following that introduction, Kutateladze went on to declare the deficiencies of the Georgian artistic tradition, relative to the Russian one. He lamented that Georgia had no tradition of realist painting comparable to Russia's.⁴⁸¹ For that reason, he explained, close relations with Russian artists (and implicitly, Russian artists' mentorship), was vitally important for Georgian artists' success. Thanks to his interactions with Moscow's artists, Kutateladze enthused, he was now able to view his own work 'from the point of view of Gerasimov, Iogansson and others.'⁴⁸² He concluded by thanking his Russian colleagues, and the Tretyakov Gallery, for their support.

The repetition in the press and elsewhere of the same condescension on the part of Russian artists and critics and the same self-effacing reverence from Georgian artists makes it clear that these were standardised expressions of a new Russo-Georgian relationship, articulated from the time of the exhibition's opening. As a glut of articles talked about the exhibition's success in spite of Georgian artists' failings, Georgian artists were wheeled out

⁴⁷⁸ Indeed, the only prominent member of that group missing was Kakabadze, although, as discussed earlier in this thesis, this was not due to the Party's or Beria's unwillingness to include Kakabadze in the exhibition. See NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 43, ll. 40 and 45.

⁴⁷⁹ 'Интересные вещи' and 'некоторая неосознанность' Ibid., l. 33.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., l. 49.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., l. 51.

⁴⁸² 'с точки зрения Герасимова, Иогансона и др.' Ibid., l. 52.

to confirm their own inferiority and submission.⁴⁸³ Further comments offered by Kutateladze and published in *Pravda* summed up the position in which Georgian artists found themselves:

Talent and political conviction, devotion to the Bolshevik Party, that is what an artist needs in order that his painting is just. That I have understood. It often came to me to turn to com. Beria for the clarification of political questions, and he never once refused to help.⁴⁸⁴

Kutateladze had understood that submission to the Party's ideological agenda was the only real factor determining the approval that they could expect.

To add insult to injury, Georgian artists did not receive many of the honours and benefits that they were promised during preparations for the exhibition. At the meeting of the Artists' Union in November 1937 and at another in March 1938, artists complained that they were never given the studios and accommodation they had been promised and that they were yet to receive payment for commissions.⁴⁸⁵ They also grumbled that since work on the exhibition had finished, funding for their work was again scarce.⁴⁸⁶ Several artists even protested that they still did not know whether or not the works that they had sent to Moscow had been included in the exhibition.⁴⁸⁷ However, by the time of the November meeting absolute reverence for the Party leadership in Moscow had been established. The meeting even opened with one artist's suggestion to elect an honorary presidium of the Georgian Artists Union comprising Stalin, Beria, Voroshilov and other members of the Politburo.⁴⁸⁸ The suggestion was met with a standing ovation and the entire congregation's 'wild applause'.⁴⁸⁹ Georgian artists, then, did not see themselves as beneficiaries of the exhibition, but felt compelled, whether through genuine admiration or fear of reprisal, to express their absolute support for the leadership in Moscow.

⁴⁸³ Comments about artists' shortcomings fill the pages of many of the reviews, despite a generally positive evaluation of the exhibition itself. See, for example, Kriger, 'Istoriia.'

⁴⁸⁴ 'Талант и политическая убежденность, преданность большевистской партии—вот что нужно художнику, чтобы картина была правдивой. Я это понимал. Мне часто приходилось обращаться к тов. Берия за разъяснением политических вопросов, и он никогда не отказывал в помощи.' A. Kutateladze, 'Bolshaia tema,' *Pravda*, 22 December 1937, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁵ Artists made similar complaints throughout the meeting. Toidze, for example, complained that work opportunities and funds for commissions had not been shared with artists, and that Duduchava had prevented him from collecting an honour that had been awarded to him. See NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 133, l. 92.

⁴⁸⁶ For example, Mirzoev attempts to defend the treasury's work, but complains that they were not able to set up new studios because Duduchava had misspent the Union's money. *Ibid.*, ll. 195-6.

⁴⁸⁷ NAG f. 10, op. 1, ed. khr. 100, ll. 53 and 80.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 2.

⁴⁸⁹ 'бурные аплодисменты.' *Ibid.*, l. 2.

'The responsibility for depicting Stalin belongs completely to Georgian artists'⁴⁹⁰

These revelations help to explain why Beria elected to use only Georgian artists in the production of his exhibition, and why the Georgian exhibition was the only Stalin cult exhibition of its scale, planning, thematic cohesion and political significance to present works by artists belonging to a single Soviet nationality.⁴⁹¹ It is fair to conclude, as Sarah Davies does, that it is 'not surprising', given Stalin's Georgian birth, that in the 1930s and 40s 'the Georgians were particularly active suppliers of cult material concerning Stalin's childhood and youth,' particularly since 'the cult was a potentially useful way of boosting the republic's status and that of Beria.'⁴⁹² It seems sensible and natural that Georgian artists might be the primary producers of painted images of Stalin in his youth, simply because much of that period of Stalin's life was spent in Georgia. Georgian artists might well be expected to have felt a particular right to portray Stalin because of their national kinship, and were well placed to do so because of their access to locations that witnessed momentous moments in the leader's life and career. They might well have relished Stalin's Georgian birth as a reason for them to expect and seek greater opportunities and recognition in Moscow.

Nevertheless, this does not explain why Beria did not draw on the resources of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the production of his exhibition, which after all was about Stalin's activities not only in Georgia but in Transcaucasia, or why other republics did not attempt similar feats in the late 1930s and 1940s. It does not attempt to consider these questions in the context of Soviet national politics, including the changing relations between Georgia and the Soviet centre in the 1930s, or to examine them with reference to the representation of Stalin's nationality in the context of the personality cult.

There are several possible simple explanations for the choice, including matters of practicality and logistics. One might conjecture that the Georgians were selected with a view

⁴⁹¹ The closest equivalent to the Georgian exhibition in terms of exhibitions of national art was a smaller exhibition of works by Azerbaijani artists that opened in Baku in November 1937. In preparation for the exhibition, *Pravda* reported that forty-four Azerbaijani artists were working on the theme of 'The Work of Comrade Stalin and His Allies in Azerbaijan', although a later notice of the exhibition's opening didn't mention the theme as a feature of the exhibition. The exhibition did not travel to Moscow, and received only a fraction of the publicity given to the Georgian exhibition. 'Vystavka kartin v Baku,' *Pravda*, 2 October 1937, p. 3; 'Vystavka kartin khudozhnikov Azerbaidzhana,' *Pravda*, 1 December 1937, p. 6. There was also a large exhibition of Armenian art in Moscow in 1939, but it was not based around a single unifying text, as in Georgian case. See *Vystavka izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva Armianskoi SSR* (ex. cat.) (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1939.)

⁴⁹² Sarah Davies, 'Stalin and the Making of the Leader Cult in the 1930s' in Apor *et al.*, *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships*, pp. 29-46 (p. 40).

to developing a more personal and relatable vision of the leader. Through the Georgian people's connection to Stalin's early roots, Georgian artists might offer tantalising cultural insights or personal recollections about his childhood character. As we know from contemporary culture, it is the personal that most immediately captures our attention and invests us in a celebrity figure, which must have been among Beria's goals. Alternatively, Georgian artists may have been chosen for logistical reasons, because Beria's residence in Tiflis made them easier to supervise than artists based in Yerevan or Baku. It might have been concluded that Georgian artists would find it easier to travel around Georgia to visit the locations in which Beria's history was played out and to converse with local people. Given that Georgia was part of the ZSFSR at the point at which the exhibition was conceived, it might have been considered appropriate to draw on artists from Tiflis as the Transcaucasian region's cultural capital, particularly considering that many Russian and Armenian artists were also based in the city. While the overwhelming majority of the contributing artists were of Georgian nationality, a handful of artists of non-Georgian descent, such as Nalbandian, also featured.

The question is also complicated by the fact that signs of Stalin's Georgian nationality were generally absent from his personality cult. Instead, as Jan Plamper and others have shown, Stalin's ethnicity was represented as supra national due to his identity as the father of the Soviet peoples (*otets narodov*).⁴⁹³ The representation of Stalin's nationality in the personality cult did evolve over the course of the 1930s, 40s and 50s. In film, for example, the Jewish actor Semen Gol'dshatb played Stalin several times in 1937-8, before being replaced by Mikheil Gelovani, a Georgian, from 1938.⁴⁹⁴ Later, in the late 1940s, Gelovani, who spoke with a strong Georgian accent like that of Stalin himself, was replaced at Stalin's behest by the ethnic Russian Aleksei Diky—a shift that has been connected with Stalin's quest to Russify his image at the height of the 'anti-Cosmopolitanism' campaign.⁴⁹⁵ However, in spite of these shifts, Stalin was consistently presented as existing above ethno-territorial national divisions, belonging to all Soviet nationalities equally and at once: 'Georgia, when appearing in representations of Stalin, only did so as locally coloured background, as folkloric wallpaper in one of the many rooms of the "USSR as a communal apartment"'.⁴⁹⁶ Indeed, as other Soviet nationalities developed their own canons of art on the

⁴⁹³ Plamper, 'Georgian Koba or Soviet "Father of the Peoples"?' pp. 123-40.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-27.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124. In referring to the 'USSR as a communal apartment', Plamper is citing Slezkine 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism.'

Stalin theme, local vernaculars were even established, so that Central Asian representations of Stalin the leader frequently bore Asiatic features and ‘distinctly “Polish,” “German,” or “Romanian” Stalins emerged.’⁴⁹⁷

The separation of Stalin from his Georgian ethnicity in the context of the personality cult requires us to acknowledge that more was at play in the choice of Georgian artists for Beria’s exhibition than the fact of Stalin’s Georgian birth. A more convincing explanation, taking into account the evidence offered by the detailed examination of the exhibition undertaken in this chapter, is that the choice was less about convenience, or about Stalin’s ethnicity. Instead, it was about configuring and announcing Georgia’s place in the Soviet Union in light of evolving political imperatives and changing nationalities policy. Georgians were given special status in Stalin’s Soviet Union. They enjoyed greater access to opportunities both inside the Georgian SSR and elsewhere in the Soviet Union, including in Moscow, than Soviet citizens belonging to another national group, excepting only the Russians.⁴⁹⁸

As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, the concessions Georgia enjoyed were driven in part by the threat that the Soviet leadership perceived in Georgia as a result of Georgians’ strong nationalist impulses and their instinctive resistance to centralised control from Moscow. As such, the Georgian exhibition of 1937, and the particularly fervent production of the Stalin cult in all spheres of cultural life in Georgia under Beria’s supervision, is best understood as an initiative intended to control as well as appease Georgian exceptionalism. In the Soviet Union, under Soviet nationalities policy, the expression of nationhood and national identity was limited to the sphere of culture. The Georgian exhibition encouraged the expression of a kind of Georgian cultural identity. It provided a platform for the display and dissemination of painting and sculpture from the Georgian SSR. However, the type of identity that was expressed through the exhibition was carefully and meticulously prescribed, firstly via Beria’s text, and secondly through his close supervision of the exhibition’s planning and production. The type of painting demanded from artists left no room for the expression of an idea of national identity reflected in any distinguishable ‘national form’. Artists were expected to produce works of history painting that followed from the Russian tradition and painters such as Surikov. Instead, the only perceptible expression of ‘national feeling’ was in an implied sense of the special affection that the Georgian people, including Georgian artists, held for the Soviet leader. Georgian

⁴⁹⁷ Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*, p. 180.

