

## Dimitri Shevardnadze – Art Curator

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### Who Is Dimitri Shevardnadze?

Dimitri Shevardnadze is a painter, graphic artist, conservator-restorer, theater and cinema artist, author of the coat of arms of Tbilisi State University, organizer of expeditions to Georgian historical monuments, co-founder of the Academy of Arts, founder of the Society of Georgian Artists and the National Gallery, founder of the museum work and the Art Museum in Georgia. The National Gallery carries the name of Dimitri Shevardnadze.

Dimitri Shevardnadze was executed in the year of 1937. He is a repressed artist and public figure. For this reason, first article about his work was published in the 20th century, only after 10 years after his rehabilitation. Artist's Toil, a letter by Shalva Amiranashvili was published in the newspaper Communist in 1967. And an extensive work, titled Dimitri Shevardnadze, by Irine Abesadze and Ketevan Bagratishvili, was published after the fall of the Soviet Union, in 1998.

To the question of who is Dimitri Shevardnadze, the



Dimitri Shevardnadze

article offers an answer – Dimitri Shevardnadze is an art curator.

And the goal of this article is to explain that very answer.

To support our answer, we must follow Dimitri Shevardnadze's work step by step. More precisely, word by word: we must read his work, as preserved in the archives, old newspaper articles, described in memories and letters, according to the framework of curatorial work.

This letter focuses on the Society of Georgian Artists, National Gallery, and the Art Museum Metekhi founded by Dimitri Shevardnadze. You will often come across large fragments of articles and memories in the text. This was a deliberate decision, with the purpose of describing that time in its specific language and through the narration of the people who were a part of it.

### Who Is an Art Curator?

Before we rewind the time and return to Dimitri Shevardnadze's era, let's shortly define the profession of art curator.

Who is an art curator?

A curator is someone who researches, selects, exhibits and describes works of art for museums, exhibitions, or other cultural projects.

The word curator comes from the Latin word *curare*. *Curare* in Latin means to care, to look after. The role of the profession of an art curator has changed and developed throughout time. However, the essence of the profession, which is defined in the word itself – caring for works of art, does not change.

The profession of curator is connected to the emergence of public museums in the 18th and 19th centuries. At that time, the curator's function was to care and look after the museum's collections. The profession was also connected to the museum, an

art institution. Enriching museum collections with new works, researching works of art, and organizing exhibitions were the initial functions of the curator.

Today, a curator does not necessarily have to be connected to an institution. Independent curators organize exhibitions in various spaces and manage biennials and festivals.

Nowadays, curatorship is a multifaceted profession. And, attitudes towards it also vary. Modern curators often call themselves exhibition-makers. Today, the role of the curator is the role of a mediator, who does not dictate the interpretation of an artwork to the artist or the society, but creates an equal atmosphere for sharing knowledge in the format of an exhibition. According to the Swiss curator, Hans Ulrich Obrist, responsibility of the curator is to create a free space without occupying it; that curatorship is a practice that connects artists, the public, institutions and different social groups with each other.

There is, basically, no curatorial school in Georgia. The role of curator is often taken by art historians, and sometimes, by artists. Instead of a school, we have Dimitri Shevardnadze to learn about the basics of curatorial work.

Shevardnadze's work is a template of the Georgian curatorial school, a guide for performing curatorial work.

Dimitri Shevardnadze's vision, which is 100 years old, is still relevant today. The statute of the institution that he created a century ago can be used to run a modern art institution.

Dimitri Shevardnadze created a firm foundation of the Art Museum not only in terms of its collection, but also in the immaculate structure of the institution. An institution like it does not exist in Georgia even today, a hundred years later.

Let us now go back to the first half of the 20th century and follow the thread of Shevardnadze's work in the labyrinth of Georgian art. Let us start from the beginning.

Dimitri Shevardnadze was born in 1885 in the village of Bakhvi, Guria. He received his education at a Real School in Kutaisi. In 1906, he went to Germany to continue his studies and enrolled into the Munich Academy of Arts. The Chiatura Manganese Processing Black Stone Council financially supported his studies in Germany. The Society for the Spreading of Literacy also provided financial assistance to the young student. Alongside his studies, Shevardnadze worked at a photo studio in Munich.

The artist who arrived in Europe was not satisfied with the education he received at the academy – he was interested in museum work. While living in Mu-

nich, he observed the work of European museums and learned about the rules for organizing exhibitions. It is clear that Shevardnadze, even in Munich, was thinking about the importance of the art museum for the country and drawing the contours of his future work.

While visiting museums and exhibitions in Europe, he was seeing how important it is for the country and the nation to gather and study antiquities, cultural heritage, and to protect and collect new art, which is precisely the job of a museum.

Shevardnadze got acquainted with European museums and attended exhibitions, on which he published reviews in the Georgian press.

In 1910, his letter about the exhibition of art of Islamic countries held in Munich was published in the People's Newspaper.

The letter reads:

*“There exist no decent museums in Asia, there exists no society, even, which, at least now, would be attempting to shelter the art of its old nation and not let the foreigners steal it all away.”*

This letter shows that Shevardnadze, first of all, was worried about Georgia and the works of art taken from Georgia. During this period, Georgian society was deeply concerned about this issue. This is a time when Georgia is part of the Russian Empire, priceless works of Georgian culture are scattered and lost, and monuments are unexplored.

Shevardnadze, while returning to his homeland for holidays, visits the Georgian Historical and Ethnographic Society and gets to know Ekvtime Takaiashvili. Their partnership begins here. Historical and Ethnographic Society was founded on the initiative of Takaishvili in 1907 in Tbilisi. It had several departments: history, archaeology, linguistics, and numismatics. The main goal of the society was to study the history, past, and antiquities of Georgia.

In 1911, Dimitri Shevardnadze was appointed as a member of the Historical and Ethnographic Society.

*“I am working at museums, in the Church Museum near the Sioni Cathedral, in the museum of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy in Georgia. You cannot imagine how many interesting things there are for me in these museums, unfortunately, nobody is there to care for these precious treasures and they have no place to organize them either, everything is piled together in one room and being ruined with dust. This museum is very rich with old manuscripts, which are full of drawings...”* he wrote to his brother living in Zürich, from Tbilisi.

Shevardnadze is interested in studying the antiquities, architecture, and olden works of art of Geor-

gian culture. Upon arriving in Georgia, he carefully researches everything he can get his hands on, and in Munich, he observes and masters the rules of preserving and exhibiting antiquities. Returning to his homeland, Dimitri is ready to put the knowledge and experience he gained abroad into work.

### The Return

Dimitri Shevardnadze returned to Tbilisi in 1916. 100 years ago, Tbilisi was a different city called Tiflis.

In the 10s of the 20th century, Tbilisi was ripening to blossom into a fantastic city of poets. In the city fogged by the smoke of wars and the approaching revolution, a new time was dawning.

The young artist settled in the house of the father of Kiril and Iliia Zdanevich at 23 Ghunibi Street, today called Barnovi. Dimitri's apartment soon became a gathering place for artists, scientists, historians. The idea of creating a museum was born in this house.

From the balcony, a view of Tbilisi opened up. Metekhi was visible, then different –surrounded by a castle. From the balcony, Dimitri looked at the future place of implementation of his idea, the place that turned out to be fatal for him.

*“Dito (nickname for Dimitri) lived strangely, beautifully, and extraordinarily. As soon as you visited him on Barnovi, he would invite you up to the roof of the building, where there stood chaise longues, he would serve you black coffee, and a conversation about paintings and new poems would start.*

*We sat there and watched the city sunk into the streetlamps, what a marvelous scene stood before us! Dito's apartment was like a little museum, everybody who stepped out of it was already in love with the host,”* writes Nita Tabidze, a daughter of Titsian Tabidze in her memoirs.

Everybody was happy to go there. Discussions and debates on different, important topics at that time were held in Dito's apartment. Among the guests were: Ivane Javakhishvili, Iakob Nikoladze, Aleksandre Mrevlishvili, Mikheil Chiaureli and others.

*“Every idea and thought behind those huge national initiatives that made Dito so restless and tortured him, was born in that house. That balcony was the witness to our inspiration and joy of youth”,* - remembers Giorgi Eristavi, Dimitri Shevardnadze's faithful friend.

“Dito was a rather kind, selfless, humble and supportive person. Always ready to do good for others. Endowed with the qualities of a great public figure, he always had new ideas, primarily aimed at **discovering, collecting, protecting and studying** Georgian fine art pieces. Most importantly, Dito had an amazing ability to practically implement his

ideas. He would begin working energetically, passing on his overwhelming enthusiasm to others and putting them into work.”

In 1916, in Tbilisi, Dimitri starts his work from a blank page. There is no National Museum yet established, there exists no Art Gallery, no Academy of Arts, and no Art Museum.

### Society of Georgian Artists

Dimitri Shevardnadze set to work immediately after his return from Munich.

He took the first step towards great goals in 1916 and founded the Society of Georgian Artists. By establishing a professional society and uniting artists, it would be possible to implement the plans drafts of which he had in mind.

Shevardnadze gathered several artists and art lovers in his studio: Giorgi Zhuruli, Giorgi Eristavi, Shalva Kikodze, Ioseb Gegelashvili and revealed to them his intention of establishing the Society of Georgian Artists. Everyone supported the initiative. Soon after, the group held a meeting to which they invited supporters of art. Dimitri presented the draft statutes of the society at the meeting. The meeting approved the proposal and the entire intelligentsia of artists united in the society. Giorgi Zhuruli was appointed as a chairman, and Dimitri Shevardnadze was appointed deputy chairman. As Vakhtang Beridze would later write, Shevardnadze was the leader and inspirer of this society.

The Charter of the Society of Artists describes the main goals of the Society's activities. The Charter is a list of Dimitri Shevardnadze's future plans, his to do list. The Society's goal is to promote the unification and connection of artists, sculptors and architects with each other, the spread of various fields of art in Georgia. Also, the collection, protection and study of the remains of olden Georgian art.

To achieve these goals, the society should carry out the following work: establish art schools; establish and manage an art gallery where it will collect and preserve samples of painting and sculpture; establish an art library with the gallery; hold art exhibitions, both temporary and permanent and even mobile; appoint prizes and scholarships for artists and researchers; publish a magazine about art in Georgian and other languages; conduct expeditions to study ancient Georgian art; conduct lectures and hold public talks on art; promote the enrichment of Georgian museums; take care of the preservation, protection and restoration of antiquities; To organize exhibitions of antiquities of artistic value and ethnographic collections; To promote the development of the national art industry; To hold meetings of the society at which members will read reports on art.

The plans of the society are fascinating. The charter reflects Dimitri Shevardnadze's institutional vision

and his goals. The society's activities include both exhibition and educational activities. The charter states Shevardnadze's intention to create an institution - a museum, initially - in the form of an art gallery. He attaches equal importance to the **collection, preservation and exhibition** of both modern and ancient art.

A magazine, public talks, lectures, a library - all are important tasks for popularizing art and bringing it to the wider public. Dimitri Shevardnadze himself is a painter. He knows well what it takes for an artist to devote all his time to creativity. Scholarships and prizes are one of the important items on the list of goals. Dimitri envisions and wants to establish a European-style institution that will work on the study and collection of old and new art, organize exhibitions, have an educational program, and a publishing house.

*"The charter also shows that Dimitri Shevardnadze wanted to conduct the matter in such a way that the artistic life of Tbilisi, and of Georgia in general, would rise to the European level, equal to the most advanced centers, and escape the provincial detachment,"* – writes Vakhtang Beridze in an article, An Outstanding Figure of Georgian Culture, published in the newspaper Communist in 1986.

The importance of the new, contemporary art of that time for Shevardnadze is evident not only from the society's statutes, but also from its first steps:

*"The society began its activities by inviting everyone who was interested in painting and asking them to present their works. During this period, alongside G. Gabashvili, Al. Mrevlishvili, M. Toidze, V. Sida-mon-Eristavi, D. Guramishvili, V. Jorjadze, G. Zaziashvili, I. Nikoladze and others, the following young people appeared: L. Gudiashvili, Mikh. Chiaureli, D. Kakabadze, El. Akhvlediani, K. Maghalashvili, Al. Zaltsman, K. Zdanevich, K. Zanis, Z. Valishevsky, Le-Dantiu. The discussion of artworks took place,"* – recalls Giorgi Eristavi.

The first exhibition, which was held on the initiative of the Society of Artists, was the exhibition of Niko Pirosmani. The exhibition was held on May 5, 1916, in the studio of Ilia Zdanevich. The one-day exhibition featured Pirosmani's works belonging to the Zdanevich brothers. The exhibition was free. In a review of the exhibition published in the newspaper, People's Page, the artist Mose Toidze writes:

*"This exhibition was undignified and amusing for some. Some even considered exhibiting this kind of art an insult, but, in my opinion, N. Pirosmanashvili is such a strong personality, with his heart beating with the national characteristic so vividly, that not only we should not be ashamed of displaying his work, but seeking soil in him as if in an unprocessed gold ore. If we do not want Georgian painting to completely blend into the reflexes of Europe-*

*an art, become merely an insignificant, outdated, a tenth, twentieth-degree copy of art of other nations and only that, and thus lean towards the void of degeneration, it should reject pedantic pride, and until unique style, characteristic, and ways of creativity still exist in our people, in one or two strong personalities, this is what we should dive into. This is where our strength, our life lies."*

The responses show that some artists and society met Pirosmani's work with ridicule. Despite the criticism, the Society of Artists did not stop caring for Pirosmanashvili's works and collecting them. Later, in 1922, an interview with Dimitri Shevardnadze was published in the newspaper Bakhtrioni, where he recalls this period. Through this interview, we can listen to Dimitri and see 1916, Pirosmani and the first steps of the Society of Artists through his eyes.

