

*Telavian Thistles: Nonconformist Offerings of Vati Davitashvili*

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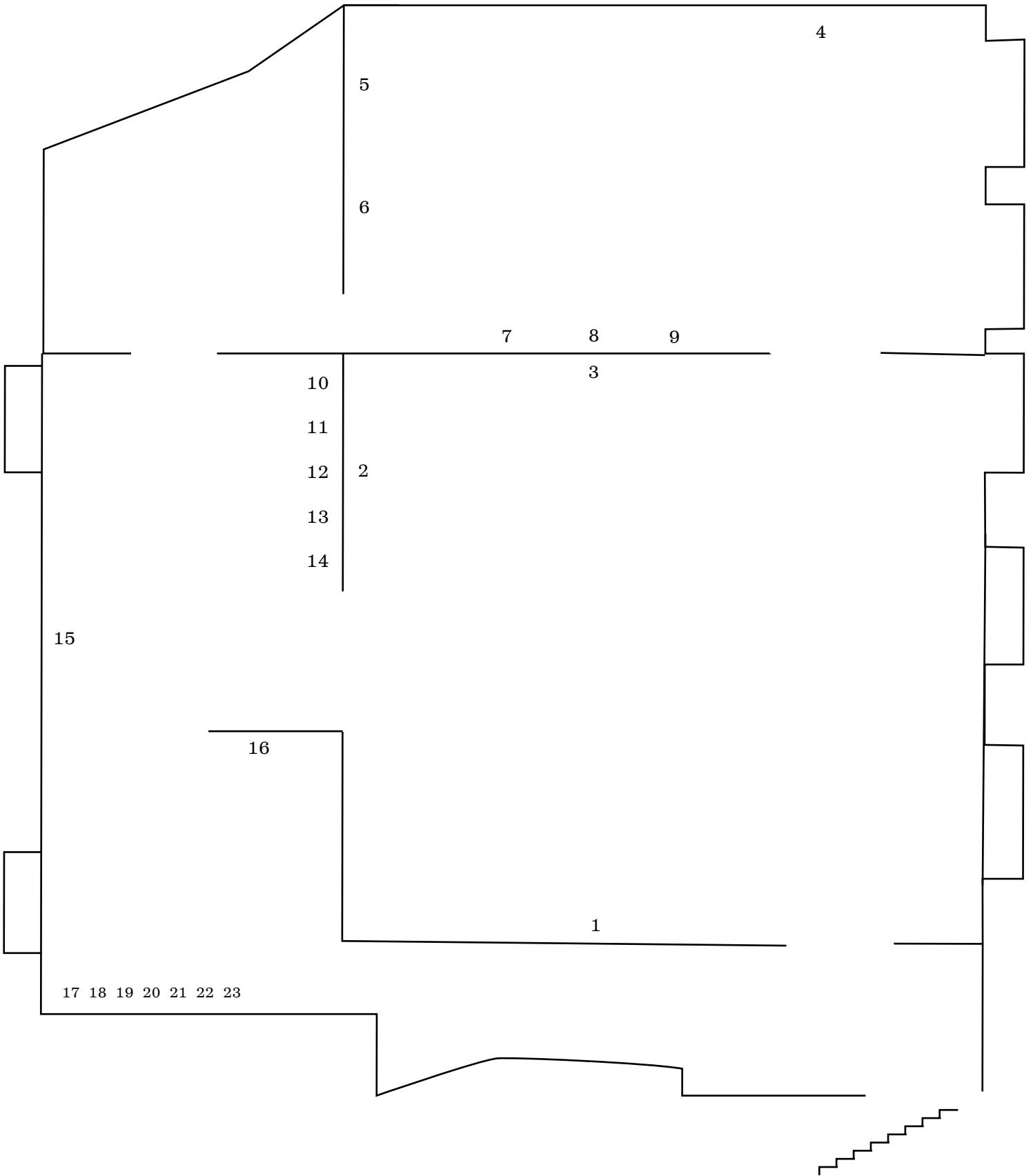
*Self-taught artists mingle with the masses. Each has their own character, baggage, and mien. In their vagrancy, they resemble the wildflower Thistle known as Narshavi in Georgia. The finest honey forms from its nectar while also having medicinal properties. And so are the self-taught artists - they can act as healers for the soul. - Ruslan Ghonghadze*