⁴⁹⁸ Blauvelt, ‘Status Shift and Ethnic Mobilisation,’ p. 654.

artists' affection was expressed through the continual repetition of Georgian artists' raptures at being given the honour of producing the works for the exhibition. The Georgian people's adoration was then reflected in the sheer volume of material the Georgian nation collectively contributed to the Stalin cult, including the exhibition. However, it was also represented in the exhibition symbolically. Since the crowds that appeared in many of the canvases, listening attentively to Stalin's speeches, were comprised of the leader's Georgian kinsmen, they symbolised not just the Soviet people's love for Stalin, but that of the Georgian nation in particular.

At the same time, the exhibition's expression of Georgia's place in the Soviet Union, and Georgia's relationship with central Soviet power, was also carefully dictated from above. Making the exhibition one of Georgian national art allowed it to appear to confirm Georgia's privileged status and to appease Georgian national pride. The Georgians would be the first to take on this honoured task. However, the exhibition was also an expression of central control over Georgian life, politics and all forms of expression, including in the cultural sphere. The heavy handed supervision of the preparations for the exhibition, moreover, including constant supervision by Beria and representatives at IMEL, and the consolidation of Georgian artists' studios into the building of the Georgian National Gallery where they could be more easily monitored, confirmed this message. The highly public last-minute rejection of works from the exhibition that did not demonstrate a sufficient degree of conformity with socialist realist orthodoxies, moreover, sent the same message. It made clear the newly stringent controls to which Georgian artists (and by symbolic extension the Georgian people) would now be required to submit. Finally, the repression of Duduchava and several other senior administrators of the arts in Georgia confirmed that divergence from this path would not be tolerated.

This chapter has shed new light on the complicated political objectives of the Georgian exhibition of 1937 and examined its consequences and implications for Georgian artists. It has demonstrated that while the exhibition served several political functions simultaneously, some goals were prioritised. The exhibition was presented as a demonstration of the success of Soviet nationalities policy, which, the Party claimed, had facilitated a flourishing of the arts and of national culture in Georgia. However, the exhibition reflected (and signaled) a shift in nationalities policy, both in general and with respect to Georgia in particular. While the exhibition was offered as evidence of a flourishing of Georgian national culture, all evidence of a specific 'national form' in Georgian painting was stripped from the works presented. Georgian 'national form' was reconfigured and reduced to a notion of the

Georgian people's special affection of Stalin as the greatest son of their homeland. This narrative was useful in flattering the Georgian people with the idea of their special closeness to the leader, and thereby further encouraging their loyalty to him. It was also valuable in disguising the confiscation of cultural freedoms that non-Russian Soviet nationalities, including the Georgians, had previously enjoyed. At the same time, denigration of Georgian artists' technical mastery in the press asserted the superiority of Russia's national culture to the cultures of the remaining Soviet nationalities, including the Georgians. The evaluation of Georgian paintings using the Russian realist tradition as the only metric confirmed that success for Georgian and other national artists would come through emulating their Russian colleagues. A central task of the exhibition was the materialisation of Beria's history of Stalin's early career—the transformation of ideology into reality. However, Beria's decision to enlist only Georgian artists in the project ensured that it fulfilled many political aims beyond this one. These included subjugating Georgia and the Georgians, both symbolically and in practical terms, to Moscow's will—or at least providing Georgian artists with the opportunity to publicly declare their own and the Georgian people's willing allegiance to the central Soviet authorities. For Georgian artists, the project meant dramatically increased central Party supervision that was not matched elsewhere.

Chapter 6: Reinventing Pirosmeni in the 1920s and 30s

This chapter continues investigations presented earlier in this thesis concerning the attempts of artists, critics and other commentators in the 1920s and 30s to interpret Soviet policy calling for ‘national form’ in Soviet culture. It does so, however, through a specific lens. Examining commentaries that appeared from the mid-1920s through to the end of the 1930s concerning the pre-Revolutionary self-taught Georgian painter Niko Pirosmeni, it considers Pirosmeni’s place in discussions about the ‘national form’ of Soviet Georgian painting. It explores his role in the delineation of a Georgian ‘national’ canon of Soviet art both before and after his canonisation as a ‘Great Tradition’ of Georgian culture in the second half of the 1930s.

As discussed earlier in this thesis, in the mid 1930s, in connection with the establishment of the new Soviet Constitution in 1936, Soviet nationalities policy was reconstructed based on a newly primordial conception of ‘nations’ and ‘national cultures.’ This new conception privileged ‘nations’ shown to be ‘more developed’ and of greater longevity, helping the Party to justify the ‘consolidation’ (assimilation) of nearly two hundred national groups into a much smaller number of Soviet ‘nations.’ This newly primordial construction of nations, however, also consolidated assumptions about nations and ‘national cultural heritage’ that, as observed in chapters two and three of this thesis, were already held by many Soviet cultural commentators in the 1920s and early-1930s. Many of those commentators already expressed conceptions of nations and ‘national cultures’ that reflected a primordial understanding of nations as naturally and inevitably existing entities, and which drew no distinction, for example, between contemporary ‘nations’ and their pre-modern ancestors. Commentators seeking to interpret the slogan of ‘national form’ in Soviet culture presented divergent ideas about what that form might constitute (ranging from ‘national’ aesthetic traits to ‘national’ climatic or socio-political conditions). However, they tended not to articulate any particular definition of the ‘nation’ in question, or of what should or should not be included within the canon of its ‘national cultural heritage.’ Instead, the definitions of these terms were taken to be self-evident. With the shift in Soviet nationalities policy that took place in the mid-1930s, though, these assumptions were formalised in an approach to nations as primordially existing units and whereby ‘classics’ or ‘Great Traditions’ of Soviet ‘national cultures’ were identified, often in examples of ‘cultural heritage’ that pre-dated the Soviet era by centuries.

In this context, Pirosmeni's painting was selected as a 'Great Tradition' of Georgian national culture. In celebration of this fact and to mark the twentieth anniversary of the painter's death, he was honoured with a personal exhibition of 110 works held at the Metekhi Museum (Georgia's main art museum, formerly and presently the National Picture Gallery of Georgia) in Tbilisi in 1938. However, throughout the late-1920s and 1930s, Pirosmeni was already the subject of considerable attention. In the early 1920s, following the establishment of Soviet power in Georgia, Dimitri Shevardnadze, assisted by Kirill Zdanevich and others, devoted considerable energy to locating and acquiring as many of Pirosmeni's paintings as he could to be preserved in the collection of the Georgian National Picture Gallery. Pirosmeni's works were also acquired by Glaviskusstvo for state collections in Moscow in 1928.⁴⁹⁹ And in 1930 a personal exhibition of 60 of Pirosmeni's paintings opened at the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. This exhibition subsequently toured to other Soviet centres including Leningrad, Kiev, Kharkov and Odessa, after which it was intended to travel on to several European cities. Pirosmeni's paintings were also featured in GAKhN's Art of the Nations of the USSR exhibition in Moscow in 1927 as well as in the 1937 exhibition of Georgian art in Moscow.

In addition to these exhibitions, commentaries on Pirosmeni by some of the most prominent Georgian and Russian art historians and critics writing on Georgian art, including Duduchava, Rempel, Shevardnadze and Chepelev, also appeared throughout this period with notable frequency.⁵⁰⁰ These commentaries, moreover, are striking not only in their quantity but in their consistently positive appraisals of Pirosmeni—a circumstance that may seem surprising when one considers the widespread denunciation in the Soviet press of Pirosmeni's pre-revolutionary associates, and the sustained criticism of painters, such as Gudiashvili, who considered themselves Pirosmeni's students.

It should be noted, of course, that the selection of unlikely sources as positive models for the Soviet cultural canon is far from unique to Pirosmeni. In general, the accepted model for the establishment of a Soviet cultural canon was based on Lenin's 'theory of two

⁴⁹⁹ See *Katalog priobretenii gosudarstvennoi komissii no priobreteniiam proizvedenii rabotnikov izobrazitelnykh iskusstv* (Moscow: Glaviskusstvo, 1928).

⁵⁰⁰ See Aleksandr Alf, 'Niko Pirosmenishvili,' *Iskusstvo*, 3-4, 1929, pp. 106-113; Duduchava, *Gruzinkaia zhivopis*, pp. 90-113; Rempel, *Zhivopis sovetskogo Zakavkazia*, pp. 62-73; Aleksandr Gen, 'Niko Pirosmenishvili' and Konstantin Paustovsky, 'Niko Pirosmenishvili: zhizn na kleenke,' *Brigada khudozhnikov*, 1, 1931, pp. 27-29; Dimitri Shevardnadze and M. Zubar, *Niko Pirosmenishvili: iliustrovani katalog vistavki: Kharkiv; Kyiv-Odesa. Sichen'-liutii 1931* (ex. cat.) (Kharkov: Sektor mistetstv NKO USRR, 1931) and *Vystavka Kartin Niko Pirosmenishvili* (Tbilisi: Metekhi Museum, 1938). A collection of essays in Russian and Georgian published in 1926 and including first hand accounts of several Georgian artists' and writers' encounters with Pirosmeni in the 1910s provided an important source for the above commentaries. See Titsian Tabidze *et al.*, *Pirosmenishvili* (Tiflis: Gosizdat, 1926).

cultures,' which stated that the culture of every society was made up of two parts—the dominant culture of the ruling class and the progressive culture of the oppressed class. The Soviet cultural canon, then, was to be built on the principle that all world culture could and should be mined for its progressive features. Those elements, cleansed of any features of the oppressive class' culture, would be the material from which the new Soviet culture was built. As Katerina Clark articulates, many Soviet intellectuals in the 1920s and 30s hoped that in mining this wealth of world culture, Soviet culture would become a beacon of progressive culture that would guide the progressive forces of rest of the world.⁵⁰¹ As such, the idea that Pirosmeni's painting might be mined for its progressive features, in spite of probable questions over the suitability of other elements of his legacy, is not surprising in itself. The same principles, moreover, applied in the delineation of the 'Great Traditions' of Soviet culture in the second half of the 1930s. The Pushkin established in this period as the 'official progenitor of a Russian national tradition,' for example, was a highly edited version of the poet as he had really existed. Cleansed of any former associations as 'an irreverent, irrepressible, and even bawdy poet,' he was transformed into the official 'guarantor / emblem of [that tradition's] linguistic and aesthetic norms.'⁵⁰² Pirosmeni could likewise be cleansed of negative associations.