*"I arrived in Georgia in 1916. As soon as I did, my attention was drawn to the paintings in the shops in front of the station. Interested, I sought out the identity of the author and was told that these paintings belonged to Niko Pirosmanashvili. Soon in 1916, I began to unite Georgian artists and for this purpose I was determined to establish a society of artists. I compiled a list, in which I also included Niko Pirosmanashvili as a people's artist. Then the society's organizational meetings were held. Our desire was to invite this legendary painter to a meeting, but it was not easy, since no one knew his whereabouts. We entrusted the search and invitation to the artists Lado Gudiashvili and Zaziashvili. They, by asking around in samikitnos (a small douqan, kind of a canteen in old Tbilisi) and shops, were able to find this suddenly appeared artist and invite him to one of the meetings.*

*He was so impressed by the fact that painters paid attention to him, but he proudly declared: "I am now famous in France too." He meant the letters of the French Le-Dantiu published in the French newspapers.*

*At the end of the meeting, Zhuruli, Gogolashvili and I asked him to give us information about his identity. He told us that he was from Kakheti, that he had been orphaned at the age of 8 and that he had been living in Tbilisi since then. He would now be over 60 years old.*

*When he left, I gave him one Toman to help him out. It seemed that he was very poor. He took the money and said: "With this I will buy paints, I will paint a picture and gift it to you." Indeed, after some time, Pirosmanashvili brought us a painting titled "Wedding in Kakheti". The picture was painted on ordinary calico and is now kept in the National Gallery.*

*After the first meeting, he disappeared again like a meteor and only Lado Gudiashvili was able to see*

*him. He regularly helped him out.*

*When one day he went to Piroshmanashvili to bring something to help him out, he was told that Nika had already died.*

*He lived in a damp basement (on 29 Malakani Street), in one room, the area of which was only 1 sq. sazhen (Russian unit of measurement, Eng. fathom). The floor was covered with jars full of paints. It is noteworthy that he prepared black paint with soot and explained to Lado Gudiashvili how to make it too. He had an unfinished painting of Shota Rustaveli hanging on the wall.*

*Immediately after our first meeting, we took him to Eduard Klar to take his picture, which was placed in the appendix of the People's Page.*

*Only mikitanis (owner of a samikitno) close to him knew of his life, since he spent his time regularly only with them.*

*An outstanding imagination he had.*

*In the end, it is noteworthy to say that Georgian academic painters met him coldly and rejected his technique.*

*As for me, I believe that he was an artist who, with the vivacity of the true folk conveyance, brought to us the entire way of life of Georgia in the 19th century. Niko's incomparable intuition remains an inexplicable phenomenon for me. He has one painting, Giorgi Saakadze, which depicts him holding a flag that speaks to one in the color of crimson. Fascinating, where this man get such a lively perception of national color from?..*

*Niko came to us as an unexplainable legend."*

Dimitri Shevardnadze compares Piroshmani to a meteor, a star, an unexplainable legend. Dimitri's curatorial talent did not disappoint. After all, one of the curator's roles is to discover and present unknown or lesser-known artists. Now, 100 years later, we can confirm that Piroshmani is a star of Georgian art. And if it were not for the Zdanevich brothers and Dimitri Shevardnadze, this star would not be shining in the sky of Georgian art.

Wedding in Kakheti, the canvas that Niko gave to the Society of Artists, was the first painting that laid the foundation not only for the Niko Piroshmani museum collection, but also for the collection of the Georgian Museum of Art in general.

The Piroshmanashvili exhibition organized by the Society of Artists is another proof that new painting is important to Dimitri. But, it seems, the Tiflis society of that time is less interested in contemporary art. It is not interested, because it cannot perceive it and cannot connect with it. New art needs a me-

diator, an art curator, who will put the artists' work before the eyes of the public.

In the press of that time, in various letters, it is written that painting is only now being born. If fine art is in this stage, it is important to care for it, collect, exhibit, and support it. Those were the steps that Shevardnadze has outlined in the statutes of the Society of Artists and was actually implementing every day.

In June 1916, the newspaper Homeland published a letter entitled Our Art. The author of the letter is not specified. The letter informs the reader about the establishment of the Society of Artists. The letter lists the goals of the society, but one of them is particularly highlighted – expeditions to different regions of Georgia to study the remains of Georgian art.

*"This is a great work, because the remains of art are not studied by a historian-scientist, in whom all feeling and passion have been killed from mental work, but by an artist, who, according to their talent and ability, births a new work of art from the impressions they have gotten from the remains of ancient Georgian art.*

*If until now historians and scientists would give us a dry description of these remains, now our artists will give us an artistic interpretation of them, breathe a living soul into them, and through their new works, make us feel the soul of Georgian art.*

*If we ever want to have new Georgian art, we certainly need a sense of the spirit of our olden painting, since it is an expression of our own, national color; only national color and peculiarity are something that can undoubtedly bring forth the necessary fruit of the artist's work, the national spirit is a driving force that animates the artist's fantasy and deepens it.*

*Look around and you will be convinced that each and every work of art carries a deep national spirit. Take away this national color and unique character and nothing will remain of them."*

Perhaps the author of this letter is Dimitri Shevardnadze himself... Even if he is not, he certainly shares the opinion expressed in the letter, that for the birth of new painting, it is necessary to see and feel old painting.

The foundation of new Georgian art should become old Georgian art.

### **Expeditions. Study of Ancient Georgian Art**

Dimitri was interested in studying Georgian antiquities even as a student. Before the establishment of the Society of Artists, he participated in an expedition organized by the Historical and Ethnographic Society to Tsinarekhi, where he copied the frescoes

of the Maghalaant Church.

After the establishment of the Society of Artists, in 1916, Ekvtime Takaishvili entrusted Dimitri with the task of assembling a group of artists for a new expedition. From the churches in which painting was not protected and was being demolished, the group of painters was supposed to reproduce copies of the frescoes, in other words, repaint them. Dito formed a group of artists, which included Mose Toidze, Lado Gudiashvili, Mikheil Chiaureli and Giorgi Eristavi.

The expedition travelled to the village of Nabakhtevi and worked in the single-nave church of the Amirejibi family. The church had no roof, was not protected from rain, wind, and sun, and as a result, the 15th-century frescoes were deteriorating and being destroyed.

In 1985, in the article Artist and Citizen, Inga Lortkipanidze wrote:

*“Dimitri, even at that time, cared for collecting secular portraits. He knew well that portraits of historical figures were preserved in Georgian churches and wanted to create a separate collection in the future museum with copies of them. In Nabakhtevi, a group portrait of the Amirejibi family was presented – Kutsna Amirejibi and his family.”*

The next expedition was organized by the Society of Artists to Davit Gareji, and in 1917, together with the Ethnographic and Historical Society, under the leadership of Ekvtime Takaishvili, the artists went to Tao-Klarjeti. These expeditions were also a kind of a school for young artists. They were given the opportunity to study and work on ancient Georgian wall painting, which became a solid foundation for their art.

Organizing expeditions to Georgian cultural monuments is not only important for Georgian art and artists, but first of all, it is a great national cause. In Georgia at that time, monuments were neglected, unstudied and forgotten, frescoes were damaged, churches were destroyed. The country's history and culture was being washed away and destroyed. For a country that had become a Russian province, the study and preservation of olden Georgian art was a matter of strengthening national identity. After all, art is not only important for its time, art also determines the future. Georgian medieval art was supposed to strengthen the consciousness of the nation conquered by Tsarist Russia.

As early as 1909, in the newspaper Droeba, Mikheil Javakhishvili published an article entitled National Museum, in which he talks about the necessity of creating a national museum in Georgia and expresses sorrow regarding the condition of Georgian historical monuments and the export of Georgian art samples abroad:

*“The Georgian nation has passed the path of twenty centuries and has made its small contribution to the treasury of spiritual and mental culture of smaller nations. But at the very time when the era for the renewal and revival of these nations has come, due to tough luck and because of negligence by Georgians, that one page about Georgians, which has been written with so much blood and fire by our fathers and ancestors, is almost being eternally erased from the book of human history. The entire work of the spiritual and mental creation of the Georgians, tested in a fierce fire and sweated by thousands of generations, was brought to the doorstep of the nineteenth century and handed over to a new generation and new forces in the hope that **they would add new to the old, enlarge, enrich and strengthen the temple of national culture.***

But they were deceived, and so were we.

*Almost a full century has passed since the agents of the entire enlightened country are uninvitedly wandering inside our ownerless homeland and without any permission carry abroad the last remnants and ruins of our creation and past glory, our work and our achievements, the merits and bequests of our ancestors. Every remnant, taken out of Georgia, is a fragment of the spiritual body of our nation, a cup of its blood, a feature of its body, a part of its soul.*

*Since the wheel of our fate has turned backwards, our historical remains have been and are being taken away from us. They are taking everything that can be taken away, some with money, some like thieves and some like bandits. Cultural theft has become such a common occurrence among us that even we ourselves, often we consider it an honor when some wandering adventurer takes away some precious treasure from here for a “show”, a “memory”, or to “make our name known.” If pearls and precious things were not enough, they moved onto carvings and architectural remains. But who is complaining about the ones that were taken away! What remained was also destroyed, debauched, degenerated, erased, and their memory has disappeared from our hearts. Remember the remarkable fresco painting of Sapari, Mtskheta, Alaverdi, and many other monasteries. Elsewhere, such remains are guarded as carefully as the apple of an eye, but between us, our educators have blessed us by erasing the best examples of our art, our spiritual glory, and cultural wealth.*

*But, let's not put blame on the others for everything and also see our faults in our tragedy. If only we had known the price of our past and had had the slightest ability to protect our rights, we would not have let the others destroy it and given up Sapara, Akhtala, Bodbe, or the treasure that was taken away. Whatever has been taken away is gone and can not return back. If we have any stamina, any*

*ability, we should keep what is still here, what has remained and is, so far, in our hands. It still is not too late, and if this nation wants to be a nation, if it still has the will and ability to protect itself, the strength to live, and some energy, the remains can still be collected, kept, and protected. And a museum is necessary for collecting and preserving.”*

In 1916, the National Museum, where the olden art of Georgian culture would be gathered, did not yet exist. Establishing a museum is a national and political issue. Every step taken to study Georgian monuments are also of national importance.

Establishing an art museum is no less important than the creation of a national museum. The National Museum should house the past, olden Georgian art, and the Art Museum should exhibit the present – new art.

Dimitri Shevardnadze already has the idea of establishing an art museum. He knows that for the country and its future, only the art of the past is not enough. It is precisely new art that shows whether the country is currently alive and what its future holds.

#### **Exhibition Activities and the Temple of Glory**

Dimitri Shevardnadze is a painter by profession. His profession helps him in his curatorial work – not only because he knows exactly what a painter needs, but also because in the works of a painter, practice, or action, is more important than research.

One of the points in the charter of the Society of Artists is the creation of an art gallery. To implement other points of the charter, or its goals, Dimitri needs a place, a space where old and new painting will be exhibited, where Georgian art will take up residence.

Let us now imagine Tbilisi a century ago. It was a different city then. The current Rustaveli Avenue was named after Golovin. The site of the current parliament building is the Cathedral of the Caucasian Army, which was built in 1870 to commemorate the subjugation of the Caucasus by Tsarist Russia.

Alexander Garden was the first public garden in Tbilisi. On the side of the garden, on Golovin Avenue, there is a Military-Historical Museum, the Temple of Glory, today's National Gallery.

The Military-Historical Museum in Tbilisi was founded in 1888 to commemorate the successes of the Russian Army in the Caucasus. The building of the museum was completed in 1892. The architect of the building was Albert Salzman. Salzman used the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome for the museum project, changing the scale and designing a building similar to the Gallery in Rome. The arrangement of the museum's exposition was completed in 1907 and the Military Museum – Temple of Glory was jubilantly opened.

Weapons, flags, swords, and other spoils taken by the Russian Empire in various battles were exhibited in the halls. Pictures depicting battle scenes and portraits of Russian soldiers hung on the walls



Niko Pirosmani, Wedding in Kakheti, oilcloth, oil. 1916. Museum of Art of Georgia

from ceiling to floor. The Georgievsky treatise was exhibited, as well as a canvas by Franz Roubaud, which depicted the entry of the Russian army into Tbilisi in 1799. Metal plaques were attached to the main facade of the building with dates and reports of important victories of the Russian army in the Caucasian War.

In short, the Temple of Glory was a symbol of the subjugation of the Caucasus and Georgia, of Russian imperialism.

Due to the threat of the First World War, in 1916, the items exhibited in the museum were taken to Russia.

The building became empty.

Dimitri chose the building of the Temple of Glory as the home for the art gallery.

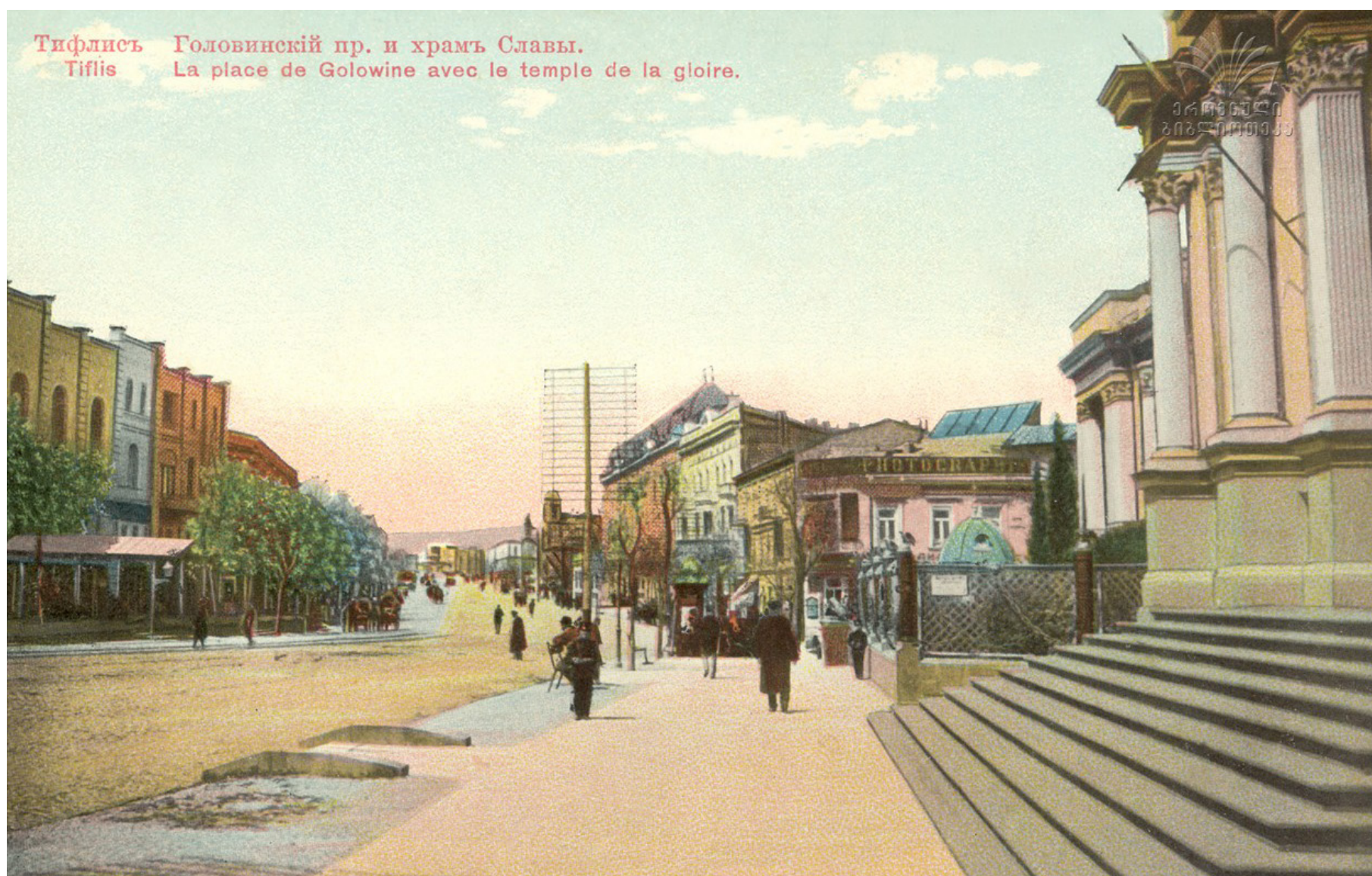
The building built as a museum, which was a copy of the exhibition gallery, had overhead lighting, that is, the ceiling was glazed and the hall was lit by the daylight, which was an important criterion when selecting the building as an art gallery.

