

Elene Chantladze

Dual exhibitions at kaufmann repetto and Anton Kern Gallery survey the different aspects of Georgian artist Elene Chantladze's practice. At kaufmann repetto, a span of works that include landscapes, portraiture, and still life exemplify her sensitive registers of mark-making and uses of unconventional materiality. The singular point of view in these drawings and paintings possess a diaristic intimacy while conjuring a rich image-repertoire of shared associations. While at Anton Kern, her different modes of world-building draw on art historical and literary traditions of the pastoral and the folk tale to explore the everyday and the speculative characteristics that buttress her portrayals of people and animals within the landscapes they inhabit. From washes of color to finer renderings evoking mood and atmosphere, these works elaborate narrative potential through figures, relations, and *mise-en-scène* that are both familiar and fanciful.

Born by the sea in Supsa, Georgia, a town named after the river running by her home, Elene Chantladze gathered stones, wrote stories and plays, kept diaries, and read voraciously from a young age. For much of her life, she has lived in Tskaltubo, where warm radon-carbonate mineral springs coursing under the earth here brought fame to the region in the form of spas popular with the Soviets. While working in the area's various sanatoriums and diagnostic centers to support her family, she would collect the empty chocolate boxes discarded by doctors, the old calendar pages the nurses gave her, or any thrown-out items with surfaces suitable to make drawings and paintings. As proper paper was expensive and too scarce for her to procure, Chantladze embraced these obscure materials to create visual collaries for the fables that still contour her imaginary.

Her drawings and paintings inhabit a dual space, grounded in ordinary stuff of everyday life as well as reflecting a highly subjective representation of lived experience. Her approach to image-making is layered, accreted with meaning through both the materials she uses and how she synthesizes personal history, literature, local custom, and global events into her fantastic tableaux. The range of media she employs – from traditional paint and charcoal to more unconventional materials like kerosene and berry juice, as well as natural elements such as stone and man-made detritus including paper plates and plastic lids – not only speaks to the primary relationship of Chantladze's being in the world, but also to the deep compulsion of the artist to create something from anything. Equally inspired by the surface differentiations on a rock found by the riverbank as in the

kaufmann repetto

stains and marks on the discarded scraps on which she draws and paints, her quasi-fairy-tale compositions engage with vertiginous simultaneity, idiosyncratic figuration, and surreal narrativity. In her work, there is a porosity of being, children roam fields of flowers in which their own faces peer back at them, animals approach as friends and hover as protecting spirits over landscapes rife with foliage, lovers can be star-crossed and bridegrooms monstrous. However, any perception of *faux-naïf* sensibility belies a complex reparative impulse for portraying worlds in whose making Chantladze recenters her vision and subject position within a culture that has traditionally allowed for this kind of creative labor and self-taught practice to remain invisible.

Like a folklorist attending to local myth and legends that bind community beliefs or an astrologer scrying the night sky for patterns in the sky congruent to our most human hopes and fears, Chantladze's work, evokes the potential for the otherworldly to elucidate or reimagine the everyday. As Annina Zimmermann writes, "Elene Chantladze is not creating new worlds, but tracing life and arranging it into meaning."¹ In this tracing and re-arranging, she discovers not only a sense of selfhood located within the psycho-aesthetic experience, but remakes a world in which her perspectives-shifting and idiomatic-enliven her surroundings through both wonder and critique.

- Miciah Hussey

Elene Chantladze lives and works Tskaltubo, Georgia. She has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Kunsthalle Zurich; Gallery Nectar, Tbilisi; LC Queisser, Tbilisi; Modern Art, London, and Fierman Gallery, New York. With artist Ser Serpas, she had an exhibition at Conceptual Fine Arts, Milan, and has been included the group exhibitions "girls, girls, girls," curated by Simone Rocha at Lismore Castle Arts in Lismore Ireland, and more recently with Rooms Studio at M HKA in Antwerp Belgium. A publication *The Gift to Irma* with essays by Ser Serpas and Miciah Hussey is forthcoming.

¹ Zimmermann, Annina, and Thomas Heimann, "Encounter with the Forest People: Introduction to the universe of the artist Elene Chantladze" in *Elene Chantladze*. Tbilisi: Posta Press, 2019. 97.