Rather than proposing the selection of Pirosmeni as somehow an anomaly in this process, then, the goal of this chapter is to examine the range of representations of Pirosmeni that appeared in 1920s and 30s, both before and after his establishment as a 'Great Tradition,' and to consider how discussion of Pirosmeni in that period related to wider debates, traced in chapters two and three of this thesis, about the 'national form' of Soviet art. The chapter is concerned with investigating how Pirosmeni's art was characterised in the 1920s and 30s. What features were selected at different moments as evidence of its value in instructing the Soviet cultural canon? And was it more often presented as valuable in informing Soviet culture in general, or as a source of a specifically Georgian 'national' canon of Soviet art? As we will see, commentators spoke from a range of viewpoints, for different readerships and editorial boards, each with their own methodologies and motivations. Some focussed on deconstructing the artist's moral character and social conscience while others concerned themselves primarily with assessing formal qualities in his painting. Even those sharing similar approaches drew divergent conclusions, though all, for different reasons, and to differing degrees, agreed on Pirosmeni's relevance for the construction of Soviet painting.

⁵⁰¹ Clark, *Moscow*, p. 11.

⁵⁰² Clark, *Petersburg*, p. 289.

This chapter, then, analyses commentaries appearing on Pirosmanni in the 1920s and 30s with a view to offering a new lens through which to examine attempts to interpret demands for ‘national form’ in Soviet art. In addition, it hopes to offer some tentative suggestions as to the reasons for the selection of Pirosmanni as a ‘Great Tradition’ of Georgian culture in the second half of the 1930s, especially in the context of Beria’s reconfiguration of Georgia’s relationship with the Soviet centre through the 1937 exhibition of Georgian art in Moscow.

Representing Pirosmanni in the 1920s and 30s

Of the commentaries appearing on Pirosmanni in the 1920s and 30s, an article by Aleksandr Alf published in *Iskusstvo* in 1929 was among the most rapturous. While expressing indignation that (as the author believed) Pirosmanni was almost unknown outside of Georgia, it presented him unambiguously as a shining model for contemporary Georgian painters as well as for Soviet painters in general.⁵⁰³ It described Pirosmanni as the ‘first and most significant Georgian national artist,’ whose painting was fertilising ‘the young art of the national republics,’ and who deserved to be known ‘by all those who hold the fate of the young Soviet art near and dear.’⁵⁰⁴

In support of this assessment, Alf highlighted a range of features of Pirosmanni’s painting as well as aspects of his biography, including evidence he identified of Pirosmanni’s class identity and personal and moral character. Certain facts of Pirosmanni’s biography were available to commentators thanks to a collection of essays and personal recollections of encounters with Pirosmanni written by several of his contemporaries and published in Georgia in 1926. These included details of a humble and often chaotic life (whereby Pirosmanni tried his hand at a series of trades before turning to alcohol and scratching a living as a painter of signboards), and of his death in poverty and destitution in Menshevik Tiflis in 1918. However, Alf did not present Pirosmanni as others subsequently would, as a class victim of the injustices of pre-revolutionary society—a member of the lower classes unable to thrive under capitalist conditions. Instead, he nominated Pirosmanni a member of the proletariat, a proletarian artist who was successful in spite of the injustices of capitalist society—one of the ‘rare victors’ in a struggle with ‘the almost insurmountable obstacles that stood before the

⁵⁰³ Alf, ‘Niko Pirosmannishvili,’ p. 106.

⁵⁰⁴ ‘первого и крупнейшего грузинского национального художника’; ‘молодое искусство национальных республик’; ‘всякий, кому близки и дороги судьбы молодого советского искусства.’ Ibid., p. 112.

artist-proletarian on his path to culture and art' in the pre-Revolutionary era.⁵⁰⁵ He claimed for Pirosmanni an understanding of the 'artistic mission standing before all artists collectively,' of the benefits of 'collaborative effort and collective will,' and of a 'brotherhood of artists' in which artists support each other in their creativity.⁵⁰⁶ He identified in Pirosmanni's painting, moreover, a 'social accusatory bias' and 'craving to depict various industrial items' that he presented as evidence of the painter's investment in proletarian concerns.⁵⁰⁷ In this way, Alf insisted on Pirosmanni's validity as a model for Soviet proletarian painting.

The assessment Alf offered of the formal and thematic content of Pirosmanni's painting was also overwhelmingly positive. He praised Pirosmanni's 'wonderful works of art,' his 'laconic, expressive and idiosyncratic colour palette' and 'ceaseless artistic growth.'⁵⁰⁸ His declaration that 'among the national artists of the Union who have shown us the path of primitivism, the first and most honourable place belongs to Pirosmannishvili,' moreover, and his description of Pirosmanni's painting as 'healthy, organic primitivism, coloured with the taste of national originality,' both validated 'primitivism' as a model for Soviet painting and positioned Pirosmanni as a model for both Soviet and Georgian 'national' art.⁵⁰⁹ Indeed, it seemed to imply that Pirosmanni had not only established a useful model for Soviet painting, but also belonged directly to the Soviet cultural canon, despite his death having preceded the arrival of Soviet power in Georgia. He compared Pirosmanni's 'primitive' painting to that of Western European contemporaries including Paul Gauguin and the French primitivist Henri Rousseau, distinguishing what he described as Pirosmanni's 'organic primitivism' from Western European painters' pursuit of primitivism as a means of escaping 'the contradictions of Western bourgeois life.'⁵¹⁰ However, he also attributed the superiority he claimed for Pirosmanni to a richer representation of 'contemporary life,' proposing a better analogy for Pirosmanni's painting in the Mexican painter Diego Rivera's 'nationally, socially bright and colourful art, which plays an active role in the life, everyday existence and the revolutionary

⁵⁰⁵ 'редких победителей'; 'Почти непреодолимые препятствия стояли в дореволюционную эпоху перед художником-пролетарием на его пути к культуре и искусству.' Ibid., p. 106.

⁵⁰⁶ 'своеобразную художественную миссию, стоящую перед всеми художниками в целом'; 'коллективное творчество и коллективную волю'; 'братство художников.' Ibid., p. 108.

⁵⁰⁷ 'Социально обличительный уклон'; 'тяга к отображению различнейших индустриальных вещей.' Ibid., pp. 110 and 112.

⁵⁰⁸ 'прекрасных художественных произведений'; 'лаконическую и выразительную своеобразную гамму красок'; 'беспрепятственным художественном росте.' Ibid., pp. 106 and 110.

⁵⁰⁹ 'Среди национальных художников Союза, указавших на этот путь примитивизма, Пиросманишвили принадлежит первое и наиболее почетное место'; 'Здоровый органический примитивизм, окрашенный струей народной самобытности.' Ibid., p. 112.

⁵¹⁰ 'противоречий западного буржуазного быта.' Ibid., p. 112.

struggle of his nation.’⁵¹¹ Had Pirosmani lived to see the Sovietisation of Georgia, he suggested, we should suppose his painting ‘would have reflected the revolutionary struggle and the new life of Soviet Georgia with the same immediacy and truth [found in Rivera’s painting].’⁵¹²

As if to support the case he made for Pirosmani’s proletarian credentials and for the applicability of Pirosmani as a model for Soviet painters, Alf also offered an evocative account of Pirosmani’s life and of his personal character. Based largely on the 1926 memoirs, he united a tale of the depravation and misfortunes suffered by the artist with a portrait of his good character in a dramatic narrative in which Pirosmani was both hero and victim. In this highly sentimental and romanticising account of the artist’s life and character, he presented a colourful, strong-willed, proud and volatile but also good-natured and morally righteous character, child-like in his stubborn creative self-assurance and in his propensity to reject the society and assistance offered him by Tiflis’ cultural community. The main tropes of Alf’s account of Pirosmani’s life, then, were of a ‘proletarian’ steadfastness in spite of adversity. Yet they also built on popular stereotypes of a Georgian ‘national character.’ Alf spoke, for example, of Pirosmani’s ‘martyr-like exploit of fighting for his art,’ describing how he retained a ‘full cup of creative enthusiasm’ despite the oppressive socio-economic conditions of the capitalist society in which he lived—the heroic effort and superhuman fortitude of a truly dedicated proletarian artist.⁵¹³ But colourful anecdotes also added to a romantic portrait that drew on orientalisng stereotypes of Georgianness, including a street-wise wiliness that was mixed with resignation and resoluteness in adversity, self-sufficient pride, emotional sentimentality and a fondness for alcohol. Alf related, for example, the recollections of a tavern owner for whom Pirosmani had worked, who described the painter as ‘a very honest man, homeless, ill and poor’ who dressed in rags, ‘sat alone at the table’ and ‘wouldn’t accept refreshments from anyone.’⁵¹⁴ Yet the Pirosmani described was also ‘a good person’ who was ‘fond of poetry,’ ‘knew Georgian literature, loved Vazha Pshavela,’ ‘drank a lot of

⁵¹¹ ‘национально и социально ярко окрашенное искусство, играющее активную роль в жизни, быту и революционной борьбе его народа.’ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁵¹² ‘тяга к отображению различнейших индустриальных вещей’; ‘отразило бы революционную борьбу и новую жизнь Советской Грузии.’ *Ibid.*, p. 112. Alf’s choice of Rivera for comparison was perhaps a little imprudent considering that the painter had recently cut short a working visit to the Soviet Union (in 1927-8) under threat of arrest for anti-Stalinist activities and would be expelled from the Mexican Communist Party in 1929 for criticising Stalin’s regime. Nevertheless, it helped Alf to stress Pirosmani’s social consciousness and sympathy with the proletariat’s struggle.