The first exhibition of copies of olden Georgian wall paintings in the Temple of Glory was organized by Dimitri Shevardnadze in 1917, after his return from the Nabakhtevi expedition. This was the first exhibition of Georgian fresco painting, the first bridge between Georgian fine art and society.

*“In January 1917, under the leadership of Dito, we held an exhibition in the Cathedral of Glory of the copies of Nabakhtevi and of the frescoes previously painted by K. Kron, D. Shevardnadze and D. Kakabadze. On the opening day of the exhibition, the gallery was filled with people. The festive atmosphere was supported by the mood of the audience. At the end of the gallery, a lectern was set up, from which E. Takaishvili, before the opening of the exhibition, addressed the public. He spoke about the importance of the exhibition and the protection of material culture and expressed his desire to give this work a systematic character. Finally, he noted the contribution of the artists and thanked us. He especially highlighted the contribution of Dito. The exhibition aroused extraordinary interest and admiration from the public, everyone had a smile of delight on their faces. They stood in front of the frescoes, amazed, and would not leave. Everyone came to us in turn, shook our hands and congratulated us,” – we read in Giorgi Eristavi’s memoirs.*

A newspaper published a short report about the exhibition:

*“The exhibition of Georgian frescoes opened last Sunday, January 8, in the Temple of Glory, with an introductory speech by Ekvtime Takaishvili. On the first day, although the entrance fee was one maneti, a large number of people and society attended; there were Russians, Tatars, Armenians, and others.*



Tbilisi, Golovin Avenue and the Cathedral of Glory, postcard

Attendants were: Member of the State Council, K. Abkhazi, City Mayor A. I. Khatsov, representatives of Georgian cultural institutions and the press, and others. The exhibition is very interesting, both from a national and scientific point of view. The entrance fee is 50 kopecks (25 kopecks for students). The exhibition is open From 10 am to 4 pm”.

The exhibition of frescoes copies was met with great response. Samples of wall paintings scattered in different parts of Georgia were displayed before the public's eyes. Several letters were printed in the press about the exhibition. Let's read a few fragments:

“It is as if a new country has opened before our eyes – familiar, but forgotten. This is the impression created by the exhibition of olden Georgian paintings, which the Society of Georgian Artists organized in the Temple of Glory.

Such a vision carries an enormous cultural significance. Political battle alone is not enough to revive our homeland. National renewal must also take place with the help of art. The search for beauty and the feeling of it must take on a broad social character. Democracy must be ennobled by the magical touch of a chosen spirit.

Our past, our historical tradition provide the best soil for the union of people and aesthetic culture. Georgian art has never been isolated and inaccessible, Georgian writers, architects and artists have never had the character of an untouchable priestly caste. Their works were open-hearted like the light of the sun, which illuminates with equal abundance the great and the small, the slave and the master. Our art has not been confined neither in the pyramids, where only pharaohs sleep, nor in the Holy of Holies, where only priests and high priests enter, nor in castle towers, where only knights live, nor in salons, where only aristocrats move about. Georgian temples and palaces were often built on hills and mountains, so that every visible being could see them, the walls of the building were fluted with carvings and paintings, so that great art would be accessible to everyone,” – **Geronti Kikodze, The Beginning of Renewal, the newspaper Georgia;**

“Remnants of the ancient glory

have not yet disappeared!”, – Akaki Tsereteli.

Last Sunday, January 8, was a day of every Georgian's pride. On this day, in the Temple of Glory in Tbilisi, we saw the remains of our glorious past, exhibited by the Georgian Ethnographic History and the Society of Georgian Artists.

They showed us the remains of the old glorious Georgia, our past self-creation, our own soul, our own face...

Copies of paintings and pictures, preserved in the old churches and monasteries of Georgia, half-destroyed and washed away, are exhibited here.

These images show us the art of painting, the diversity of clothing worn by Georgians in ancient times, the diversity of their faces. Paintings of ancient temples have been copied, which are striking in their carvings and the beauty of their design.

Each fresco is copied with great care, with strict observance of colors, even with fake scratchings, and on one fresco – a Russian scraping from some savage of our time.

The frescoes were mostly copied by young artists: L. Gudiashil, G. Eristavi, Ir. Toidze, D. Kakabadze, D. Shevardnadze, M. Chiaureli, G. Khmaladze. Several frescoes are the work of the famous artist M. Toidze, Norwegian artists Kr. Kron, Grinevsky, and Kiuni. Musaev also provided help.

Our historian T. Zhordania was not lying when he urged everyone to quickly take care of and copy what was preserved in old monasteries if they wanted to study the ancient Georgian appearance, clothing, dress and ornamentation, and lay the foundation for the flourishing of national art.

**Yes, exactly; the revival of our art should be based solely on the study and restoration of the remains of our past...”,** – Ioseb Arimathieli, *Remnants of Ancient Glory, magazine Theater and Life.*

Dimitri Shevardnadze prepared the ground for new Georgian art by studying ancient Georgian art and exhibiting copies made by artists during expeditions. By exhibiting Georgian wall paintings, he showed the public that there was a great tradition of painting in Georgia and that the Georgian easel painting is a continuation of medieval wall painting.

Newspaper articles are writing about this too, they regard the fresco exhibition as the beginning of renewal and the promise of the artistic blossoming.

The first exhibition held in the Cathedral of Glory unites old and new Georgian art, past and present – copies of medieval century frescoes are made by young artists. With this exhibition, Dimitri Shevardnadze laid and strengthened the foundation of new Georgian art.

After the exhibition closed, Dimitri never left the building of the former military museum, the Temple of Glory. As Giorgi Eristavi recalls, he appointed the building for the Society of Georgian Artists, fearing that someone would settle in the building. As a result, he abandoned his apartment, moved to the half-basement of the building, and guarded it.

A new era was approaching.

In 1917, a revolution took place in Russia. The Russian Empire was finished.

On May 26, 1918, the National Council declared Georgia's independence.

The first few years of independence were a crucial period for Georgian culture – a time of flourishing for the Georgian culture.

The independent Georgian government, despite the poverty, is open, and tries to support the ongoing processes in the arts. This is the best time to realize Dimitri's goals.

In June 1918, the Society of Georgian Artists wrote in a letter to the Minister of Education:

*“The Society of Georgian Artists is experiencing great hardship due to the lack of suitable housing. The society has not been able to establish an art school and library, and it is unable to hold exhibitions of paintings. However, there is one building in Tbilisi, the so-called Temple of Glory, which would be of great use for the Society of Artists. Today this building is the property of the Republic of Georgia. We mediate before you, so that the aforementioned building may be transferred to the Society of Georgian Artists, which intends to organize an exhibition of paintings by Georgian artists in the near future.”*

In March 1919, an article was published in the newspaper Georgia – For Georgian Art. The author is not indicated. This text gives us a certain idea of the mood of the time, so we offer several fragments:

*“Political independence in itself will not have much value if the Georgian people have not gained autonomy in spiritual culture. The May 26 Act will only be fully justified if we create, not only an organized nation-state, but a new set of ideas and forms that express our spiritual energy and basic instincts.*

*Even in spiritual culture, science is more objective and impersonal, while art better portrays national identity. Therefore, art is of incomparable importance for the development of national self-consciousness.*

*The first stirring of the drowsing public thought almost always begins with an aesthetic act of some sort; writing a great poem or musical work is often equivalent to winning several great battles.*

*Unfortunately, Georgian art is in a helpless state today.*

*From a social and economic point of view, art is a kind of comfort, and although, as science has proven, primitive man learned to draw earlier than he learned to build a house and cook, special wealth and care are required to create the modern aesthet-*

*ic culture. But who should show it this care, if not the state itself, which today represents the largest economic organization? In a democratic era, there are neither rich and refined titles, nor wealthy benefactors who patronize writing and painting. The democratic state must assume the function of kings and aristocracy in this field as well.*

*It is well known how the taste and thinking of the customer have always influenced aesthetic creation. What pleased the Athenian democracy was unsuitable for medieval Christianity, and what the Gothic and Byzantine styles created no longer satisfies modern man. We too can no longer think and write today as the authors of Karamaniani or Amiran-Darejanian thought and wrote. We need a new ideological content and formal language that expresses the sensibility of democratic Georgia in the same way that Shota Rustaveli or the writers of the seventeenth century expressed the sensitivity of chivalric and feudal Georgia.*

***The search for new paths is visible in almost every field of Georgian art.*** Therefore, it is necessary for the state and the individual to cooperate with each other in achieving new goals. Of course, the president of a modern republic does not need and does not suit doorkeepers, but the democratic republic itself needs architectural and artistic jewelry that will bring variety to the everyday monotony.

The newspaper Ertoba publishes an article titled Culture and Democracy, in which we read:

*“Freedom alone cannot become the only cherished treasure of all democracy. Freedom is a tool for acquiring other social and cultural gains, for social and cultural advancement, for strengthening the economy, and for making it flourish.*

*A democratic state should spare no expense in introducing the people to the gurgling streams of our culture, and provide them with everything that a revived democratic state can give.*

*Our people are great lovers of art, music, and painting. Provide them with these cultural blessings of free Georgia.”*

After the successful first exhibition, a second exhibition was held in 1919. This time, Dimitri organized an exhibition of new, contemporary paintings and sculptures. We can reconstruct this exhibition with the reports and responses published in the press of the time.

An announcement was published in the April issue of the newspaper Ertoba calling on artists to submit their works,

In other words, in today's sense, an open call for the exhibition was organized:

*“At the end of April, the Society fo Georgian Artists will host an exhibition of contemporary Georgian painting and sculpture at the Temple of Glory.*

*The society calls on all Georgian artists to participate in the planned exhibition.*

*Exhibition conditions:*

- 1. Paintings will be accepted until April 25;*
- 2. Paintings should be sent to the following address: Tbilisi, Golovin Ave. House No. 13, Temple of Glory, addressed to the Society of Georgian Artists. Paintings are accepted every day, from 4 to 7 pm. On Sundays and holidays from 11 to 2 am. Artists living outside Tbilisi can send their paintings by mail.*
- 3. The painting should be placed in a frame, and should generally have a decent appearance.*
- 4. The back of the painting must include the name, last name, and address of the artist, as well as the title of the painting, the of the painting and its price.*
- 5. An insured card must be sent to the public, indicating the number of paintings, their names, the price of each image, and other information.*
- 6. According to the Charter of the Society fo Georgian Artists, 10 percent of the proceeds from the sold paintings are donated to the benefit of the society.*

At this time, Niko Pirosmani is no longer alive, but Dimitri Shevardnadze is sparing no effort to collect his works for the exhibition.

In an interview with him we read:

*“Gogolashvili and I decided to collect and organize Niko’s paintings, and we even set about fulfilling our intention with our own money. We went around the basements and shops which were full with his paintings.*

*In addition, at Arsenidze’s initiative, Davit Kebabze donated 4,000 rubles to the collection of Piroshmanashvili’s paintings. About 20 pictures were purchased with this money. It should be noted that the mikitani did not wish to let go of the paintings and were often completely against selling them to us.*

*In this case, Benia Chkhikvishvili and director Al. Tsutsunava provided invaluable assistance. I remember such a case. One mikitani, who had a valuable collection of Niko’s paintings, refused to sell them. Only Benia’s threat made him give in. The threats were expressed in the closing of the samikitno. The mikitani did not forget this and when the tax was imposed on the shops, he went to Benia and said, “You have to pay me back for the Piroshmani paintings now,” demanding exemption from the tax, and he achieved his goal too.”*

The exhibition opened on Sunday, May 4, 1919, at



Tiflis, Cathedral of Glory

2 p.m. The entrance fee to the exhibition was 25 rubles. On the first day, the exhibition was visited by more than a thousand people. The exhibition was attended by the government and the founder.

The opening of the exhibition was attended by the members of the government and the Constituent Assembly, of various artistic and cultural societies, as well as representatives of missions in Tbilisi.

This exhibition is the first exhibition of contemporary art held at the National Gallery. It featured the future stars of the Georgian art: Lado Gudiashvili, Iakob Nikoladze, Davit Kakabadze, Niko Piroshmanashvili and others.

The opening of the exhibition was once again followed by a great response in the press. Vakhtang Kotetishvili, Grigol Robakidze, Titsian Tabidze, and Davit Kakabadze wrote about the exhibition.

In the newspaper Public Affair, Vakhtang Kotetishvili published a review entitled: **In the Alleys of Images.**

*“Today, an exhibition of Georgian artists opens. Young artists are calling Georgian society to the Temple of Glory, and they want to show what the potential of art in Georgia is. The opinion of Georgian society is interesting. Based on it, we will be able to resolve the issue: has Georgian consciousness grown or not? And this issue is a big one.*

*Art is the expansion of the human self, the elevation of the individual, the overcoming of the collective level, the knowing of personal creativity and will. In us, however, the collective swallows the individual, makes us lose our uniqueness, sharpens, rounds off the corners. In general, everywhere and especially in us, those who avoid originality, those who avoid everything new, those who give form to the thinking accepted by everyone, which has undoubtedly become undoubtable in the “wider society”, are most persecuted.*

*The audience applauds the orator only when they effectively express an idea that the audience has come to love. A new idea confuses them, as the audience’s mind is unprepared for it, immature.*

*Following a path that is easy for society to understand and is familiar to it may be good in some other field (although I doubt that such a field exists), but in art it is unattainable. This would be the inquisition of art.*

*Yes, society, taken on a large scale, is afraid of new things, and this fear characterizes our society as well.*

*I needed to make this introduction because in the gallery where the paintings of Georgian artists are exhibited, in some places, the specter of “danger”*

*is dwelling, and I doubt that the Georgian “broad” society” should walk past those pictures without a grimace. We could be patient if they would only shrug, but I think that with incalculable irony, it will wash hands of it exactly where more modesty and observation is needed. However, let’s leave it to the Georgian society to do as it pleases. I am only warning you.”*

Kotetishvili reviews the works of artists in the article. He is impressed by the paintings of Lado Gudiashvili. He especially highlights the work of Gudiashvili and Kakabadze. He wonders how society will evaluate their works, adding that even if they cannot evaluate them justly, this will not diminish their value:

**“Overall, this exhibition is a symbol of the victory of our art, and we should wish our artists victory,”**— This is how Vakhtang Kotetishvili concludes his review.

