

The artist Avtandil (Avto) Varazi was among the brilliant exponents of his generation, whose dissident activity played a pivotal role in Georgian non-conformism, waking the younger generation of the 1970s to Western developments.

Varazi was a leading figure among artists and intellectuals of the 60s and 70s, diffusing potential divisions with ingenuity and inherent humility. Through his public position as an artist, dissident and thinker, Varazi instigated the Non-Conformists' movement in Georgia. The Non-Conformists did not have a driving ideology. At the core of the movement were spontaneous, largely chaotic and idealistic people such as Varazi. Their unpredictability and intangibility infuriated the authorities who tried at every opportunity to control and prevent any disagreeable image of life under the regime. In such an atmosphere the artist was forced to make the choice between possession and existence: the freedom, unaccountability and creativity of the latter versus access to materials, benefits and privileges through serving the ruling ideology.

Under conditions of political and ideological pressure Varazi, through his innovative approach and magnetism, was able to connect with dissidents and young artists who disagreed with the regime. Henceforth the circle of Varazi" actively promoted the development of a parallel art, un-connected with the ideology of socialist realism.

Throughout his life, the artist consistently sought out different modes of production that would give him not only complete freedom in regards to subject matter and materials, but also with the ability to express without hindrance his never ending flow of visual imagery. For Varazi self-expression was part of the creative process, with the aim of extending the range of visual possibilities within the context of aesthetics.

While studying with Alexander Bazhbeuk-Melikov, who came out of the milieu of the second wave of Tbilisi Modernists, Varazi took up painting. He was more inspired by the immediacy and way of life of Niko Pirosmiani, in the way that a talented and inquisitive artist is inspired by a great predecessor. During this period of study Varazi was also interested in the art of those who had directly participated in the Modernist Parisian circles of the 1910s and 1920s, such as David Kakabadze, Lado Gudiashvili and Elene Axvlediani. His Thus through imagination and inquisitiveness he became acquainted with the artistic principles of European Modernism. He experimented with diverse styles, including analytical and synthetic cubism, before pursuing his own aesthetic ends. In the process of citing various modernist tendencies and movements, he sought a way of overcoming them. In his later years he would categorically avoid all stylistic conventions and inclinations.

A retrospective look at Varazi's oeuvre reveals a marvelously diverse range of colour, drawing methods and ordinary uses of objects and materials.

Against the backdrop of his figurative and collage series, relief objects on the theme of bull's heads stand out in particular. This series of concrete compositions, minimalist execution and metaphysical profundity dominates, in a way, over the rest of his oeuvre.

Stretched over space and time, the Bull's Head works have a determinate meaning in Varazi's oeuvre. He persistently returned to the theme of the bull, albeit with lengthy pauses, from the inception of this series in 1962 to the realization of the final piece in 1977, the year of his untimely death. The theme was one which excited him and fitted in with his philosophy, his own aspirations and the mood of the period.

Bull's Head (1976) presented in this exhibition, consists of 70 by 40 cm relief object. The main component is a pair of men's trousers which are attached to a flat board. The impressive mass of Bull's Head almost compresses the surrounding area, while the vertical lines formed from the gap between the boards serve to organize the structure of the piece. Furthermore, the contrasting background flatness and foreground volume of Bull's Head play off against each other to produce conventional compositional space. The expressive effects of treated glue and fabric paint on rough wooden background form an emotionally charged, concrete and plastic sign which, despite the relatively small size, is emphatically monumental. The artist has carefully moulded, stretched and torn the object into folds, plans and bulgers, taking maximum advantage of the material's texture and sculptural possibilities, so that the expressive character of Bull's Head is given dramatic and tense expression. Varazi is not aiming for physical resemblance to an animal's head. Rather his goal is to create unified, visual metaphor in which the concepts of conflict and isolation converge. At the same time, making use of fluidity of this semiotics, he provokes the viewer to his own interpretation of the image.

Stylistically and ideologically the ready-made. In using found materials in the production of Bull's Head, Varazi transforms them into a multimedia but unified object that directly reflects psychological and emotional state of the artist.

The life and oeuvre of Varazi bristle with various spontaneous incidents that precede the inception of new works. One day a friend's newly purchased trousers caught Varazi's attention. With characteristic bluntness, he stated his claim to them with the intention of using them material for his art: "You've such good trousers. they would make wonderful bull's head ...on moment these trousers are hanging on your legs, and next where mane. God knows where you drag them, but I would be delighted to take this wasted material and wipe my hands on them, smeared with paint..."In the image of a bull, as both the pursuer and the pursued and as an individual both tired of, but also looking for, a fight.

A structural and stylistic analysis of Bull's Head (1976) reveals the work as an authentic example of the artist's working methods; as shown by the characteristic use of waste material, the composition, the particular textures and relief format. This work serves distinctly as a portrait of the artist, who was little interested in representation as such. Rather he sought out the existential essence of things by pulling objects and images out of their usual environment.

It should be noted by that Varazi's solo exhibitions, one during his lifetime and two after his death, as well as the drafting of his catalogues, were always accompanied by a hunt for the whereabouts of works scattered across museums and private collections. The artists made a number of works on the theme of bull's heads between 1963- 1977, one of which is currently in MOMA the collection of Lika Varazi, artist's daughter, who previously acquired in from a collection in Leningrad.

Varazi was not much concerned with questions of timing and authorship of his works, saying that..."from a certain point of view it is silly too sing paintings .Remember the nameless temples, frescoes and canvases..."

In surveying the creative life of Varazi, we find that the process of acquiring innovative powers relies on the appreciation and existence of freedom and the reduction of direct imperatives. The most characteristic feature of Varazi 's oeuvre is the saturated use of axiological categories and cultural and philosophical semantics in day to day contexts.

Varazi did not have time for cop outs and clichés; his skill and ingenuity quickly doing away with them. He was closely aware of the need for new forms in art. Both his planned and realized activities touch upon a wide range of issues regarding modern art of the mid-20th century. here was no space for indifference and indulgence in Varazi's divers explorations. His life and inspiration merged into one. In his ambition for innovation, he explored every opportunity in a moment of genius...Bull's Head was one of those images which the artist materialized in such a moment.

Catalogue note written by Iliko Zautashvili, artist and art historian.