⁵¹³ ‘почти мученического подвига борьбы за свое искусство’; ‘полную чашу своего творческого горения.’ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁵¹⁴ ‘очень честный человек, бездомный, болезный, бедный’; ‘садился один за стол’; ‘угощения ни от кого не принимал.’ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

vodka' and 'loved Georgians' but 'did not like the authorities.'⁵¹⁵ Alf presented Pirosmanni as a proletarian hero, but one whose character was based on prevalent affectionate but nevertheless orientalisising stereotypes of Georgianness. In doing so, he contributed to the development of a cult of Pirosmanni, versions of which, as we will see, continued to appear in commentaries published in Moscow and Georgia throughout the 1930s. Although those commentaries often identified divergent class identities for Pirosmanni and conflicted in their evaluation of various qualities of his painting, they drew consistently on these same stereotypes of character, which largely corresponded with popular notions of a Georgian 'national character.' Through their repetition of the same motifs, commentators on Pirosmanni contributed, whether consciously or otherwise, to the establishment of a cult of Pirosmanni that very likely precipitated (and afterwards validated) the selection of Pirosmanni as a 'Great Tradition' of Soviet Georgian 'national culture' in the second half of the 1930s.

Following Alf's article, Duduchava's *Gruzinskaia zhivopis* dedicated a whole chapter to Pirosmanni. Like Alf's article, it combined an evaluation of Pirosmanni's painting and his class profile while developing a particular image of the painter's character and life. His positive appraisal of Pirosmanni's painting and affectionate character portrait echoed much of the sentiment of Alf's writing. Like Alf, he praised the simplicity and expressive quality of Pirosmanni's 'primitive' style and distinguished what he presented as Pirosmanni's authentic primitiveness from the studied primitivism of Western European 'primitivists' such as Rousseau.⁵¹⁶ However, Duduchava diverged from Alf in his representation of Pirosmanni's class identity. Rather than celebrating Pirosmanni as a star of the proletarian class, he instead ascribed Pirosmanni to what Marx termed the 'lumpenproletariat,' a class of drunkards, criminals and vagabonds incapable of social consciousness.⁵¹⁷ He agreed that Pirosmanni instinctively sensed 'the social disorder in his bohemian society.'⁵¹⁸ However, he nevertheless committed the painter as a 'member of the petty bourgeoisie,' who, due to his class status, had not been equipped to effect any improvement to the social situation that he observed.⁵¹⁹ He represented Pirosmanni much as he represented Gudiashvili, as an artist who

⁵¹⁵ 'Добрый был человек'; 'Очень любил стихи'; 'знал грузинскую литературу, любил Важа Пшавела'; 'Очень много водки пил'; 'Любил грузин, но не любил власть имущих.' Ibid., p. 108.

⁵¹⁶ He actually refers to Jean-Jacques Rousseau but presumably intended to cite the French painter and Pirosmanni's contemporary, Henri Rousseau (1844-1910). See *ibid.*, p. 98.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., p. 98.

⁵¹⁸ 'инстинктивно чувствовал и как-будто видел в своей богеме социальную неустроенность обществе.' Ibid., p. 112.

⁵¹⁹ 'как мелкий буржуа.' Ibid., p. 113.

had sadly been prevented by circumstance from adopting a more socially revolutionary position, despite his natural social conscience. Indeed, rather than stressing Pirosmeni's class credentials, Duduchava emphasised his national ones, crediting Pirosmeni's 'primitive' painting with having singlehandedly revitalised a Georgian national canon of painting that, he argued, had lost its 'individuality' in the nineteenth century due to the imported influence of Russian realist painting.⁵²⁰ He presented Pirosmeni not as a representative of proletarian painting but as the embodiment and model of a Georgian 'national culture' that he implicitly suggested should be preserved and cultivated.

Despite differences of emphasis, Alf's and Duduchava's accounts were united in their positive appraisal—and evocative portrayal—of Pirosmeni's personal character. Indeed, Duduchava's portrait of Pirosmeni echoed many of the tropes observed in Alf's, suggesting the already ubiquitous nature of the cult of Pirosmeni appearing in this period. Like Alf, for example, Duduchava repeatedly painted a picture of Pirosmeni as child-like in his natural gentleness. He described him, for example, as viewing the world 'with child-like sincerity and creative love'—a view he corroborated with observations about the love of animals apparent in his paintings and his sensitive reflection of the psychology of his sitters.⁵²¹ Duduchava contradicted Alf's account of Pirosmeni as a tortured, bitter and lonely soul, as the suffering inhabitant of Tiflis' bohemian underworld (as an incarnation of capitalist social dysfunction). Instead, he represented him as an integral character in a specifically Georgian world—that of the joyously rowdy, 'carousing' Georgian petty tradesmen (*kintos*) presented in his paintings. As Duduchava told it, Pirosmeni 'loved the bohemia of Tiflis.'⁵²² He loved 'carousing,' 'hospitable friends,' 'eating houses,' and '*ashugi* (singing *kintos*).'⁵²³ He was fond of alcohol, 'unable to live without vodka and wine,' but this fact related to his unbridled enjoyment of bohemian life in Tiflis, not to any desire to escape it.⁵²⁴

Duduchava, then, offered an appraisal of Pirosmeni's qualities as a painter that was comparable to Alf's but contradicted Alf's evaluation of Pirosmeni's class identity and his representation of some aspects of Pirosmeni's character. In doing so, he tied Pirosmeni more definitely than Alf had to stereotypes of Georgian identity that had been perpetuated and developed in Georgia over the course of the preceding decades by a variety of intellectuals, not least by members of the Georgian modernist literary organisation known as the Blue

⁵²⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

⁵²¹ 'с детской искренностью, творческой любовью.' Ibid., p. 106.

⁵²² 'полюбил Тифлискую богему.' Ibid., p. 101.

⁵²³ 'Любил кутить.' Ibid., p. 101.

⁵²⁴ 'не мог жить без водки и вина.' Ibid., p. 100.

Horns.⁵²⁵ In associating Pirosmeni with a child-like gentleness and purity of character as well as with a romanticised, carnivalesque vision of pre-revolutionary Tiflis, Duduchava built on and consolidated Pirosmeni's place within that tradition. While Alf emphasised in Pirosmeni an appropriate model for Soviet proletarian culture, Duduchava stressed Pirosmeni's significance in belonging to—and personally reviving—a 'national' tradition, which Duduchava considered vital in informing contemporary Soviet Georgian painting. Nevertheless, whether positioning him primarily as the source of a proletarian or 'national' tradition, both commentators presented his painting as significant, and both contributed to a cult of Pirosmeni that inevitably moulded the way that he was viewed and presented later in the 1930s. Two articles published together in *Brigada khudozhnikov* in 1931 continued Alf's and Duduchava's highly complimentary tack, despite also sharply contradicting one another in both their approach to representing Pirosmeni and in their evaluation of his significance. The first, by Aleksandr Gen, was aligned in particular with Alf's in that it emphasised what it identified as Pirosmeni's attraction to themes of class struggle and industrialisation. It claimed that Pirosmeni noticed 'the tragedy of social contradictions and the class struggle' veiled behind the 'tinsel life' of pre-revolutionary Tiflis, while a series of 'scenes of working life' and 'social portraits' were 'infused with social pathos.'⁵²⁶ It also shared Alf's and Duduchava's positive appraisal of various formal characteristics of his painting, including the 'expressiveness and sharpness' of his palette and his mastery of composition, and continued their impulse to distinguish Pirosmeni's painting from contemporary Western European tradition.⁵²⁷ Nevertheless, in notable contrast to the preceding commentaries, Gen not only foregrounded social themes over discussion of Pirosmeni's representation of a 'national' tradition but explicitly pushed back against what he saw as other commentators' excessive emphasis on Pirosmeni's embodiment of 'national' traditions. He declared that it 'would be a great mistake to consider the work of Niko Pirosmenishvili only as a vivid expression of patriarchal national and cultural traditions' and criticised tendencies to romanticise the story of "poor Niko" the eternal vagabond.⁵²⁸ Gen, then, was concerned with recognising Pirosmeni as a valuable source in the development of a Soviet cultural

⁵²⁵ On this, see Ram, 'Decadent Nationalism.'

⁵²⁶ 'трагедию социальных противоречий и классовой борьбы'; 'мишурой быта'; 'сцен трудовой жизни'; 'социальных портретов'; 'проникнуты социальным пафосом.' Gen, 'Niko Pirosmenishvili,' p. 27.

⁵²⁷ 'выразительности и остроты'; 'богатство и многообразие.' Ibid.

⁵²⁸ 'Было бы величайшей ошибкой рассматривать творчество Нико Пиросманишвили, только как яркое выражение патриархальных национально-культурных традиции'; "'Бедный Нико," вечный бродяга.' Ibid.

canon, but rejected what he saw as excessive emphasis on his role at the head of a specifically Georgian national canon within it.

Konstantin Paustovsky's article, meanwhile, published alongside Gen's, was guilty of exactly the romanticisation of Pirosmeni's legend that Gen derided. It took a creative approach to its subject, attempting to establish, in Paustovsky's words, 'a biography of the artist according to his use of colour, the materiality of his objects, and lastly, by the themes of his pictures'—although what his text actually established was more like the illustration of his character.⁵²⁹ Paustovsky sought to present formal qualities identified in Pirosmeni's painting as reflections of Pirosmeni's character and biography. He began, for example, by painting for the reader an evocative vision of a backward but romantic Tiflis, describing the scene, for example, when he first saw Pirosmeni's work in 1923 'by the light of a high kerosene lamp' that cast sharp shadows over the quiet room while 'a clock ticked softly on the wall.'⁵³⁰ He then explained how this dingy environment, as well as the tragedy of Pirosmeni's destitute existence, found reflection in both Pirosmeni's painting and his demeanour. He interpreted Pirosmeni's dark palette and the absence of shadows in his paintings, for example, as proof that he was often working at first light, which Paustovsky took as evidence either that he slept poorly—perhaps due to his poor living conditions—that he was exceptionally committed to his art, or exceptionally desperate for the meagre living it could afford him.⁵³¹ The 'poverty' of Pirosmeni's materials (his use of oilcloth in place of canvas) is offered as a reminder of the impoverished conditions in which the artist lived and implicitly of Pirosmeni's forbearance in enduring them.⁵³² Unlike his predecessors, however, Paustovsky does not appear to have been concerned with presenting Pirosmeni as a model either for contemporary proletarian painting or as the figurehead of a Georgian national tradition. Instead, he demanded recognition of Pirosmeni simply as 'one of the best artists of the twentieth century,' albeit one whose story he associated with a wistful nostalgia for a backward and humble pre-industrial (and pre-Revolutionary, capitalist) Tiflis of artists' studios lit with oil lamps and adorned with softly ticking clocks.⁵³³

Shevardnadze's essay for the catalogue accompanying Pirosmeni's exhibition in Kharkov in 1931, by contrast, gave a somewhat more restrained, factual, primarily biographic account of Pirosmeni, less emotional in tone than Alf's, Duduchava's or Paustovsky's.