The May 9 issue of the newspaper Georgia publishes Grigol Robakidze’s review – **Exhibition of Paintings by Georgian Artists.**

In the article, Grigol Robakidze reviews the work of several artists participating in the exhibition:

*“Lado Gudiashvili is not yet a finished master. But the path he has chosen is real. He will face only one danger: repeating himself. If this last danger is overcome, we can congratulate Georgian art on a skilled master.*

*Davit Kakabadze introduces himself to us for the first time. He belongs to those chosen ones who always justify hopes.”*

*Robakidze criticizes Mose Toidze’s composition, calls Erekle Toidze still only a child but a true artist, sees a strange tenderness in Iakob Nikoladze’s marble, and refers to Niko Piroshmanashvili’s works as a maddening burst of Georgia’s creative power:*

*“The foundation of the exhibition is Niko Piroshmanashvili,”* – he writes.

*“There are others participating in the exhibition. Their style is different, and others will probably talk about them. I should mention only one artist here who has not exhibited anything, but has devoted his entire strength to the exhibition. This is D. Shevardnadze. His dedicated work for Georgian art is amazing. Of course, no “thank you” is needed here.”*

The magazine Seven Lights published Davit Kakabadze’s response:

*“The justification of our lives lies precisely in art. Art is the only mean to strengthen the meaning of our life. It can do this. Contemporary art should take on*

*a folk form, and when art takes on this form, then the time for its reign will come.*

*This exhibition is of great importance to us, because almost all of our contemporary painting was presented here. The Society of Georgian Artists gave every artist complete freedom to participate in the exhibition, and every artist had the right to exhibit their work. This is a positive side of the exhibition.*

*The appearance of the exhibition left a negative impression: the paintings were not arranged in a row, there was no system in the distribution of artists, and each part of the exhibition had a random character. This defect must definitely be corrected in the future.*

***This exhibition has shown us that there exists a contemporary Georgian painting, the artistic side of which is not in such a hopeless state as was thought. We can say that our art is now gaining a solid foundation.***

*From the above words, it can be seen that there is contemporary painting, and this exhibition was its first public appearance. **Our new painting is still in the period of exploration, but what this exhibition has given us allows us to think that our painting will flourish, that our painting has a future.***

In the newspaper Ertoba we read a review by T. Gartman:

*"I am writing these lines about the Georgian exhibition not for those fierce art appreciators who go to the exhibition armed with great knowledge, who are experienced in modern art by visiting and looking at art exhibitions for many years; not for those who, with a sober and cruel eye, discuss whether the famous artists still hold the flag high as high as their earlier victories, or whether new artists offer any hope. I am even less willing to teach, or give some advice to artists who have chosen this or that direction, or wish them this or that corrections, say that it would be better in some way. I write these lines for those who, due to the change in mass psychology, are striving for culture, who, due to a great spiritual hunger, are thirsting for new spiritual nourishment and go to exhibitions to see pictures that are often surprising to them, to be surprised by everything, not to understand much, but to absorb everything, one way or another, with their tender feelings and so that after a while rethink and reexperience the impressions they received from the exhibition. This is who I am writing for.*

*I must welcome the support for art shown by the Georgian government, which has allocated a large sum of money not only for the purchase of works by Georgian artists, but also for the purchase of works by artists of other nationalities. Support and help for*

*art are especially necessary in these difficult times, and every step taken in this direction should be especially welcomed. In addition, I would like to add a wish that the Museum of Modern Art be opened as soon as possible, so that it can be given, especially to the democratic masses, to fully approach the works of visual art."*

The newspaper Georgia publishes a review by artist Sergey Sudeikin, translated by Titsian Tabidze. In the review, Sudeikin particularly mentions the works of Niko Pirosmani:

*"Pirosmanashvili is the backdrop for the exhibition. Pirosmanashvili is the Georgian Giotto," he writes.*

*"Where there is such an aesthetic and demand for painting, it is understandable that an exhibition of Georgian artists leaves the impression of true art."*

Titsian Tabidze would recall the first exhibition of new art a few years later, in 1926, in his review of Lado Gudiashvili's exhibition:

*"They say the sky opens once in a hundred years for one to make a wish, and Georgia reached these open doors of heaven in 1919, when the first exhibition of Georgian artists was held in the former Temple of Glory. In that temple, which had previously been only the Temple of Glory of our slavery, where the torn flags of Georgia, Shamil's broken sword and the unsheathed helmets of Hadji Murad hung, surrounded by the cannons of Russian tsarism and the cast iron words of Emperor Alexander I's seductive manifesto, the exhibition of Georgian art took place, which later laid the foundation for the National Gallery.*

*The people of Tbilisi do not want to be reminded that the knights of this exhibition were Lado Gudiashvili and Davit Kakabadze, who were later sent to Paris as laureates.*

*It is well known that artists find it most difficult to say good things about other artists – but many will remember the famous artist Sergey Sudeikin's letter about the Georgian exhibition. He, with particular enthusiasm, praised the paintings of Niko Pirosmani and Lado Gudiashvili.*

*The pace of our time is different: former Temple of Glory is now the National Gallery. Today, Georgia has an Academy of Painting, where a whole army of new artists is being trained."*

The reviews of the exhibition were this diverse. Everyone emphasized the great importance of the exhibition for Georgian art, and predicted a great future.

The exhibition closed on June 4, and on June 8, an auction of paintings was held at the Temple of Glory:

*“On Sunday, June 8, an auction of paintings will be held at the Temple of Glory. The viewing of the paintings will begin at 10 am. Admission is free.”*

The second and third exhibition of new art was held in the Temple of Glory in December 1919. In this exhibition, artists of all nationalities living in Georgia participated.

An announcement was published in the newspaper *Ertoba*, calling on artists to bring their works to the building of the former Temple of Glory. The announcement stated that the artists' paintings for the exhibition would be grouped according to directions. The exhibition space was divided into three wings: left, center, and right, and the artists' works were displayed according to directions and divided by their schools. The exhibition also featured works by Niko Piroshmanashvili.

The artists represented at the exhibition were as follows:

Left room: Alexander Bazbeuk Melikov, Vladimir Boberman, Natalia Goncharova, Lado Gudiashvili, Sargis Egikyan, Kirill Zdanevich, Ervand Kocharian, Niko Piroshmanashvili, Vera Schlesinger.

Middle room: Elene Akhvlediani, Boris Zanis, Tatiana Zanis, Irakli Toidze, Mose Toidze, Vasil Krotkov.

Right room: Amayak Akopian, Giorgi Bashinjagiani, Mose Bat, Giorgi Gabashvili, Stepane Gabaev, Davit Gvelesiani, Mechislav Delpes, Konstantin Zanis, Grigol Kepinov, Krievs-Malkhaziani, Isak Mezurniani, Astgik Minasiani, Simon Nalbandiani, Alexey Nosov-Belyakov, Vasil Fyodorov, Konstantin Kavataradze, Vyacheslav Shelomov, Giorgi Khmaladze, Gratsian Khmelevsky, Ivane Khojabegov, Gigo Zaziashvili.

Not that many reviews were published in the press about this exhibition. In the 1919 art chronicles, the magazine *Theater and Life* published a short notice about it:

*“There is progress in the field of painting, two exhibitions have shown us that Georgia can be proud of artists such as: Piroshmanashvili, Gabashvili, Mrevlishvili, Eristavi, the Toidzes, Gudiashvili, Shevardnadze, Kikodze and others. Sculpture is progressing slowly. Until now, Nikoladze and Chiaureli have been in the center of it. It would not be too much to say that it is necessary to establish a school of painting and sculpture.”*

During this period, work was underway to establish an Academy of Arts, and Dimitri Shevardnadze was, of course, involved in this process.

*“The Society for Georgian Artists, at Dito's initiative, decided to establish an art school in Tbilisi on the*

*base of the Moscow Art School. Dito and I created the school's program at his apartment. The program was discussed at the school meeting. It was attended by the school staff and invited guests. The program was unanimously adopted. This laid the foundation for the Tbilisi Academy of Arts, which was founded in 1922”, – recalls Giorgi Eristavi.*

Until the academy is established, Dimitri's goal is to give artists the opportunity to get acquainted with European art and broaden their horizons. As always, Dimitri achieves his goal.

In 1920, artists Lado Gudiashvili and Davit Kakabadze traveled to Paris. In 1920, the magazine *Theater and Life*, we come across a notice:

*“Artists L. Gudiashvili and D. Kakabadze were sent abroad (to Paris) to attend higher art courses at the government's expense.”*

During this period, the Georgian government sent a number of young people abroad on scholarships. Under the leadership of Shevardnadze, the artists were selected by the Society of Artists based on the works presented at the 1919 exhibition. The following were selected to travel abroad on scholarships: Lado Gudiashvili, Davit Kakabadze, Valerian Sidamon-Eristavi, Ketevan Maghalashvili, Shalva Kikodze, Mikheil Chiaureli, Giorgi Eristavi, Elene Akhvlediani, Shalva Khmaladze, Shalva Dzeladze.

Lado Avaliani describes the episode when Gudiashvili learns about his departure to France:

*“October 1919... Café Chimerion... Working on the fresco at the entrance to Chimerion. Lado is finishing up a painting the wall on one side of the entrance, Sudeikin on the other. Suddenly, at the top of the stairs, on the platform, Titsian Tabidze appears. Even the walls repeat his equally sudden call:*

*– Lado! It has been decided to send you and Datiko to Paris.*

*Gudiashvili looks up in surprise and barely manages to wink at Titsian. The messenger disappears like a ghost. Gudiashvili's heart is filled with joy at this unexpected news, but Titsian running away angers him. He quickly descends from the scaffold, slams his brushes on the stairs, and hastily takes off his coat, which is covered in paint...*

*Sudeikin stares at him in surprise for a while...  
– Lado, what happened, who made you angry?!  
– Titsian heard something, that me and Datiko are being sent to Paris, he called it down and ran away... He didn't give me time to ask me what happened or how...*

*“Congratulations, then!” said Sudeikin.*

## **National Art Gallery**

Dimitri Shevardnadze's determination, knowledge and love of the work bore fruit. In 1920, the National Art Gallery was opened in Tbilisi. The Temple of the Glory of Imperial Russia, the Military Museum - the Museum of the Subjugation of the Caucasus, was transformed by Dimitri into the symbol into a center of art and culture.

On April 16, 1920, the National Assembly of the Republic of Georgia adopted a decree on the establishment of the National Art Gallery of Georgia.

The institution was subordinate to the Ministry of Education and financially supported by the state.

Dimitri Shevardnadze was appointed as the director of the gallery.

The main goal of the gallery was to preserve, study and collect works of painting and sculpture, mainly Georgian and of the peoples bordering Georgia, both ancient and modern.

The gallery had a book depository and a library where literature about art was collected, as well as collections of engravings and reproductions, and art magazines.

### **Decree**

#### *The establishment of the Georgian National Art Gallery*

1. *"The Georgian National Art Gallery shall be established in the city of Tbilisi from February 1, 1920, in accordance with the regulations, temporary staff and budget annexed to this decree.*

2. *For the needs mentioned in the first article, forty-three thousand seven hundred and eighty (43,780) rubles shall be allocated from the state treasury by order of the Minister of Education from February 1 to June 1 of this year, 1920.*

3. *The increase in wages established by the decree of the Constituent Assembly of February 10, 1920, shall be extended to the state mentioned in this decree.*

4. *This decree shall enter into force on the date of its adoption by the Constituent Assembly.*

*1920, March 30.*

*Comrade of the Chairman of the Founding Assembly, Ekv. Takaishvili.*

*Chairman of the Government of the Republic N. Zhordania".*

### **Regulation**

#### *For the Georgian National Art Gallery*

1. *"A National Art Gallery is to be established in Tbilisi.*

2. *The goal of the Art Gallery is to collect and preserve works of painting and sculpture, primarily the art of Georgians and the peoples bordering Georgia, both ancient and modern.*

3. *There is a book depository next to the Gallery, which houses works on the arts, as well as collections of paintings, engravings, reproductions, and art magazines.*

4. *The Art Gallery is subordinate to the Minister of Education.*

5. *The Art Gallery is governed by a Council chaired by the Gallery Director, for the management and use of the Gallery, in accordance with special regulations.*

6. *The Director of the Gallery and other officials will be appointed by the Minister of Education upon nomination by the Director.*

7. *The Director is the Gallery's immediate manager, who will be tasked with:*

A. *Management of administrative and economic-family affairs and their distribution among employees;*

B. *Relations with external institutions and individuals;*

C. *Managing one of the sections of the gallery according to its specialty.*

8. *The funds of the Gallery include:*

A. *A specified amount of money from the state treasury at the disposal of the People's Ministry and*

B. *Museum entrance fees, donations, income from the sale of duplicates of collections.*

9. *The gallery's special funds will be spent in accordance with the general rules after receiving permission from the Ministry of Public Education.*

10. *The gallery has its own seal with the state coat of arms and the following inscription around the coat of arms: "National Art Gallery of Georgia".*

*March 30, 1920.*

*Comrade of the Chairman of the Founding Assembly, Ekv. Takaishvili*

*Chairman of the Government of the Republic N. Zhordania".*

Dimitri Shevardnadze spent four years preparing the ground for the establishment of the gallery. He envisioned the art gallery as the beginning of an art museum, often referring to the gallery as a museum in his letters and reports.

*“In 1920, on May 1, the Georgian National Art Gallery was opened, and Dimitri was appointed as its director. This was the first museum of fine arts to be established in Georgia,”* – Shalva Amiranashvili writes.

The building allowed Dimitri to begin gathering his collection. For an art museum, it is not enough to simply have the will and determination to collect. Creating a museum collection requires knowledge of art and a precise vision. Art Museum is not just a repository or warehouse for works of art.

An art museum and the collection of works preserved within it should reflect and present the country’s past and present, history and politics, and the thoughts and intentions of society.

An art museum is a place where thought is produced, as a blueprint for the future of a country and society.

Dimitri Shevardnadze has a clear vision for creating a fine art collection. He brings together modern and ancient works of art, Western and Eastern art, mak-

ing an emphasis on the art of Georgia’s neighboring countries.

It intends to showcase Georgian art at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, in the context of the art of neighboring countries.

