

V A R L A

2018 is the jubilee year of Felix Varlamishvili –Varla, the France emigrated Georgian artist. He would be 115 years old.

In the XX century, Felix Varlamishvili's name was known only to a small group of people in Georgia. In recent years, there has been an active interest in his art... In Georgia, the artist's works are kept at the National Museum and in private collections. The project – “Varla – 115” makes it possible to publish the given album, to catalogue artist's main works kept in Georgia and to spotlight the archival material.

Chardin Art Gallery

The full evaluation of any artist is possible only through the comprehensive research of the artist's entire work. Felix Varlamishvili, an eminent Georgian artist working in immigration, became known for the wider society during the 80s of the last century. The personal exhibition, held at the Georgian Art Museum was followed by great feedback. Georgia discovered an artist with a clearly expressed individuality; he rose from the national ground and absorbed the achievements of world fine art; although away from Georgia, he could maintain a profound spiritual unity with his homeland even while being in France – so evident in the best of his works.

A talented and industrious artist, with a promising future, was still very young, when he left his homeland. Today, it is hard to say what would happen had Felix Varlamishvili stayed in Georgia; would he evolve as an interesting artist and create his own world or would he mix with the masses and be limited to state orders? Maybe, he would be a victim to repressions for his extremely tender soul and naivety... However, such was the will of the prime mover – Felix Varlamishvili had to get familiar with the world's achievements in art, to establish his own place among Paris artists in the conditions of harsh competition, to live the hard life of an immigrant, to suffer from nostalgia.

For decades, he did not have any concerns except art. Away from everyday problems, he was happy only when left with his own world. He always mentioned about that in the card sent to the family. Amazingly humble, he was very modest in writing about his exhibitions held in different parts of the world; he avoided parading his own successes, while between the lines, one could sense his feeling of regret and remorse towards his country and family.

Felix Varlamishvili's works are scattered in museums, exhibition halls and private collections of France and other countries; only a small part is kept in Georgia. The art scholars must be given a chance to thoroughly study Varla's art. “Does anybody still remember me in Georgia?” – asked the astonished artists unable to cover the tears of joy. Truly, Georgia has to remember its dignified children, who lived and died in a foreign land, who never ceased to serve their homeland even while being far away.

The “Chardin” gallery has conducted a great work for releasing Felix Varlamishvili's first album, allowing the society to learn about the artist's life and his art. We express our heartfelt gratitude to the Ministry of Culture and Tbilisi City Hall for their support.

Felix Varlamishvili, whose proper acknowledgement still remains with a future, takes his place among the great Georgian artists.

Natalia Varlamishvili
2018 Kutaisi

PAATA NATSVLISHVILI

V (st) a r L A!

On January 19, 1980, Lida Naskidashvili wrote to her old friend Mzia Papava-Cheishvili, from Paris to Buenos Aires:

“We are big anxiety now here! Catholicos of all Georgia H.H. Ilia has arrived. He is accompanied by the Bishop of Tskhum-Abkhazeti-Nikoloz and his brother Victor... We have presented him Varlamishvili’s painting. Well, dinners and banquets are usual. Luba arranged tea for him on Sunday, after Versailles (I was there also). However, I could not even get to his reception (I have house painters at home). On Sunday, after the liturgy, Tamaz took Father Ilia”...

In just this small part of the letter entangled are as utterly private matters as well as the socially significant events, starting with the apartment renovation and finishing with the reception of the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia. Apart from the author and the house-painters, these five lines happen to mention as many as seven persons: the Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II, the Metropolitan of Tskhum-Abkhazeti Nikoloz (Makharadze), Ilia II-s brother Victor Shiolashvili, Georgian artist residing in France – Felix Varlamishvili, Georgian emigrants Luba (Chachibaia-Abdusheli), Lida Naskidashvili’s brother – Tamaz Naskidashvili, who, if I am correct, was the chairman of Georgian Diaspora in France and Father Ilia (Melia) – the Priest at the St. Nino Church of Paris.

It was Ilia II’s first visit to Georgian emigrants in the status of a patriarch, and the given letter fragment shows how overloaded was this visit: visiting Versailles, then the reception held by the Patriarch, later – the liturgy... Lida Naskidashvili specifically emphasizes that the hosts had presented the Patriarch with Felix Varlamishvili’s picture. Apparently, it was the most valuable gift that Parisian emigrants could have presented to the Patriarch.

It is also highly probable that the gift would not be one of Varlamishvili’s ordinary works similar to those that were kept in many Georgian families living in Paris. With this letter it becomes clear to us that the few works of Felix Varlamishvili preserved in Georgia also include probably one of his best paintings kept in our Patriarch’s collection.

Indeed, the work kept at the Patriarch’s chambers is distinguished by its size and content. “At the Brook” – could be the title of this canvas and I cannot recall a similar plot with Varla. It will be one of the main adornments for Varlamishvili’s large exhibition, which is arranged by the “Chardin” Gallery, for the catalogue to which this introduction is written.

Felix Varlamishvili, or Varla, was unknown in Georgia for a long time considering the general public and legal sources of information; while a narrow circle was very well aware of him and whenever possible, private individuals would bring in his works too. Part of these works was discovered by the famous Georgian gallerist Zaira Berelidze and exhibited at the “Vernissage” Gallery in 2008. She also published a small, 12-page catalogue – the first catalogue about Varla in Georgia. Earlier, in 1987, there were ten pieces of Varla’s art exhibited at the Georgian Art Museum. According to the artist’s will, these pieces were then handed over to the museum by his wife, the Danish artist – Zire Binder. There were also presented Varla’s earlier works kept at the Museum funds and several paintings from Tbilisian’s private collections. That same year, this exhibition visited the artist’s home city – Kutaisi too. Here is the full list of paintings handed over to Georgia: “Fishermen”, “Working in the Field”, “Reaping Harvest”, “Winter”, “In the Field”, “Celebration Day”, “Mematsvne” (Dairyman), “Travelling”, “Old Tbilisi”, “Celebration in the Village”. Six of them are paintings, while four others are drawings. On the opening

day of Varla's first personal exhibition, the artist's brother, a teacher from Kutaisi – Ivane Varlamishvili presented one of the earliest works of the artist to the museum. This is a drawing named "Cigarette Sellers", which was exhibited at the Young Artists' Exhibition in 1923 and was later published in the Russian language magazine "Plamya".

And now, this great exhibition at the "Chardin" Gallery and this catalogue, more precisely – the album. Only people who are well-aware of such endeavours will understand how much effort was taken and how much work was done by the experienced gallerists: Khatuna Chkheidze, Maia Nozadze and Ia Dvali in order to fulfill this longtime intention. They have found a number of Varla's unknown works in Georgia and abroad, along with his well-known paintings that placed them in one space – printed or real. We can say that Varla's art will become an integral part of Georgian fine art after this exhibition.

Unfortunately, Felix Varlamishvili could not manage to publish an album of his paintings or, at least, to index them. Soon after his death, many of his original and photo-reproductions of the sold works were destroyed in the fire at his apartment on 11 Daguerre Street, in Monparnasse, Paris. What survived are: the 12-page booklet printed in mid-70s, the 1988 catalogue by Art Dealer Paul Sonnenberg and the leaflets of his personal exhibition. Mr. Sonnenberg included dozens of works that he had sold in this catalogue, and despite the fact that reproductions are small, this edition is of great importance in researching Varla's art. However, it should be noted that Sonnenberg's dates are controversial in some cases. It is well known that Varla rarely dated and titled his paintings, and we should suppose that depending on the interest of a particular buyer, the dealers could make the work seem either new or old for commercial reasons. For almost a quarter of a century, Varla's works were sold upon completion and sometimes – in advance and now, it is difficult to determine where his works would be – in whose collection, in which museums or in which country. Sometimes some paintings of Varla might appear at certain auctions – this is it. However, that is still something.

According to online websites, there were 144 works of Varla presented at various auctions as by August 10, 2018. The first one was sold at the Pillon Auction in 1990, and the last one was sold a few months ago via the Internet. The auctions presented Varla's paintings and drawings as well, works that were created with oil on canvas or cardboard, gouache, tempera, ink, mixed techniques, lithographs and prints. There were no icons. Varla was an icon painter also, but his icons are extremely rare and have not yet appeared in auctions. Varla's auction prices start from 100 euros and exceed 40 thousand dollars. The most important thing is that almost all of his works presented at auctions are sold and the price of almost all of them increased with at least two steps. Although Varla was a very productive painter, his works had to be searched in the same manner as Le Dantu and the Zdanevich brothers had searched for Pirosmeni's paintings. No one should think that the parallel to Pirosmeni is awkward. Even according to what we know of him today, Varla is a true star of Georgian fine art and we must consider him in the first row of great Georgian artists.

And if years ago, Georgian emigrant culture – whether it was writing or painting – was considered separately from the native Georgian culture, today we observe how it is gradually becoming an integral part of Georgian culture with our own participation. We observe how Felix Varlamishvili's art is also becoming a part of the united Georgian painting and with our own participation.

I do not have any desire to claim the functions of an art historian, they will research Varla's art more profoundly than I can, they will study, analyze, evaluate and give the right place in the history of Georgian and world art. I can neither boast about meeting Varla personally – when I first arrived in Paris, he was several years passed away. Along with a general review of Varla's life and art, I will only try to remind the interested society of the old publications and some new publications that I've acquired –

Varla's unknown original or the photo-reproductions of his unknown works, his yet unpublished letters, photos, memoirs, ephemeras and other documents. In addition, I will specify some fact or dates from his biography, which is still varied in different sources. I think that all of this, together with the most interesting observations of art historians, can fill our knowledge about Varla and make his portrait more distinct. Because the documentary material about Varla is not large, it is of particular importance to value each newly created work, each new ephemera, each new corner of his life and art, new fact and new details. This article of mine is based on the presentation – "Varla – the Georgian Artist", which I read at the scientific conference – "XIX-XX Centuries Georgia" held at the National Manuscript Center on May 28, 2013. However, now, it is relevantly longer as I have gathered much more information Georgian Artists", published in 1966 in Tbilisi, by the publishing house "Literatura da Khelovneba" [Literature and Art]. This book is separately reviewing the art of Lado Gudishvili, Elene Akhvediani, Ucha Japaridze, Tamar Abakelia, Soso Gabashvili and Elguja Amashukeli; however, as if predicting my future interest in traveling and Georgian emigration, I, the eighth-grader, was especially interested in the last chapter, titled "The Paris Impressions".

I could not pay much attention to it then but, nowadays, it should be emphasized that this part of Gulnara Japaridze's book was a breakthrough in the print media of that time and in art science due to its precisely selected tone and moderate but necessary criticism. Firstly, I cannot recall any other book about Georgian emigration with such a warm and sophisticatedly tender text, secondly – the article does not condemn the nonrealistic painting as gravely as it was done before and later – by the art historians. With this article Gulnara Japaridze was the first to introduce to us the Georgian immigrant artists: Vera Paghava, Vano Enukidze, Felix Varlamishvili and Susana Ghambashidze-Tokhadze. Though based on first impressions, she reviews the works of Vera Paghava and Vano Enukidze with sufficient depth, while presenting Varla's art in its most profound and detailed manner. Here, she is also providing sparse biographical information about Felix Varlamishvili; since then this information has been continuously completed and accurately researched by scholars and journalists. A lot has been done in researching Varla's life and art by Ketevan Kinwurashvili and Nona Gobejishvili. We should also remember interesting studies and publications of Ketevan Bagratishvili, Tamaz Sanikidze, Gogi Khutsishvili, Guram Sharadze, Eliso Chogovadze and others.

Above, I have drawn parallels with Pirosmani and was a bit concerned whether it would have been an exaggeration; however, while reading Gulnara Japaridze's article, I was relieved to discover that she had also drawn a similar parallel to Pirosmani. The author reviews Varla's painting "Salamuri" [a flute] of 1941 in detail and writes:

" I do not know whether the artist wanted to have this notion encompassed in his work. That is how I perceived this deeply lyrical picture for the first time, and I have also felt a genuine sense of figure just like with Pirosmani; the only strange thing was that I found the painting in the middle of Paris, in a foreign environment, torn away from homeland."

Varla's certain resemblance to Pirosmani is also well acknowledged by the well-known art historian Tamaz Sanikidze; the latter was the director of the Art Museum of Georgia at the time, when, at Zire Binder's request, Zurab Tsereteli brought Varla's 10 works from Paris to Tbilisi and handed them over to the museum as bequeathed by the artist. All ten works, whether paintings or drawings, though created at different times, are carrying a Georgian thematic. The exhibition, which opened at the Art Museum, on March 27, 1987 and on March 29, Tamaz Sanikidze's article – "The Return", dedicated to this exposition, was published in the newspaper "Komunisti" [Communist]. It states:

“During the first years of staying in France, Felix Varla’s work was mainly inspired by Georgian themes. Moreover, his works were clearly influenced by Pirosmiani and Gudiashvili; however, later, neither Georgian nor foreign tradition mattered to Varla anymore. He developed his own aesthetic concept, theme, manner, style”

Survived recording of Varla’s voice:

“I drew all my works with love to Georgia and I created my own painting style based on that.”

Felix Varlamishvili was born into a family of Georgian Catholics in Kutaisi on April 22, 1903. His father, Grigol Varlamishvili, was a financier holding a high position at Kutaisi Bank. Taken by art and poetry, he could play on different music instruments. After the early death of his mother – Rosa Paliashvili, Felix moved to his aunt in Akhaltsikhe and then returned to his father in Kutaisi, spending the rest of his childhood with his father’s sister – Marta Varlamishvili. Martha’s husband, Kozma Saakashvili, was a brother of the last Padre of the Catholic Church of Kutaisi – Damiane Saakashvili and he had great authority in the Georgian Catholic community.

As for Grigol Varlamishvili, he married for the second time and had three children, whose descendants are still living in Kutaisi. Grigol’s best friend at his second wedding was – Prince Napoleon Murat, son of Salome Dadiani and Achille Murat. Later, he baptized his first daughter.

At the age of nine, Felix was enrolled at the Real School of Kutaisi, after graduating from which, in 1920, he became a student at the newly established Tbilisi University at the Faculty of Natural Sciences. In the meantime, the Academy of Arts opened in Tbilisi, and as he had been fond of painting since childhood, he moved to the academy. His teachers included Iosif Charlemagne, Eugene Lanceray, Gigo Gabashvili, Iakob Nikoladze, Oscar Shmerling and Boris Fogel. Felix graduated from the academy in 1923 and soon became a teacher himself; he opened private art studio, or a school, and started teaching children. The famous Georgian art historian Vakhtang Beridze was among his students. Many years later, while discussing various issues with Vakhtang, he remembered Felix Varlamishvili as a teacher with great love and as an artist with great respect.

It was a very disturbing time in Georgia, and while being a teacher of Vakhtang Beridze, Felix did not have enough time for art; nevertheless, some of works of that time are still kept in Georgia. At the time, he was mostly inspired by old Kutaisi and Old Tbilisi – generally popular themes in Georgian art of that period. He regularly participated in art exhibitions, conducted by the Tbilisi Academy of Arts and other institutions of Tbilisi and Kutaisi. Right before leaving Georgia, he decorated Ietim Gurji’s “Gmiri Ana Qalis Leqsi” [A Song on Ana Baji, the Heroine] with six illustrations; it was published twice – in 1927 and 1928, with 5 thousand copies each time. Although the book does not state the artist’s name, the Art Museum’s employee, the late Nona Gobejishvili, had paid attention to Grishashvili’s copy kept at the Ioseb Grishashvili Library-Museum; the book cover has an inscription made by the academician poet himself: “Published with mi edition. The pictures are by Felix Varlamishvili”. I do not think that this is Varlamishvili’s only case of illustrating a book – he could have decorated other books before that. It is also probable, and it should be researched, that he had cooperated with Georgian magazines and newspapers of that time as well. For some reason, I am sure that his paintings must have been published in Ioseb Imedashvili’s “Teatri da Tskhovreba” [Theater and Life]. It is known that he used to draw satirical and political posters for the “windows” of the USSR Telegraph Agency Georgian Branch while still studying at the academy and that during 1923-1924, he cooperated with the Russian illustrated magazine “Plamya”, which was issued in Tbilisi. In her letter “Love for Homeland”, published in the newspaper “Kutaisi” on November 14, 1987, Nona Gobejishvili listed Varla’s works that were

printed in that magazine. As for the illustrations of Ietim Gurji, they are approximately at the same level as the poetry of Ietim Gurji. Neither in form, nor in the implementation mastery, these illustrations do not leave the traditional frames and the average level of the book&magazine design of that time; generally they relate to Varla's later creations as, for instance, Gudiashvili's "Easter", printed in 1920 in "Teatri da Tskhovreba", relates to Gudiashvili's art. However, several foreground and background figures from the illustrations of Ietim Gurji's book, whether of men or horses, have already demonstrated Varla's sophistication of silhouette and elegance of line.