⁵²⁹ 'биографию художника по его колориту, по фактуре его вещей и в последнюю очередь - по темам его картин.' Paustovsky, 'Zhizn na kleenke,' p. 28.

⁵³⁰ 'при свете высоко поднятой керосиновой лампы'; 'глухо тихали стенные часы.' Ibid., p. 28.

⁵³¹ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵³² Ibid., p. 28.

⁵³³ 'одного из лучших мастеров начала двадцатого века.' Ibid., p. 29.

However, the illustration of Pirosmani's character and class identity as well as the tragic story of his life were still at its centre, and many of the same tropes were emphasised. Echoing Duduchava, Shevardnadze characterised Pirosmani as a 'true lumpen proletarian painter.'⁵³⁴ Like those before him, he emphasised Pirosmani's strength of character and commitment to his art, referring to his 'steadfastness and courage' despite 'suffering complete physical and moral disaster.'⁵³⁵ He did not foreground to the same degree as earlier commentators the illustration of Pirosmani's character as embodying either proletarian resilience or stereotypes of a Georgian 'national character.' However, he repeated many of the same clichés, for example, about Pirosmani's 'honesty, kindness to people, pride, and selflessness' and 'extraordinary ability for and love of painting,' and reproduced sympathetic comments about Pirosmani's misfortunes.⁵³⁶ His references to a figure who 'wandered from one place to another,' 'drank in order to paint and painted in order to drink,' was easily irritated by members of the the public commenting on his work, and 'found himself completely incapable of practical life,' moreover, repeated the same stereotypes of Georgian bohemia found in Alf's and Duduchava's commentaries.⁵³⁷

Shevardnadze did not address directly the suitability of Pirosmani's painting as a model for contemporary Soviet culture, or for a specifically Georgian canon within it. However, his declarations that Pirosmani viewed his subjects 'through the eyes of the Georgian people' and depicted life 'as the Georgian people see themselves,' while his painting was 'deeply imbued with the customs of old Georgia' clearly evoked a particular Georgian national cultural tradition and situated Pirosmani within it.⁵³⁸ Specifically, it positioned Pirosmani as embodying the voice of a Georgian nation distinguished by a unique set of customs and values. The implication, then, like that found in Duduchava's commentary, was that such a tradition was something to be valued and respected, whether as a model for contemporary Soviet culture or simply as a feature of a Georgian 'national' history. The cult of Pirosmani that Shevardnadze perpetuated, moreover, served to confirm Pirosmani's importance within that cultural tradition at the same time as it articulated the 'character' of the nation that produced it.

⁵³⁴ 'справжній люмен-пролетар-художник.' Shevardnadze, 'Niko Pirosmanishvili: (Zhitty maistera),' in Shevardnadze and Zubar, *Niko Pirosmanishvili*, pp. 6-7.

⁵³⁵ 'непохитності й мужності'; 'переносячи усі фізичні і моральні лиха.' Ibid., pp. 5 and 7.

⁵³⁶ 'надзвичайні здібності й любов до малювання, про його чесність, добрість до людей, гордість, безкорисливість.' Ibid., p. 5.

⁵³⁷ 'кочує з одного місця до іншого'; 'Він пив, щоб малювати, і малював, щоби пити'; 'виявив себе зовсім нездатним до практичного життя.' Ibid., pp. 6-7.

⁵³⁸ 'він очима грузинського народу'; 'життя так, як його бачить сам грузинський народ'; 'глибоко просякнуті звичаями старої Грузії.' Ibid., p. 7.

Unsurprisingly Rempel's account of Pirosmani's legacy, appearing in *Zhivopis sovetskogo Zakavkazia* a year later, was markedly less passionate in its approval for Pirosmani than accounts that came before it. Addressing other critics' positioning of Gudiashvili as an heir to Pirosmani's artistic legacy, for example, Rempel disputed any such honoured lineage, declaring the two artists to be linked instead only by their shared 'pessimism, mysticism and national romanticism' and 'mystical-erotic, decadent distortion of reality.'⁵³⁹ Indeed, in line with his wider methodology, Rempel was interested in Pirosmani primarily as an opportunity to dissect the 'class standpoints' that he embodied, although he ultimately struggles to reach a conclusion as to the painter's mixed and shifting class affiliations.⁵⁴⁰ By devoting so many pages to the discussion of Pirosmani (fifteen pages of a 153-page text purportedly dealing with contemporary Soviet painting in three republics, plus 13 of a total of 98 illustrations), however, Rempel implicitly confirmed Pirosmani's significance in the history of Georgian painting. His ambivalence towards Pirosmani, moreover, is notable in light of the vehemence of his disdain for the artists of Larionov's circle 'who, in the process of their decay arrived at neo-primitivism, the typical product of the collapse of urban petty-bourgeois culture.'⁵⁴¹ Even Rempel, then, amid the militant proletarianism of the Cultural Revolution, did not dismiss Pirosmani entirely. Instead, he appears, for whatever reason, to have been motivated to seek progressive features in Pirosmani's painting with a view to justifying Pirosmani's place in the Soviet culture canon.

There was an absence of writing about Pirosmani between 1933 and 1936, which corresponds with (and can be attributed to) the 'artistic reconstruction' taking place in those years under Beria's supervision, when Georgian artists and critics were occupied almost entirely with the production of Georgia's contributions to Stalin's personality cult, including the Moscow exhibition in 1937. In the late 1930s, however, following the establishment of the new Soviet constitution and the shift in Soviet nationalities policy that accompanied it, the official formulation of Soviet culture, and of the role of 'national cultures' within it, had changed. Pirosmani was now to be held up as an embodiment of a newly-imagined Georgian 'national culture.'⁵⁴² However, under the banner of the 'Friendship of the Peoples' the

⁵³⁹ 'пессимизм и мистицизм, а также национальный романтизм'; 'мистико-эротическое, декадентское, упадочническое искажение действительности.' Rempel, *Zhivopis sovetskogo Zakavkazia*, p. 77.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 64 and 66-67.

⁵⁴¹ 'деградируя, пришли к неопрimitивизму - типичному продукту распада городской мелкобуржуазной культуры под влиянием загнивающего капитализма.' Ibid., p. 62.

⁵⁴² There is more work to be done to clarify exactly when and how Pirosmani was singled out for the honour. The question remains of whether the choice of Pirosmani was imposed from above or evolved as a result of other factors, including Pirosmani's public popularity and the commentaries presented by intellectuals over the course of the 1920s and 30s.

delineation of the characteristics of the national culture that he embodied needed also to be compatible with narratives about the place of ‘Georgian’ culture and ‘cultural heritage’ within the greater pantheon of Soviet culture and its ‘heritage.’ In particular, it had to be compatible with narratives about the role of the Russian ‘nation’ in guiding the cultural development of her less-advanced brother nations.

In 1937, Vladimir Chepelev, then the head of the department of the Soviet East at the Museum of Oriental Cultures, discussed Pirosmi in the series of lectures that he delivered at the Tretyakov Gallery to coincide with its exhibition of Georgian art.⁵⁴³ Yet, perhaps surprisingly, in light of the recent establishment of Pirosmi as a ‘Great Tradition’ of Georgian ‘national culture,’ the focus of his argument that Pirosmi’s importance in the history of Georgian painting had been hitherto overplayed. The logic behind this argument becomes clear when we consider Chepelev’s further complaint, that representations of Pirosmi’s singular importance had led to the neglect of nineteenth-century Georgian realist painters such as Gabashvili and Mrevlishvili.⁵⁴⁴ Chepelev, then, set out in his lectures to refute the contention (which he ascribes more or less fairly to Shevardnadze and Duduchava) that realist painting lacked historical roots in Georgia’s cultural traditions, and that the influence of Russian realist painting had harmed the development of Georgian culture.⁵⁴⁵ In opposition to this idea, Chepelev presents the influence of Russian realist painting in Georgia as contributing to the development of an inclination towards realism already existing in Georgian painting, declaring that the entire history of Georgian art had been characterised by the pervasiveness of ‘narratives from simple human life’ that were analogous to such traditions.⁵⁴⁶ Despite ‘challenges’ that Chepelev perceived in formal characteristics of his painting, Pirosmi was declared to be a ‘talented artist’ who was commendable for having worked on such class-oriented themes as the national liberation struggle in Dagestan.⁵⁴⁷ His painting was not set apart from or in opposition to the development of realist painting in Georgia but presented as naturally compatible with it, especially in its supposed treatment of contemporary life and class struggle. Chepelev’s account thus allowed both Pirosmi and the influence of European and Russian realist traditions on the development of Georgian painting to be reframed in accordance with the new metaphor of the Friendship of the Peoples. The Russian realist tradition, as a progressive precursor to a contemporary Soviet

⁵⁴³ Vladimir Chepelev, ‘O gruzinskom iskusstve’ [lecture given at the Tretyakov Gallery, 27 October, 1937], GTG, Department of Manuscripts, f. 8, op. 3, d. 366, ll. 1-10.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., ll. 3-8

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., l. 4.

⁵⁴⁶ ‘сюжета из простой человеческой жизни.’ Ibid., l. 1.

⁵⁴⁷ ‘трудностями’; ‘талантливый художник.’ Ibid., ll. 7 and 14.

Russian national culture, was not to be viewed as the culture of Georgia's former oppressor. Instead, it represented the nourishing culture of a Soviet brother nation, helping to guide Soviet Georgian painting on a path of development that was both appropriate to the Soviet context and had shared roots in centuries of both Georgian and Russian culture.