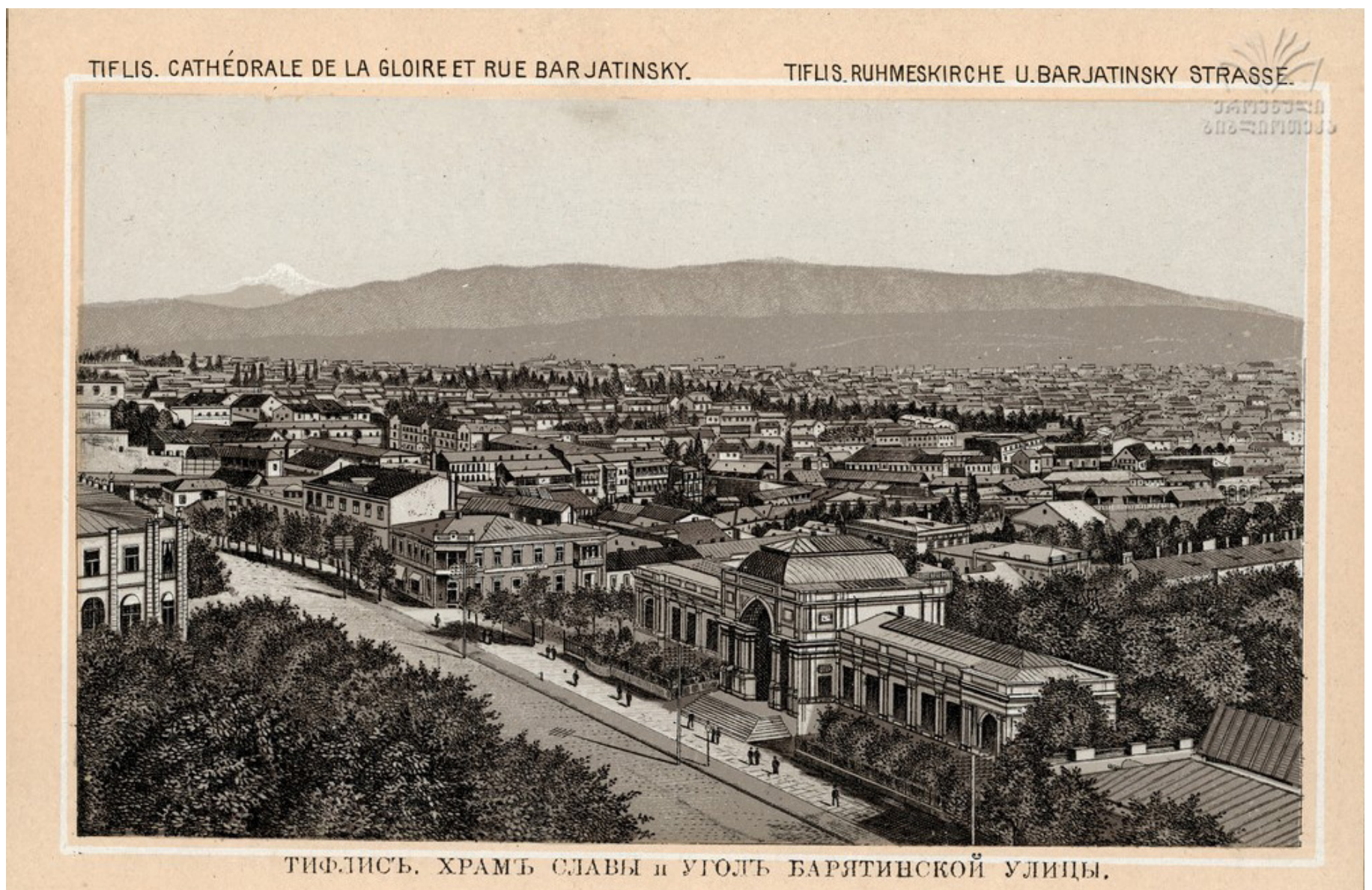
Dimitri creates an opportunity for East and West, old and new, past and present, to intersect in Tbilisi, once a military city and now a temple of artistic glory.

Dimitri carefully collects works. In 1919, purchases several works presented at the new painting exhibitions, gathering Pirosmanni’s scattered canvases, looking for examples of ancient painting throughout Georgia.

Giorgi Eristavi recalls:

*“He very energetically took up the collection of works, mainly samples of Georgian painting. He visited many cities and villages and collected many paintings. Some of them were given as gifts, others he bought. He also collected books and created a library.*

*He found Dutch paintings in the attics of the destroyed noble houses in Kakheti. He also brought pictures from Borjomi. To this we added the photographs of Ekvtime Takaishvili. At that time, the Russian army returned from Persia. A Russian general brought Iranian collections. Dito asked the govern-*



Tiflis and the Cathedral of Glory

ment for money and bought them. He established Eastern and Western sections in the gallery.

*In the very first year, we filled both wings of the gallery. In the middle was the library. Dito ordered books from Europe. From Pavle Tumanishvili, me, Giorgi Natidze, and Dito purchased furniture brought from Germany, which is now here, in the library. Gigo Gabashvili gifted us a library and his own works. The Hermitage sent us Jabadari's miniatures.*

*We had only a few employees at the gallery. Dito lived in the gallery and swept the halls himself. He would also cut the picture frames himself. We helped him out."*

Finding and purchasing paintings scattered across the country is no easy task. Dimitri decides to organize a large exhibition at an art gallery, where he will display the works he has already acquired. At the same time, he would use the exhibition to find new works.

Dimitri involved others in collecting works too, so that if there was a valuable work somewhere, it would not be missed or lost.

In a letter to artist Ketevan Maghalashvili, a close friend, he writes:

*"The art gallery is organizing an exhibition of old paintings. The paintings must be collected from both state institutions and private individuals. The organization of this exhibition requires a lot of work: for this purpose I will also have to visit the provinces. For example, I was informed that there are about a hundred old paintings in Tsinandali belonging to a noble family. I should go see them and if they are interesting, I will bring them back for the exhibition. I will probably leave this week. I would be so close to you, but I am not sure if I will be able to stop by!*

*Keto! Maybe someone in Tianeti also has some old paintings, try to bring them for the exhibition. We guarantee everyone that we will not take it away from them. There will be an announcement about this in the newspapers too..."*

Soon after, in an announcement published in the newspaper Ertoba, we read:

*"With the consent and approval of the Ministry of Education, the Georgian National Art Gallery is organizing **an exhibition of olden paintings** for artistic and scientific purposes. Therefore, the gallery administration kindly asks everyone (both in Tbilisi and in the province) who has any paintings of olden Georgian, Persian or European paintings, as well as miniatures and engravings, to kindly submit them for the exhibition at the National Art Gallery building, Rustaveli Ave. 12. Tel. 5-96. Paintings will*

*be accepted from September 17-26 from 10 am to 2 pm and from 5 pm to 6 pm.*

*The gallery guarantees the protection and inviolability of the paintings. If any painting is selected, approved, and evaluated by a special artistic commission for the National Gallery, it will only be purchased by the gallery after an agreement with the owner.*

*Gallery Administration."*

The Exhibition of Olden Paintings was opened. The exhibition gave the public the opportunity to evaluate what works of art were found in Tbilisi. The exhibition featured exhibits presented by private individuals, examples of Persian painting brought from the Georgian Museum, examples of Georgian painting brought from the Museum of the Georgian Historical and Ethnographic Society, and pictures brought from the Likani Palace.

Dimitri Shevardnadze writes:

*"Organizing this exhibition gave us an unexpected result: it revealed that in Tbilisi there is excellent Persian painting of world importance from the 15th century until the beginning of the 19th century. Excellent Georgian portrait painting of the 18th-19th centuries, very interesting painting from Western Europe, among which were Rembrandt, Luca Cranach, Ruisdael, Proudhon, David Teniers and others."*

The committee selected the paintings, and the gallery purchased them with government funds. For these and other minor expenses of the gallery, the government allocated 4,683,388 roubles, or 5,204 pounds sterling, which is approximately 1,000,000 GEL today.

On February 25, 1921, the Red Army entered Tbilisi.

Sergo Ordzhonikidze informed Stalin by telegram:

*"The red flag of the Soviet government is waving over Tbilisi, long live Soviet Georgia!"*

Georgia lost its independence. The country, liberated from the shackles of Tsarist Russia, was subject to a new and fundamentally different empire. If the regime of the Russian Empire pursued an imperialist policy through the hands of the Georgian nobles and aristocracy, in 1921 the Bolsheviks established power through the hands of the proletariat and with military boots.

The exhibition of old paintings had not yet closed when Georgia was Sovietized. By this time, the Gallery already had a collection of pictures, which consisted of pictures purchased from private individuals and transferred from the Museum of Georgia.

By 1921, the total number of paintings had reached two hundred. By this time, 17 paintings from European painting, along with other Georgian treasures, had been taken to Europe during the evacuation of Tiflis.

The gallery's collection also included paintings purchased with government funding at the 1919 exhibition - modern painting.

During the early days of Soviet rule, or rather the transitional period, the Gallery faced many challenges. It was not fully equipped, so various institutions and military agencies had claims to the building, but Dimitri repelled them all.

In the first years of the gallery's activity, Dimitri Shevardnadze's attention was mainly focused on enriching the gallery's collection with exhibits.

After the Soviet era, the funds of the Gallery, the Georgian Museum and the Georgian Historical and Ethnographic Society were also replenished with confiscated property. The confiscated property distributed in warehouses was, through the Gallery's mediation, transferred free of charge to the funds of the Gallery and other museums. Selected museum property from warehouses was first collected in the National Gallery, and then distributed to other museums and the university. Among them were: old weapons, jewelry, books, porcelain, furniture, and a library.

At that time, during the transitional period, such difficult living conditions were created that a lot of museum items appeared on the market. The items were sold very cheaply. The gallery tried to prevent this property from falling into the hands of private individuals and being scattered, so it bought everything it could afford. During this period, the gallery acquired a number of paintings and publications.

The gallery's expenses were covered by the People's Commissariat of Education. The gallery also had its own small income – from ticket fees and sold duplicates.

In the first years of Soviet rule, a large part of Georgian cultural figures continued their activities as usual, and the Soviet government helped them to some extent. Many artists even welcomed the new political order.

The Bolsheviks had their own cultural program – the creation of new art and culture. A cultural revolution was to take place everywhere, in both cities and villages. The main goal of the revolution was to transform man into a new – Soviet man. Art and culture were important tools for implementing this idea. If earlier, in Tsarist Russia, art served the tastes of the Tsar's court, the aristocracy, and the bourgeoisie, now it had to be put at the ser-

vice of the people. In Lenin's words, if before, the aristocracy was the commissioner of art, now the Soviet state, and therefore the people, became that customer. The roots of art had to go deep into the working masses. Art had to be understandable and beloved by the people, it should have been inspiring and extremely emotional.

In the new reality, Dimitri Shevardnadze continues his work. His work already included spreading art among the people. Creation of a public institution, educational and exhibition directions imply exactly this. However, from the reports and letters it is clear that he is not very interested in the new cultural program and avoids ideological propaganda. He follows his chosen path, his program is to care for old and new Georgian art.

Meanwhile, interest in art is growing in society. This is undoubtedly due to the establishment of the Art Gallery and the exhibitions held there.

“Not only has interest in art increased in Georgian society, but it now only listens to art, relies on it, and hopes for it...”, writes Paolo Iashvili in the year of 1922;

*“Painting is now becoming hopeful and is beginning its history with undoubtedly noticeable talent and awareness. An example of this are the laureates and young artists from Tbilisi sent to Europe, who, given the conditions, perform true miracles.”*

The reports show that the Soviet government and the People's Commissariat are not as generous as the Social Democratic government was. Dimitri constantly has to emphasize that more funding is needed for the Gallery to achieve its goals.

In 1923, works of art that had been taken out of the country during the reign of Tsarist Russia were returned to Georgia. Dimitri Shevardnadze was also on the return commission. The gallery's collection was also growing through donations. With a small amount of money, Dimitri tried to purchase works of art - he bought works of contemporary artists from periodic exhibitions.

*“...The contemporary art department in the Gallery needs special attention, and a separate budget should be found for this, so that worthy paintings can be purchased for our exhibition every year,”* – He writes.

In 1924, at a meeting of the Society of Georgian Artists, Dimitri Shevardnadze raised the issue of organizing an exhibition of paintings by international artists in Venice and inviting Georgian artists to participate in it. The Society sent a delegation to the Chairman of the Government, Shalva Eliava, regarding the sending of Georgian artists to Venice. The members of the delegation were: V. Kotetishvili, D. Shevardnadze, V. Sidamon-Eristavi, I. Niko-

ladze and V. Gabashvili.

A statement was sent to the People's Commissar of Education about sending 40 young artists on a one-month excursion to the International Exhibition of Artists in Venice. The Soviet government was not interested in the Venice Biennale and this topic was closed without an answer.

What was the gallery like 100 years ago and what works were exhibited back then?

In 1924, Irakli Topadze's letter, The National Art Gallery, published in the magazine Mnatobi, describes the modern paintings exhibited in the right hall of the gallery.

*"From contemporary painting, the following are presented here:*

*5 paintings by artist Gigo Gabashvili: Two "Samar-kand", two "Khevsuri" and one "Rainy Day"; Several paintings of Mtskheta by Al. Mrevlishvili; Portrait of Akaki Tsereteli by Shalva Kikodze; One small etude and another large painting by Valerian Sidamon-Eristavi, "Queen Tamar"; three paintings by Mose Toidze: "Moonlit Night", "The Bride", "Party in Mtskheta"; four paintings by Davit Kakabadze: "My Mother", "Self-Portrait", "Still Life" and "Imereti"; Lado Gudiashvili's five paintings: "Shota Rustaveli", "Pirimzisa", "Celebration", "The Feast of the Kin-tos" and one small sketch; two etudes by Romanoz Gvelesiani; Portrait of a Woman by Al. Beridze; Portrait of Iakob Nikoladze by Keto Maghalashvili; V. Sudeikin "Carnival"; Sorin's "Landscape"; three paintings by Kirill Zdanevich: "Dancing Woman" and two still lifes; Salzman's "The Lady with the Shawl"; A Portrait of a Woman by Khalil-Beg Musayev; Saryan's "Street"; B. Vogel's "Batom", "Venice" and "Nalias"; Khachaturian's "Armenian Women"; Tadeosian's "Armenian Bazaar"; Iakob Nikoladze's sculpture "Wind".*

Despite the gallery's small funding, Dimitri was able to systematize, organize, and partially exhibit the gallery's collection.

By 1926, the gallery had 240 paintings and 300 miniatures. The paintings were mostly exhibited in the halls.

The gallery hall was divided into 7 sections to save space.

The library was located in the middle of the building. The library divided the museum into two wings. On the right side, exhibits of Eastern art and modern painting, works by both Georgian and foreign artists, were exhibited.

*"Here, there is a magnificent display of ancient Persian painting, which is of world importance. Nowhere, in any European or Russian museum, can you find so much, and such artistically significant*

*pieces as those presented in our museum,"* – Dimitri Shevardnadze writes in one of his reports.

In addition to Persian paintings, "a valuable Chinese painting and about ten Indian miniatures" were also placed in this section.

The Georgian section was mainly represented by portrait painting of the 18th-19th centuries. Dimitri has the idea that the Georgian section, including ecclesiastical paintings, may also be represented in art from an earlier period.

On the left side of the gallery, old Russian painting and Dutch, French and Italian art are exhibited. All the paintings have appropriate captions in Georgian and Russian. Shevardnadze notes that after the scientific study of the paintings, many of the paintings will need to have their captions corrected.

By 1926, the Gallery library included 4,000 publications. It was open to anyone who wanted to use it.