Refined and elegant, exquisite and sophisticated, melodic and poetic – these definitions are often used by art scholars while reviewing Varla's art from the French period.

Tamaz Sanikidze once wrote in an article that was already quoted above:

"Most of his elegant, balanced, calm and decorative compositions are intended for domestic interiors (artists, other than the Little Dutch Masters, rarely remember such features of art). Of course, the basis for such "chamber" perception of beauty is set by the subject and its understanding: hunting, village scenes, old palaces and fortresses, people frozen in motion and their obscure faces, horses presented in multiple angles, sharp and at the same time refined line, color – sometimes the only one, but with different tones, sometimes contrasting and amazingly deep, intense – creating an idyllic mood that comes with sorrow, the sorrow that accompanies Varla's art till the end"

In the June issue of the magazine "Sabchota Khelovneba" [Soviet Art] from 1987, Nona Gobejishvili gave a description of Varla's works:

"These very sincere paintings, created with a Georgian attitude, are restrained, laconic, natural and naïve but not artificial. The characters' faces are individual and at the same time they are similar to each other. We find them in the working process: they are busy but they do not move, they speak, but their lips are still. They do not pose – they live. The skill of holding a brush, the exceptional precision of implementation, the refinement of paint, the meticulous processing of a surface makes his work more attractive. Everything speaks about the great natural talent of the artist, his internal flair".

These are Ketevan Kintsurashvili's words from the article "Double Joy", printed in the "Kutaisi" newspaper, dated – November 5, 1987:

"Felix Varlamishvili's recent works (the "Fishermen" would be a characteristic piece) neither tell us any specific stories, nor do they convey any objects, personality or private character. The artist comes up with pictures, constructed in his imagination and as if stemming from his dreams and depicts them on canvas. His art constructed on associations originating from a real basis. This is what defines the poetic and lyrical nature of Varla's works".

A famous art scholar, the early deceased Gogi Khutsishvili, who had more frequent and closer relations with Varla than with other emigrants from Georgia, wrote in the "Kutaisi" newspaper of December 8, 1987:

"Each artist stays in history with one's own uniqueness. Felix Varlamishvili created his own world, which was characterized by sharply expressed individuality, which distinguishes him from the other great masters of his time. Felix Varlamishvili's art is yet another great example of the unity between national and universal".

All these quotes were published in 1987, after holding Varla's first personal exhibition at the Georgian art Museum. The newspaper "Akhlagazrda Komunisti" [Young Communist] had also written about the exhibition, or rather, it was reviewed by, then a young and now famous art scholar, the columnist of the newspaper – Samson Lezhava, who directed the art section in the newspaper. I was then the editor of this newspaper and remember my conversation with Samson about the title of his column. We did not argue much. The review was published under the headline: "The Return of a Great Artist". Samson Lezhava was the first to mention Varla as the great artist in his review in the newspaper, an issue from May 1, 1987. All the other writers were more careful except – Gogi Khutsishvili, who described him as a great artist in his review, quoted in the previous paragraph. However, as the future has shown, there was nothing to be afraid of. Today it is clear to everyone that Varla is a bright Star of Georgian art, indeed a great artist, despite the fact that none of his numerous works are big in size!

Maybe in Georgia we were first, but the foreign press had already referred to Varla as to the great artist. In violation of narrative chronology, we must recall in advance that one Argentine newspaper named Varla as the great artist back in 1951, when publishing his first exhibition announcement:

"On October 2, at the Viau Gallery, at Florida 530, the French artist Varla will open his exhibition, which will also feature some landscapes of southern Argentina. Varla came from Paris, and his arrival was preceded by best reviews about his art. Several works of this "Autumn Salon" member were purchased by the state, which is proof of his high value as an artist. The creation of this great artist can now be evaluated by the society and critics of Buenos Aires".

The French newspaper "Nouvelles Littéraires" [Literary News] also mentioned Varla as a "great artist" in its Christmas issue of 1958: "Great Artist".

"Presented at the Drouant Gallery were the latest compositions by Varla – a great artist and an interesting worker merging literary inspirations with not-so realistic lights and shadows".

And this is how Samson Lezhava evaluated Varla's art in his already mentioned review:

"Many of his works are characterized by distinctive sophistication. Some are outstanding with their special refinement. In addition, they display a rather audacious deformation that can be originated only from a rare professionalism, which at the same time excludes excessive tension – almost never losing the sense of harmony, at times – serenity and even – exaltation. The uniformity of the surface in the works often corresponds to the "nobility" of spots, to a rather rich texture. It is noteworthy that even during the thorough processing, there are no signs of extraordinary affection with details, and the feeling of integrity is supreme everywhere".

Felix Varlamishvili has been acknowledged as a talented and hard-working young man since his studies at the Academy of Arts. It was not accidental that Public Commissar of Education in Georgia had decided to send him abroad together with two other students but due to financial problems this could not be implemented. Felix seemed to have been so disposed to go abroad, so willing to continue his studies that he still decided to leave Georgia, even at his own expenses and risks; in order to fulfill his intentions he had even activated the western ties of the Georgian Catholic community.

The wheel of fortune started spinning, and in 1928, the year when young Georgian artists – Lado Gudiashvili, Elene Akhvlediani, David Kakabadze and Ketevan Maghalashvili came back from Paris to Georgia, Felix Varlamishvili left abroad together with his coursemate Luka Khitarishvili.

Still, one of the Georgian artists who had been educated in France, namely Ketevan Maghlishvili, painted a portrait of Felix Varlamishvili in Tbilisi. This portrait too was presumably kept in Georgia, along with the early works of a future great artist, when he moved from Akhaltsikhe to Ardahan. Unfortunately, this work is still to be found. It is not excluded that this portrait is simply not identified.

Felix was not a political emigrant, and he never thought that he would leave his homeland forever.

First, together with Luka, he took refuge at the Georgian Catholics Abbey in Istanbul. Initially, Georgian emigrants were taken care of by the head of the monastery Padre Shio Batmanishvili and the Catholic monks. Soon, Felix began working and then, in 1928, after gathering the traveling money he left for France, probably together with Luka again. In one of his private letters, he remembers the exact date of entering France: August 25, 1928. Felix arrived in Paris and rented a house, or a workshop at Montparnasse. One of his works, kept in my biblioseum, must belong to that time; it is oil on cardboard, size – 24x34. In addition, this picture could be called “City in the Evening”. It is hard to determine, but it is probably depicting a small French town, or maybe even a Parisian view. It is not excluded that this could be a non-existent city, imagined by the artist while trying to remember Kutaisi. The signature is complete – “F.Varlamishvili,” written in Latin letters. He was not Varla yet. Thematically, too, he was still greatly attached to Georgia; the generalization and stylization would come later.

After arriving in Paris, Felix Varlamishvili was unable to continue his studies, but he soon found a job, and for a few years, he worked at the furniture atelier as a decorator. In 1933, his pictures were exhibited for the first time at the “Speranza” Gallery. The exhibition passed invisibly – it is difficult to be established as an artist in Paris. Varla had not yet had his distinctive style, which would be revealed by and by with his slightly elongated figures that resembled the portraits of Modigliani, as if frozen in movements from the hail of invisible someone and with its still wheel.

Indeed, a wheel – the symbol of movement – is often portrayed still, functionless in Varla’s works: what could make one wheel move, or what would be the result of its movement?

Nevertheless, the wheel of the artist’s fortune kept on spinning:

“Speranza” means “hope” in Italian. It seems symbolic that during the time “Speranza” was holding his exhibition, Varla met his future wife – Zire Binder, with whom he would tie all of his future hopes, and who would become his reliable and loyal companion for the rest of his life.

Zire Binder told an amusing story of how they had met to my friend, Chito Roukhadze, in a very interesting way. Zire’s narrative is included in Chito’s short memoir about Felix Varlamishvili, which she wrote on my request a few years ago, and which has not been published yet.

Here I have to mention a few words about Chito Roukhadze and his family, because the Roukhadzes’ great and strong family, living in France, was the closest to Felix and Zire.

I heard about the immigrant Roukhadzes in 1990, when I was sorting through the archives of Aleksandre Sulkhaniashvili – Kakutsa Cholokashvili’s brother – in – arms. In 1984, Lado Roukhadze, living in France, wrote to Sasha Sulkhaniashvili in America: “Chito – my daughter works in Lausanne, at the International Olympic Committee; this summer, she will arrive at the Los Angeles Olympics and maybe she will come to see you too.” I remembered this story when I, as the vice-president of the newly created National Olympic Committee of Georgia, was commissioned to communicate with the International Olympic Committee. Thus, on one fine spring day of 1991, David Kakabadze called me from Lausanne; he was the head of the International Relations Commission of our Olympic Committee, and

later – the head of the Georgian service of “Radio Tavisufleba” [Liberty]. At that time, he was already living in Europe; we sent him to Lausanne to get acquainted with the situation at the International Olympic Committee. “I have a surprise for you”, - he told me. “I have one too” – I replied. You go first! No, you say it first! Finally, we found out that we both had the same surprise to share and the same thing to tell each other. This surprise was Chito Roukhadze, the existence of which I learned from her father’s old letter, while Dato had already met in Lausanne.

Chito or officially – Marie-Helene Roukhadze was born in Nice, in the family of Georgian father and French mother. She was the first child of a newly married couple. The Nice newspaper “Le Courier de Nice” of August 9, 1939 announced:

“On July 19, there was born Marie-Helene (Chito) Roukhadze. Father – Vladimir Roukhadze, coming from Georgia; mother – Bernadette Santrot, French. The child was baptized at St.Pierre de Feric on August 6. Godmother – Princess Antoinette Murat. The baptizing was marked with great celebration. The feast was led by our renowned compatriot, His Excellency, Prince Napoleon Murat, who, according to the Georgian tradition, drank separate toasts for all 30 guests. Among them were the noble Tengiz Dadeshkelianei, Prince and Princess Dadianis, husband and wife Akhvledianis, lords – Kochakidze, Maghlakelidze, Cheishvili, Gurgenzidze, Shavgulidze etc. Our best wishes to little Marie-Helene baptized with the mark of French-Georgian Friendship”.

Mentioned in the news, Prince Napoleon Murat, who drank at least 30 toast at that feast, was Salome Dadiani’s second son – Napoleon Louis Archille Murat. One, which I had already mentioned as the best friend at Grigol Varlanishvili’s wedding, the godfather of Varla’s older sister.

MarieElene Roukhadze has humanitarian education. She served as a teacher for some time and then worked for 25 years in Lausanne, Switzerland, where she headed the Department of Publications of the International Olympic Committee and edited the IOC bilingual official magazine “Message Olympique” / “Olympic Message”, in which her articles and studies were published as well. In addition, she wrote short stories and the novel “Famadihana” in French language, which was translated by her cousin Lia Rukhadze and published in Georgia in 2013. Marie-Helene Roukhadze accompanied Marquess Juan Antonio Samaranch to Tbilisi when he was having his first official visit to Georgia in 1992. Chito dearly loves her father’s homeland and she doesn’t even remember how many times she has been in Georgia. She considers herself Georgian.

In 1994, Paris celebrated 100 years of the International Olympic Committee. When the Georgian National Olympic Committee refused me in joining the delegation sent to Paris, Chito sent me a personal invitation to participate in the celebration. Moreover, she wanted to introduce me to her father – “He is aware that you helped Sasha Sulkhaniashvili to return to Georgia and he wanted to meet you,” – she wrote.

I’ll always regret that this acquaintance never happened. Despite the celebration fuss, Chito could somehow find time to call me in Paris and tell me that the next day, we would be going to Pontoise to her father. However, Karlo Inasaridze had already planned to take me with Teo Kedia and Father Archil Davrinishvili, whom I was staying with, to Leuville, where Eter Shengelia, Maria Berishvili, Orest Gordeladze and Mikhail Kavtaradze were waiting for us the next morning. Everything was planned ahead, so I could not cancel the meeting. I explained all of this to Chito, that I was not able to go the next day and expressed my regrets.

Our friendship just grew stronger – we went together to Kakheti, Racha, Davit-Gareja, Uplistsikhe; we had Olympic business trips to Atlanta, Sydney, Moscow... But I still lament the missed chance of meeting her father.

A few words about her father too: Lado Roukhadze was born in Khoni in 1902. He graduated from Kutaisi Classical Gymnasium and continued studies at Tbilisi University. He left Georgia after the sovietization but returned. In 1926, he left his homeland again. This time, as it turned out, forever.

Lado Roukhadze's talent, mindfulness and diligence soon resulted in his success – he started working as a common worker at Bellac's shoe factory and soon became a highly qualified engineer-technician in leather manufacturing. Before long, he was promoted; later he even got married to the factory owner's daughter. Bernadette Santrot was a dignified spouse for him. As Lia Rukhadze wrote in the afterword of Chito's book, "Everybody wondered how a woman, raised in the French bourgeois family, could stand with such frequent traditional feasts at their house".

Lado Roukhadze and Bernadette Santrot had seven children – daughters and two sons: Marie-Helene (Chito), Nathella, Nelly, Cecilia, Alexis, Alain-Mohandas and Eliane. They grew up surrounded by Vrla's creations. More or less, all are educated in art. Nelly and Eliane are musicians, Mohandas is an artist. Nelly draws too; she has published her ornamental paintings as greeting cards. Chito specially studied binding craft and she is a professional book restorer. Their house, first in Bellac and then in Pontoise, was the center of culture, and it remains that way with its stage, concert hall, sculptures in an entrance and garden and most importantly to us – the walls painted by Felix Varlamishvili.

The essence of Lado Roukhadze, as of a man and a philanthropist, is well exemplified in the letter sent to him by his friend from Argentina, the chemist Leonide Cheishvili. The letter was sent on April 23, 1986, from Lomas de Zamora to Pontoise, and this is the first time it has been published as many other documents provided here by me:

"Brother Valodia,

This message will clearly unexpected to you! Unexpected in a way that we have not heard about each other since our last encounter 40 years ago, at Sasha's family, in Paris. As if everything becomes forgotten. So many things have happened during these forty years! A lot of good friends from Europe seem to be forgotten but there is one thing I have never forgotten: this is your selfless, graceful generosity and your helping hand, when I was in very difficult situation after the war.

As soon as Sasha informed you about me and my family's conditions, you immediately sent me a contract from Limoges, paid all the expenses for our arrival – for a completely unknown person!

Forty years have passed since then. I am already over eighty years old. It time to think, to look back and give an account of past actions to myself. I have enough free time, as I have left my professional activities, I look through my accumulated "bills" and liquidate them. At the same time I intend to leave no moral or material debts before my "big trip". Wanting or not, a man of my age has to get used to the idea that everything, including one's existence, has its own limit.

Well, my brother Valodia, I can never pay you a moral debt. It will stay as one of the most wonderful memories of my life. Your chivalrous deed will always be tied to gratitude. I want to ask you one thing only, please do not let me take the material debt with me if you want me to be at peace when I leave. Don't I know the nature of us, the Georgians (!) that we do not like discussing such things, but I am asking you for this one favor as a brother and a friend, as the godparent (we value baptizing ties a lot!). I

have allowed myself to send you the equivalent amount in dollars in the form of a check, to be delivered from Germany, by my son-in-law.

Think of it as if borrowed yesterday in Paris, somewhere in the street or at a restaurant or at our home and today I am giving it back to you. Although the amount is not big, it is handed with heart and now returned with gratitude and apologies for being late for "one day".

Now, my brother, we will not see each other again (let's face reality!). So I embrace you strongly, say thank you on behalf of my family too, sending you kisses from you goddaughter Mzia (already 42 years old, married to a British man, having 6-year-old boy named Tom). Be happy with your family for a long time. Greetings with love to your wife and children. Be so kind, write a few words back. Include a picture too.