Quote from the film *Telavuri Thistles*, 1981

LC Queisser presents a solo exhibition of Vati (Vakhtang) Davitashvili (1946-2000) co-curated by Thea Gvetadze. Davitashvili was a self-thought, nonconformist artist rarely exhibited outside his home region of Kakheti. Living in Telavi, where he built his studio early on, gave Vati relative freedom from rigid dogmas imposed by official Socialist Realism upon the entirety of cultural production in the Soviet Union. Progressing from more traditional landscapes of his town to more sophisticated structural works in 1990s, he arrived at a completely contemporary mode of presentation. Davitashvili started to present meta-works of other images within one plane, thus providing a sophisticated meaning-making process. While images of churches, landscapes, people, trees, newspapers, and butterflies are fixed geometrically in the background surrounded by abstract patterns, the first objects we see when looking closely are symbolic representations of sustenance - a multiplicity of Kakhetian shoti breads, long and crescent-shaped, pointed at both ends, potted plants, sausages, radishes, cucumbers, salt shakers, clay jugs with wine. Bread here receives a symbolic function of an offered sustenance while simultaneously becoming an embodiment of life. Although bread reverberates through Davitashvili's visual vocabulary, bread loaves are also traceable throughout Georgian art history, including works of Niko Piroshmanashvili (1862-1918) and Vera Pagava (1907-1988).

He was closely acquainted with several important artists of his time, who all played a significant role in forming his idiosyncratic painterly language. Among them was the director Sergei Parajanov (1924-1990), whom the artist met when studying at the Kyiv Aviation Institute to become a pilot and who helped Davitashvili to break the perceptual boundaries of the surrounding Communist reality. After returning from Kyiv, Davitashvili started working with Avto Varazi (1926-1977), a major artist in Tbilisi in 1960s and 1970s. He was also in close touch with notable Russian nonconformist Evgeny Rukhin (1943-1976), organizer of the 1974 Bulldozer Exhibition. In Telavi, Davitashvili has mentored several generations of self-taught artists who continue to carry his legacy.

The microhistory of Vati Davitashvili underlines several vectors of Georgian art history. While telling the story of an outsider, Davitashvili's legacy connects to the constraints and freedoms available within the Soviet system. The artist, connected to his immediate community and the larger regional art scene, has literally and figuratively used Kakhetian architectonics, traditionally considered less obvious but more refined, to break the system while working within it.



1. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1990  
Oil on cardboard  
62.8 × 76.2 cm
2. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1993  
Oil on cardboard  
64 × 60 cm
3. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1990  
Oil on cardboard  
67.5 × 54.5 cm
4. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1991  
Oil on cardboard  
59.7 × 75.5 cm
5. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1991  
Oil on cardboard  
34.2 × 45.7 cm
6. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1990  
Oil on cardboard  
63 × 75.5 cm
7. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled)  
Oil on cardboard  
18 × 15.5 cm
8. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled)  
Oil on cardboard  
18 × 15.5 cm
9. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled)  
Oil on cardboard  
18 × 15.5 cm
10. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1992  
Oil on cardboard  
31 × 23 cm
11. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1992  
Oil on cardboard  
31 × 23 cm
12. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1992  
Oil on cardboard  
31 × 23 cm
13. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1992  
Oil on cardboard  
31 × 23 cm
14. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1992  
Oil on cardboard  
31 × 23 cm
15. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1991  
Oil on cardboard  
59.8 × 75.3 cm
16. Vati Davitashvili  
თელავი (Telavi), 1992  
Oil on cardboard  
68 × 82 cm
17. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1993  
Oil on cardboard  
14.5 × 10.5 cm
18. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1993  
Oil on cardboard  
10.5 × 14.5 cm
19. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1993  
Oil on cardboard  
10.5 × 14.5 cm
20. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1993  
Oil on cardboard  
14.5 × 10.5 cm
21. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1993  
Oil on cardboard  
14.5 × 10.5 cm
22. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1993  
Oil on cardboard  
10.5 × 14.4 cm
23. Vati Davitashvili  
უხატავრო (Untitled), 1993  
Oil on cardboard  
10.5 x 14.4 cm.