Shevardnadze worries that the Gallery does not have a photography and restoration room where it would be possible to photograph and restore old works of art.

Due to lack of funds, the Gallery does not have a catalog either. Dimitri had intended to publish a trilingual catalog, which would include reproductions of the paintings with scientific descriptions. Through a trilingual catalog, the gallery would be able to establish connections with European and Russian museums.

In the first half of the 1920s, the number of visitors to the gallery was approximately 30,000 per year. The general public had access to the gallery at a reduced price (10 kopecks for trade union members and 20 kopecks for individuals) to view the exhibitions. The number of visitors increased in the summer. Tourists could visit the gallery for free. Dimitri Shevardnadze took upon the role of the guide at the gallery.

From this time on, Dimitri began to think about expanding the museum. Shevardnadze believed that the gallery should include all examples of fine art: Georgian church painting:

frescoes, icons, enamels; easel painting and sculpture; Persian, Indian, and Chinese works of art; works of ancient European painting:

*"This is absolutely necessary, as recent research reveals a great relationship between the arts of the West and the East."*

A gallery for contemporary art should be organized separately, and the library should be expanded:

*"If we implement the above measures, we will have*

*an art gallery of world importance.”*

The Arts Council, which consists of both Georgian and famous foreign artists, participates in resolving artistic issues. The director is responsible for administrative management.

Dimitri was not averse to doing menial work either. He was skilled and knowledgeable in photography work, restoration, and frame making.

He would clean the Art Gallery with his own hands. Once, dressed completely simply, he was sweeping the Gallery hall. Some Russian artist went in and asked for the director. Ditto led him to his small office (at the entrance, on the right), sat down at the table, and introduced himself as the director.

Dimitri writes in one of his reports that it is necessary to add more staff so that every hall has a supervisor. If there are a lot of people in the gallery, the staff have to leave their work and pay attention to the halls. Especially in the summer, there are frequent cases of hooliganism - visitors leave inscriptions on the works with a chemical pencil. The gallery has no security:

*“I don’t know whether to attribute it to the culture of our people or, the opposite, to their indifference to works of art, but in 10 years we have only had 2 cases of theft. Once a photograph was stolen, and once a Persian miniature.”*

The gallery doesn’t have a night watchman, so employees or Dimitri himself often have to stay there.

The Society of Georgian Artists does not stop its work, but loses its primary significance under the Soviet regime:

*“Now, due to the creation of a new organization, the Association of Revolutionary Artists of Georgia, the old society is ceasing to operate, now it ARAG’s turn”.*

In his reports, Dimitri writes:

*“We have not declared a socialist competition with anyone. What will be done by the museum in terms of socialist construction is clear from the above report,”* – This is how Dimitri Shevardnadze avoids involving the National Gallery in an ideological competition.

As the accounts show, Dimitri’s planned activities are often prevented by lack of funds. The small amount of money the Gallery has is used to enrich its collections:

*“For this, we cannot be criticized under any circumstances, because it is better to have museum collections than empty equipment.”*

Due to lack of funds, the Gallery is also having difficulty purchasing works by contemporary artists, which Dimitri is very concerned about:

*“We are leaving artists without a minimum income and at the same time we are sinning against the development of our art history. Without material support and encouragement, it cannot develop,”* – Dimitri writes and adds that it is necessary to purchase works from periodic exhibitions:

*“The growth of the collections is very slow due to lack of funds. During these ten years, in addition to the artistic property allocated from museums, the property purchased from private individuals in the gallery is not a large number, although it is notable for its value.”*

Maintaining and caring for the creative heritage of Niko Piroshvili was one of the important tasks of Dimitri Shevardnadze’s life. In the 1920s, the gallery collected 105 paintings by Piroshvili. Some were purchased, and some were given to it for free. In 1930, 70 of Piroshvili’s works were purchased with funding from the People’s Commissariat of Education.

On behalf of the gallery, Giorgi Leonidze collected Piroshvili’s biographical materials, and the gallery purchased the manuscript.

On February 25, 1927, at the initiative of the Society of Georgian Artists, an exhibition of Niko Piroshvili’s works was opened. About 90 works were exhibited.

Public interest in Piroshvili’s work was growing. In the following years, a larger exhibition of Piroshvili’s work was planned.

In 1930, in Moscow, Dimitri buys Piroshvili’s works from Kirill Zdanovich, a total of 39 paintings: “The Feast of the Nobles in the Field”, “Childless Millionaire and a Poor Woman with Children”, “Horse Thief”, “Ortachala’s Beauty”, “Doctor on a Donkey”, “Cow Milking Woman”, “Cook”, “Ortachala’s Beauty with a Hand Fan”, “Street Sweeper”, “Old Peasant with a Little Boy”, “Firewood Selling Boy”, “Shete”, “Actress Margarita”, “Deer”, “Giraffe”, “Deer”, “Little Deer”, “Woman with Grapes and Boy”, “Still Life”, “Easter Lamb in the Cemetery”, “Wolf”, “Easter Lamb”, “Yearling Ram”, “Bear on a Moonlit Night”, “The Musician”, “Woman with Beer”, “Woman with Buckets”, “Robbers Go to Attack”, “Shamil”, “Girl with a Red Ball”, “Nanny”, “White Bear with Cubs”, “Pig with Piglets”, “Eagle with a Hare”, “Seated Lion”, “Deer with Landscape”, “The Lady with the Umbrella”.

In 1930, the National Gallery received a proposal from the Neue Kunst Fides Society in Germany to organize an exhibition of Piroshvili. The exhibition was to be held in various cities in Germany. With the permission of the Commissariat of Education,

Dimitri agreed to the proposal. Before going to Germany, the exhibition was held first in Tbilisi and then in Moscow. Dimitri Shevardnadze also traveled to Moscow with the exhibition. In December, Dimitri was refused permission to go to Germany “due to currency considerations.” Opening the exhibition in Germany failed. The exhibition continued its journey in the Soviet Union – First in Kharkov, then in Kiev, and finally in Odessa. The exhibition was a success in all cities. “Success is very big,” – Dimitri Shevardnadze writes in his letters. Responses were published in the press; public discussions were held. The public was delighted with the exhibition. Despite its success, Dimitri was in a hurry to return to Tbilisi in order to return to the Gallery and continue working on the issue of the Metekhi Museum.

*“I’m in a great hurry to get home,” – Dimitri writes to Ketevan Maghalashvili, – “I have to take care of the museum business.”*

### **Georgian Louvre – Metekhi Museum**

“He was so absorbed in his work that he would forget about himself,” recalls Giorgi Eristavi.

*By 1924, Dimitri wrote that he had given up painting due to lack of time. He chose curatorial and museum work over painting. The creation of an art museum became the main goal of his life.*

In 1929, in the Gallery’s five-year plan, Dimitri Shevardnadze wrote that the art gallery building could no longer accommodate the museum’s collections. Also, during this period, they were planning to demolish the Gallery and expand the garden.

The time has come for the plan conceived years ago to be implemented.

Dimitri considers the Metekhi Fortress to be the best location, as the main building can easily be converted into a museum.

***“It is time for this historic building – a landmark of old Tbilisi – to become the “Georgian Louvre”, – writes Dimitri.***

Convincing the Soviet authorities is not easy. Dimitri has to repeat in his annual report that the collections can no longer fit in the Gallery building and that a new building is needed.

A report from 1930 mentions that the Gallery is popular with the general public and student youth. It is visited by workers, students, and Red Army soldiers, both local and from all over the Soviet Union.

*“We cannot conduct scientific work. Our misfortune is that we have never received money according to our budget, and therefore the plan always remains unfulfilled. Despite this, the museum has grown over the past ten years. Its cultural role is enor-*

*mous. It is visited by the masses, our library serves all the artists of Tbilisi, the Academy of Arts, and outsiders. We hope that we will have a new building and then this museum will be not only a landmark of Tbilisi, but will also gain world recognition.”*

Times are changing. If in the 1920s the Soviet government was relatively tolerant towards artists, since the 1930s the reins had been tightening. If before that an artist could avoid socialist themes, since the 1930s socialist realism has become the only framework for art.

In 1932, Dimitri Shevardnadze addressed a lengthy letter to the Commissariat of Education:

*“Georgia is home to the most valuable, world-class works of art, from ancient times to the present day, but not all of this is visible because many things are not exhibited due to the cramped and unorganized space. The interest of the broad masses in the art museum has grown so much that the existing museum, small and unorganized, can no longer accommodate it. This very important issue must finally be given due attention and a full-scale art museum must be established in Tbilisi, where there should be a concentration on all collections of fine arts. This should include: paintings, sculptures, frescoes, icons, artistic engravings, enamels, miniatures, porcelain, bronzes, graphics, artistic furniture, peasant art, etc.*

*The museum needs: exhibition halls by department, additional storage rooms, halls for periodic exhibitions, a hall for the art library, lecture halls, laboratories and offices, rooms for carpentry and metalsmith work, apartments for guards.*

*With proper reconstruction, the Metekhi prison would be a great fit for the needs of a museum. At the same time, I will not say anything about the great political significance of turning the Metekhi prison into a museum, because that is obvious to everyone.”*

The Metekhi Fortress consisted of several buildings and stood to the west of the church. Metekhi has had a fortress-wall since ancient times. In ancient times, the fortress was the king’s palace, which was destroyed during invasions. In the 19th century, during the reign of Ermolov, a new fortress was built on the ruins of the old fortress - Metekhi Prison. During the reign of Tsarist Russia, many famous revolutionaries were imprisoned in Metekhi Fortress, including: Gorky, Stalin, Kalinin, Kamo. The fortress functioned both during the period of independent Georgia and in Soviet Georgia.

In the memoirs of Vakhtang Beridze we read:

*“At the bottom of Metekhi, where the banks of the Mtkvari River come closest, there were two narrow bridges next to each other. In the bay of one*

*of them, on the right bank, stood a mosque with a colorful roof built by Shah Ismail in the 16th century. On the other bank, where the Mtkvari River turns, a caravanserai hung over the river. The Metekhi church was still surrounded by 19th-century lousy barracks. Until 1933, this served as a prison."*

Dimitri Shevardnadze stubbornly moves towards his goal. It is clear that the main thing for him is to fulfill his long-standing plan, to house a valuable collection and create an art museum. To achieve his goal, he gives Caesar what is Caesar's:

*"The development of the Cultural Revolution and the demands of the broad masses have now reached the point where the Party and the Soviet government, hopefully in Georgia too, will dedicate some time and pay due attention to the most undeveloped museum front and, by overcoming obstacles, will use museums more beneficially for the cultural needs of the broad masses.*

*By meeting the presented requirements, at the end of the second five-year plan we will have in Tbilisi the "Georgian Louvre", which will occupy one of the first places in the entire Soviet Union in its dignity and will also attract the attention of foreigners."*

In 1933, the Central Executive Committee of Georgia transferred the Metekhi Fortress to the People's Commissariat of Education to establish an art museum.



Dimitri Shevardnadze in the studio

The abbreviated text of the resolution is as follows:

*"Metekhi Fortress, which was converted into a prison during the reign of Tsarist Russia and before the Sovietization of Georgia, was a symbol of the enslavement and oppression of Georgian and Caucasian workers, to be transferred to the People's Commissariat of Education of Georgia for the Central Museum "Metekhi" and to be established as a scientific-research institute of fine arts.*

*Chairman of the Central Executive Committee Philippe Makharadze."*

The Art Museum – Metekhi was founded in 1933. Dimitri Shevardnadze was appointed its first director.

On November 18, a large-scale ceremonial rally was held on the Metekhi plateau to celebrate the opening of the museum. At the opening, the museum director was presented with the key to the fortress.

**"From today, Metekhi Castle is an art museum."** – Many responses were published in newspapers regarding this remarkable event:

#### **"An Art Museum Instead of a Prison"**

Dimitri Shevardnadze

*"Metekhi was a symbol of the oppression of workers. The walls of Metekhi have seen many selfless, famous fighters, whose victory of ideas and aspirations gave Metekhi, as a symbol of oppression and torture, a deadly wound."*

*The old Metekhi stands no more. By the will of the Soviet government, a new Metekhi is being built, which will be one of the centers of people's education - an art museum."*

#### **"Take Care of Metekhi"**

Alexandre Tsutsunava

*"And now, today it is a fact that Metekhi is no longer a prison. From now on, Metekhi will be a treasure trove of art and the best of human aspirations,*

*From today on, everyone will go to Metekhi with great interest, of their own free will, to experience the captivating beauty of art.*

*So let us shout hurrah and huzzah to the Soviet government of Georgia, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, and its wise leader, Comrade Lavrenti Beria, who, single-handedly shook the walls of the terrifying past, destroying the prison for the flourishing of art.*

*The history of mankind does not remember such an*

*example. Down with the old, long live the new Metekhi!*

### **“Two Stories”**

Sandro Akhmeteli

*“Metekhi – a fortress, Metekhi, the vault of freedom...”*

*Metekhi – an insult, Metekhi shackles...*

*Metekhi citadel of culture – an art museum...  
Two histories of Metekhi... of completely different kinds...*

*Feudal Georgia and monarchical Russia built Metekhi as a fortress and Metekhi as a prison.*

*The Soviet government turned Metekhi into an arts center.*

*From today, Metekhi will begin to beat with the creative heart of socialist Georgia!*

*Hail to the new Metekhi!”*

### **“A Sure Indicator of the Growth of the Cultural Level of Workers”**

Ushangi Chkheidze

*“People always have special love and respect for historical relics, no matter how dark their past is. But, Metekhi has always been remembered with hatred. Within the walls of Metekhi, the policy of the Russian emperors suppressed the noblest ideas of people; Metekhi humiliated the best warriors; the bones of Georgian revolutionaries were crushed in Metekhi; from Metekhi, thousands went to the icy fields of Siberia and in the taigas the intentions of the best people were buried. Metekhi also produced steel-like warriors. The emperors of Russia could not shatter the will of the people.*

*The victorious working class today is building the giants of the Soviet countries with great enthusiasm; at the same time, it does not forget about the cultural front. The transformation of the Metekhi Fortress into an art museum is an unmistakable indicator of how much the needs of the working people have increased, their cultural level; this is a great event in the life of the workers of Soviet Georgia, an extremely courageous step of the government.”*

### **“A Great Historical Act”**

Giorgi Chubinishvili

*“One of the main sources for developing artistic*



Tbilisi, Metekhi Castle

დ. შიშინაძე

# გარდაქმნათ მეტეხის ციხე ხალხმწიფის მუზეუმად

Let's transform Metekhi Fortress, Proletarian Art, 1932

taste among the broad masses of workers is monuments of art. Only museums can preserve these monuments as examples; for this purpose, in Tbilisi – in the center of Georgia – there was only an art gallery with a very limited exhibition area; the property of the Georgian Museum of Art was also kept there.