With gratitude,

Forever your Leo"

By the way, Varla's only painting that I know in Argentina is kept in the family of Leo (nide) Cheishvili, in Lomas de Zamora.

I do not know about others but while reading this letter of Leo Cheishvili, I always get tears in my eyes and how can I not regret that I missed the opportunity of meeting this person back in 1994. Based on the legendary humility of Lado Roukhadze, about which I have heard from his relatives and Parisian friends, I'm sure he would not have approved publishing this letter, but without this letter I would not be able to fully describe the way I perceive him.

Gulnara Japaridze does not name a surname in her article, otherwise she probably meant Lado Roukhadze when she wrote:

"The Georgian theme (and Georgian artist, which is more important) reflected in Felix Varlamishvili's works during the first years of his stay abroad and the days of WWII. While France was in turmoil, the artist and his creations were sheltered by his compatriots – the Georgians living in Paris. It is also natural that they would open their doors first to their native artists and native subject."

I have included the Roukhadzes story in my article for several reasons. One, Felix Varlamishvili's life and art is closely linked to this family; Second, - a great part of materials connected to Varla, now kept in my Bibliotheum, I have received from Chito Roukhadze, for which I once again am thankful to her; last – Varla's letters to Lado Roukhadze, which I am going to provide below, would be incomprehensible to the readers without first introducing to the Roukhadze family.

And only 20 years after that missed opportunity, already in a different century, in 2014, I came to Pontoise, where I saw the Roukhadzes' beautiful house, with walls painted by Varla and had a chance to see many of his works there. I had a chance not only to see them but also photograph each and every piece of the Roukhadze's whole collection. Unfortunately, the head of the family was no longer alive – Lado Roukhadze passed away in 1998, at the age of 95. My hosts in Pontoise were Chito, Nathella and Nelly Roukhadze. They told me a lot about Felix Varlamishvili, and Chito, shortly afterward, sent me the memoirs she wrote upon my request, via email; she handed me Varla's letters, photos and ephemeras related to his creations and, most importantly, several original works by Varla and Zire Binder.

All of this includes a very interesting piece of information for future studies about Varla and his art.

Since 1945, Felix Varla had become a member of the "Autumn Salon" and before long, he had the right to participate in a salon without a jury.

Shortly afterward, he was with the jury himself.

"Autumn Salon" was the greatest forum for fine art for its time. This Parisian union of art workers was established the year Varla was born – in 1903 by the Belgian architect Frantz Jourdain, in cooperation with Georges Rouault, Edouard Vuillard and Albert Marquet. Such great artists as Poul Cezanne, Auguste Renoir, Odilon Redon and others participated in the establishment of the society. At various times, the presidents of the society were Auguste Rodin, Auguste Renoir, Aristide Maillol. The establishment of the salon was a reaction to the conservative policy of Parisian salons. Unlike the "Salon of Independents", which was held every spring showcasing the works created during winter, the "autumn salon" exhibited the works created during the summer. In addition, autumn exhibitions included artists and sculptors as well as architects, musicians, writers and designers. And most importantly, foreigners could take part in the Autumn Salon as well. The first autumn salon was held at the Petit Palais. From 1904 to our days, autumn salons are held in the Grand Palais (except for 1937 and 1940). The most important autumn salon in art history was the salons of 1905 and 1907. In 1905, Matisse and his friends exhibited their works at the Salon and at the same time established a new movement in art called Fauvism. Meanwhile, in the fall of 1907, Autumn Salon hosted an exhibition dedicated to the memory of Gauguin and arranged the Cezanne retrospective, thus establishing Cubism. In 1911, Guillaume Apollinaire presented Robert Delaunay, Fernand Leger, Jean Metzinger and Henri Le Fauconnier. Members of the Paris Salon Association were Aristide Maillol, Kees Van Dongen, Antoine Bourdelle, Raymond Duchamp-Villon, Nicholas Roerich, Constantin Brancusi, Andre Segoznak, Marcel Duchamp, Charles Peguy, Alexander Archipenko, Giorgio de Chirico, Suguharu Foujita, Paul Claudel, Francis Picabia, Suzanne Valadon and others. After the First World War, autumn salons were dominated by the creations of Amedeo Modigliani, Georges Braque and Marc Chagall. Felix Varlamishvili was exhibited at the Autumn Salon from the pre-world-war-two period. Until the mid-50s Autumn Salon was the main platform for contemporary fine art in France and largely around the world. Then the first place was gradually taken by the Parisian biennale.

A more or less famous Varla, thanks to Autumn Salon in 1947 Varla arranged an exhibition at the Galerie Roux Hentschel. Saved is the exhibition's invitation-catalog, which contains a small introduction from the French poet and art critic Rene Massat. As Rene Massat wrote: "Varla prefers to follow the colors rather chase them. He knows how to measure the power of green or ruddle and how to mix them. He skillfully owns and tames the color... The movements of his characters are airy and the vivid colors do not burden them more than the shirt would burden the body of a dancer".

According to the same ephemera, we can learn that the exhibition was open on February 14 and closed after two weeks, on March 2 and that there were presented 28 works: "Family Scene", "Harvest", "Still Life", "Interior", "Crabs", "Women at the Table", "Green Table", "Fishermen", "Farmers", "Composition", "Dinner on Grass", "Domestic Scene", "Picking Apples", "Drinker", "Armchair", "Cavalcade", "Naked Figure", "Village Scene", "Food", "Nude", "Fishermen", "Room Scene", "Christmas", another "Village Scene", "Still Life (with mushrooms)", "Picking Apples", "Bathers" and "Girl".

I internationally named all the works presented at the 1947 exhibition to demonstrate Varla's themes of that time, at least in this way. I would like to focus on still lifes and nude girls, less common for the later period of his art. Based solely on the title, except for "Green Table", it is difficult to determine which works were presented at that exhibition or which one of them is still kept today and where

because Varla has a number of paintings and drawings carrying the same titles. Often he would make copies and versions of his own pictures. So it is possible that we have seen some of these works, if not in the original form, at least in the form of reproduction.

I said it is possible, but I have definitely seen one or two of those in Paris, in some Georgia family, say – in Leuville or at Varla's old friend, Sexton of the Saint Nino Church of Paris – Nicola Mamulashvili; the latter invited me to his house in 1994. In his small apartment, along with photos of Shota Abashidze's dance ensemble, there were several works of Varla, too. I remember one or two Varlas at Teo Kedia as well.

It was very difficult to live in post-war Europe. Varla's pictures were not sold so frequently in Paris and there was no income from the applied art (Felix called it additional art) either. Although Zire sold something in her homeland, it was impossible to legally export pictures from France. The couple had to find various other ways to survive.

In this situation, the wheel of fortune turned once again and Felix and Zire decided to leave France. They thought about arriving in Georgia too but, finally, decided to go to Argentina. The peripeteias of that time are well narrated in six letters from Varla to Lado Roukhadze. These letters were sent from Paris to Bellac during one year from November 15, 1947 to November 16, 1948. There were hundreds of letters from Georgian immigrants that have passed through my hands, and I have to mention that Varla's letters are pleasantly distinguished from Georgian immigrant epistolaries with their better Georgian and comparatively correct orthography or punctuation. A good calligraphy from an artist, which is also present in Varla's letters, can not be surprising at all.

While preparing Varla's letters for publishing, I only corrected minor orthographic and punctuation mistakes; I did not touch the dashes, placed in the beginning or the ending of sentences, as they are stylistically characteristic of the author. In each letter, Varla refers to his friend with a very Georgian openness and at the same time officially: "Brother Vladimir".

Letters are published with a slight rediction.

On November 14, 1947, Felix wrote to Lado:

"Brother Vladimir,

Where have you been, I have not heard from you for a while. Why have you stopped your dynamic arrivals in Paris? We hope that you and your family are well.

[...] Bernadette is waiting for a baby, it's very nice. Soon Bellac will be in the hands of the Roukhadze and the Communists won't be happy. How is the house? I've heard that you sowed wheat in the garden, which is very practical. It's interesting what the harvest is like.

All of this is fine, but we miss seeing you. If you have a chance to come here, please see us. We are still in Paris. Our departure time is getting closer. Today I received a letter from Gomelauri: Our requests have already reached the Ministry of Immigration, where he has a friend and he writes that he will ask them to act faster. So, we will have visas in two-three weeks.

Zire can't wait to leave, and I think we will indeed be more victorious there. In Paris, the pictures are no longer sold and no additional art moves forward. – I sold two more paintings in Denmark with the help of photos, I've already sent the frames, now I have to smuggle the paintings somehow, otherwise it is prohibited by law. I have sold one work at the Autumn Salon (Crustaces); the state bought it for

25000francs but they will pay me either in February or March. It is still very pleasing. The state bought three works during one year. I have almost nothing left from my exhibition but still could not make my fortune. I'm going to plunge into life in Argentina and I already have a lot of projects. – My Chilean friend (about whom I have probably already talked to you) is now in Paris and came to me several times. He needs a man like me. He bought a large wooded land on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, where he wants to build a village for country-cottages. I have to do Norwegian style, small house projects and perhaps I will stay in Chile for a few months. – Zire plans to go to Denmark for Christmas for ten days to solve the issues with my works. – Poliko has not been in touch for a long time, and must be in Bellac. Convey my greetings.

Zire and I hope to see you soon.

Greetings from Zire to you and Bernadette. Kissing children. Your Felix''.

The Chilean friend Varla mentioned was Avtandil Merabishvili, who lived in Chile at the time; he had bought huge territory on the shores of the Pacific Ocean and was planning to build a "Georgian City" there. On the basis of friendship with Avtandil Merabishvili, we can conclude that Varla, though very far from political confrontation, was more sympathetic to the national-democratic wing of Georgian emigration. This Avtandil Merabishvili – Chile's copper and salt-peter tycoon lived in luxury and he often hosted the elite society of Santiago – politicians, writers and artists, businessmen, athletes... all the Georgian who arrived in Chile had to visit the Merabishvili for at least one evening. It did not matter how many people were visiting – one, two, ten, or fifty – there would be a huge, 15- meter white table cloth set for the feast. Today the cloth is not white anymore – it is filled with autographs of the honorable guests that have visited at different times. Among them are the embroidered autographs of Georgian football players, the Sukhishvili-Ramishvilis' ensemble dancers, Ioseb Noneshvili, Rezo Chkheidze... There are, of course, autographs of Georgian emigrants as well, but none of them belong to Varla. Apparently he did not arrive in Chile.

As for that unique table cloth, Avtandil Merabishvili's daughter, Gedi Merabashvili, presented it to me when I was in Santiago, and now it is kept in my Bibliouseum. I am now thinking about its exhibition and publication. Meanwhile, Avtandil Merabashvili's plans for building the "Georgian City" in Chile were hampered, then – altered and finally – failed because once one of the richest Georgian emigrants was implacably bankrupted...

Varla's second letter to Lado Roukhadze was dated December 24.

"Dear brother, Vladimir,

Zire and wish you a Happy New Year and Merry Christmas, wishing you and your family good health. We hope next year your inheritance will gain one more son [...] I'm sure the holiday celebrations will be joyful at your side (if you do not have a toothache). – Life is very quiet here. Zire did not go to Denmark because of various reasons. – For New Year's Eve we plan going near Etampes to eat duck with friends.

The issue of our journey to Argentina is slowly moving forward. I frequently get letters from Gomelauri but I have not received a visa yet. I hope that we will be able to leave soon, before the ticket price rises. A lot of Georgians intend to go to Argentina. Many have already left England and Italy; soon there will be groups from Germany as well.- Gomelauri is asking for a list of all Georgians who wish to leave. It appears that it is much easier with a group. So, I started alone and now there is a whole colony. I do not know what will come out of this and what families with small children are going to do. It feels somewhat insane.

Of course, everyone is concerned about financial issues and the political future. – I think that a wise man will be able to succeed there more than here. – Let's wish them victory.

In his first letter Gomelauri wrote that he has not seen Georgians for twenty years, and he will be satisfied with looking at Georgians. – He is very much a patriot and I think he will provide everyone with a job. I personally would not recommend it to anyone that much. [...]

So, my Vladimir, be well and let me know your story. Write to me whenever you feel like it, I'm still here.

Kiss your children and wish Bernadette Happy Holidays on our behalf. Zire will soon write to Bernadette.

Your Felix''

Gomelauri, mentioned in the letter, had moved to Argentina in the 20s, now it is difficult to determine from where exactly but he was Felix's old acquaintance. Giorgi Gomelauri helped him get visas, although obtaining a visa for Argentina was easy in any case; many refugees from Europe fled to this South American country. The main problem for Felix was the absence of French citizenship, as confirmed in the next letter, which was sent half a year later, on July 3, 1948. In this letter, Varla confuses allegiance with subordination:

"Greetings, brother Vladimir,

[...] After my last letter, I have some more news to add. – I have already received a French subordination. It has been one week since my last name was published in the "Journal Official", so was Zire's. Now we can obtain the French "carte d'identite" whenever we want and a passport as well. This passport can let us travel without a visa to many countries in Europe as well as to some American republics (Chile and Cuba).

Some Georgians are already preparing to go to Argentina this month and I think that Sasha and Mzia are also going. The others will probably leave in August. – I'm feeling sad to stay but it's better to get French subordination and then to travel normally.

It is quite chilly here and we often think of Bernadette and the kids, they would not be able to bathe in the sea. I still hope that it is not as cold there as it is in Paris. How are you? Have you decided to go to Spain as you were planning?

Say hello to all and come soon.

Your Felix''.

Thinking that now being officially French they would go to Argentina, Zire and Felix left for Denmark. In the following letter, dated August 24, he wrote:

"Brother Vladimir, finally, I think we are going to Denmark. Tomorrow, Wednesday afternoon. – We have already bought tickets. Passport and English visas are ready, too. – I'm taking several paintings illegally and Danish money too. – I hope we shall travel fine.

It will be exactly 20 years (August 25) since I have last crossed the border and now it will be my first time going abroad. – We both regret that we could not see you before going. I'll write to you about our adventures from there and think we shall have a good vacation.

You might have already started working in Bellac, and if you happen to come to Paris by the end of this week, you might still see Sasha and Mzia. They left on Saturday. [...]

Zire asks if you can find the leather-makers' address in Denmark, she will go and talk with them; you can write to Denmark to the following address: Madam Binder 106. B''' FREDERIK-SUNDSVEL. Copenhagen N-V. We are grateful for your card (from Biarritz). You certainly had a good time. Certainly do write to us. I shall write to you from there too. Kiss you all. Your Felix''.

This was followed by two letters, in November, right before leaving for Argentina: "Dear Brother Vladimir, I do not know when I can pay you back in kindness. Lately, almost everyone has abandoned me. – If not you I do not know what would have happened to me. – Right after receiving your letter I took everything I had in the bank and gave a deposit for the ship. The name of this ship is Alcantara (English ship) and it leaves from Cherbourg on December 4. This is the best ship, it's big and the 3^d class is with the four-men booths. At the same time, it moves fast and we'll arrive in Buenos Aires in 16 days. It's a bit more expensive (six-thousand-frank difference), but think it is more favorable. – Well, that means I have less than a month of living in Europe. [...] I am greatly grateful to you, my brother, if I am lucky I will do everything to be of use for you and your family. So, my greetings brother, and I hope to see you soon; It's been a month now since our last meeting and as you can see there have been changes. – I do not think of what awaits me there, it is still very vague. – Greetings and many thanks to you and Bernadette from Zire.

Your Felix''.

The friends met each other once again before leaving. Lado Roukhadze blessed Felix and Zire on their way to Argentina.

On December 4, 1948, the couple left Europe from Cherbourg and arrived in Buenos Aires around Christmas time, December 21 or 22. It was snowing and winter in Europe, while Argentina met them with summer.

At the time, many Georgian families left for Argentina from Europe. We do not have a direct story from Felix or Zire, but we have Tamar Papava's entry about this kind of journey; I think it was somewhat typical and they could have gone through the same process as Tamar and Akaki Papavas did a year later, in 1949.

This is how Tamar Papava remembers the journey from Europe to Argentina in her yet unpublished memoirs:

"They checked our papers as soon as we were on board and this lasted for two hours. Then they checked our eyes and hands. Then separated women and men, the ship departed and we left Europe at 9 o'clock, on 30th of Enkenistve [September], 1949... There is a real "Scound Coming" on this ship... So many people, so many religions! What a riot, what a smell, what a noise and chaos... There, somewhere at the end of the ship is our bed in one large hold. There are several hundred women and children. Kakich is in the second hold, with men. God, help us endure this great torment for three weeks! How could I ever imagine that we would fall into this situation?"

