

גאורגיה: מסע בזמן



תערוכת צילומים של האמן דרור מעיין

האוניברסיטה הפתוחה

Georgia: A Journey through the Ages



Photographs by the Artist Dror Maayan

The Open University of Israel

Preface

The cover photograph of this catalogue shows a young restorer in the monastery of Kintsvisi on the scaffolding before a fresco, looking down at a piece of cloth to be used in the restoration work. It marvelously reassumes and evokes the dialogue between present and past, which the photographs taken by Dror Maayan during two expeditions to Georgia in 2006 and 2007 display before our eyes. The two groups of painted figures of the fresco in their light sfumato seem to look at and to implore the restorer with their raised hands to continue her work. The photograph invites us to think about the conditions of the past in the present, about continuity, rupture and re-use, about the mediated life of images and monuments of other epochs in our own time, sometimes threatened or abandoned, sometimes appropriated or revitalized, but never just there, as if they were something “natural” and could be recorded or documented in a pure way. That the restorer doesn’t look to the protagonists of the painting or act on these figures which are near and distant in the same moment, opens a space of reflection, regarding her work and our own involvement with the photograph. For the latter is a work of art in its own right, an artistic comment to a shared experience which has led Dror Maayan to the creation of a double corpus of photographs in and about Georgia, past and present.

In fact, the division of the photographs into a documentary and an artistic group was the basic agreement of collaboration between the scholar and the artist. The production of the first group is particularly important for the use of researchers and restorers, and thanks to the generous cooperation of the Georgian Ministry of Culture as well as the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation (Tbilisi), it can today be defined as the most up to date and richest documentation of Georgian medieval art and sites, to become accessible on-line in an open access format. The second group is the result of the personal dialogue of the artist with the people, landscapes, villages and urban spaces in Georgia today. These photographs are thus Dror

Maayan’s proper work of art. However, only in the combination of eminent examples of both groups in the present exhibition, made possible and realized by the Open University of Israel, can Dror’s work be fully appreciated: as a multi-layered reflexion on and an encounter between Georgian monuments and contemporary life in a complex dramaturgy of light and shadow, color, points of view, printing modes etc. Dror Maayan’s exhibition is thus a double invitation: to follow him to see Georgia through his eyes and to enjoy as well as appreciate his work as a photographer who continuously knows to shift *between* and subtly question the distinctions *of* the genres of the art of photography itself.

Prof. Dr. Gerhard Wolf



About the Exhibition

"Georgia. A Journey through the Ages" presents but a small part of a vast and exquisite corpus of photographs of present day Georgia taken by the Israeli artist and photographer, Dror Maayan. This corpus is the result of an international project of cooperation between Georgian, German, Swiss, Italian and Israeli scholars, led by Prof. Dr. Gerhard Wolf, director at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut. As part of the research project "Medieval Georgia in a Cross-Cultural Perspective," the Kunsthistorisches Institut, together with the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation (Tbilisi) and Prof. Dr. Barbara Schellewald from the University of Basel, undertook expeditions in 2006 and 2007 to medieval Georgian monuments. These expeditions were completed under the most challenging conditions and in regions that were almost impenetrable.

connecting past and present, reflecting rituals and religious practices that seem today as fresh as ever.

The exhibition also shows the intriguing, variegated aspects of the capital, Tbilisi, and exhibits the discourse between the art of photography and art history. It opens a vista into the rich cultural and artistic heritage in Georgia, past and present. The past is still to be seen in certain parts of the town, especially in its unique architecture which incorporates foreign influences (Byzantine, Russian, and Eastern) into its local building tradition. Thus for example, in the Old City of Tbilisi, where the architecture is characterized by Eastern elements, there are ancient wooden houses with special balconies, a characteristic feature of Georgian architecture. Above all, Tbilisi is shown in these photographs through the daily routine of its inhabitants, revealing a lively, vibrant, cheerful, and welcoming people.

We wish to acknowledge the generous support of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut, and especially its director, Prof. Dr. Gerhard Wolf for exposing the Israeli public to a small part of its rich and varied collections. Special thanks go to Dr. Emma Maayan-Fanar who contributed to the catalogue, as well as to Prof. Konstantin B. Lerner for his help with the catalogue's historic aspects. We wish to thank the staff of the Open University of Israel who were instrumental in ensuring that this exhibition took place.

Mati Meyer

IV The unique vision of Dror Maayan blends the artistic and personal process of photography. Sensitive and profound, it captures intimate and special moments of everyday life, creating basic as well as comprehensive photographic documentation of monuments from the past, and providing research tools to present and future art historians. And yet the documentary approach is unique; the angle of the artist's shots, the carefully considered lighting and composition, make of each of these documented images a work of art. Photos documenting Christian monuments from the Georgian "Golden Age," are side by side with artistic photos — figures, landscapes, towns and villages — telling of the rich fabric of daily life in post-communist Georgia. The distinction between past and present is not necessarily artificial. On the contrary, the photographs create a harmonious mix, blending past with present, and vice-versa. The monks praying in the open air, the cattle grazing in the prairies, the baptism of a newborn in the church, or the music cassettes offered for sale side by side with amulets and icons in the church's vicinity, are vibrant testimonies to an invisible thread