The transformation of Metekhi into a museum provides a great stage for a new, colossal museum construction and creating a broad center of art. Therefore, the transfer of Metekhi appears to us as a great historical act, a foundation for the development of the art culture of Soviet Georgia and the settlement of Georgian museum affairs in general.”

### “Future Art Repository”

Sandro Inashvili

“From now on, the Metekhi Fortress – an art muse-

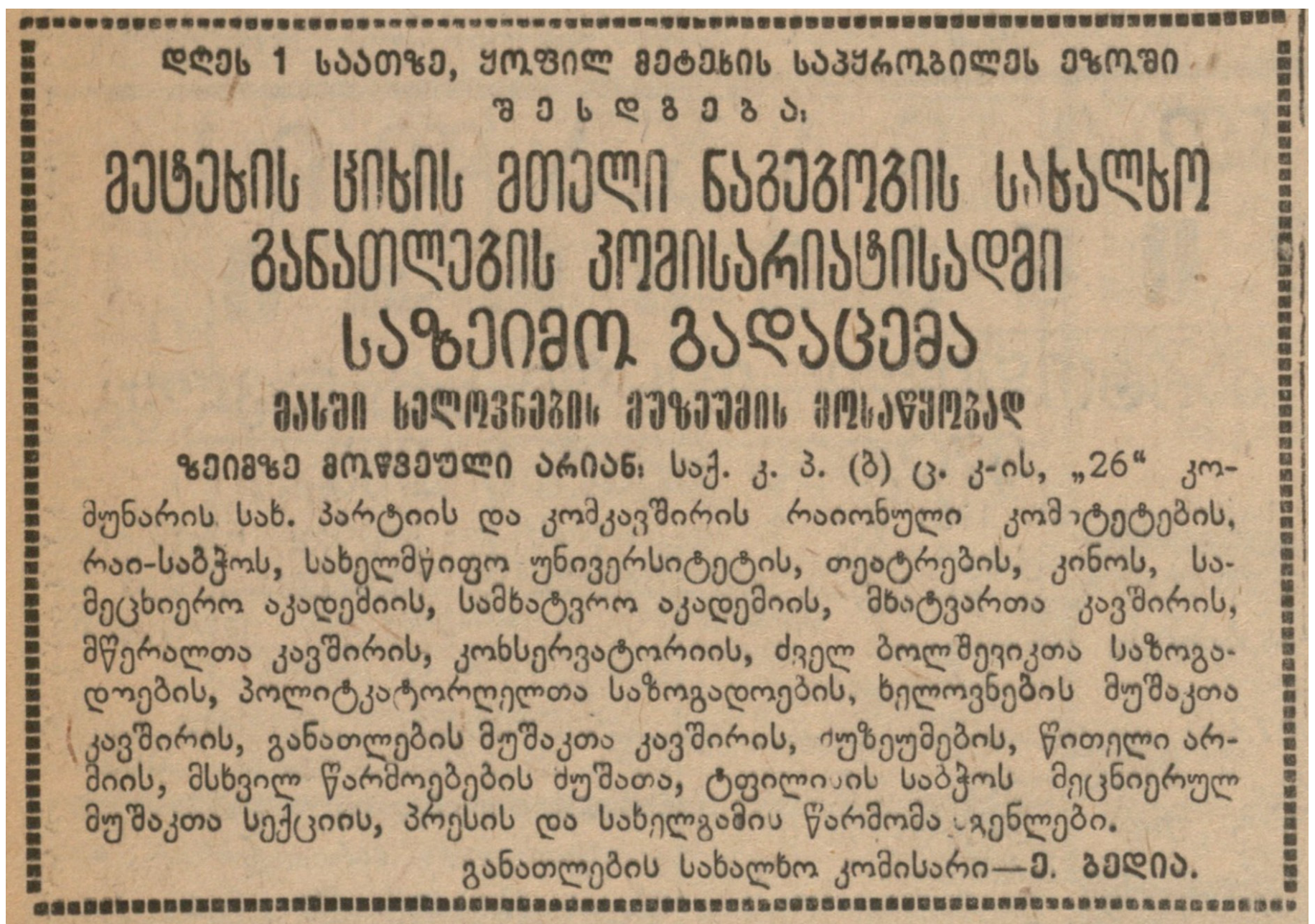
um – will be visited by thousands, not by the hurt and heartbroken population, who in the past would go there to hear the stories of the torture of their children and relatives, but by workers filled with joy and hope for the future, to learn about our cultural achievements.

This opportunity only became possible during the Soviet regime, and it became a fact only under the leadership of the Communist Party and its great leader, Comrade Stalin.

All we can do is to enthusiastically welcome this decision of the government and spare no effort to implement it immediately.”

### “Greetings to the New Center of Georgian Soviet Culture!”

K. Marjanishvili Theater Collective



Announcement of a grand opening, newspaper Communist, 1933

*“Metekhi Fortress, which for decades was held in the hands of the Tsar’s executioners to suppress the thoughts of those striving for freedom, was turned into an art museum by the class of builders of socialism, its party. Prison cells of the revolutionary communards will be transformed into exhibition halls for art monuments.*

*The entire collective of our theater welcomes and celebrates this victory of great importance with special joy. We are delighted and strengthened by this new indicator of the unstoppable progress of Soviet culture.*

*Our greetings to the leader of the construction of Georgian Soviet culture – the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia and Comrade Lavrenti Beria, with whose initiative this wonderful task was carried out. Salute to the Museum of Art – the new center of Georgian Soviet culture!”*

The Literary Newspaper also responded to the opening of the Metekhi Museum:

#### **“Metekhi”**

Leo Kiacheli

*“From today, Metekhi is the Georgian Art Museum. This is such a great story that it will undoubtedly be recorded as a historic date in the history of our culture. Such facts bring about a turning point in people’s lives and give a great impetus to their creativity.*

*Metekhi – Palace of Arts, is a well carried out strike from the socialist and revolutionary proletariat*

*on the darkness of the past, which lay in the heart of our capital and tormented us with its nightmares. My enthusiastic salute to the right hand of the proletariat, which returned Metekhi to Georgian culture.”*

#### **“May the Builder of the Castle Die”**

Nikolo Mitsishvili

*“The castle was conquered by culture. Metekhi has become our proud foundation. Happy is the man whom the Georgian government will grant the honorary position of the first director of the Metekhi Museum.*

*This is how the face of the country changes and the songs change too.*

*No one could have done this.*

*This was made possible by the power of the victorious class and the party that demonstrated this power and wisdom.*

*And today, together with the Georgian working peo-*

*ple, the poet can already sing another song – about the beautified and ennobled “fortress.”*

#### **“Metekhi - Athenaeum”**

Konstantine Gamsakhurdia

*“Metekhi was the name eponymous to goosebumps once, of unpleasant goosebumps in the last century.*

*Only the bloody regime of the Romanovs could have gotten such an inquisitorial idea: to turn a historical monument into a prison.*

*Our revolutionaries were defeated in Metekhi, and it would be a shame to leave Metekhi as a delegate in the new Georgia.*

*Metekhi occupies a place in our capital as glorious as the Acropolis in Athens or the Castle of the Holy Angel in Rome.*

*The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia and its leader, Comrade Lavrenti Beria, laid the foundation for another great cause with their truly historic resolution.*

*Metekhi should unite the old and the new museums of painting, architecture and sculpture, exhibition halls, richly-lit studios for artists. In Metekhi, we should exhibit the faces, plans, reproductions, faces of frescoes, etc., of the great monumental monuments of Georgia.*

*Where darkness resided, light must reign.*

*Where working people were shackled, the children of those same people must create a new culture.*

*Metekhi should become a brilliant Atheneum of the new Georgian Soviet culture.”*

#### **“Historic Act”**

Titsian Tabidze

*“The fact that Metekhi Prison has been transformed into an art museum is a fact that in its own right, marks a historical milestone, and its significance will be more appreciated from generation to generation.*

*There is no doubt that this was an unfulfilled dream of previous generations, but only during the Soviet regime did this dream become a reality, and 16 years after the October Revolution, a citadel of such culture was created in Soviet Georgia.*

*Just as the Red Kremlin is considered the meridian of socialist revolution in the world, from now on Metekhi will light a candle for the oppressed nations of Asia and show what the life-giving path of Lenin’s national policy is.*



Metekhi's Dungeons as a Center of Socialist Culture, Literary Newspaper, 1933

*Metekhi, turned into a prison by the Russian Tsarist satrap General Yermolov and the Menshevik authorities, was a tomb for heroes dedicated to the revolution – but the work of the revolutionaries trapped in Metekhi broke Tsarism and turned the place of torture and suffering from a prison into a tool of great culture, from which new masters of fine arts will be created and where what socialist Georgia inherited as a cultural heritage will be collected.”*

**“Long Live the new Metekhi!”**

Giorgi Leonidze

*“Release of Metekhi from the title of a prison – is an extra testimony to the progress of the cultural construction of Soviet Georgia. In 1829, the satrap of Russian imperialism, Yermolov, built a fortress on the heights of Avlabari, or Old Isani, “with chains and death,” as the folk song says.*

*In Metekhi, in the 5th-17th centuries, the palace of Georgian kings stood. Then, the arsenal of the Persians and Ottomans. And in 1800, the last king of feudal Georgia, Giorgi XIII, decided to build his palace here. The king ordered the site to be cleared of residents. The plan of the future palace was drawn up by the German specialist Deitrich. A new royal palace was to be built with great labor and setting new taxes. However, an unexpected event occurred. During the first works, lightning struck the cut foundation. The frightened king stopped the work on his palace, and “gave into fearing and dreaming. A ghastly thing, mysterious to human nature, invaded his mind and soul.” The inhabitants of Tbilisi, “the believers and the non-believers, the naturalists, and the diviners” interpreted this event in various ways. The clerical king grew his tearful prayers and abundant almsgiving.*

*This is what historian Platon Ioseliani tells us, who, together with the king, saw in this natural phenomenon a mysterious sign and prophecy of the destruction of the Georgian Kingdom and the Bagrationi dynasty.*

*This was, in his opinion, the revelation of Balthazar.*

*The merciless thunder of history has shattered feudal dynasties, the decaying imperialism of Russia, and the obsolete Menshevism. Today, the mighty proletariat of Georgia and the Caucasus, in its sixteenth year of struggle, labor, and enthusiasm, is*

*building a new palace in Metekhi – the Museum of Georgian Art.*

*Long live the new Metekhi.”*

*“It was truly a great event. One of the most beautiful and characteristic corners of the city, which had been cut off from it for a long time, was being returned. The long-suffering Metekhi Cathedral was being restored as a magnificent monument of our architecture, and the opportunity was created to house an art museum,” Vakhtang Beridze writes in his memoirs.*

**“Welcoming the Rally Gathered at the Former Metekhi Prison”**

*“To the Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Central Committee of Georgia, A. L. Beria, the workers of Georgia, having gathered together with the broad working masses, on the occasion of the ceremonial transfer of the Metekhi Fortress Art Museum to the Commissariat of Education, we warmly greet you, the fighting leader of the Bolsheviks of the South Caucasus.*

*At your direct initiative, the Metekhi Fortress, which during the tsarist government and the Menshevik dictatorship represented the oppression and obedience of workers, was handed over to the Commissariat of Education to be transformed into a center of science and culture.*

*The Commissariat of Education is deeply convinced that with the party government and your subsequent help, the museum will become the pride of the Soviet Republic of Georgia and a remarkable scientific institution of the Soviet Union. Long live the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the leader of the Comintern, Comrade Stalin. Long live the A.K. Regional Committee, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia and their leader, Comrade Beria. Long live the Cultural Revolution.”*

*It was a sunny and warm November day. Metekhi was surrounded by red flags, and flags were also displayed from the windows of the cells. The prison doors were open, and everyone could enter and explore the future museum.*

*Party representatives delivered speeches at the*



Sketch of the former Metekhi Prison, newspaper Communist, 1933

rally: Comrade Bedia, Comrade Sil. Todria, Kurulov and others. The speakers thanked Lavrenti Beria and Joseph Stalin for the museum.

All of the speakers noted that the conversion of the prison into a museum was initiated by Lavrenti Beria.

If we didn't know that Dimitri Shevardnadze had been requesting a new building for years for a museum, while reading these speeches and responses, we might have thought the same. The Metekhi Fortress became a museum through Dimitri Shevardnadze's determination, hard work, and determination.

It was such a time. More important and necessary than commemorating Dimitri's achievements was praising Beria. Dimitri probably didn't even care whose name was written on the museum and who would credit him with his many years of hard work. The main thing was that Tbilisi had an art museum, and Caesar should get what was Caesar's:

*"To sum it up, our cherished dream has come true, the Georgian State Museum of Art has been created, the collections of which represent a true treasure of our nation."*

The Metekhi Museum is the first art museum and scientific research institute that studies Georgian art from ancient times to the twentieth century.

The Metekhi Museum has four sectors: ancient Georgian art, Eastern art, modern art, antique and Western art. The work of the sectors will be led by a

team of scientist-workers. Each sector will have two functions: exhibition and research.

A publishing house of the Metekhi Museum will be established, which will publish scientific research works.

The museum plans to acquire new works to expand its collections.

The collections of ancient Georgian art were fully transferred to the museum, which were kept at Tbilisi State University before. Also, the collections of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy, the Georgian Historical and Ethnographic Society, the Ecclesiastical Museum and the Georgian National Art Gallery.

The 1934 production plan of the Metekhi Art Museum states that the three buildings and the former church of Metekhi need to be renovated and reconstructed. According to the plan, the church was to be used to store the most valuable collections separated from museums and brought from the provinces.

The first floor of the third building would house the administration, chancellery, and library; the second and third floors would house exhibition halls.

In the fifth building there would be restoration and photo laboratories, carpentry, metalsmith, and jewelry workshops.

Due to its small size, the fourth building was not suitable for exhibitions, so research offices were

to be located there. Part of the building was to be temporarily given over to some scientists who did not have a place to live.