It is also worth mentioning that Felix, with the help of that very Lado Roukhadze, had better tickets and therefore, they probably did not have as much trouble as the Papavas. The real struggle began later, after they set their foot on the land of Argentina.

In her memoirs, Chito Roukhadze tells an interesting story of Varlamishvili's life in the first period of their stay in Argentina: They did not have any means for existence... They could not pay rent and they were kicked out of the apartment... Varla was forced to make copies of others... By the advice of neighboring Indians, they referred to Eva Peron's office... They had sued the swindler art dealer...

Then, the wheel of fortune spun in a right direction, and Varla found an apartment as well as a job. At first he created sketches for carpets and panels, then he even found time for painting and rented a studio on Vicente Lopez Street. He managed to arrange two personal exhibitions in Buenos Aires in 1950 and 1951. Both of these exhibitions were held at the Viau Gallery at Florida 530, which was considered the best space for contemporary art. Florida is the main shopping street in Buenos Aires. Now, in the place of Viau there is a boutique – "Isadora" and a sock store. When I was there, I did not shoot the photos myself and asked my friend, the Bonaerense bookinist and antique expert – Gocha Shatirishvili to send me the photos of this place.

Varla's first exhibition in Buenos Aires, where he presented twenty creations, was reviewed by the French media before it opened.

The newspaper "Le Quotidien" wrote:

"M. Felix Varla, who came to Buenos Aires a year ago, will hold his first exhibition at the Viau Gallery, giving gallerists and lovers of art to get acquainted with the authentic representative of the famous "Paris School" modern artistic movement.

- This art stems from Cezanne just like the whole modern art; however, some might consider Odilon Redon as his more immediate predecessor, or Andre Marchand who is even closer to me – says Varla, whom we visited before the opening of the exhibition.

Felix Varla, a member of the "Autumn Salon", was fortunate when the French State bought several of his paintings and displayed them in museums, including the Cere Museum, which is rich in masterpieces of French masters.

Varla, so popular among European collectors, strives to expand his vision and inner world with new horizons. It is doubtless that he should expect a lot from encountering South American primitive art, traces of which can already be observed in the works he will present at the exhibition.

From his latest trip to Bariloche, Varla brought some sketches, which depict the charm of this impressive region, as well as the artist's great mastery and emotions that fill up these sketches.

Varla will exhibit up to twenty canvases and Gouache and we will get to know him better".

The second French newspaper issued in Buenos Aires – the "France Journal" did not share the introduction from "Le Quotidien", which described Varla as a representative of the Parisian school and declared that the artist did not belong to any movement:

"On October 2, a French artist – Felix Varla will present an exhibition of his works at the Viau Gallery, which will last until October 14.

An outstanding artist, whose art does not belong to any particular school, arrived in Argentina a year and a half ago. In addition to works made with inspirations, he used his chances of being in South America and created landscapes of the Bariloche regions, where he enhanced gouache with Indian ink.

Several of these landscapes will also be displayed at the exhibition. They open a new side to the theme so frequently processed by artists that they show an individual vision, rich in detail and mystery.

Felix Varla is a member of the "Autumn Salon", which means that his works are exhibited annually at the salon. In addition, he arranged two exhibitions of his paintings in 1932 (a mistake! It must be 1933 – P.N.) and in 1947. The latter was held at the Roux Hentschel Galerie. The art critic – Rene Massat, wrote: "Time stops in each painting of Varla, giving them their own look and adding charm, just like a pause and a breath in music".

The second critic, Robert Ray, is very enthusiastic about the works of Varla, especially for the purchase of his paintings by the French government. "Varla's canvases are exhibited at the Paris Museum of Modern Art and the newly established Ceret Museum in Eastern Pyrenees, where Varla's creations are exhibited along the canvases of Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, Kisling and the sculptures of Maillol. Felix Varla was a member of a group of artists called the "School of Ceret", which was established by the composer Deodat de Severac.

The exhibition at Viau stirs a lot of curiosity, and we shall return to it after the opening".

The letter was not signed. To be more precise it has only the initials: R.M.

After the opening of the exhibition the newspaper probably returned to this topic as promised and published a review, but unfortunately I could not get the material.

There are numerous other publications that I have. Varla's very first exhibition in Buenos Aires – in "South American Paris" – has not passed unnoticed. He was actively reviewed by local Spanish, French, German, English and Georgian media. Yes, Felix Varlamishvili's exhibition in Buenos Aires was reviewed by the local Georgian press! In those years, the Georgian magazine "Mamuli" was published in the capital of Argentina; it was edited by a great Georgian figure and the Rustaveli expert Viktor Nozadze. He was not only the editor for this magazine but also the correspondent, the translator, the stylist, the proof-reader, the designer and the pre-presser. In the second edition of "Mamuli", [Homeland] published in May 1951, we read:

"Our compatriot Felix Varlamishvili (Varla) arranged an exhibition at the Gallery of Viau in Buenos Aires on October 2-21, last year. Mr. Varlamishvili's exhibition had great success, and the media throughout Buenos Aires, printed in either Spanish or in four other languages, met this exhibition with great praise and congratulated the artist with victory.

Unfortunately, we cannot include the whole report of the press here, we only point out the view and appreciation of one of Buenos Aires' main newspapers – La Prensa about about this exhibition: "With pictures of Mr. Varlamishvili (Varla), we're encountering a positively worthy modernist. He has obtained his name and honor as in France as well as outside. Museums and collectors bought his pictures".

"This exhibition at Florida Hall, is complete enough to understand the significance of these works in the modern direction. It follows a line that was preceded by artists like Picasso and others who shared with each other permanent and bold attempts".

Then they list the pictures with their titles and write the following:

"These pictures present him as a skillful colorist who reveals his originality by sticking to the rules of composition. He reaches the synthesis of form, enforcing it with all of his skills and strengths that come in hand to solve problems with most unexpected means: the authenticity of the landscape is colored in

the beauty of these pictures, coming alive in objects and living forms, laid out with essential lines, which reaffirm the purity of his yellow, red and green colors. We see the same idealized life in tempera. Four landscapes of Bariloche and other creations persuade us of his creative talent”.

“Among those few foreign artists who have visited us for the last three years and have brought enlightenment through their works, Varla, along with the quality of his decisions, strengthens the undeniable virtue of his values. In this very near future Mr. Varlamishvili is holding the second exhibition of his works in Buenos Aires”. (“La Prensa”, October 11, 1950)

This information is accompanied by a reproduction of Varla’s “Green Table”, which was probably brought from France because the work with the same title was also presented at the 1947 Paris exhibition. Or maybe it was a copy of his old picture, already created in Argentina. The “Green Table”, as we can judge according to the black&white reproduction printed in the magazine, is somehow related to Picasso’s three works from 1901: “Absinthe Lover”, “Absinthe”, “Harlequin and His Friend”. I do not know whether Varla had seen any of these, but to me, the resemblance to “Green Table” is obvious.

The fourth edition of “Mamuli”, released in November of 1951, its 109 page (magazine “Mamuli” has a continuous page numbering) shows Varla’s “Vintage”, which I assume must be taken from the invitation-catalogue cover of exhibitions in Argentina. My assumption is based on one of the copies of the invitation-catalog, which is very similar to the 1947 Paris Exhibition catalog; only the picture is different. Evidently, Varla commissioned the design for invitation for invitation-catalogues for Argentine exhibition (one or both) according to samples he had brought from Paris. A reproduction of the “vintage” in the magazine “Mamuli” has a headline: “Varlamishvili’s second exhibition in Buenos Aires”. In the same edition, there is another reproduction of Varla’s alder picture – the “Fishermen”.

Finally, Varla’s one more creation is published in the magazine’s fifth edition (p.159). This is “Kabakhi”, which has to be ever older. All the reproductions of “Mamuli” magazines are of course black-and-white.

Besides the reviews of the French and Georgian press, I have quotes from other newspapers as well.

Alvar Nunes wrote in the Spanish-language Argentine magazine “Saber Vivir” (Know How to Live):

“It is obvious that the French artist Felix Varla, who exhibited his works at the Viau Gallery, is master of color and composition. All the items in his drawings are arranged, excluding any randomness. But do not think that it is against emotionality. The intelligence with him never diminishes the sensitivity of an artist”.

“A Frenchman who knew how to translate from Argentine” – this was the title of the article published by one of the Buenos Aires papers, the title of which is unfortunately missing from the newspaper clipping owned by me and kept in my Bibliothek.

One could read in this article:

“The French artist Felix Varla presented twenty works – in oil and tempera, and drawings. We approached the artist when he was surrounded by the audience, which was always pleasant to any artist.

“It’s been a year and a half since I arrived in Buenos Aires and have traveled straight to the south,” said Varla. “Beholding the snowy peaks, I felt the whole greatness of this cozy and heartfelt land. As a sign of

my gratitude to Argentina, I've dedicated several canvases to this magnificent landscape; some of them will be presented at the exhibition.

- Don't be afraid of my Spanish! Currently, I am reading Argentinean authors for two hours every day to master the language.

We tell him that the paintings are the best proof of his language skills. The drawings, just like music, convey the mysterious tension that is perceived by all sensitive beings. You look at his works and see that the French artist has captured the interesting nuances of the great and mythical landscapes of Argentina. Our South, with its original uniqueness, has been completely immersed in Varla's art. Varla's paintings move. His figures speak.

Many of his drawings are hymns to labor; to labor as not to a theme but as the celebration of movement. His schematic figures seem to come to life in front of our eyes with their inner world, and they transform into a colorful, lyrical world that moves and speaks to us.

With his first exhibition, the French artist leaves his poetry – lit message for us to remember. He emphasizes the freedom of modern art as in his oil works as well as in tempera. His works are as harmonious as well as impressionistic, but only in terms of composition and not the colors, - says Arturo Garcia Paladini, - the lyricity of themes and nuances turns these little paintings into a true painting poetry”.

I really like the term “the celebration of movement” coined in this little review. The original version says – “un alarde”, which means celebration, as well as show, spectacularity, boasting and playing. Varla's movements – the reaping of wheat, cutting the wood, or fishing is some kind of a game, a play... This boy plays well, they could say in Georgian when praising the singing or dancing man. Varla's dancing figures are one of the characterizing signs of his style together with the wheel. As for the wheel, which we find in many of his compositions, I assume that it is a transparent reference to the eternal celebration of this movement, representing the symbolic image of the wheel of fortune at the same time. The most amazing thing is that the wheel, which is usually associated with movement, is immobile in Varla's art, either leaning somewhere, at the edge, or right in the center. Everything is moving in Varla's pictures, except the wheel! If I were asked what is most characteristic of Varla's paintings, I would say without hesitation: the movement and the still wheel.

The author of the quotation given in the review is Arturo Garcia Paladini (1918-2010). He was an Argentinean writer, then a young man of 30 years, but already well-known. In 1950, Varla made his sketch and it was published by one of the Argentine newspapers. I do not own the original, although I have a copy of that publication.

My Bibliozeum also keeps Arturo Garcia Paladini's hand-printed text “Felix Varla's Art in Buenos Aires”, from where I took the quote. I could not find out whether this text was published anywhere and I assume it was more like a press release or flier for spectators at the exhibition. In this publication I have to present a translation of the whole text:

“It is Felix Varla's first exhibition in Buenos Aires: twenty works, 13 of them – in oil, the rest – in tempera and pencil. Varla's art is characterized by depicting movement in composition. The harmony and impressionism of composition but not the color; and a cold range of colors, a combination of nostalgic and sensitive notes, which radiate a calm and pleasant loi. This French master is primarily a great decorator as the basis, on which his fantastic themes open up with the mastery of plastic art is decorative too. And this does not go to the extremes so characterizing other artists of the so-called

“Parisian School”. In fact, Varla will present this exhibition with different aspects of his art. In paintings depicting the southern lakes of Argentina, we see Varla in the search for interpretations. In small works performed by Impressionist technique, he is free to play and to use all means to achieve realistic nuances. That’s what his originality is about. His choice of lyrical themes turns these small pictures and allegorical compositions into genuine painting poems.

This is the essence of his art, and its perception does not require great tension of mind. He stands separately from the techniques and methods of deeply-intelligible primitivists and fauvist and does not belong to any of the contemporary movements. His self-understanding as an artist makes him put his genuineness and decorator’s mastery in front of his mind and intellectualism: the latter would look fake in his art.

The intensified cult of rhythm and brilliant knowledge of composition, motion and proportions do not diminish the impressionism of his form, which carries the spirit of our time. Carrying intricate tenderness, his art is reminiscent of the most gentle tones of old gobelins and handmade tissue. This is world of his personal visions, removed from everything tragic. This is a world of labor and humane love, to which all free and cultural people gravitate today, in this hopeless world”.

In my opinion, this review from Arturo Garcia Paladini is one of the most complete and precise descriptions of Varla as of a fully evolved artist.

It seemed to be a result of the success of the exhibition that Varla was commissioned to create panels for a large hotel restaurant, and soon afterward, he was to decorate the windows of the prestigious shop “Nordiska” on Florida Street. His window decorations in Persian style were reviewed by the English newspaper – the “Standard” in a way that would suit any great artist. The review was published on August 26, 1951, and signed by someone called “Leila”, the identity of which was unfortunately undetermined. However, this pseudonym, the English language of the newspaper and the intricate construction of the text forces us to think that the author is not a native Argentinean.

I include its complete version in this letter:

“If like many others you have paused at one of Nordiska’s windows lately in calle Florida 999 to look with admiration on the superbly painted Persian screen with its magnificent epic fifteenth-century portrayal of warriors carrying banners in setting crowded and filled with action, and have marveled at the fine detail and the extraordinary-jewel-like quality of the colors that no modern palette seems capable of producing, we will let you into a secret. The screen is not the work of a fifteenth century master, but that of Felix Varla, a French artist who came to this country from Paris two years ago.

Varla, who says of himself, “paints with two hands – one dedicated to the past, one to the present”, which he describes in his very personal and modernistic paintings, has captured the style and technique of the early Persian painters so well that at first sight his work would appear to come from the brush of one of Shah Tahmas’s court artists. In Paris his copies of scenes from Persian miniatures were eagerly sought after by antiquaries and re-sold for fabulous sums. Varla who believes that a revival of Persian painting and decoration is now on its way, has devoted years of research to the study of Persian miniatures, and by experimenting with colors and varnishes using both oil and tempera on wood, frequently scraping the colors off only to go over them again until he achieves the right tone, is probably the only living artist who has obtained a palette approximating that of the early Persian masters.

And whether it is the right or left hand that Varla uses for his highly personal and imaginative modern compositions matters not, because here again he accomplishes what he sets out to do to

produce something that is not merely an imitation of the big movements of today, but an addition to research. In his studio in Vicente Lopez where he paints fourteen hours a day, his charming Danish wife showed us some of the modern XX canvases which Varla is preparing for his forthcoming exhibition at the Viau gallery, the while her husband worked on one of his Persian screens apparently unconscious of the preset as he set out to revive the glories of Persian painting.

In both his still-life compositions, which have depth and pattern, and his imaginative interiors peopled with elongated, angular figures in flowing robes, there is a quality of eternal harmony comparable perhaps to Van Gogh, and the same brilliant and brave way of using color to express emotion with a blue that is strangely deep and luminous, predominating. Nevertheless he remains always a leader, not a follower. In an entirely different vein are his tempera painting of flowers in which he conveys in an extraordinary degree, the perfume, fragility and impermanence associated with fresh flowers”.

Very soon after the publication of this review and exactly one year after the first exhibition was held in Buenos Aires, the same Viau Gallery hosted Varla’s one more exhibition. We learned from Leila’s review that Varla had presented at least two still lifes and at least two canvases with flowers.

Very soon after the publication of this review and exactly one year after the first exhibition was held in Buenos Aires, the same Viau Gallery hosted Varla’s one more exhibition. We learned from Leila’s review that Varla had presented at least two still lifes and at least two canvases with flowers. With a small note from the art critic Fabio Berraute, published in one of the newspapers in Buenos Aires, on December 9, 1951, it is clear that Varla had exhibited 21 works this time – 17 oils and 4 temperas.

