

Humanity today faces many challenges, and it is the aim and lifelong ambition of the gifted and imaginative artist to understand the principal meaning of life through the prism of his soul and to deliver his viewpoint to the public.

One characteristic of our century has been the way in which the connections between social and cultural cycles have disintegrated. Nowadays extreme individualism has been transformed into a search for the universal. But how does the universal manifest itself? It often occurs precisely in the chaos of everyday life by the loss of one's individualism. Individualism based on the existence of a sacred idea that demonstrates the lifetime philosophy of the artist, not formally but internally, represents his ego and fully represents his outlook.

David (Archil) Sulakauri is precisely this kind of artist.

I met the artist many years ago. When I first came to his house I felt profoundly as if I had been transferred into the far away past where scenes of the life of high aristocracy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century became real; it felt as though I had encountered the shadows of the past, and this made me altogether to forget our immediate present. I emphasize this moment in order to express the impact of the house itself which, with its history, has an impact as a perpetual source for artistic thought. There can be no doubt that David Sulakauri's unique world and its wonders were partially influenced by this environment.

David Sulakauri's paintings are about his anxieties and his pain. This is a world full of emotion, his subjective outlook, discovered and created by him and then offered to his audience; the world born in his imagination, so personal and pure yet shared with others. You can actually feel and suffer together with the artist. David Sulakauri transforms the general principles of life through a Georgian reality, and thus creates a deeply national sentiment, so characteristic of his paintings. Every aspect of his artistic vision is rooted into his inner self, in his own nature. He not only depicts reality but he creates new life prompting the depth of our own emotions. With his art he tries to show what he considers to be the most important and genuine attributes of life.

David Sulakauri belongs to the generation of the 1980s, to a generation which had constructed a characteristically new stage in terms of the search for a new stylistic language. This was a generation which had a pivotal role in preparing the ground for a new visual content.

David Sulakauri was born in 1952 into a family of artists. His father Karlo Sulakauri was a master of the art of the cartoonist; his uncle Archil Sulakauri was a renowned writer. David studied at the Academy of Art in 1972-78, at first in the faculty of painting restoration, and later in the faculties of painting and sculpture.

His biography shows that David was already seeking his own way into the artistic world. He was not quite satisfied with his education and became a pupil of the renowned artist Edmund Kalandadze,

who had a profound influence on the development of our young artist. Kalandadze had his own approach to artistic form where clear intensive colours had a special role. David Sulakauri followed his views and made them as the principal basis of his own artistic position.

Edmund Kalandadze was constantly in search of new artistic forms, and encouraged the new generation to open up to new challenges. He led them to discover for themselves new forms and a new artistic language that would make their art more progressive. His teachings are visible in David Sulakauri's paintings; more importantly they have been absorbed and become authentic.

At the same time Sulakauri was engaged with the Georgian (მსოფლიო) cultural heritage. The fusion of the innovative and traditional became the foundation of his artistic credo. He emphasizes a flat surface, where the outlines receive a special significance by rendering them especially dynamic and expressive; sharp gestures enhance the artful meaning, lines are rhythmic and taut, the colours are clear and intense; deformations, exaggeration, and sensuality all contribute to making Sulakauri's paintings deeply individualistic.

David Sulakauri's paintings are diverse in terms of themes, content and genre. He 'writes' landscapes, portraits, draws thematic compositions with multiple figures, paints religious scenes, works on easel paintings as well as monumental canvases; he creates graphics, dedicating much time to mastering the encaustic technique. His artistic life was characterised by the employment of a variety of artistic techniques.

After graduating from the Academy of Art, David taught drawing for a year at a boarding school in Tusheti.

The Tushetian mountains inspired him to paint in the genre of landscape art. He created hundreds of sketches and drawings in order to fully explore the nature he admired. His compositions are dense with bright colours, where he tries to fully explore the texture and potential of foil paint.

Landscape art became the ultimate motivation for Sulakauri's art. From the very beginning he managed to establish his system of painting through his relationship with Nature, and this determined his general attitude towards the world. His landscapes are done in oils as well as in the encaustic technique. His landscape paintings seem to have gone in two directions; some are executed in more poetic, lyrical, manner attempting to depict the immediate mood of the scenery; others exude a more monumental panoramic vision, unfolding a singular eternity in its might and glory. His landscapes represent a fine integral part of the world, of the 'cosmos'. He often paints landscapes that are not real, but transforms the reality and invites us to share his vision of it, suggesting that we discover in ourselves the ability to appreciate the scenery from a different perspective.

His brush works with rich, free, dynamic parallel strokes enabling him to reveal a space, but without losing the significance of the flat surface of the canvas, thus achieving a playful relationship between flat and airy dimensions.

Landscape seem to be the artist's passion, his way to feel himself a child of nature, and perhaps this is where his Tushetian roots are revealed. In particular, he wants to depict the inner structure of nature, to catch its mood. He paints what he knows well and is close to his own nature, what he is familiar with and feels for. Thus nature becomes the supreme belief for Sulakauri's art, his meaning of life that gives power and strength, the foundation of our being, eternal sustainability. By using intense clear colours he adds emotional depth to its interpretation; generalized form enhances its firmness. We even get the impression that we hear a song emerging from the painting.