Chepelev's sentiments were repeated by writer and journalist Evgeny Kriger in two reviews of the 1937 exhibition of Georgian art in Moscow and also by Bukhnikashvili, who wrote an essay for the catalogue accompanying the personal exhibition of Pirosmeni's painting that opened in Tbilisi in 1938. Kriger, for example, commented on the esteem for Pirosmeni that he had witnessed among young Georgian painters during a visit to Tbilisi the previous year, explaining that Georgian painters had expressed admiration in particular for his warm, deeply humanist treatment of his subjects and empathy for the lower classes.⁵⁴⁸ Echoing Chepelev, he expressed reservations about the 'childlike quality' of Pirosmeni's painting, but he also celebrated the 'immediacy of his impressions,' suggesting Pirosmeni's interest in representing contemporary life.⁵⁴⁹ Bukhnikashvili, meanwhile, positioned Pirosmeni not only, as others had done, as a painter concerned with social and class themes, but as the foreteller of the bright socialist future to come: presenting a proposal allegedly made by Pirosmeni to the Society of Georgian Artists to open a communal house for artists in the centre of Tiflis as a vision of the socialist world that would soon appear, he noted that Pirosmeni's dream had 'been realised ... in the amazing scale of the development of the creative life of Soviet artists.'⁵⁵⁰

With the establishment of the 'Friendship of the Peoples' metaphor and of a network of 'Great Traditions' of Soviet and 'national' cultures under it, certain parameters defining the ways in which Pirosmeni's significance was represented were set. Although individual commentators retained a degree of agency in the features of Pirosmeni's oeuvre that they stressed or celebrated, the 'Friendship of the Peoples' metaphor made it desirable to represent Pirosmeni's painting as complimenting, if not contributing to a shared, longstanding and naturally coinciding Georgian and Russian tradition of socially-committed 'realist' art. Despite the status of 'Great Tradition' newly accorded to Pirosmeni, commentaries appearing in this period seem to suggest a concomitant reduction in the absolute status of Pirosmeni's painting as a source of the Georgian national canon of Soviet art. Notably, however, the

⁵⁴⁸ Kriger, 'Istoriia.'

⁵⁴⁹ Kriger, 'Istoriia.' Ibid., p. 4.

⁵⁵⁰ 'Наивная мечта художника претворена нами в жизнь изумительным по размаху подъемом творческой жизни советских художников.' V. Bukhnikashvili, 'Niko Pirosmenashvili' in Shevardnadze *et al.*, *Vystavka kartin Niko Pirosmenishvili*, pp. 25-30 (p. 30).

impulse to romanticise Pirosmeni's legend and his character in this period was retained. Chepelev, for example, spoke wistfully of how Pirosmeni 'died tragically in need' while his art was 'mangled' by Larionov's circle.⁵⁵¹ Bukhnikasvhili described a photograph from Pirosmeni's youth in which 'a young man looks out with a beautiful, intelligent face' and 'expressive, cheerful eyes' while Kriger referred to Pirosmeni simply as an artist whom 'it is really impossible not to love.'⁵⁵² In the late 1930s, moreover, celebration of his character was foregrounded often in place of explicit approval for his painting, suggesting that as a 'Great Tradition' of national culture, his function was not so much as a model for Soviet Georgian painters but as an avatar of a constructed myth of Georgian 'national identity' that could be manipulated and moulded to serve different purposes at different times.

The Cult of Pirosmeni as the Personification of the Georgian Nation

The diversity as well as the striking positivity of appraisals of Pirosmeni throughout the late 1920s and 1930s raises the question of what made Pirosmeni's legacy so enduring and adaptable, and what made him suitable in the late 1930s for selection as a 'Great Tradition' of Soviet Georgian culture.

Before those questions can be fully answered, there is more research to be done concerning the process of establishment of 'Great Traditions' of national culture in the late 1930s in general, including about the extent to which these traditions were masterminded within the Party leadership and imposed from above, and about the role of artists, critics and other commentators as well as of public taste in precipitating their selection. Further research, moreover, is necessary to shed light on the range of the Soviet leadership's intentions and goals in establishing these traditions and on the process through which the legacies of the cultural figures selected as 'Great Traditions' were edited and amended to serve particular goals. As others have discussed, the new 'Great Traditions' were partly used to articulate new Soviet cultural orthodoxies. Pushkin, for example, as the representative of a 'Great Tradition' of Russian literature, became a yardstick for defining the linguistic and aesthetic norms of a rapidly crystallising canon of Soviet socialist realist literature.⁵⁵³ The establishment of 'Great Traditions' thus facilitated increased central Party control over the Soviet cultural canon by helping it to define its characteristic features. However, as is apparent in the case of

⁵⁵¹ 'исковерканный'; 'умерший трагически в нужде.' Chepelev, 'O gruzinskome iskusstve,' l. 7.

⁵⁵² 'смотрит юноша с прекрасными, умным лицом'; 'выразительные, жизнерадостные глаза.'

Bukhnikashvili, 'Niko Pirosmenashvili,' p. 25; Kriger, 'Pervye vpechatleniia.'

⁵⁵³ Clark, *Petersburg*, p. 289.

Pirosmani, the system of ‘Great Traditions’ also allowed the central authorities increased control over the articulation of particular Soviet and ‘national’ identities and over the articulation of new relationships established between the Russian and non-Russian ‘nations’ of the Soviet Union and the central Soviet authorities under the new rubric of the ‘Friendship of the People.’

Over the course of the late 1920s and 1930s, commentaries appearing on Pirosmani, in addition to debating the value of his painting in the Soviet context, consistently connected Pirosmani with stereotypes of a Georgian ‘national character’ that had been consciously constructed by intellectuals over the course of the preceding century. As others have shown, Russian and Georgian Romantic writers such as Lermontov and Pushkin as well as Aleksandr Chavchavadze and Nikoloz Baratashvili articulated particular visions of Georgian nationhood in the nineteenth century.⁵⁵⁴ Georgian nationalist thinkers in the late nineteenth century such as Ilia Chavchavadze and Niko Nikoladze presented others, and in the early twentieth century, writers associated with the *Blue Horns* literary organisation offered others still.⁵⁵⁵ Each of these constructions of Georgianness, however, built to some degree on those that preceded it, so that, regardless of the nationality of their authors, each, in different ways, developed on a romantic and orientalisng vision of Georgia and a Georgian ‘national character.’ When the avant-garde figures of Larionov’s circle discovered Pirosmani in the 1910s, they set out to reconfigure their own position between East and West by presenting their art as akin to Pirosmani’s, and Pirosmani as a ‘true primitive’—a category that they attributed to the art of the ‘East,’ and placed in opposition to the ‘studied primitivism’ of Western European modernism.⁵⁵⁶ In doing so, they first tied Pirosmani to a romantic and orientalisng vision of Georgia and Georgianness. These ties were then canonised in the volume of essays and memoirs published about Pirosmani in 1926 and, as we have seen, were subsequently drawn on by commentators in the late 1920s and 1930s to construct a cult of Pirosmani built on those stereotypes.

As regards the question of the reasons for the positivity of appraisals of Pirosmani throughout the late 1920s and 1930s and for the selection of Pirosmani as a ‘Great Tradition’ of Georgian national culture, one answer might be found in the unique malleability of his legacy—the particular scope for Pirosmani’s story to be adapted, appropriated and reinvented. One of the factors that made this scope so great in Pirosmani’s case, I would

⁵⁵⁴ Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*; Ram and Shatrishvili, ‘Romantic Topography and the Dilemma of Empire.’

⁵⁵⁵ Ram, ‘Decadent Nationalism.’

⁵⁵⁶ Sharp, ‘Beyond Orientalism.’

suggest, was the shortage of primary evidence illuminating the reality of his life, activities or views. He left no memoirs and, as a self-taught artist without any formal education, published no theoretical texts or other commentaries confirming his support for a particular social, national, class or ideological stance. The notebook that his contemporaries claimed he carried religiously, as well as his regular correspondence with his sister, might have contributed valuable further evidence, but both were apparently lost.⁵⁵⁷ Thus, the 1926 volume of essays and recollections became the principal source of Pirosmani's biography. The fragmentary nature of these sources introduced extraordinary scope for its embellishment and manipulation, ultimately leading the artist's foremost Soviet biographer to conclude that 'one must come to terms with the fact that everything written about Pirosmanshvili in the past, the present and the future will inevitably contain at least an element of fiction.'⁵⁵⁸ The absence of concrete evidence confirming Pirosmani's social and political outlook, as well as the range of social strata to which he objectively belonged over the course of his life, made it easy for commentators to hypothesise about the views Pirosmani held and to adapt Pirosmani's legacy to new political and cultural imperatives.

Arguably, though, the most important factor making Pirosmani appropriate as a 'Great Tradition' in the second half of the 1930s was the fact that a cult of Pirosmani had already been established, and that it already connected Pirosmani with existing stereotypes of a Georgian 'national character.' This cult, moreover, continued tropes of Georgianness that were familiar and popular among Georgian intellectuals (and perhaps also within the wider Georgian population), from representations of Georgia and Georgians that had been offered by intellectuals over the course of the preceding century. Whether Pirosmani's painting truly offered an appropriate model for Soviet and Soviet Georgian painting in the late 1930s, his cult offered the Soviet leadership a pre-established and highly adaptable vehicle for articulating a particular vision of the Georgian nation. Based on pre-existing national cultural stereotypes, it was appealing to intellectuals who were already attached to romantic conceptualisations of Georgian nationhood. It fed into it a narrative of Georgianness that was gratifying to the Georgian people, inspiring both national pride and contentment with a political system that gave the impression of supporting national cultural difference. In this way, it seems to have followed the logic of the *korenizatsiia* drives in that it offered the impression of support for expressions of national sovereignty, but for a kind of sovereignty

⁵⁵⁷ Erast Kuznetsov, *Pirosmani* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1975), p. 10.

⁵⁵⁸ 'Надо примириться с тем, что все написанное о Пироманишвили в прошлом, настоящем и будущем неизбежно будет содержать в себе хоть частицу вымысла.' *Ibid.*, p. 8.

that in practice was limited and controlled by the Soviet centre. It also fitted neatly within the new hierarchy of cultural forms set out under the banner of the 'Friendship of the Peoples' since, as we saw in Chepelev's commentary, Pirosmeni's painting could be presented as evidence both of concurrent trends in historical Georgian and Russian art and of the Russian nation's superior cultural progress. The evolution of Pirosmeni's cult over the course of the late 1920s and 1930s, moreover, had cleansed the romantic conceptualisations of Georgian nationhood that it was built on of any association with Tsarist imperialist roots by abstracting those notions from their original sources.