“The Italian newspaper – “Histonius”, issued in Buenos Aires, wrote about the exhibition:

“Felix Varla, a Georgian artist from Paris, now living among us, has been exhibited at the Viau Gallery for the second time. Earlier we had already mentioned that this artist is especially attracted to oriental art. The stylized shapes drawn in enamel colors are arranged in choreographic rhythm on the general background characteristic of the miniature. Since the previous exhibition, the art of Varla has been developing in the direction of mastering colors and surface reflections, creating a specific stained-glass effect. This phosphorous radiance may sometime be exaggerated, because in some compositions it mutes the simple and sophisticated colors, the finding of which, on the other hand, is so easy for the artist. The thought-provoking tender world, which was created in the paintings of Varla, its unrealistic and at the same time living, fable-like characters turn our sights into “One Thousand and One Nights” and mythology that slumbers in each of us, woken up by some poetry from time to time.

It is hard to say what the author of this article means by the love of oriental art, but another Argentine newspaper saw some influence on Japanese engravings in the works of Varla. I do not know whether anyone has noted, but while talking about Varla, some might remember Giorgio de Chirico with his metaphysics, “functionless” horses similar to those wheels and with uninhibited urban landscapes. Some of Varla’s works were evidently influenced by Matisse and Fauvism. Picasso’s “absinthisms” were already mentioned.

“Felix Varlamishvili’s works clearly demonstrate how a great master was thoroughly acquainted with the European art tradition, - wrote Samson Lezhava in his review quoted above – but it is also clear that he was unobtrusively transforming enormous information on the basis of his own experiences and internal personal goals. At the same time, evident are some “oriental” tendencies that grant the pictures with even more tenderness... The thought arises that this very modern painter incorporates the

skills of the icon painter and miniaturist. In addition, along with feeling a single color, a relatively large surface, he had his own secret of loading the surface with intangible nuances”.

Generally, except for those five works, the black-and-white reproductions of which are printed in the “Mamuli” magazine, we do not know what works were presented at Varla’s exhibitions in Buenos Aires. Today, it is difficult to find them. I know Varla’s only work in Argentina, which I have seen at Leo and Turpa Cheishvili’s home in Lomas de Zamora, but it belongs to the early period of Varla’s art and not to the Argentine times. This is a small vertical composition that can be called the “Shepherd of Goats”., which is quite different from Varla’s famous works. On paper with a golden background, he drew a shepherd with two goats and three lambs in black pencil and white gouache; the white gouache spots create the effect of volume and even some colorfulness. The artist inscribed his initial and surname in Georgia in the upper left corner of the drawing. While working on this introduction, Turpa-Maria (Pusi) Cheishvili wrote to me from Buenos Aires that the size of this piece is 18x10cm, dated 1941; it was presented to Pusi’s father Leo Cheishvili either soon after drawing or while still in France, where they had already known each other or in Argentina, where they met again.

However, according to Argentina’s largest newspaper “Clarion”, there must have existed the catalogue of Varla’s first exhibition; I could not find it and can only imagine that one of the copies I have is the reproduction of the first page, or the cover of this catalog. It is not known whether Varla took any of his works created in Argentina when he returned to Europe. Anyway, the already mentioned bookinist and antique specialist – Gocha Shatirishvili, is looking for traces of his paintings across Latin America at my request; unfortunately, there are no results so far.

However, in the author’s opinion, the first Argentine exhibition was far better than the second one. The latter was not covered by the press like the first one, and in a letter to Lado Roukhadze , Varla explained that he was perceived as a French artist during the first exhibition, while for the second one, he had become an ordinary emigrant, which might never return to Europe. Interest in such artists was less.

Varla’s letters sent from Argentina to France are interesting in many ways. No matter how many quotes we use from the Argentine press about these French/Georgian artists’ creative activities, the story of Varla and Zire is best told through their private letters. These letters, as well as the ones provided above, are published here for the first time.

The earliest letter sent from Argentina dates back to November 11, 1950. As long as he did not succeed, Varla did not consider it necessary to write a letter; later, as Lado Roukhadze’s “Racing Horse”, as Felix calls himself, was valued sufficiently, he was happy to share his good news with his friend.

“Brother Vladimir,

I do not know if you can forgive me for writing this letter so late. Finally, I have decided to write to you. Being silent for so long was a very bad sign as we were having quite a hard time here (certainly it concerns the material side). Currently, we are much better and I am a little more hopeful. – There were moments when we wanted to get out of here, whenever we would have money for traveling.

- My congratulations to you for having a baby girl – I’m very happy that everything went well and Bernadette is in good health.

- You may be wanted a boy, - but what can you do, you are fortunate with girls.

- I had an exhibition in October and it went very well.

- I did not expect it to tell you the truth. – A lot of people have attended and the newspapers praised me a lot too. – I have cut out twelve reviews from the newspapers in four languages. Spanish, French, German and English. – The French helped me very much. L'attach culturel propagated me in diplomatic circles.

- I drew all the pictures here for 2 months (20 pictures).

- There are two French newspapers here and the journalists visited me at home much earlier before the exhibition. – They wrote such letters (praising) for the second and third days that I was really scared- Because I was intending to arrange a small exhibition and I did not think it would be publicized like that. – I immediately repainted all the pictures having a much deeper approach this time.

- It was all for the better indeed as they valued me highly.

- It was harder during this time as the expenses had grown. Frames, canvases, catalogs etc.

I finally won. I sold four pictures and made a name. I met a lot of people. Galeria Viau is the best thing here (avant-garde). Its owner treats me with great respect and wishes all the best for me. He advised me to hold a second exhibition; he says all the pictures will be sold. It was surprising that so many people asked about the prices of the pictures at this exhibition. I think they really liked it. They cannot yet dare to buy as they have heard my name for the first time, that's the rule here. – Afterwards, I was commissioned to create a decorative panel for the dining room of large hotel. – Now, I go to the mountains, near Cordoba, about 800 kilometers from here (Sierra de Cordoba).

- I will be among ten artists from Buenos Aires who are invited for two weeks (unfortunately without spouses). There are beautiful landscapes as they say. The hotel belongs to one rich Norwegian, who is a great admirer of art.

At the same time the apartment issue is still not solved. We still do not have enough money to rent a room with a kitchen. The apartments are so expensive here that the fee for one month equals to the engineer's salary of one month. Besides, it is necessary to provide a guarantee from someone wealthy. I think we have finally found that guarantee and now we have to find an apartment. This is not easy either. – Let's see if we can manage this by the end of the year.

Perhaps, I have already bored you with talking about me so much but I know you will be happy to hear good news from us. It is not that easy to succeed in America. I have lost a lot of time but now I have realized that I can make it if stick to pure art.

Recently, I wrote a letter to you many times but I did not send any of them. We were both extraordinarily desperate and heartbroken. I did not want to add up to your worries. (Now your racing horse gives a little more hope).

- I heard about Lado Churghulashvili's tragedy – I was very saddened. I do not want to believe that this is true.

- So far, the local colony is peaceful, thank God. A month ago, all six children of Cheishvilis were sick with a whooping-cough, and now they are all good. Write back soon, be a brother, with more news about Bellac and Paris. I kiss the children and greet the whole family.

Your Felix''

While still in France, Felix had already known the Argentinian Cheishvili – Sasha and Leo. In Buenos Aires, he continued communicating with them and also, got closer to their parents-in-law. Certainly, he knew Turpa and Mzia Papavas too. By the way, Mzia Papava – Sasha Cheishvili's wife – is the very Mzia Papava, with the letter of which I have started this introduction. According to the magazine "Mamuli" publications, we have to suggest that Felix Varlamishvili was close to Viktor Nozadze as well. So far, we do not have any information on what kind of relations he had with Georgian artists living in Argentina – Erasti Iashvili and Lado Isakadze, who is more famous with his pseudonym – Saakadze. Nevertheless, it is known that Felix Varlamishvili was somehow standing aside from the Georgian community of Argentina, and generally, he was a very reserved man, avoiding communications and having just one or two friends. Lado Roukhadze, of course, was one of the first among them. As it seems, encouraged by Varla's example, Lado thought of leaving Europe too, choosing between Canada and Australia. He even asked Zire to find out about life in Australia from her brother who was already living there. While almost Argentinian Felix was inviting him to Argentina. The letter was sent from Buenos Aires, on January 7, 1951:

"Dear brother Vladimir,

Happy Holidays! Wish you health and all your dreams to come true, and also having your baby girl – now I think this should be enough if you plan to move from Europe. – Your last letter made me think a lot. I do not know what your perspectives are in Canada but in my opinion, it is better for you to come to Argentina for a short time. Here, you will see what you can do. You would live with us as we have already found an apartment. We have two rooms, outside of the city; nothing special but sure looks like paradise to us. – One room is made into an atelier and you will live there. – We would be very happy if you moved and settled here.

You should be able to start a business here in your field, depending on contacts and finances. – Business must be dealt carefully here but it is not that easy to deceive you. Zire wrote about you in Australia but her brother writes so rarely that I do not know when he will reply. Anyway, I would not recommend it, it would be much better here. – It is very sad that you are selling your house, we feel sorry too, but what can you do? If that house was here you would be a wealthy man. – It would be good if you could rent a house with a garden just like Cheishvili. You see yourself. It should be easy with a tourist visa and two or three months would be enough to find everything. – Write me soon. This letter came late because of changing apartments and now it has been a week since we are in a new apartment.

Now it's summer and it's quite hot, if you come at the end of February it will be better, because interesting people are now away from Buenos Aires. – Have you received a letter from Datiko?

So goodbye my Vladimir and greeting everyone.

Your Felix''.

Lado had neither sold the house nor did he decide to leave France; as it is obvious from Varla's next letter, now it was him who wanted to leave "his own" Argentina. The letter is dateless, but as Felix speaks about his second exhibition, it must be written at the end of 1951:

"Brother Vladimir,

It has been a long time since I contacted you and you probably think that I have forgotten you. I wanted to write to you many times but I had always set it aside for the future. Recently, I had a lot of projects, but I could not make whatever I was intending.

- I had an exhibition in October. This was second and much stronger than the first one. – Many people attended and it drew attention, - but could not sell anything and the press was silent; the reason for this is that: 1) they found out that I was not French by birth, and I am considered Russian here; 2) that I have lived here for a long time and I'm not going back to France. Usually the artists of all fields come here for a short time. They have concluded that I am just an ordinary emigrant. That's why my stocks have fallen completely; 3) Currently, there is a terrible nationalism here and nobody commissions anything to a foreigner. They think they are the best. – This means that the future is extremely limited here. – Everything affected me morally and was even a bit ill.

Lately, I have decided to go to Bolivia and Peru for a month, for painting. But the local peso is so low that it seems impossible to move from here.

My only wish is, and it has been since the very first day here, to return to Europe. I do not know how, but I'd like to do so this year, after I get a little money. The source of my income is still painting screens, in Persian style and that is how we live. This is our adventure for the past month.

- How are things with you? Your last letter was not joyful and it made us sad too. We hope that your condition is better for now.

- For a while, I thought about you coming here but you'd definitely regret it... Here are all the European people we know are regretting and wishing to go back.

I do not meet with the Georgian colony anymore, everyone is worried about their own issues.

I do not think that Georgians here live better than the Paris colony. – Zire sends you greetings and we hope that you will write soon.

Be so kind to write your opinion about the conditions there.

I wish you all the best and health to you and all your family.

Your Felix"

Despite his standing aside from the Georgian community, he would be affected by one tragic event in Buenos Aires no less than anybody else, if not more. It occurred during the time of his second exhibition and concerned a man with his mother's family name, particularly – his relative as there are not many Paliashvili at all.

Tsatsa Paliashvili, who had gone through the war, searched for his ex-wife Tamar Chilaia in Italy and Spain but finally found and killed her in Buenos Aires. The magazine "Mamuli" wrote in its fourth edition:

“Despite being restricted, on October 20, he entered her room, drew a revolver, approached a woman and... and the result: two bullets in a stomach, one – in a breast, one – in an arm

He spared his miserable self from death – went to the police and confessed.

Tamar was immediately taken to the hospital. She lived for a week in suffer – what could have saved her! In suffering she died.

This shameful and embarrassing murder caused great anger among Georgians. Mourning Georgians and foreign friends treated Tamar’s remains with proper respect and buried her at La Chacarita cemetery on October 29.

The funeral law was performed by Father Nikoloz Zambakhidze”.

Although he had already decided, we can consider that this tragedy accelerated his return to Europe.

When the wheel of fortune turned again – in 1952, Felix and Zire returned to France. Europe was relatively settled. Varla quickly rebuilt his business relationships and exhibited his work at the Autumn Salon that same year.

A year later, in December 1953, Varla and Zire sent their Christmas greetings to the Roukhadzes to Pontoise. Writte by Zire in French:

“Dear Vladimir and Bernadette, our best Christmas and New Year wishes. We hope you are well, that Bernadette feels better after the illness and that the children are well. With our best wishes, your Felix and Zire.”

On the other side of this greeting card, Varla painted the Christmass scene in gouache. This is a multi-figured colorful composition, where the artist, despite its miniature size, manages to give the accuracy of motion, mood and emotion with precision. These kind of original greetings were sent by the Varlamishvilis to their friends and acquaintances, but suppose that this card from 1953 must be the oldest among them. Today, it is kept in my collection. The card’s measures are 8x17 cm.

Since the second half of the 50s, Varlamishvilis had traveled a lot to Italy, Spain, Portugal, Scandinavia, the Netherlands and the USA. Italy was particularly attractive for Varla, perhaps because this country resembled his homeland the most. In addition to the non-existent, fairy tale towns, he drew some real Italian towns too. The most famous of them are his “Siena”, “Florence” and “Venice”.

On December 25, 1958, the “Journal de l’Amateur d’Art” newspaper wrote: “Here, this eerie world where gondolas are sailing through sorrowful Venice and the stones are singing in bright colors. He ushers us into the mystery with accentuated drawings and compositions of rich colors”.

On December 17, 1958, at 5 P.M. the Drouant Gallery presented Varla’s large exhibition, which lasted until January 6 the following year. I know this information precisely from the invitation card that is kept in my Bibliouseum.

This exhibition was reviewed by the “Combat” Newspaper on December 29:

“Sophisticated texture, charm and sensitivity. Varla’s creations are built on nuances.”

On the last day of the year, the "Arts" newspaper noted:

"Varla – this is an exquisitely illustrative painting with its colored gowns, golden towers and fortresses, an unreal and enchanting atmosphere".

And in the first issue of 1959, the magazine "Le Peintre" summarizes:

"Varla has a tender soul, but his strength in art determines the decorative nature (with the best sense of this word) of his creations and tames the variety of genres. The exhibition deserves great praise".

The Drouant exposition was followed by exhibitions in the United States – San Francisco, Detroit, New York, Dallas, Houston..

In the meantime, Varla sits in his studio at 11, Daguerre Street and paints. Paints quickly. Paints a lot, too much. Sells a lot, too. For ten years, hundreds of Varla's works were scattered around the world in museums and private collections, but more – in private collections.

Here's what Gogi Khutsishvili wrote after getting to know French museums and private collections:

"Having a private collection is a very expensive pleasure and it is only available to a very wealthy person. There is no practical way for any random author or creation to be included in these collections. This business is led by not only their owners but also first-class specialists and the web of well organized, experienced and almost international networks of art dealers. I too had a chance to see several such collections. Imagine my joy when I saw pictures of Felix Varla among the world's renowned modern masters – Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Van Gogh, Cezanne, Picasso, George Braque, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Rouault, Chagall, Leger, Matis, Duchamp and others"

Varla became a well-known artist – the most famous Georgian artists living abroad. The story of his success has reached Georgia as well. During this period, Felix Varlamishvili managed to restore relations with his close relatives in Georgia after three decades of being apart.

In 1961, in a letter sent to his brother in Kutaisi, Varla wrote:

"I work a lot, especially for the last 4 years. I have a contract with one of the art galleries. I want to explain the conditions of this place: there are about 30 thousand artists and sculptors and everyone strives to live on their creativity. Imagine what wrestling one has to endure to sell one picture! – That's what the art merchants and art dealers are for, some of them are world famous and people come to them from abroad to buy pictures from them. I was lucky that I made it into a famous gallery. So, for four years all my pictures belong to this merchant and I do not have the right to sell them to others. Instead, I am provided financially. In search of the stories, I travel twice a year with my wife in France or neighboring countries. After all, I do not have any pictures after continuous work and I am not rich either. Nevertheless, it is still fine as I don't have any other concerns but painting."