Sulakauri's early paintings with dark colours are now transformed into a lighter, more optimistic colour scheme. His scenes seem to open up and smile with an eternal confidence.

In his graphic works the artist tends to operate with generalized forms that enable him to achieve an illusion of volume as well as the linear rhythm of the transformed images. He creates characters and their internal condition with precision. He manages to create an organic symbiosis between concrete realism and generalized art forms, thus simultaneously generating an aura of monumentality and poetic art.

In Sulakauri's art a new page opens with a search for materials and the preparation process. He explores his experience as a restorer and absorbs the material used for iconography. He prepares a primer with size on wood and makes simple pigments from minerals. He is drawn to the dense firm texture, his white primer enhances the clean effect of his paintings. Strokes on the other hand become thin and light, liberally applied to the canvas. His colour scheme becomes more restrained and his forms more laconic. Freely placed colourful and energetic spots on the canvas juxtaposed with the white primer creates the unique world of David Sulakauri, and reveals his outlook, an artful unity through his own senses .

His animal paintings where the animal forms are emphasized in black are especially impressive. Perhaps only a true artist can unfold the essence of an animal in this way. His *Owl* seems as though it is tired of the wisdom of life. We see a motionless image of a black *Boar* whose position betrays his readiness for an imminent attack, presenting a feeling of tension and unnerving alarm.

The artistic thinking of David Sulakauri is based on the capacity of his materials, which he explores fully. He always stays in touch with the sources and in spite of his constant experiments, he stays with the boundaries of his artistic system.

His urge to experiment with different techniques led David Sulakauri into exploring the encaustic technique (known as the wax technique using heated beeswax enriched with coloured pigments). He

is one of the fortunate Georgian contemporary artists to have addressed this technique. David has created portraits, still lifes, landscapes, thematic compositions, and wall paintings using this challenging technique.

His interest in portraits began from his early years when he was mostly painting in oils, but more recently he has later he has transferred to the encaustic technique.

His portraits with an oriental theme are distinctive, where we can feel his admiration for, and knowledge of, the art of the East. His paintings are somewhat reminiscent of Qajar paintings, although he chooses a more colourful approach. The decorative effect of Qajar portraits had by contrast been achieved with the help of pleasing lines. Sulakauri uses a shimmering arrangement of colours in tinyparticles facilitated by oil paint that can be compared with the art of mosaic. He creates unforgettable images with his refined colours and decorative, structured, laconic forms. His captivating portraits capture the character of the sitter with an alluring, engaging gaze.

His portraits have perhaps been inspired by the environment in which the artist lives. One can find an incredibly beautiful old Tushetian woman's costume and various antique objects in his house. The walls are decorated with beads of semi-precious stones and oriental silver jewellery. He employs these objects playfully, installing sparkling objects in his paintings thus creating a romantic effect.

Sulakauri has a different approach towards portraits of specific individuals; His interpretation is profound and exuberant, focused on the internal condition and thus revealing its emotional order. The portrait demonstrates the attitude of the artist towards the individual portrayed.

David Sulakauri is also working in an unusual and challenging medium, in that he paints on handmade paper that has a peculiar relief texture with rough edges. The surface thus becomes more structural. Unlike the uneven surface of oil or wax paintings it is soft and velvety. The artist fully exploits this feature of the material, and its uneven edges enhance the compositional structure of his paintings. He covers the paper with various colours and uses it directly as a background. These technicalities often dictate some ideas to him. Paintings executed on paper are distinguished by a variety of themes.

His paintings *A wounded soldier*, and *Interrogation* were done in the 1990s when these themes were a matter of great concern to the artist. The 1990s were difficult and complex times in the modern history of Georgia. The thematic and compositional execution of the picture reveals the significance of the problem. It is amazing how the artist could predict how themes might play a role in our existence in times to come. Sulakauri uses black outlines, slightly distorted with an exaggerated background; the juxtaposition of the figure and a background conveys the an emotionally expressive mood and an exalted sense of tragedy.

His *Fish* sparkle like precious stones on the canvas. These creatures are depicted in parallel rows in a pattern resembling a carpet, where every fish is different from the others. His refined, subtle, and beautiful colours make the picture so much more lively. Every composition in this cycle is characterized by a rich and flamboyant colour scheme.

Sulakauri's paintings have become more emotional with time. His sensual approach is better manifested in his paintings that have a somewhat 'interactive' character. These attractive paintings express more temperament and emotion. *The Red Riders* depicts a group of horsemen with swords occupying the entire canvas and galloping towards the viewer. The forms are executed in a generalized manner with a distorted dynamism and strongly chiselled forms, achieved with the help of brush strokes and colours. The expressive exaggeration gives the impression of emotional tension. The brush strokes have a force of their own, at times conflicting with each other, at others blending in harmony. The artist draws from the concrete motive and tries to achieve a sense of common ground inhabited by his own emotions, to weave his personal attitude into its fabric, and to demonstrate his own interpretation and evaluation of the event.