The failure of cultural commentators in the late 1920s and 1930s to agree on specific characteristics of Pirosmeni's painting that would enrich a nationally-specific canon of Soviet Georgian painting mirrored the failure of artists and critics in the same period to identify an appropriate 'national form' for that canon. Both circumstances were products of the inherent contradictions of a Soviet nationalities policy that simultaneously demanded 'national form' and promoted cultural homogeny. In the late 1930s, moreover, the continued foregrounding of the cult of Pirosmeni established over the course of the preceding decade rather than the content of his painting echoed conclusions about the 'national form' of Georgian culture suggested in the 1937 exhibition. National difference in the context of the 1937 exhibition was to be found in Georgian artists' special responsibility in representing and glorifying Stalin's achievements and in their special attachment to the leader in light of his own Georgian nationality, not in any particularity of style. Similarly, stylistic particularities of Pirosmeni's painting that had earlier been associated by some with national stylistic traits were either ignored by commentators in the late 1930s or explicitly declared to be problematic. The focus was on Pirosmeni as the embodiment of a conceptualisation of Georgian 'national character' that was appealing and familiar to Georgians and offered them an impression of cultural sovereignty while also helping to corroborate the new Soviet cultural hierarchy. At the same time, the establishment of Pirosmeni as a 'Great Tradition' of Georgian national culture created in Pirosmeni a prototype of Georgianness that had the potential to be manipulated and amended as necessary at a later date.

Conclusion

This thesis makes several important contributions to both to the study of Stalinism and Stalinist culture in general, to scholarship on the Georgian experience of Stalinism, and to the advancement of knowledge concerning the politics of Soviet culture and nationality.

It has introduced extensive, previously unstudied primary evidence pertaining to the history of Georgian painting and art criticism in the 1920s and 30s. These materials include periodicals and archival documents relating to the workings of artists organisations in Georgia such as the Society of Georgian Artists, Proletkult, SARMA, REVMAS and the Georgian Artists' Union as well as institutions in Moscow contributing to discussions about 'national form' in Soviet art such as the Museum of Oriental Cultures and GAKhN's Department for the Study of the Art of the Nationalities of the USSR. Further archival documents and excerpts from the contemporary periodical press, moreover, have illuminated the planning, design and reception of important exhibitions including the Art of the Nations of the USSR exhibition 1927 and the Georgian exhibition in Moscow in 1937. Through these materials, institutions and individuals (including important critics such as Duduchava, Rempel, Chepelev and Mirzoev) whose activities were central to the story of Georgian painting in the Stalin era and yet whose activities have hitherto remained obscure in the scholarship on Stalinist culture have also been introduced for the first time. They have also facilitated the first detailed examination of discussions that took place in Georgia and Moscow in the 1920s and 30s concerning Georgian painting and the question of 'national form' in Soviet culture, as well as of the single most important event in the history of painting in Georgia under Stalin, the 1937 exhibition of Georgian art in Moscow.

Based on the analysis of these materials, this thesis has also presented a series of conclusions about the specificity of the Georgian experience of Stalinism. It has established that the experiences and activities of Georgian artists and critics in the first decade and a half of the Stalin era not only differed significantly from those of artists and critics of other republics, but that they did so in diverse and evolving ways in response to a complex network of influencing factors. These factors were connected with the realities and practicalities of implementing Soviet nationalities policy in that period. However, they also reflected the complex ways in which wider Stalinist discourse and political and cultural imperatives interacted with the imperatives of Stalinist national politics. Existing scholarship on Soviet national politics has highlighted some of the factors contributing to the uniqueness of the Georgian experience of Stalinism. These include the role of Stalin's Georgian nationality, the

developed degree of Georgian national consciousness, and the Georgians' initial resistance to Bolshevik rule. However, there are still many questions to be answered regarding the degree to which these and other factors affected the Georgian experience in practice. There is more work to be done, for example, on how these factors affected (and ultimately benefitted or disadvantaged) Georgians' experiences, as well as on the degree of influence that one factor may have had relative to another. Through what mechanisms, for example, did Stalin's Georgian nationhood affect Georgians' experience of Stalinism? How did it ultimately impact the activities of Georgian painters on a practical level? And in what ways did it constitute an advantage or a disadvantage? Equally, how did the Georgians' developed degree of national consciousness and early hostility to Bolshevik rule affect the Soviet leadership's attitudes to Georgia? And how did those attitudes play out in Soviet policy? This thesis has made several significant steps towards answering these questions and advancing our understanding of the politics of culture and nationality in the Soviet Union.

Others have observed, for example, the 'special status' among Soviet nationalities that the Georgians enjoyed in the Stalin era. This status has been attributed largely to the advantageous associations of Stalin's Georgian nationality. Benefits of this status for the Georgians, moreover, have also been identified as including increased access to opportunities for work and positions of political authority in Moscow and special degrees of autonomy in local governance in Georgia. This thesis, however, extends existing knowledge about Georgia's 'special status' in several ways. Firstly, it has helped to provide a chronology for the establishment of Georgia's 'special status'—at least as it affected Georgian painters. Secondly, it has shed light on the practical implications of that status. My examination of the 1937 exhibition of Georgian art in Moscow, for example, has demonstrated that it was only in the mid-1930s, when a major shift in Soviet nationalities policy coincided with the stepping up of work on Stalin's personality cult, that an honoured role for Soviet Georgian painters emerged. It was then, for the first time, that Georgian painters were singled out, alongside their Russian colleagues, as providing a model that painters of other Soviet nationalities should follow.

It has also shown that the special status conferred on the Georgians at this time had a range of implications for the Georgians. It entailed a special honour, but also special responsibilities and restrictions. The honour that it entailed, moreover, was also limited, especially as regards the relative status of the Georgian and Russian peoples (and Georgian and Russian painters). Georgian painters were given special responsibility for depicting Stalin's early career, and for providing Soviet painters of other nationalities with a model for

depicting Stalin's activities. Yet this honour was accompanied, as we have seen, by extensive reductions in the autonomy that Georgian painters could claim. Their efforts in producing the exhibition were subject to an unprecedented degree of central Party supervision. And the fruits of those efforts were then presented through a carefully controlled programme of guided tours, lectures and reviews that explained to the public how both the exhibition and Georgian artists' achievements in it were to be understood. The prestige of their special responsibility, moreover, did not immunise Georgian painters against critical evaluations of their artistic achievements. Indeed, the high profile nature of their task if anything placed a spotlight on their deficiencies and, although the honour of the task that had been given to them was declared to be great, evaluations of their skill in performing it were mixed. At the same time, reviews of the exhibition as well as meetings held between Georgian and Russian artists in connection with it made clear that although the Georgians had been marked out by this special task, their status was still below that of their Russian counterparts. Accordingly, in the press and in person, Russian painters condescendingly offered Georgian painters advice for their improvement and the Georgians received this advice with graceful deference while acknowledging the Russians' superiority. In the same way, the assignment of special responsibility to the Georgian painters symbolically embodied the honoured status that the Georgian people were now to enjoy within the Soviet hierarchy of nations. Yet it also conferred on the Georgian people a special duty to lead the way in declaring their love and appreciation for Stalin and their support for his leadership. This both conferred on Georgians a gratifying privileged status and placed pressure on Georgians who had previously been reticent in declaring their support for the regime to now spell out their alignment with it.

There is no conclusive evidence confirming whether Georgian artists and critics were genuine in the love and appreciation they expressed for Stalin and Beria in the late 1930s, both through their production of the 1937 exhibition and in their pronouncements during meetings of the Artists' Union and in the contemporary press. The sudden *volte face* made by so many artists and critics between 1935 and 1937 in their assessment of Duduchava, however, seems to suggest that there was at least a degree of capitulation to Party pressure involved in precipitating Georgian artists' rapturous praise for Stalin and Beria and for the educational value that they claimed to find in working on the Stalin theme. The circumstance of several leading Georgian painters, including Kakabadze, failing to contribute works for the 1937 exhibition, also suggests that enthusiasm for it was at least not universal. Moreover, if Georgian painters were not motivated to participate by their appreciation of Stalin, the

significant monetary and other rewards offered for participation in the exhibition gave them plenty of alternative incentives to do so.

Regardless of whether Georgian artists in the late 1930s were genuinely inspired and motivated by their admiration for Stalin, others have demonstrated that, at least by the end of the Stalin era, many Georgians did develop an authentic and powerful attachment to Stalin and genuinely supported the Soviet leadership in Moscow. Indeed, the strength of that attachment was exemplified in the impassioned protests that took place (and were brutally repressed) in Tbilisi in 1956 in response to Khrushchev's initiation of de-Stalinisation.⁵⁵⁹ On this basis, Timothy Blauvelt has identified the appearance of a 'Stalinist Georgian nationalism (or Georgian national Stalinism)' according to which, for a time, 'Georgian nationalism, the honouring of Stalin's memory [and, before 1953, of Stalin] and the Soviet system were all aligned together.'⁵⁶⁰ As the Soviet leader, Stalin brought honour to the Georgian nation, as well as a host of special privileges, both of which encouraged Georgians' support for him.

There is some question over whether evidence of the genuine support for Stalin and the central Soviet authorities that the 1956 demonstrations suggests extended to the majority of Georgians (and more especially, to the majority of Georgian painters) in the late and post-Stalin eras. Blauvelt notes, for example, that a large proportion of those taking part in the 1956 protests were young Party and Komsomol members, suggesting that they might have been more likely to feel attachment to Stalin and the Stalinist regime than the wider population.⁵⁶¹ Their youth, moreover, meant that they had grown up under Stalinism, and were thus less likely to be able to view the regime (and its violence, for example) objectively, and therefore more likely to support it. By contrast, many of the leading Georgian painters of the 1950s and 60s were those with strong ties to the pre-Soviet world. As I have shown elsewhere, even the work of leading proponents of socialist realist painting in Georgia at that time appears to reflect ambivalence if not outright hostility towards the Soviet regime (or at least certain of its policies).⁵⁶² During the post-Stalin cultural liberalisation of the Khrushchev era, moreover, Gudiashvili, Akhvlediani and other painters formerly associated with the pre-Revolutionary transnational modernist avant-garde found themselves again at the centre of the Georgian artistic establishment. However, the fact that they never really adopted a style of painting compatible with Soviet socialist realism, and had for the most part avoided

⁵⁵⁹ See Blauvelt, 'Status Shift and Ethnic Mobilisation' and Blauvelt, 'Resistance, Discourse and Nationalism.'

⁵⁶⁰ Blauvelt, 'Resistance, Discourse and Nationalism.'

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Brewin, 'Ucha Japaridze.'

contributing to the production of the Stalin cult in the 1930s, suggests that they never truly aligned themselves with the Stalinist cause.