This letter is kept in Kutaisi, in the family of Varla's brother.

Varla is still sitting in his workshop at Daguerre Street 11, painting. But not as fast and not as fast as before. He sells almost everything. The guests were astonished to see the bare walls of his workshop. Usually the artist's walls are full of one's creations, are they not?

Starting in the 1970s, Varla was often ill and was often preventing him from working.

In 1973 he wrote in Kutaisi:

“I have not been well, but now I’m making it. So I can work. My work has a good demand and I am alright materially. I think the quality of my work has also improved”.

He was quite uncommunicable and contactless before; he did not like leaving home earlier either, and now he almost never goes out of Daguerre 11; he is either at his workshop on the first floor, or upstairs, in an apartment. This three-story house is still standing in Montparnasse, even after the fire, however the trace of Varlamishvili is completely erased there.

The late Gogi Khutsishvili, a well-known art scholar, as mentioned above, had the most frequent and closest relationship with Varla out of other Georgians, while he was in Paris in 1974-1975. In addition, Felix Varlamishvili, already a well-known artist, was visited by Ucha Japaridze (in 1960), Gulnara Japaridze (1964), Simon Kintsurashvili (1965), Tamaz Sanikidze (1982), Ketevan Kintsurashvili (in 1985), Rezo Tabukashvili (1986)... Varla’s contacts with people who wanted to meet him, as the ones who had come from Georgia as well as those who lived in emigration, was so rare that each such encounter is worthy of being mentioned separately.

“ His wife helped him with relations with art dealers and galleries, while Nicola Mamulashvili was his “guest-keeper”. Without him, he would rarely receive a guest.

I do not know whether Ucha Japaridze’s story about the meeting with Varla has survived. Gulnara Japaridze’s impressions are described in the above quoted book. The memories of others are interesting too.

Gogi Khutsishvili became friends with Varla during his long trip to France in 1974. He was a lecturer at the Art Department of Tbilisi University and it was from him, upon returning from the trip, that I heard Varla’s name for the second time after Gulnara Japaridze’s book. Later, in 1987, he remembered the great artist in the newspaper “Kutaisi”:

“In October of 1974, I met a man, much older than me, and I became friends with him. He was a citizen of France but a pure Georgian with his soul and flesh. He was a great artist – Felix Varlamishvili (known in the world of artists as Varla). It happened so that my apartment in Paris was just seven minutes away from Daguerre Street, where Felix lived and worked; in between us there was just Boulevard du Montparnasse and Rue de la Gaité.

One fine October day in Paris, I approached the three-story building on the 11, Daguerre Street. I went to the second floor and rang the bell with great anxiety. A gray-haired man with a lean body and trustworthy appearance opened the door. The first sentences of our meeting were pronounced in French. I asked him about the artist Varlamishvili and when he invited me inside, the dialogue naturally continued in Georgian. After the greetings, Mr. Varlamishvili carefully observed me but could not come to any conclusion: members of the Georgian community of Paris are very well familiar with each other, and he was very surprised to see an unknown young man talking in Georgian.

I had to immediately and briefly introduce myself, explaining that I arrived just a few days ago from Tbilisi and, in any case, I was not the son of any Georgian living in France.

Then Mr. Varlamishvili was surprised by how I found him, and after a little silence he asked: Does anyone still remember me in Georgia? I immediately told him that I had heard his name from the people

of the older generation. In these words, I saw tears on the fine face of Mr. Varlamishvili. Both of us had to make awkward movements in order to hide our worries.

Mr. Varlamishvili called his wife and told her some sentences in a language unknown to me. A little later I learned that Ms. Zire Binder was Danish. From the fact that they gave me the right to visit them anytime and without prior notification, it was obvious that my first visit to Varlamishvili went well and it even brought some pleasure to the hosts. Naturally, I used this permission to be with them frequently during my almost two-year stay in Paris. This way, I became a witness to Mr. Varlamishvili's working process and his discourses about art.

These conversations usually took place at a small workshop on the first floor of the artist's apartment. The first thing that surprised me at his workshop was an ascetic emptiness. There was a molbert, a small table for paints, a few chairs and, most importantly, absolutely bare gray walls. The workshop owner noticed astonishment and told me with a sad smile: I work every day but I do not have any of my pictures, they all sold... I could see only several of his creations during my entire stay there (the private collectors, amateurs, museums would buy the works as soon as they were completed...)"

As if continuing a colleague's narrative, Tamaz Sanikidze wrote:

"He always worked a lot, he painted a lot and very fast, but almost never kept anything, he sold the paintings and made a living (he never had another source of income), or he would just generously give them away. He could give the masterpiece without hesitation. Nevertheless, he kept these ten paintings. Apparently, he liked them and had intended to use them to make a name in his homeland."

Here is how Tamaz Sanikidze describes the meeting with Varla:

"I met Felix Varlamishvili in May, 1982. Then, the central exhibition palace of Paris (Grand Palais) was hosting an absolutely unique exhibition – "In the Country of the Golden Fleece" – ancient Georgian art of five thousand years, which had great resonance among Parisians and the guests of Paris. Itold the artist about this exhibition. He knew about it but could not attend because he was not feeling well. With child-like joy, he looked through magazines and newspapers that published materials about the exhibition and repeated several times that he would definitely go see it. He was a lean man with a bright face, pale skin, soft facial features and amazingly buoyant eyes. He did not talk much and had an Imeretian accent. He was obviously avoiding talking about himself and his art; at such times, his spouse and a family friend – a handsome old Georgian man, interacted and answered questions instead of him. From time to time, the artist just nodded to them. It was with their help that I saw his works – 12 of those that were leaning to the wall; along with a few domestic items, they were taking up almost all the space of the tiny workshop, making it impossible to move around."

Tamaz Sanikidze, who was then the director of the Georgian Art Museum, shared the idea of arranging a big exhibition with the artist, however, this turned out to be impossible.

"He was very pleased when told him that we were very interested in his creations in Georgia, that the Georgian Art Museum had acquired some of his early works from his old friends' families in Tbilisi and that we wanted to hold a great exhibition in the halls of our museum. He was happy, but as soon as he heard that we needed to have at least a hundred pictures, his mood suddenly altered. He said that everything he created he was giving to the art dealer, who sell them and that it would be impossible to collect the works for the exhibition; that whatever I saw there might be taken away the next week and he might never see them again. Finally, he brought out his little catalog with several photo-reproductions of his works, inscribed on each of them – for the Tbilisi Museum and handed it mo me.

These were copies of those ten creation that were delivered to the Georgian Art Museum after the artist's death, according to his will.

The exhibition was held anyway. It opened on March 27 at the Georgian State Museum of Art. Along with those ten pictures presented were the works kept at the artist's friends and the Museum of Art, thus making it possible to demonstrate an extremely interesting image of the artist, who could have had a very special place in the history of modern art in Georgia if fate had allowed, as now, we are not even aware of his full biography."

In 1991, after Varla's death, his wife had a visit in Paris from Guram Saradze, a well-known researcher of Georgian emigration. He recorded an interview with Zire Binder on video and described that meeting in the essay "The French Diary", in which he wrote:

"We talked about the lack of Varla's works presented in his workshop, and this is how the hostess explained it: even when Varla was alive, the workshop's walls were almost always empty as admirers of his art would purchase the newly finished paintings immediately. While most of the remaining pictures were sent to state museums after his death. I was quick to make that decision as there was a fire several years ago in our apartment and I could barely escape in my nightgown half-asleep. Everything else was destroyed in the fire! Fortunately, this workshop was built separately in the yard and it was far from fire, but I was so frightened that something could happen to this place too that I immediately sent the majority of works to the museums."

Varla's several exhibitions in France and abroad – Japan, Belgium, Iran and again Belgium – fall in the middle of the 1970s...

Several ephemeras from these exhibitions appeared in my collection: an invitation, a catalog and a poster of the Van Dormael Gallery exhibition in Brussels from April 22 to May 18, 1977; an invitation and advertisement for the exhibition held in Monte Carlo during December 1-17 of the same year. Varla's only booklet that I had mentioned in the beginning of this article was also published during that time. One copy of this booklet is kept with me together with the artist's visiting card and his autograph.

One lithography, sized 35x44, was also created back then; it depicts five boats and there fishermen with one huge and three small fish. A little while ago, Chito Roukhadze presented me with one of the etchings. On the back side of it was the English-Georgian inscription in pencil:

"To Paata Natsvlishvili. This etching (artist proof) was given to me by Zire, when she was checking the quality of a tirage. With a cordial friendship. Chito Roukhadze 28 XII 2012".

The etching is monochromatic. In fact, as I learned from the internet, this is not an etching but a colored lithography, the name of which is "Fishing". It had 120 copies printed. Its 23rd copy was displayed at the Pillon auction on June 9, 2017 with a starting price of 100 Euros. "Minor Works of Great Masters" – that was the name of the Auction.

It is not dated, but one of Zire's small aquarelles was created at that same time, size – 15x12. She gave it to Chito and Chito gave it to me.

Photos of Chito Roukhadze and Marie Madeleine Salmon, which are now kept in my Bibliouseum, were taken at Varla's workshop in 1976 and 1977. These photographs show a number of Varla's works, the location of which is still unknown and they have never been publicly displayed. Of course, the

unprofessional photographs taken in the 70s make it difficult to judge the color spectre of the paintings, however, I think these reproductions will provide some information for further research of Varla's work.

By 1978, when the renewed museum was to open in Ceret, the museum asked famous French artists for their creations. Varla also received the request and donated his "Wine Drinker" to the museum. Today, at the Ceret Museum, this painting of Varla is hung next to Picasso and other world renowned artists.

In 1981, the Georgian language magazine "Kavkasioni" [Caucasus], issued in Paris, dedicated the whole section to the art of Georgians abroad, along with Vera Paghava, Vano Enukidze, Maria Meriko and Ethery Paghava, allotted several pages to Varla's creations, publishing reproductions of his five works, a short biography and quotes about his painting:

"Varla delivers a fascinating sense of color in his flawless and sophisticated art. In the course of all his work, he has chosen only one way – the way of stylized presentations of characters and landscapes, where the artist's favorite themes – fishing, harvesting, working in the field, family scenes and landscapes, which he enjoyed during his multiple visits to Italy, France, Portugal, Spain, South America and others.

The perfectly cohesive composition reveals the elegance of distributing the volumes and the astonishing poetry of interpretation.

Varla cautiously selects the means of expression. He diligently prepares the background of his pictures before applying cadmium and cobalt. His palette vibrates from the warmest colors to the grayish-blue tones. His technique reminds us of the techniques of old Dutch masters."

Ketevan Kintsurashvili, a famous art critic, met Varla in 1984, in Paris. Here's how she remembers this encounter in one of the interviews:

"I have known him and his art from an early age. Felix Varlamishvili would send his works to our family as New Year greeting cards. These paintings were very valuable to us and they are still displayed in our house. In 1984, when I arrived in Paris, I visited him at workshop together with his friend Nikola Mamulashvili; I saw his work and eventually dedicated several articles and reports to him. After a few years, I made a TV program and returned to his art several times. He said that his work was everything for him. He was a very modest, warm person, who seemed to always carry sorrow and this sorrow is depicted in his works also. There are no specific motives in his creations that reflect tragic events, although, looking at his pictures, I have a feeling that I hear one continuous, sad melody. His personal qualities are reflected in his art".

I assume that the immobile wheel is also a reflection of his personality. The wheel of fate stopped after a long illness. It stopped just like the wheel on Varla's canvases.

Felix Varlamishvili died on February 6, 1986. According to his will, his remains were burn and buried at the Georgian Cemetery in Leuville. The cremation was held at the Pere-Lachaise crematorium. A mourning card is kept at my Bibliotheum. According to Western tradition, Zire sent out there cards to friends and acquaintances informing them of the death of her spouse:

"It is with great sorrow that Madame Felix Varlamishvili informs you of the death of her spouse – Mr. Felix Varlamishvili, the artist.

This happened on February 6, 1986, in his 83rd year of life in the 14th District, in Paris.

Pray for his soul.

Funeral is on Monday, February 24, 1986

We shall gather at the Pere-Lachaise crematorium (Gambetta Station) exactly at 8:30

11, Daguerre atr. – 75014, Paris”

Giorgi Tsereteli’s magazine “Gushagi” [Sentine], assue №9 of 1986, included Nikola Mamulashvili’s obituary “the death of artist Felix Varla” (pp.67-70):

“Felix Varlamishvili was born in 1903 as in Kutaisi. His father, Grigol, was the director of the Kutaisi Bank and a famous public figure. Felix was the son of Grigol’s first wife. With his second wife, he has two daughters and one more son, who still live in Kutaisi.

After graduating from Kutaisi Real School in 1922, Felix left for Tbilisi and enrolled at the newly-founded Academy of Arts. Felix studied drawing in the class of Professor Charlemagne and painting in the class of Professor Lanceray. Felix expressed great talent in painting from childhood and he was considered to be the most talented student at the Academy of Art. His pencil drawings were excellent, similar to miniatures that depicted old Tbilisi. His drawings from his youth are rare here in Paris; I saw them only with Mrs. Valia Kedia. Meanwhile, his art is not represented at all in Georgia.

He dreamed of visiting Paris right after he arrived in Tbilisi; his nature could not be satisfied only with the Tbilisi Art Center he had heard and read about Parisian bohemians and many different directions in the field of art. That was why he strived to go abroad.

In 1928, he left Tbilisi and moved to Turkey through Akhaltsikhe with his friend and classmate from the Academy – Luka Khitarishvili. After arriving in Istanbul, they found jobs for a few weeks, earned money for traveling and then arrived in Paris.

In Paris he started working at a big atelier of decorations – Siegel, where his creations were greatly appreciated and he stayed there for two years. When he had enough money to leave, Felix left the job with Siegel and started working as an independent artist. In 1933, he had his first exhibition at the “Speranza” gallery. This exhibition did not bring success. Maybe it was too early and his individual and original style was not yet developed, which is absolutely essential for any artist to get noticed in Paris. His current creations can be found in Georgian families, and they are characterized by Georgian themes and spirit.

In 1934, Felix married a Danish woman who greatly helped him work in pure art. Staying in Paris became difficult for them due to economic reasons; so in 1948, they traveled to Argentina, where they worked in the decorative field again; he painted panels for furniture, which he sold well and in parallel, he worked on pictures as well.

In 1952 he returned to Paris. The owner of Galerie Drouant noticed him and bought Varla’s creations for several years. He did not have any contract with Drouant so he maintained the right to be exhibited at other galleries, especially abroad. Along with the group of “Young Artists”, Varla’s pictures were exhibited in Europe and various American countries. [...].

The entire private collections of Varla are scattered throughout the world, namely North and South America, Australia, Belgium, Iran, Japan, Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, France... France bought his works in 1945, 1946, 1963, and Paris – in 1954, 1955 and 1963.

Felix has long been sick. He passed away on February 6 of this year. According to his will, his remains were burned and buried at the Leuville Cemetery. I personally lost a close friend besides losing a prominent artist. I express my condolences to his loyal wife and relatives in Georgia”.

Giorgi Nozadze’s farewell letter, “Death of an Artist”, was also published in the same magazine:

“On February 24 of this year, we delivered the ashes of the artist – Felix Varlamishvili, known as Varla in the art world, to the Brothers’ Cemetery in Leuville. He was born with an extraordinary talent of an artist. He received an art education first in Kutaisi and then – in Tbilisi. After immigrating to Paris, he had a hard time being acknowledged in the beginning but then, in the final years of his life, he was happy to witness the mass recognition of his art, which was thanks to his stubborn willpower and tireless work.

Varla’s painting style was sophisticated, exquisite and refined. He became very prominent in Paris. How sad it is that people cannot enjoy the masterpieces of his art in our homeland. May his name be eternal.”

In 1987, according to the will, Zire Binder brought Varla’s 10 works to Tbilisi and handed them over to the Georgian Art Museum. In the same year, these works were exhibited in Tbilisi and then in Kutaisi. One of the streets of Kutaisi was named after Felix Varlamishvili, and the exhibition hall of the Georgian Artists’ Union Kutaisi branch, located on this street, was named – “Varla”.

