

a. SQUIRE

Mariam Abashidze
Milk Composition
31 August–28 September
Opening: Friday 30th August, 6–8pm

a. SQUIRE is pleased to announce *Milk Composition*, an exhibition by Mariam Abashidze comprising a three-channel video installation and related document in six parts. It inaugurates ‘Pollen Society’, a programme foregrounding urgent ecological matters.

My Mother, Rustavi, the video component of the exhibition, was filmed in the eponymous city in which Abashidze grew up, 26 kilometres south-east of central Tbilisi. Home to 127,000 people, it is also the industrial centre of Georgia and since 1948 has been the site of the Rustavi Metallurgical Plant, a factory now owned by Rustavi Steel LLC, of which the London- and Tbilisi-based asset management company Hunnewell Partners maintains a controlling stake.¹ The Rustavi area is one of the most polluted in Georgia, and Rustavi Steel LLC is one of the city’s largest emitters.² It is also one of several companies closely monitored and held to account by Gavigudet (We are Suffocating) [გავიგუდეთ], a civil rights organisation fighting to improve the air quality of Rustavi for its often unknowing citizens.³

At the centre of the film is Abashidze’s mother, Maia. She sits on a stool in the post-industrial landscape, forming a traditional Imeruli cheese in her hands. Her manicure is a shimmering pink and she wears a green jacket the colour of the occasional tree or shrub in the otherwise degraded surrounding scenery. That she never looks up from the task attests perhaps to her care or resilience, or both. Smokestacks belonging to the Rustavi Metallurgical Plant spike the sky. The shots recall the opening sequences of Antonioni’s *Red Desert*, but unlike the earlier film, *My Mother, Rustavi* is silent.

Maia’s mother is Luiza. One of Abashidze’s five relatives to have worked in Rustavi’s nitrogen or metallurgical plants, Luiza received a breast cancer diagnosis in 2022 inextricably tied to the fumes she has inhaled over the years.⁴ “Cancer is like a will, handed down to me by Rustavi,” writes Abashidze.

On the adjacent wall hangs *Medical Poetry*, a concatenation of pages suggestive of the statistical data of breast cancer discourse. It contains words or phrases gleaned from health blogs, articles and forums. Decontextualised and so nonsensical, these texts schematise the reports commissioned to homogenise information towards its depersonalisation, indecipherability, or inconclusiveness. Throughout the language, women’s bodies are rendered in low resolution as productive or culpable sites.

Mariam Abashidze (b. 2000, Rustavi; lives and works in Basel) is a 2023 graduate of VA[A]DS, The Free University of Tbilisi, and an incoming MA student at the Institute Art Gender Nature in Basel. Recent group exhibitions include *New Beginnings*, organised by Irena Popiashvili, ExpoGeorgia, Tbilisi (2024); *Kunsthaus 7B, Cislădioara* (2023); and *Lost and Precious*, Fabrika, Tbilisi (2021).

¹ Hunnewell Partners is also a minority shareholder in HeidelbergCement Georgia, the country’s largest cement producer. See: ‘The English Court Ordered Irakli Rukhadze and His Partners to Pay \$170 Million in Compensation’, *Forbes Georgia*, 31 March 2023. Accessed: <https://tinyurl.com/2jjwmk5h>.

² ‘Gavigudet Comments on the EIA Report on the Change of Operating Conditions of the Rustavi Steel’, *Gavigudet*, October 2021. Accessed: <https://tinyurl.com/46xjufaa>.

³ Recent projects by Gavigudet have received funding from the Greens Movement of Georgia/Friends of the Earth Georgia, the European Endowment for Democracy, the Heinrich Böll Stiftung Tbilisi Office, the East-West Management Institute, and the United States Agency for International Development.

⁴ In the artist’s words, “I cannot prove the truth of this claim, but no one can prove otherwise either.”

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Works

Medical Poetry (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6), 2023

6 digital prints on paper, framed

Each: 29.7 x 21 cm, 11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in

AS-ABASM-0002

First column, descending:

1. მთავარი რისკები, რომლებიც ჩვენ ვიცით, არის უბრალოდ იყო ქალი და სიბერე / The main risks that we know of, is simply to be a woman and old age
2. უშვილობა / Childlessness

Second column, descending:

3. წარმოება / Production
4. ყველა დედას აქვს ის რძე რომელიც სჭირდება მის შვილს / Every mother has the milk the baby needs
5. ყველა დედას ერთნაირი რძე აქვს / Every mother has the same milk
6. The more milk your baby drinks the more milk your body will make

My Mother, Rustavi, 2023

3-channel video, colour, silent, looped

00:10:25

AS-ABASM-0001

Office, left to right:

Untitled, 2024

Cement on paper

21 x 14.3 cm, 8 1/4 x 5 5/8 in

AS-ABASM-0006

Untitled, 2024

Cement on paper

21 x 14.3 cm, 8 1/4 x 5 5/8 in

AS-ABASM-0007

Untitled, 2024

Cement on paper

21 x 14.2 cm, 8 1/4 x 5 5/8 in

AS-ABASM-0004

Untitled, 2024

Cement on paper

21 x 14 cm, 8 1/4 x 5 1/2 in

AS-ABASM-0005

Untitled, 2024

Cement on paper

21 x 13.5 cm, 8 1/4 x 5 1/4 in

AS-ABASM-0003