There is more work to be done on the impact of Georgia's 'special status' on the experience of Georgian painters in the later years of the Stalin era and following Stalin's death. The question remains of whether the special responsibilities conferred on Georgian painters in 1937 saw any continuation after that date, even if the Georgians in general continued to enjoy the benefits of their 'special status' in the Soviet hierarchy of nations until long after Stalin's death. What is clear, however, is that the 1937 exhibition together with the establishment of several 'Great Traditions' of Georgian national culture, appears to have successfully served the Stalinist regime in establishing a version of a Soviet Georgian national identity and an understanding of Georgia's privileged status that encouraged Georgian support for the regime. The 1937 exhibition, as well as representing a major contribution to Stalin's personality cult, symbolically declared Georgia's privileged status within the Union. Meanwhile, the simultaneous canonisation of an already existing cult of Pirosmiani helped to establish a version of Georgian national identity that was at once gratifying for Georgians and useful for the Soviet regime. The combined impression of cultural sovereignty and special status allowed that officially sanctioned version of national identity to become 'deeply enmeshed in people's mindset with the aspirations of the regime,' encouraging, if not absolute and universal support for the regime, then a significant increase in that support compared with the 1920s.⁵⁶³

As chapters two and three of this thesis showed, in the 1920s and early 1930s issues of practicality and logistics as well as of inherent theoretical contradictions in Soviet nationalities policy meant that its theory was frequently not translated into practice. Efforts to interpret the Party's demand for 'national form' in Soviet culture occupied artists and critics in Georgia as well as those responsible of representing, displaying and theorizing on 'national art' in Moscow. However, the competing imperatives ingrained in Soviet nationalities policy for the active cultivation but also anticipated transcendence of cultural difference between Soviet nationalities, as well as the soft-line nature of *korenizatsiia* (necessitating its abandonment in cases where it conflicted with more important political priorities), made it impossible to construct a viable formula for the 'national form' of Soviet culture in that period. Practical constraints, moreover, such as the time, money and negotiations necessary to re-construct museum collections and displays, made it difficult for institutions to keep up

⁵⁶³ Blauvelt, 'Resistance, Discourse and Nationalism.'

with the shifting priorities of Soviet nationalities policy, even when they had settled on a model of describing and displaying 'national art.' The contradictions and challenges presented by the demand for 'national form' in Soviet culture were resolved only with the reconfiguration of Soviet nationalities policy in the mid-1930s. At that time, efforts to delineate a satisfactory 'national form' for contemporary Soviet culture were replaced with the articulation of Party-sanctioned national identities that were symbolically constructed, partly through the appropriation of carefully selected and edited versions of cultural monuments claimed as each Soviet nation's 'national cultural heritage.' In Georgia's case, the editing of these 'Great Traditions' and the 'national identity' that they articulated (at least as regards Pirosmiani) was built at least partially on constructions of Georgian nationhood evolved by intellectuals both before Sovietisation and since.

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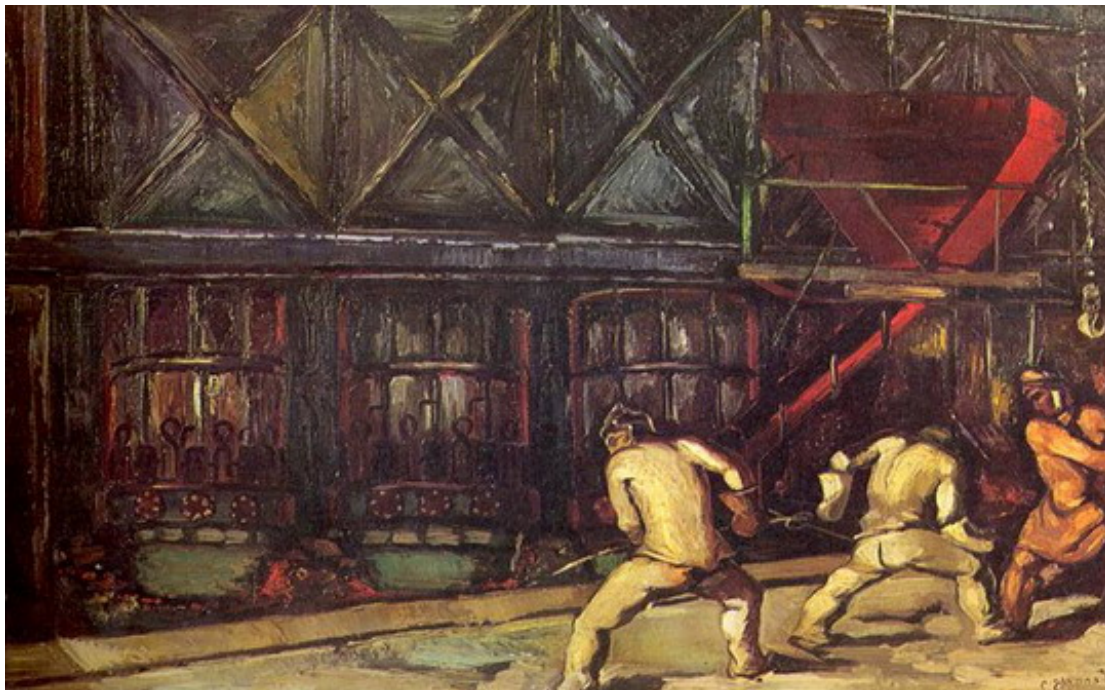


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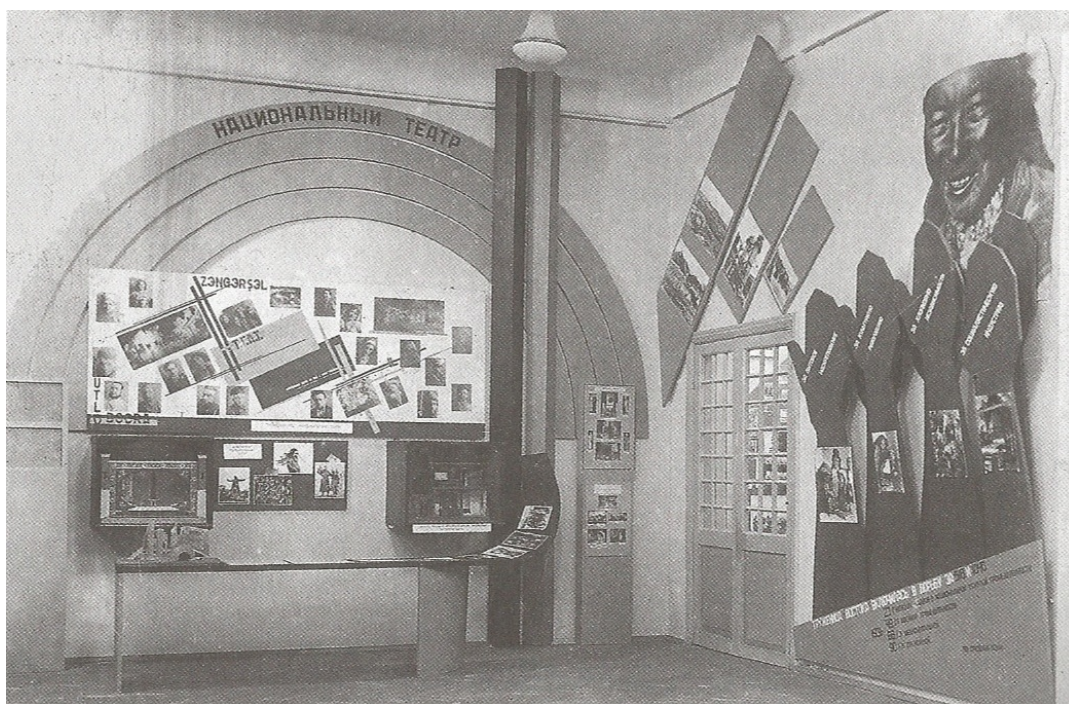


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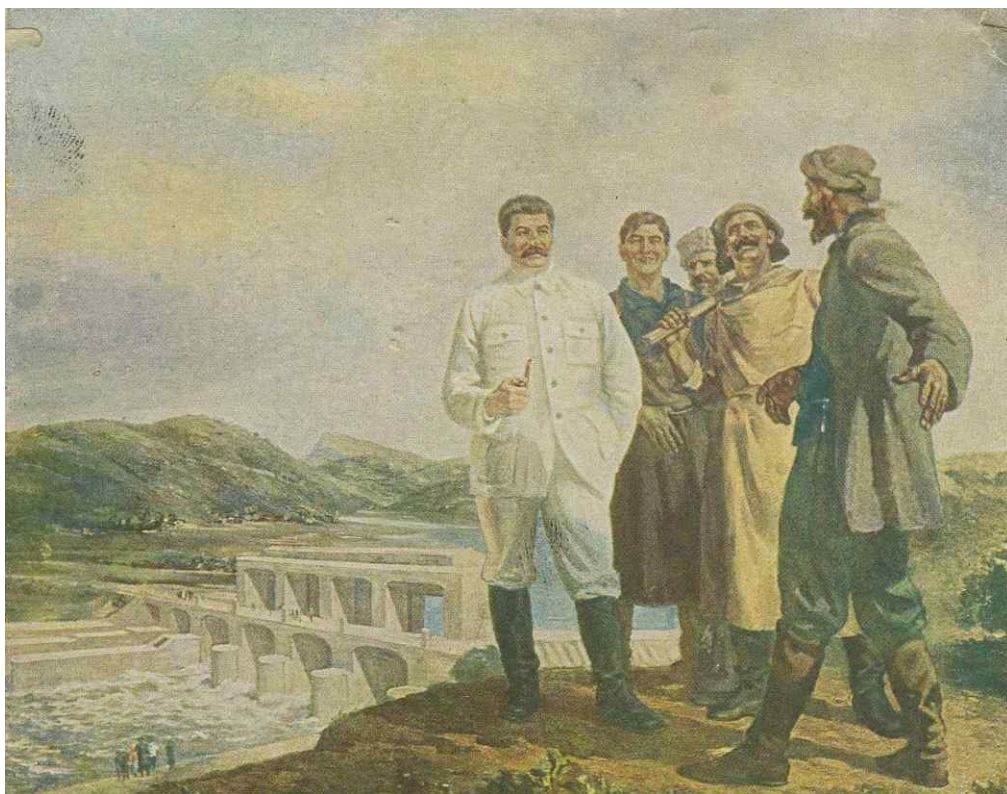


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