David Sulakauri has worked on compositions with multiple figures at every stage of his *oeuvre*. These are the pictures conveying ideas on a large scale, with a variety of themes. They can be described as the author's general discussions on religion and history; his oil and encaustic paintings are the visual 'icons' that illustrate a part of his thinking.

Sulakauri's large compositions are inhabited by many people, their numbers enhancing the dramatic effect. The panoramic compositions have a powerful impact. The 'whirlpool' of events singled out by the artist, concentrating on certain images, marks everything out with historical meaning as though they had come from the depths of the biblical past. The personages are extremely precise, looking as though they had walked from real life onto the canvas, thus intertwining ancient and modern. The personages live in time but time itself does not exist; time is eternal and universal where the human being is essential.

David Sulakauri's loyalty to artistic principles, constantly renewing its interpretation can be regarded as the most revealing feature of his unique talent.

His truly excellent art has been guided by David's ability to reveal his standpoint, his emotions and his feelings. He has established himself as an artist with an outstanding outlook and style. His sketches and unfinished pieces reflect his artistic outlook. His artistic process is organically connected with his inspiration. This is the ground from which springs his spiritually rich artistic world. Sulakauri's art represents his spiritual essence. David Sulakauri always feels the pulse of his epoch; his colourful world reflects his contemporary philosophical outlook.

Religious themes have established a new chapter in Sulakauri's artistic biography. For centuries artists have been illustrating scenes of the Gospel. Returning to this subject in our times required a more

cautious analytical approach from the artist. In the first place he should refrain from too schematic or dogmatic approach. Then, the artist should suggest that images of eternal values might be absorbed and shared by a modern, somewhat Godless, society.

Frescoes should be executed in a comprehensive manner, laden with intense emotion, responding to modern requirements conveyed on a large scale, employing artistic language and forms to reach a broad public with a wide range of belief.

The artist finds the informative symbolism of frescoes especially fascinating, but he rejects dogmatic schematism. His frescos are easy to read, laconic, monumental, decorative, and symbolic, and at the same time picturesque and vivid. (აქ უნდა ჩაისვას დამატება ქართული ტექსტიდან) Sulakauri's frescos are the result of a resplendent mixture of artistic tools of different periods. We should also bear in mind that the art of today addresses and quotes the artistic experience of humanity. David Sulakauri's artistic philosophy bears witness to the fact that he is very much a contemporary artist with an acute understanding of the experience of the artistic world where a feature of post modernism has been its fragmented, authentic, disjointed nature.

The essence of the David Sulakauri's art is fresh and gives us food for thought. His iconic wall paintings are essentially Christian, and are precise, picturesque and vivid. They give inspiration and solace to those who pray. Forms have a pivotal role in creating an artful unity, bearing the sense of time. A contemporary atmosphere has been achieved by painting the portraits of specific individuals. At the same time, however, he indulgently goes back in time by traditionally painting the archetypal past, giving an impression of eternity to his art.

This sense of eternity and a quality of momentum are what give his art a modern face. The viewer becomes a part of the great event; he overcomes the stereotypes in his frescoes.

The artist is well equipped with the language of plastic art, but at the same time the expressionistic distortion stays essential, which makes his paintings emotionally intimate for the viewer. Forms are rendered with the help of liberally applied material and colourful spots on the flat surface. Directions of the brush strokes are harmoniously blended and follow the emotional movement revealing the spiritual side of an image.

His non-traditional approach is well demonstrated in a series of sketches for paintings intended for the church at Tsalka. He strives fully to reveal the essence of the theme, charged with emotion and expression. Unfortunately the paintings have not been completed. (აქ ჩაისვას ერთი ქართული წინადადება)

In 1996 David Sulakauri painted a fresco *The Miracle of Cana*, the first miracle performed by Christ according to the St John's gospel, for the Lutheran church at Sherman Park, Milwaukee. He offered his own vision to the Lutheran parish and proposed a religious composition that would be

understandable and acceptable to the people of a different confession. He created an image of God which is not transcendental, but someone close to us to turn to.

Some years ago David Sulakauri had painted the precinct of the church in Akhalkalaki where he depicted the sufferings of Christ, full of human pain and emotion. This was his own credo and reflects his vivid, personal approach to biblical themes.

His icons are painted with the same ideology. He creates a whole range of human portraits, which have a profound impact on the viewer. His images have a sharp gaze charged with anxiety, sorrow, joy and inspiration. They exude warmth and engage us in a lively contact. David Sulakauri's artistic approach and energy derive from the example of early Christian icons.

The main appeal of David Sulakauri's paintings is that they are united by the common idea of a search for eternity. He sees an eternal truth in nature, in human beings, in the world. He is authentic in his art, which is characterised by humanist ideas and spirituality.

The artist expresses his attitude and fills his paintings with his emotions. He can sometimes be as innocent as a child, but he is always convincing. When you get closer and feel his art you will experience the incredible force of his emotions that clasps and captivates you for the right reasons, for his art is truly pure and genuine.

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