Three years earlier, in 1983, Rezo Tabukashvili presented a movie – “Papers From the French Diary”, which captured Varla’s face. I do not know, maybe these several seconds constitute the only film-image of Varla. Apart from Varla’s face, Georgian viewers saw 10 totally unknown works, on the background of which Varla’s name was spoken aloud, for the first time in the history of Georgia:

“Feliks Varlamishvili – a famous Georgian artist, known as Varla, has great popularity in Europe. Unfortunately, Georgian society is not familiar with Varlamishvili’s art either”.

Thirty years have passed since...

However, Georgian society is still not aware of Varla’s work.

However, he is one of the brightest stars of Georgian art.

A distant but true star.

The star named Varla. V(st)arla!

And the wheel of this star, which was still on the canvases, has already started to move.

And it will never stop.

2013-2018

Tbilisi

P.S. This book was almost complete and ready to be printed when I was commissioned to cover the Youth Olympics in Buenos Aires. In the course of my stay there, the attempt to find the Argentine works of Varla by the above-mentioned bookinist and antique specialist Gocha Shatirishvili had a successful outcome. Two such works were kept by his colleague, the art dealer Martin Casares. He sent digital reproductions to Gocha and I am happy to attach both of them to this article; at the same time, I am

attaching the photo of the last building on Florida Street – the Bank of Patagonia at №999, which I captured in Buenos Aires and the windows of which were decorated with Eastern motifs by Varla in 1951.

KETEVAN S. KINTSURASHVILI

V A R L A

Looking at Varla's works on the gallery walls, one after another, it feels like you keep hearing one continuous, sad melody...

The themes change: hunting, harvesting, walking, fishing... however, mood remains unchanged... People gathering herd, collecting firewood, playing on musical instruments, carrying baskets, dancing.. horses running, resting, grazing, playing with each other...

The figures are acting, often – interacting: one fisherman handing the catch to another, mother helping father to put a child on a horse, a kneeling musician looking at another one and playing the Mandolin with him in gondola... However, they never make an active contact with each other. If one is looking at the other, the latter is looking elsewhere, into space. The expressions of women and men are similar. The faces do not show any particular condition. Nevertheless, all of them are thoughtful. The figures seem to have frozen in certain positions, and each one of them is left alone with themselves. This detachment creates stillness, while the transition from one figure to the other (with a gesture or a head turn) generates a single rhythm, a slowed pace.

The movement is often complex: the foreground figure intrudes into the depths of the picture or on the contrary, it sharply turns towards a viewer, horses can be presented in completely unexpected angles, and buildings – shown with complicated perspectives. The composition carries the fragment's character: the frame cutting off stairs or the tree crown, the table's edge or the row of buildings in the foreground. But overall, there is peace. Even silence, determined by the inner rhythm and melody of compositions. The interchanging figures are echoed with objects that are lined up in a corresponding rhythm (wooden logs, empty bottles, brushwood, apples, etc.).

Varla creates a poetic world, which is figurative, nevertheless – imaginative.

The family of Felix Varlamishvili's relatives kept the card sent by 11-year-old Felix (then – Feliko) to his aunt – Nino Paliashvili, in Akhaltsikhe, in 1914. The boy informs his aunt that he has moved to the fourth grade with all four-marks, having the only five-mark in art class and that he painted this card himself. Nino was his custodian aunt. Felix's mother – Rosa Paliashvili died early. Father – Grigol got married for the second time and the child grew up with the relatives in Akhaltsikhe. At the time, when he was writing this letter, Felix was back with his father in Kutaisi, studying at the Real School.

The habit of sending his own drawings as cards seems to have stuck to the artist for the rest of his life. "I am sending you my two little pictures for memory" – these are the words Varla had inscribed on his drawings, which he sent to Georgian in the 1960s (then the Soviet Republic). They belong to a number of very rare paintings from the Parisian Period, which were found in his homeland. However, there are many of his drawings from his student days in Georgia and several paintings created before he left that are kept in Sh. Amiranashvili's National Museum of the Arts.

After graduating from Kutaisi's Real School in 1920, Felix started studying at the Faculty of Agronomy at the University of Georgia; however, in two years, with the opening of the Academy of Arts, he moved to study there. During his student days, Felix participated in exhibitions, decorated books and collaborated with the magazines. In the 1920s, he was referred to as a particularly talented, hard-working student in exhibition reviews. After graduating from the Academy in 1927, he opened his own private school of art. One of his students was a famous art critic and public figure – Vakhtang Beridze. Vakhtang always remembered his first drawing teacher with great respect and he played an important role in naming one of the streets of Kutaisi in his honor – the Felix Varlamishvili Street.

The works created in Georgian before 1927 testify to Felix's talents and show his courageous explorations. One example is his self-portrait (1927), which confirms the author's mastery and bold internal energy, vivid from his gaze and his drawing style. Upon deciding to go abroad, Felix was not intending to leave the country forever. The desire to visit Paris was so great that he and his friend, an academy classmate – Luka Khitarishvili, were determined to go afoot and sneak across the border to Turkey, from where they would travel to France. They arrived in Istanbul via Akhaltsikhe. They got a job there, gathered money for traveling and made their dream come true – they went to Paris.

Paris – the city of art – was, of course, attracting Felix Varlamishvili as an artist. However, this was not the only reason for him to leave. He was pursuing freedom, which was restricted in the Soviet country. He wanted to work in an environment where he would have complete access to information on art processes and an open path to independent studies.

Evidently, starting a new life in Paris was not easy. He worked as a decorator for two years. At the same time, he continued working on easel. His works were mainly bought by Georgian immigrants living in Paris. For them, the memories about Georgia depicted in Varla's works were valuable. One of the works of that time, with the image of a shepherd playing on a flute, was kept in Leuville for a long time, in the collection of Lida and Gogi Nozadzēs (according to their will, the collection was later transferred to the Sh. Mirianashvili Art Museum of Georgia).

Felix frequently portrayed the old Tbilisi. However, it was the only kind of Tbilisi, or Tiflis, that he and other Georgian immigrants could remember. It is not surprising that Varla's pictures have a lot in common with the works of Pirosmāni and Gudiashvili. This is the life and dynamics of the old Tiflis inhabitants, the creators of the city's "theatrical facade" that defined the theme and the compositional rhythms of Varla's works too.

Feasting Karachokhelis, dairymen with saddlebags over mules, flute-players, Georgian churches, Tbilisian balcony houses, roads of Georgia, landscapes... Although Varla drew from memory, he accurately portrayed childhood scenes and recollections: flavors of a place, dynamics of people and even the texture of objects.

1933, Speranza – a Spanish gallery in Paris hosted the first exhibition of Varlamishvili's works. The exhibition did not bring success, perhaps because the artist had not yet developed his own artistic style.

Felix rented an apartment in the Montparnasse district. One floor below, there lived a Danish artist woman. Once she had her friends come over and together, they decided to invite that Georgian young man from the floor above. That is when Zire Binder and Felix Varlamishvili became friends. As she recalled later, they had never been separated since that day. In 1934, they married. During their lifetime, Zire frequently reproduced Varla's compositions on materials creating gobelins, decorating pillows that adorned their living space.

In 1945, Felix Varlamishvili became a member of the Autumn Salon in Paris. He was given the right to display his work at the salon out of competition, and later, he was even elected as a jury member. In 1947, the state purchased three of his works: "Still Life", "Childbirth", and "The Rural Scene". Nevertheless, they still lived through hardship, and in 1948, pursuing a better life, the couple left for Argentina. In Buenos Aires, Varla held exhibitions and at the same time, he worked as a furniture decorator. As a result of his tireless work they improved their finances and returned to Paris in 1952. Felix resumed work at the Autumn Salon. In 1954, his works were acquired by the Paris Municipality too.

From 1952, the owner of the Drouin Gallery began purchasing and exhibiting Varla's works. However, the artist did not tie himself with a contract so he could cooperate with other galleries as well. Together with a group of young artists he organized exhibitions at other galleries in France and abroad. Varla's works have traveled to the USA, Belgium, Japan, Iran and other countries. In Paris, Varla's works were exhibited at different galleries throughout the years and in the 1980s, almost all of his exhibitions were sold out in advance. Numerous magazines and newspapers have reviewed Varla's exhibitions. Nowadays, the artist's works are scattered in many countries. As noted, his works were purchased by the French government and the Paris Municipality.

Varlamishvili's first personal exhibition in Georgia was held in 1987, after his death. The artist bequeathed 10 of his works to Georgia. Varla's loyal wife had overcome all the Soviet bureaucratic obstacles to hand these works over to the Museum of Sh. Amiranashvili. Celebrating this fact, the museum collected all the works kept in its funds and private collections around Georgia, which were then exhibited together with the above mentioned 10 pieces in Tbilisi and then in Kutaisi.

As written above, the artist used to draw Georgian motives at the initial stage after moving to Paris. Perhaps, consciously or unconsciously, this fact determined the peculiarity of his further creativity. Having in mind that the scenes painted by Varla look more like memories, they are rather thought-like than trying to describe the figure, however, the images are actually perceivable. He did not depict the impressions either. The pictures he created are poetic scenes and they represent the main subject of his works. It does not matter whether they are depicting fishermen, gondoliers or harvesting peasants.

Varla's work synthesized the professional knowledge he had received in Georgia, the emotions and memories that had followed him all the way from homeland and new experiences and impressions he had gained abroad.

Varla's works are of traditional nature. All the images are completed and clearly perceivable. He did not follow any of the avant-garde movements that were a lot of them before his arrival in Paris and even during his stay there. He remained faithful to his own individual style, which evolved over time. The new rhythm and dynamism, characterizing the machine epoch and the "urban" world, did not break into his art. Until the end, the artist remained loyal to nature and village. Nevertheless, his works have a modern sound. As he had mentioned in one of his interviews, he shared the attitude of 20th century art – the main thing in painting is the expression of an idea and not the description of the visible.

Most of Varla's works are relatively small or medium sized. They convey warmth and idyll. The artist was inspired by the poetry of life and he always maintained serenity and spiritual balance. He filtered everything through his point of view, evaluated, generalized and created his individual world built on associations.

The artist constructed the conditional space, often addressing the deliberate deformation of images and stylization of figures. Varla was a poet in painting. In the scenes he composed, he strengthened the rhythm and harmony that naturally emerged from his perception.

It is worth mentioning how devoted he was to the motif once it was discovered: a mother with a child, women gathering brushwood, a man driving bulls out etc.

In some of his pencil drawings, Varla depicts the details with photographic precision, even the grass blades. The paintings accurately convey the mood of a specific time of year and the essence of a place. With this point of view, especially impressive are the winter landscape. However, overall, the scenes are far from naturalism.

Varla's characteristic rhythm was somewhat already evident in his student work. We could recall the 1920s sketches, such as the "Shoe Cleaners", or from the pictures of the 1940s – "Feast at the Village" and so on. It cannot be ruled out that as a young artist he was inspired by the spirit of Tbilisian Kintos and Karachokhelis. However, in his early work, the figures stand firmly on the ground. At the same time, they are closer to reality with their appearance and clothing. In his later works people seem to be lifting off the ground. They acquire special sophistication and sensitivity as they are slightly bent, stretched vertically, with the plasticity of long limbs, similar faces and simple clothing, the creases of which emphasize the shape of the body.

The colors in the works of Varla are mostly conditional. Golden water, golden sky, red shore, blue hair... This way, the harmonious colorful world(s) is (are) created. The scenes, as if seen in a dream, seem to carry deep lyricism and sadness. The artist was attracted to simple, hardworking people, engaged in their own duties. In one of the conversations, he himself emphasized that while he depicted fishermen in "Poor Venice", he depicted the gondoliers with palazzos in the background in "Rich Venice" (he had made a picture with this title as well); adding that he personally loved the first picture even more.

Georgian themes gradually fell back under the influence of European and South American impressions. The figures and themes, appearing in Varla's works, emerged from the newly exploited cultural environment occupying his imagination. Looking at his pictures, we can assume that he observed the surroundings during his journeys (especially in Italy) and then turned everything he had perceived into his own world on canvas and paper. In the picture, he would carry the fortress that he saw on the seaside up to the top of the mountain. He frequently depicted hunting scenes, although he had never been hunting himself. He made the horses play with each other, although he had never seen anything similar in that scene. He could position something seen in the daylight into the night and so forth.

The earlier pictures, in which Varla depicted Georgian scenes, are purely "Georgian", stemming from the Georgian world. It is, therefore, not surprising that they are closely linked to Georgian frescoes and Pirosmiani's creations, even if this is more subjective and timebound. The nature and art of France (especially stained glass and gobelen) brought new light and sounding to Varla's works. He had probably acquired the culture of constructing pictorial composition and choosing the scale from those very French, Italian and Dutch artists. The stretched proportions and plastics of the figures might be derived from Georgian frescoes and even Georgian dance. His earlier friends thought that his characters looked like the artist himself. The rhythm and melody, characteristic to his compositions, are somewhat already evident in his earlier works; nevertheless, the final refinement was still determined by his European

experience. As a result of all this, we have Varla's entirely original artistic style, which we can easily recognize today.

Felix Varlamishvili died in 1986 in Paris. According to his will, the corpse was cremated and buried at the Leuville Georgian Cemetery.

Chagall painted Vitebsk during his whole life, Kandinsky – Moscow, David Kakabadze – Imereti. This does not mean that they only revived the stories connected to their homelands in their works. However, they were creatively inspired with the emotions that stemmed from there. The sorrow and joy interwoven in Varla's works are associated with memories from Georgia, but they are overwhelmed and transformed by various other impressions.

Because Varla's pictures are both figurative and imaginative, somehow they may be linked to the stage of Surrealism, which was developed in French art during his arrival in Paris. Although, unlike Surrealists, Varla's goal was not to create stories that respond to certain theoretical postulates. He is much more direct and genuine. His compositions are born from the inner state of the artist, from the humane attitude towards nature and people, from nostalgia and excitement with beauty, from inner lyricism. Varla composes pictures with colors and lines that are associated with poems and musical sketches.

DAVID ANDRIADZE

V A R L A ' S W O E

Vladimir Nabokov asserted that the best Russian books are no different from the best European books;
Both are written by Europeans...

However, our background is different – he would add.

And this very background is what matters;

everything essential happens in this background;

There is picture of culture represented somewhere between a
deaf wall and a screen;

The picture in its original and generous from...

Felix Varlamishvili's – Varla's art was like a reflection on such a picture;

I would say the non-reflected reflection...

He was a vagabond, wandering artist.

The artist, whose nomadic life was also a peculiar attempt at returning to the necessary cycle of culture
that forces the masses to turn folklore and soil culture into a mass cult;

Varla's wandering started in 1928.

At first, he would go to Stamboul

At the outset, he would hear to Istanbul, make some travel money and leave for Paris...

He would settle in Montparnasse.

He starts working at Siegel Atelier – cooking decorative opuses.

He would gather some money again and start making free art.

In 1933, he has his first exhibition at the Speranza gallery.

The debut of 30-year-old artist would pass silently.

During the next year he will get married to a Danish woman – Zire Binder.

In 1948, Zire and Felix leave for Argentina.

Here, too, he starts with making decorations;

the panels drawn for carpets would soon acquire their buyers and Varla would work even more passionately.

The couple come back to Paris;

They settle in Montparnasse again;

On the Daguerre Street...

In the letter, dated 1960, Varla writes – I saw our artist Ucha Japaridze in Paris, we remembered our youth and old friends too...

This is that very Ucha Japaridze, the nomenclatural head of Georgian artists; he represented the whole brilliance and poverty of the Soviet;

And this “brilliance and poverty” is explained not so much by the ideological dictatorship (which has never been a novelty in world history) but with the lack of the art market.

Abroad, Varla tasted this market too;

tasted and enjoyed it too...

Maybe, while doing what he had to do – decorating the carpets – Varla felt (and sensed) that:

He drew decorative backgrounds and this was the basic metaphorical construct of mass culture;

Creativity with people in the background!

After all, culture is just like the air, it is impossible not to belong to the masses.

However, “mass culture” – this is a derogatory term that is more suited to the production (one more doubtful word!) of culture rather than to its use...

Varla, while “out of borders” (as the Soviets expressed!) felt not only the modernist discourse but also the factory image;

the factory, which on one hand was paving the way for modern civilization, while on the other hand, cutting the wings of imagination.

This imagination has never been so velvety for Varla.