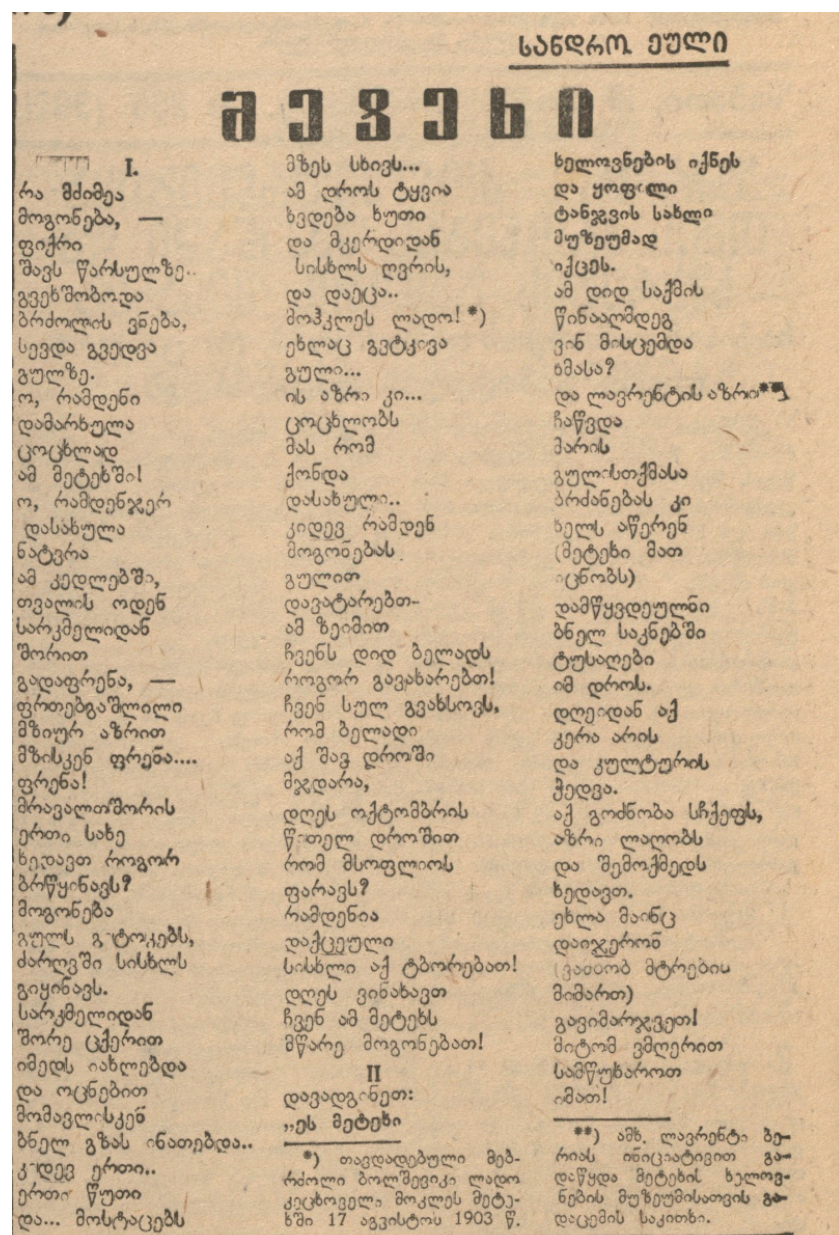
Dimitri Shevardnadze believes that the existing buildings will not fully meet the requirements of the Art Museum. Even those buildings that will be renovated are acceptable to the museum only as temporary housing. A completely new building needs to be built. A competition should be announced for the construction of a new building.

Dimitri's plans were not destined to come true. In 1936, he was dismissed from his position as a museum director. His plans were taken over by others, his life was cut short.

In 1936, Tiflis also became another city. The city was officially renamed. Tiflis became Tbilisi. Many of those who created the city's culture remained in Tiflis.

The repressions of 1937 are a black page in the history of Georgia in the 20th century. The "troikas" created by Beria sentenced thousands of people.

In 1937, writers, directors, actors, artists, and high-ranking party officials were shot and declared enemies of the people.



Poem dedicated to the opening of the Metekhi Museum, newspaper "Communist", 1933

In parallel with the repressions, cultural events were planned and held in Tbilisi.

In 1937, two important events were planned in the city – the 100th anniversary of Ilia Chavchavadze's birth and the 750th anniversary of "The Panther in the Tiger's Skin". Books were to be published, exhibitions held, etc. on these dates. For the anniversary of Ilia Chavchavadze, an exhibition dedicated to the writer's work and activities was organized in the Art Gallery. As for the anniversary of Shota Rustaveli, it was decided to erect a monument to him in Tbilisi.

These anniversaries became connected to Dimitri Shevardnadze in different ways.

Ilia Chavchavadze's anniversary exhibition was curated by Dimitri Shevardnadze. This turned out to be the last exhibition he organized.

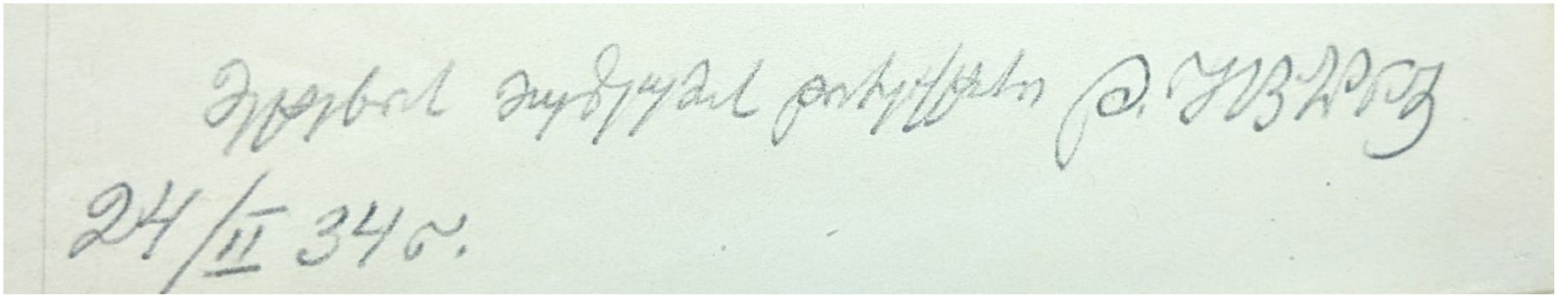
Dimitri Shevardnadze prevented the erection of a monument to Rustaveli on the site of the Metekhi Church. This was his last effort to preserve ancient Georgian culture.

To celebrate Rustaveli's anniversary, Beria decided to demolish the Metekhi Church and erect a monument to Rustaveli in its place. He sent a brigade to blow up the church. Dimitri prevented the team from destroying the church. The brigade would definitely return to carry out the order, so several people united to save Metekhi.

Mikheil Javakhishvili's son, Ketevan Javakhishvili, recalled in 1981 how Mikheil, Dimitri, and others went to Lavrenti Beria to save the Metekhi Cathedral:

*"One day, my father spoke to several people about this issue. They gathered and discussed for a long time. My father was supported by the director of the Metekhi Museum, a patriot and a highly educated person, Dito Shevardnadze, who was no less worried about this matter than my father. Niko Mitsishvili also agreed to help with this matter, and Shalva Dadiani also had the same opinion. Several more people joined them. It was decided that all of them together, as a delegation, would go to the person who had issued this order and explain the situation to him. They would try to somehow change the decision. They understood very well that this was a sacrifice on their part, but there was no other way out. There was no turning back.*

*It so happened that at the last moment some refused to leave. Father, Dito Shevardnadze and one or two other men remained. They decided that in no case they would hold back or retreat and that they would take care of this matter. Everyone was in a bad mood and felt internal unrest, because they did not know what would come out of this.*



Signature of Dimitri Shevardnadze, production plan of the Metekhi Museum, 1934

*When my father returned home, he told us: when they entered the room and that person looked at them, he was not happy. In father's words: "As soon as he saw us, a black light shone over his face. He told us bluntly: You shouldn't have come to me together like this, as a delegation. Why didn't you come separately?"*

*The delegates thoroughly argued to him that the destruction of this church would be an evil towards the Georgian people, that it was a rare example of Georgian architecture and its destruction was completely unacceptable.*

*The leader felt that he had been clearly proven ignorant and wrong. He had no choice but to change his decision. He acted like nothing had happened, and told them that he would change his order. When father returned home, his face was pale. After a silence, he said to us:*

*"He won't forgive us for this. We felt this and left that place half-alive," and he fell silent.*

In 1955, Ketevan Maghalashvili gave the following testimony in the Dimitri rehabilitation case:

*"Work on turning Metekhi into a museum was in full swing when suddenly, on Beria's orders, a brigade arrived to blow up the Metekhi Church. They were*

*supposed to erect a monument to Rustaveli in its place. Dimitri did not allow the church to be blown up, turned the brigade back and, together with representatives of Georgian art, immediately went to Beria (Giorgi Chubinashvili, Mikheil Javakhishvili, Sandro Akhmeteli and others).*

*Hearing their protests, Beria suggested that they preserved the memory of the church through photographs and a model.*

*To this they replied – "What will we answer if they ask us why we destroyed such a precious monument of architecture?"*

*Beria dismissed everyone except Dimitri Shevardnadze and asked him: "Why did you bring them in? To create public opinion?" and added: "You will demolish the Metekhi Church, but this time in your name. And I will help you build a new building for the museum."*

*Dimitri categorically refused this proposal.*

*Dimitri himself told me about the conversation between Beria and him.*

*Soon Dimitri left for Moscow and managed to allocate five million rubles for the construction of a museum building there. Upon his return from Moscow, he was dismissed from his post as director of the museum without warning. At the same time, an article was published in the newspaper condemning the group, among whom the name of Shevardnadze was also mentioned. Soon Dimitri was arrested."*

In May 1937, at the 10th Congress of the Communist Party, Lavrenti Beria mentioned Shevardnadze, among others:

*"It would not be out of place for Gamsakhurdia, Javakhishvili, Mitsishvili, Shevardnadze and some others to seriously reflect on their actions. We will not allow anyone to act hypocritically, deceive the Georgian people, and perform dirty deeds with the enemies of the people under the disguise of a Soviet writer or artist."*

In July of the same year, Beria reported to Stalin:

*"Anti-Soviet and counter-revolutionary elements in*



Dimitri Shevardnadze in Guria

*Georgia are being eradicated from their roots. 200 people have already been shot. We have already sent materials to Comrade Yezhov about the execution of 350 people. I think we will have to execute at least 1,000 people, among them: rightists, Trotskyists, spies, saboteurs, pests, etc. This does not include former kulaks and those who returned from exile.”*

These predetermined numbers, Lavrenti Beria’s brutal accounting, needed a basis – testimony, fabricated or obtained through torture, but written on paper, where everyone would tell everything about everyone.

Against Dimitri Shevardnadze, in the testimony given by a repressed public figure as well, we read:

*“Dimitri Shevardnadze actively led among the ranks of the Georgian intelligentsia and artists, counter-revolutionary, nationalist, harmful work. Shevardnadze’s apartment was a gathering and meeting place for counter-revolutionary and nationalist-minded intelligentsia. Active work was being planned in Shevardnadze’s apartment “for the Independence of Georgia.”*

The accusation against Dimitri Shevardnadze turned out to be active work for the independence of Georgia. Dimitri told Ketevan Maghalashvili, a few days before his arrest: *“I fear nothing because I*

*am not guilty of anything.”*

The Metekhi Fortress, which Dimitri once looked at from his balcony, became the place where his life ended.

Ketevan Maghalashvili recalls: *“He sacrificed his life for Metekhi, I think Dito’s grave is near Metekhi.”*

After his arrest, the new director of the museum took Dimitri’s belongings out of his office and burned them in the courtyard of the Metekhi Museum.

In prison, Dito handed over a will to the investigator, in which he left all his property to the museum - his collections, and even his carpentry tools.

On July 12, 1937, a short report was published in the newspaper Communist:

**“A worthy punishment for the bloodthirsty enemies of the people - the reptiles have been eradicated”**

“The workers of the Art Museum (former Metekhi) were delighted to see the execution of the verdict of the Supreme Court of Georgia against the three-time despicable enemies and traitors of the homeland: B. Mdivni, M. Toroshelidze, M. Okujava, G. Kurulov, S. Chikhladze, G. Eliava and N. Kartivadze. The director of the museum, G. Bukhnikashvili, delivered a speech at the specially held rally. The words were delivered by prof. Sh. Amiranashvili, artists Burduli, Dumbadze, Virsaladze, Davarashvili and others. The words of all the speakers are full of deep love and devotion to the Soviet country and the greatest hatred for the enemies of the people, among them, the former director of the museum, Shevardnadze, who, throughout his entire “work”, spit a concealed, poisonous venom against our country, banishing Soviet themes from museums and idealizing archaic antiquities instead.

In response to the traitors and hypocrites of our country, the entire museum team pledges to eliminate the results of their harmful work in the near future and fight with all their energy for great Soviet art.”

In 1952, the Metekhi Art Museum moved to the building of the former theological seminary. Even after moving to this building, the museum was called Metekhi.

In 1955, Dimitri Shevardnadze was rehabilitated. The conclusion of the military prosecutor, Colonel Tsumarov, states: “the verdicts handed down against all persons convicted in this case should be considered null and void and the case should be dismissed due to the absence of any crime in it.”

In 1958, the buildings of the Metekhi Fortress were



Ilya Chavchavadze’s 100th Anniversary Exhibition, National Art Gallery, 1937

demolished. In the 1960s, a monument to Vakhtang Gorgasali was erected there.

Vakhtang Beridze writes in his memoirs:

*“In my life’s journey, I have rarely met such a charming person as Dito Shevardnadze. Small in stature, with a head set deeply into his shoulders, as if even slightly hunchbacked, with beautiful white curls, a beautiful face, the expression of which for me was an indicator of great inner strength, nobility and kindness. It is a pity that this man, who could not live further the year of 1937, is not known today as he deserves it - he made a huge mark on our national artistic culture, as the founder of the first Society of Georgian Artists, as the founder of the National Art Gallery and its first director, **as a carer for Georgian artists, as an artist himself.**”*

In her testimony regarding rehabilitation, Ketevan Maghalashvili says:

*“Dimitri was an exceptionally bright, honest person. His artistic brilliance and boundless erudition attracted many. He provided invaluable service to Georgian artists with his advice and instructions.”*

His loyal friend Giorgi Eristavi recalls:

*“I have never seen a more selfless, kind, and hard-working man than Dito. Dito was the conscience of our society.”*

Dimitri Shevardnadze truly fought for Georgia’s independence. This battle included the establishment of the most important art institutions for Georgia, the collection and care of the works of Pirosmiani and other twentieth-century artists, and the preservation of ancient Georgian art.

Vakhtang Kotetishvili wrote in one of his articles:

**“The citizen guards the everyday, the artist guards the permanent.”**

Dimitri Shevardnadze was an artist and art curator who guarded and continues to guard the continuity of Georgia.

While working on this article, I often walked around the places where the mentioned events took place, and one thought got stuck in my mind – what would I do now if I met Dimitri?

Where would I take him, or what would I show him?

What would I tell him about?

What would I say, how did we continue the work he started?

Would I take him to the National Gallery and show him the Pirosmiani collection he gathered?

Or in an art museum, to show him a small part of the collection he created a hundred years ago?

What would I answer if he asked me – where is the new, contemporary art exhibited?

Or what would I say, where is the “Georgian Louvre” to which he dedicated his entire life?

I couldn’t show him anything new and I couldn’t say anything.

I could only tell him about himself.

I would tell him that the work he wanted to do a century ago is still unfinished. If it weren’t for him, we wouldn’t have what we have, and that this country and the art of this country stands on him and people like him.



Ketevan Maghalashvili, Portrait of Dimitri Shevardnadze, cardboard, oil. 1921. Georgian Museum of Art