It seems, although slightly, he felt that world was meant for similar people;

The homogeneous people with their algorithmic requirements...

He chose such people as his characters;

People with the structured rhythm of daily life...

People with the conveyerized life...

The conveyeriness of life as of “dasein” provides the man (das man) with cheap means or tricks to adorn this routine existence (or being here);

However, Varla never refers to cheap language;

He is protected from that thanks to his taste and the inherent culture of his European spouse and ally;

Perhaps, Varla considered that a human being, as a cultural subject, does not have that wide of a choice in reality;

Moreover, a human being can be content even with a limited assortment;

And the scarcity of this assortment hides the decorative “curls”...

The extraordinary (or ordinary) thing is that the mass society arranges time with this very “cheapness”; it divides life into fine fragments, consequently using them to fill in the years and the days;

The works and days;

The working days...

The chronicle of these “works and days” is the implicit story behind Varla’s pictures;

On the narrative...

The conveyor and the time, as the social metaphors, attribute a puristic image of accurately packaged "portions" to the happenings depicted in Varla's pictures;
However, the "pro-portions" are exaggerated;
As exaggerated as well as moderately stylized...
Varla paints as the "time of work" as well as the "time of fun";
Painting "Threshing-floor" and "Reaping", the "Field Works" or "Cutting Wood" with one hand, while painting "Horse Play" and "Hunting", "Tennis" and "The Joy of old Tbilisians" with the other...
This too is conveyeral-serial discourse;
The narrative discourse providing a person with spiritual comfort;
And this carelessness is peculiarly rhyming with the existential motif of existence, as of caring;
The motif, which is so vividly resonated in pictures of Pirosmeni – the kind of donor for Varla...
The serial happenings are sharing the ritualization of everyday life;
While the ritual itself is a relief, a break...
And leisure...
Or – idleness...
This is a disguised unwillingness...
Or the lack of will...
Although, while representing his "techne" as an artist, Varla lacks neither will, nor the skill of composing, neither the grace of chromatic phrasing, nor the scrupulous order of accurately processing the form...
Varla works on the fringes of color and line, colorful spots and linear rhythmic intervals;
Varla's temperament cannot tolerate the naked, "sly strokes".
His laminated canvases are rather breathing with the quasi-effect of glazing and blending...
Instead, the musical and the euphonic, even the phonetic coloring is augmented.
Varla has a good hand;
And a good eye...
He sees the surrounding world without aberrations;
However, he transforms the background topoi with an artistic poesis...
In this case, Varla also expresses something and this "something" – the representation of the objective, eternal, continual, meaningful meta-reality and the epoch's cultural trend.
Such is the starting point of "following", however, Varla has never been a follower of any movement.

A man is not responsible for the ritual;
A man as Homo Ludens...
The participant of the ritual has no choice;
The "other choice"...
They say the prisoner looks younger with as many years he had spent in prison...
Why?
Because in the prison (and maybe in the hospital too), people have no choice;
They lack the choice...
It seems (it seems, it seems!) that freedom is aging people more than a great affliction or suffering.
And the ritual is helping us to escape this affliction too...
Everyone has experienced such ritual as the sweetness of slavery, everyone, who has ever been awarded or whoever has decorated a Christmas tree...
Varla feels (and makes us feel too) that the "mass cult" – so embarrassing from the snob's position – adhered to the world as the protoplasm of daily creation, can one day turn into the cultivating

phenomenon;
And maybe, this could be the solution;
Or, it might reveal the soul and flesh of people, as such...
A person has not yet taken form here;
And isn't folk culture boiling in this "non-personal" element?
Anonymous and Universal folklore element...
The geniuses enter the culture avant-stage afterwards;
And this way, the high (and haughty) art becomes crystallized...
The artist – person, this lonely worker appears on "ready-made", right?
What a parasite!
The parasite dwelling on mass culture!
Varla turned out to be a wonderful assimilator, "cleanly" atting the experiences of the "other" cultures (mass cultures?)...
He managed the cultural interbreeding of the East and West and their genetic and cultural contamination...
The Far East tactically incorporated into the stylistic fabric of his pictures and displayed its image, devoid of senseless eclecticism, without any vivid "tangles".
In short, mass art did not interfere with Varla;
as he was adapting (and adjusting) the "unknown" forms, this vagabond artist could either break them, or turn them into the background, or transform them...
However, he, himself, could not tame these forms or praforms, these molds or matrices, these (mass) cultural beds;
He never desired to invent the form;
And to day the truth, in general, nobody can ever invent the form...
One could only think of the form!
And so thinks Varla as well, it would be more accurate to say that he recalls the form...
However, this form is rather the "Forma Formans" than the – Forma Formata";
By the way, he can greatly sense the easel layout of the picture too and that is why his opuses (indeed, the opuses!) do not leave an awkward impression of artificial "monumentality".
Varla believes that the form (and even the "forming form") always stems from the folk (this word has become so dull!) life,
And then it continues to exist for always;
Forever...

Varla had his share of emigrant's bitter life and sudden gifts from destiny...
But what about his concerns about falling out of time?
Trying to capture the present but in vain...
The phantoms of the present disappear right in front of him, making his solitude even more obvious;
Varla starts collecting his past.
From the past he tries to collect the present...
Living – it means existing in the kingdom of the magic of possible;
The possible considers the past – the past must enter!

And during this entrance everything turns into a potential past.
There is no longer present and no longer – future.
Only the past!

And each time, Varla could distinguish between an exhausted breath and a sigh of the past...
This endless articulation even resembles the death rattle;
Instead of being the transfer from one instant into another it is rather the sign of a petrified time!
Here, the artist creates the dead time;
The image of the passed away time...
This temporary ecstasy that is buried in the humidity of the approaching past...
He has already fallen out of time.
Aeternita that stands above time is replaced with the sowing simulations "from below", the fruitless zone, or from the "barren ground".
Upon returning to the ground he desires to return to the time again;
To capture the time and return to the time on time...
At least to have the illusion as if he is still at home;
Nevertheless, the time is locked;
The impossibility of entering the time bears new ontotex for the vagabond artist;
This negative "eternity" ...
Varla desires time so much that he cannot spare its nature for exaggeration;
Space – be my guest!
As if, Varla is creating reality from time;
Independent and self-sufficient from the "other" reality...
He is creating the lovely universe;
This surrogate of the absolute...
This is the operation that ousts time from everything attracted to it;
That is how a simple statist turns into the main character-protagonist.
At least the waiter does not go away;
Nevertheless, Varla does not cross the border;
He never falls out of the nature – the physis – into the abyss of metaphysical painting.
Although, here and there, his pictures do convey allusions and pleromas reminding of Giorgio di Chirico...
With Varla, ontological confusion or anxiety never turns into worrisome images;
He feels that scrutinizing himself would come at a high price for him.
In general, the human might not even want to live if one follows his roots deep down.
In the completely comprehended world all there is left is to be the holy fool;
And the closely examined object loses its value as well...
Varla is not the artist who diligently denounces time;
He feels that time would not wait to revenge – it would come out to him as hell;
And what is hell?
It is a stagnant present, a monotonous tension;
The inverted eternity that leads us nowhere;
"No-where" it leads...
Varla has one picture – it is a representation of plow and can be read as the intertext of Bruegel's "Icarus".
However, no fallen Icarus appears with Varla...
The vision of falling is more disturbing than the vision of death;
Every creature dies;
Only a man is destined to fall...

Felix Varlamishvili is neither an artist of the daily life nor a visionary;
Neither a storyteller nor – a philosopher;
Neither a Georgian artist nor – French...
Neither a sworn modernist nor – a Realist...
There are several opuses created on behalf of the Tbilisi avant-garde in the 1920s;
The picture that has to be perceived on the crossroads of the cosmopolitan modernism and the urban
“third culture” – the naivety.
Including “Old Tbilisi”, created with technique.
By the way, this picture was displayed at an exhibition dedicated to the 10 th anniversary of the
Great October Social Revolution in 1927.
That same year in 1927, Ioseb Grishashvili published Yetim Gurji’s “The Poems of the Hero Ana (Baji)”
with anonymous illustrations.
The only surviving copy has Grishashvili’s inscription: “the pictures of Felix Varlamishvili”.
In the letter dated 1973, the artist confesses – my works have a good outcome and think I have improved
the quality of the works too;
The 70-year-old man is still thinking about quality!
Varla’s artistic “method” also pushes us to slightly change the point of view so that beyond the
fluctuations of taste and relativism we can discover an unknown element of massive aesthetic
consciousness;
In a portrait about David Schuttenberg, Abram Efros wrote that Paris requires patience from the mildly
talented, ironically comparing the latter with the virgins, who have been collecting their dowry for years
in order to turn into decently married provincial women.
Felix Varlamishvili as well patiently anticipated the time when he could be baptized as “Varla”.
Varla, our vagabond Georgian artist – they knew him as in Buenos Aires and in San Francisco, Detroit,
Tokyo, Osaka, Yokohama and Kyoto, as well as in Monte Carlo and Brussels, Monaco and Tehran... I
almost forgot to mention New York!
First and foremost, Varla was able to impress the Parisian public;
Since 1945, he has been called the “French artist” and a member of the “Autumn Salon” Society.
Turning into an internationally convertible author was a difficult business.
Nevertheless, he too had his own campaigners;
And they did their best to sculpt a good, and as they say now – “demanded” artist from Varla...
“The People’s artist of Paris”...
Had he stayed in his homeland, it would be uncertain whether he could become the People’s
Artist of Soviet Georgia!
But he loved Georgia and Georgian people as well!
From afar, maybe he even loves Soviet people too!

What’s important is that Varla’s topic was the people;
The people and their toil;
Their toil and pastime;
The working and idleness...

Employment and unemployment...

And in the world of labor, it is not "his excellency – the worker" who governs but the government;

And the power is nothing more than the representation of the Gestalt of the worker;

That is what Ernst Junger would say...

Varla was a working artist too;

Always employed with his favorite work...

And this essay too, I am afraid, has turned out to be the representation of his Gestalt...

2018 Tbilisi

Felix Varlamishvili's works can be found in museums, galleries and private collections in many countries. This album is presenting only part of the works that are kept in Georgia. Unfortunately, we did not have access to a very rich collection of works from abroad, but we hope that this part of the artist's cultural heritage can be published in the future.

Most of Felix Varla's drawings are not titled by the author; so the names, other than few exceptions, are, more conditional and derived from the picture's plot.

Also, most of the works are not dated by the author. It is known that the artist repeated the same plot in different variations in different years; often, when commissioned, he recreated an old piece and in order to avoid the error, the date was indicated only on the drawings, which were dated by the author himself.

Chardin Art Gallery

PAUL SONNENBERG

FELIX VARLA

Felix Varlamishvili /Felix Varla/ Born on May 13, 1903 in Kutaisi, Georgia. The country in the south of the Caucasus. He died in Paris in 1986. Felix was an artist from childhood. While still in the village, he would run around the fields with coal pieces, pencils, papers and make sketches: he drew rural scenes, landscapes and the Caucasus Mountains.

Northern regions of the Georgian Caucasus were less affected by revolutionary tensions.

In 1921, after receiving secondary education, Felix enrolled at Agrarian University. In 1923, right after the founding of the Academy of Arts, he was admitted to the Academy, where his teachers were Eugene Lanceray, Gigo Gabashvili and Joseph Charlemagne.

Since 1926, his works have been exhibited at the Academy of Art. In 1927, the country celebrated the 5th anniversary of the founding of the Academy and the 10th anniversary of the revolution. Felix actively participates in the celebration of the festival as an artist. By this time, he was already dreaming of joining the "Paris School" artist.

After graduating from the Tbilisi Art Academy, Felix Varlamishvili established his own art school, which prepares young students for the Academy of Arts.

During this period, the artist works on the state order – he was tasked to create Ioseb Stalin's first official portrait.

In 1928, Varla was arrested for illegally crossing the Turkish border. Even in detention, he finds ways to draw. His works appear in the hands of the head of a prison, who turns out to be an art lover and frees him. In 1929, Varla would cross illegally into Bosphorus, Greece, Albania and Italy in order to get to Paris.

Felix Varlamishvili was accepted among the artistic circles of Montparnasse from the very beginning; with their support he held his first exhibition at the "Speranza" Gallery. Collectors have become interested in Varla's art...

During this period, Felix Varlamishvili has the same financial problems as all other artists of the Parisian school and sells his works for mere bread.

At this time he meets the young Danish painter Zire Binder. It was love at first sight and they were soon married.

A newlywed couple travels to Europe. For a few months they stopped in Brussels and Amsterdam. In Copenhagen, the father of Varla's spouse, a large entrepreneur, introduces the artist in official cultural circles. For several years, he has worked in Copenhagen...

Varla feels the influence of his Georgian idols – Niko Piroshmanashvili and Lado Gudiashvili.

His rather self-sufficient, unique, artistic language is formed through abstractionism.

Whether a rural landscape or scenes from life, the artist attributes his paintings with an unbelievable hue of transparent colors from coating.

Varla's artistic vision is characterized by stylized images of humans, with refined, slightly pointed features of faces. There is a strong inner feeling hidden in a constantly nostalgic, seemingly calm and naive artistic form.

One of his creative stages is called "Blanche", where the line dominates the painting. Its "unclean" white color is defining the artistic representation of these works. Once, while talking about such issues, Varla told me: "My whites are the fur of Georgian sheep, which is washed only after it is turned into wool".

The artist tried to reach for perfection. He could have spent all day in front of one engraving or drawing. At that time he seemed to be part of eternity.

Naturally the perfectionist Varla created only about 30 works per year. At the same time, he had preliminary responsibilities with the collectors.

Varla's sketches created for materials are associated with Cocteau's creations.

During World War II, his life in France, as a "Russian emigrant" was very hard. For a long time, Varla lived in complete isolation and spent the whole time painting.

In 1945, after a hard time of war, Varla became a French citizen. That same year he will be joining Salon D'Automne, and from then on, one of his paintings was displayed here annually.

Since 1946 the French state has regularly purchased his creations. In 1948 he had a desire to get acquainted with South America. Varla leaves with his wife for Argentina, where he will succeed soon. For the next 4 years he has exhibited in Buenos Aires, at the gallery Viau. Despite the success, in 1952, due to nostalgia, the family returned to France.

From this period, I had the happiness to be a friend of Varla and his wife. I became an expert in his art and we consistently discussed priorities in dealing with buyers from different countries.

It was not easy for friends to persuade Varla to exhibit his works in famous galleries scattered around the world: the Speranza Gallery in Paris, Drouant in Belgium, Van Dormael in Brussels, Galaxis in Detroit, Continental Fine Arts in New York, Viau in Buenos Aires, Takashimyan in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Yokohama, as well as the lae Gallery in Tehran.

Usually silent, restrained in society, Varla would express his philosophical beliefs about people or events only in our private conversations.

Success did not change the artist's calm and bright life. He remained faithful to his little workshop in Paris, in Daguerre Street.

At the end of his life, he had health problems due to cardiovascular problems. Thanks to his spouse, who led and dealt with everything (medication, vacation, work, travel, necessary contacts and sales), Varla continued his creative life. Here lies the mystery of his calmness and nobility.

On February 6, 1986, Varla's heart stopped. Along with him disappeared his wise gaze and "Giocondian" smile.

A great friend is gone. Usually, the emptiness, left after the loss of loved ones, makes us understand how important they really were.

His art will live forever for future generations.

While alive, Varla put aside 1 large and 9 small oil paintings. Each of them depicts a scene or a landscape related to his native Georgia. His wish was that these 10 works were kept at the Georgian State Museum of Art, where they were already keeping the paintings created by Varla in his youth. Together with the Embassy of the Soviet Union to France, me and Varla's wife made sure that his will was fulfilled.

On March 27, 1987, the museum held an inauguration of the hall with his name. The director of the museum, Tamaz Sanikidze, noted: "Varla's 10 new works in our collection, together with 47 already existing paintings, will occupy an important place among other works by great artists from our country. We are proud of him. The exposition of his works at the Soviet Union's great museums is under way".

We hope to see this exposition. We thank his wife Zire, who greatly helped us in preparation of this catalog.

1988 Paris

Paul Sonneberg used to be Felix Varla's French art dealer and consultant since 1952 until the end of his days. In 1988 he published a catalogue with all works he had sold.

VARLA. TBILISI, 2018

