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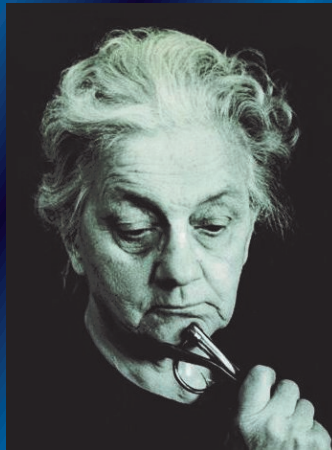
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Elene Akhvlediani
Georgia



**DIOGEN pro culture
magazine ... a month for
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you ...**





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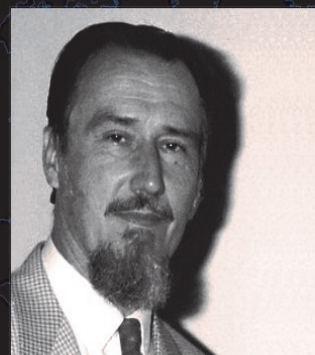
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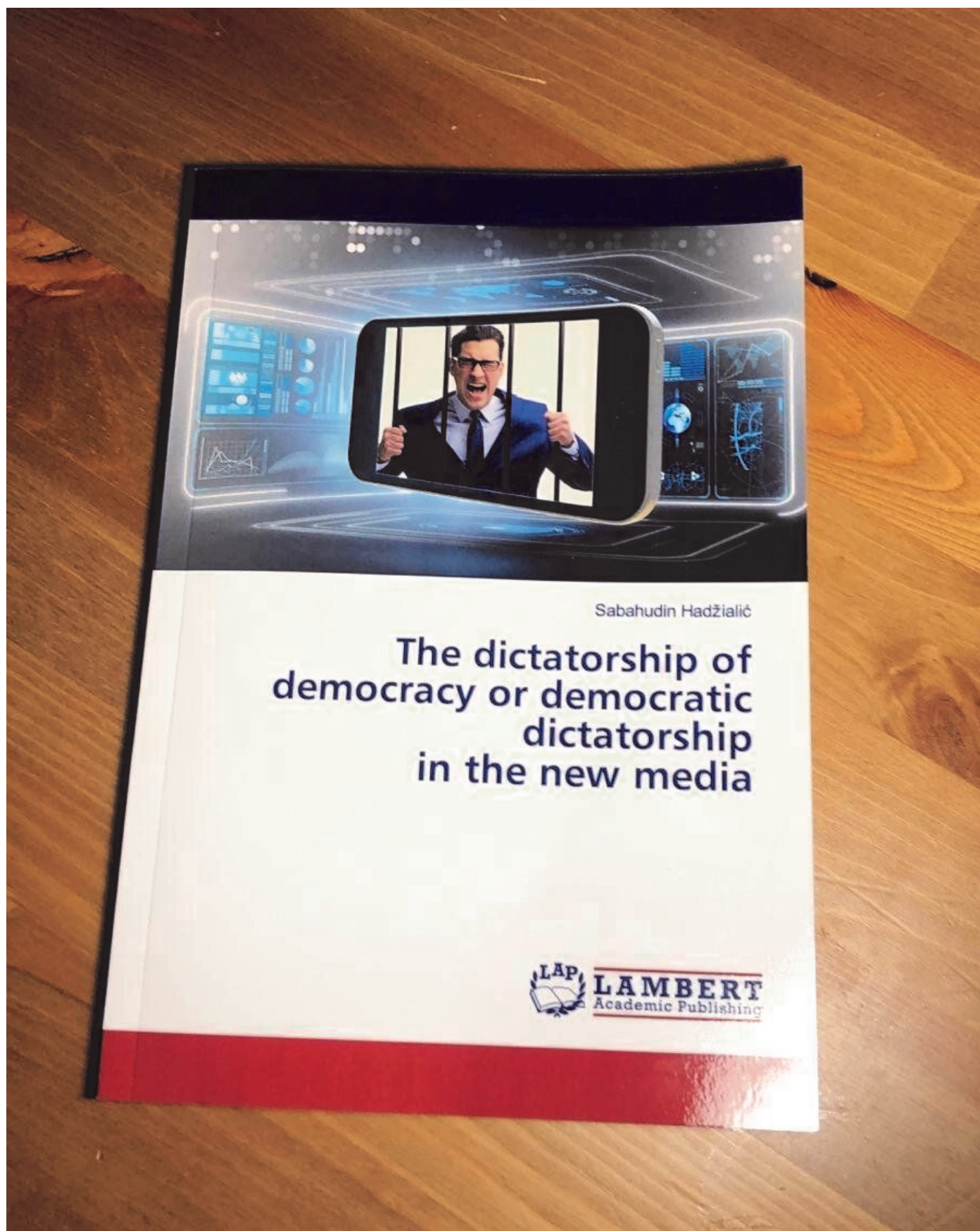
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Elene Akhvlediani

Elene Akhvlediani (1901-1975) was a 20th century Georgian painter, graphic artist, and theater decorator. Akhvlediani is famous for her depictions of Georgian towns, for her illustrations for the works of Ilia Chavchavadze and Vazha-Pshavela, and for designing plays in the Marjanishvili Theater in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Elena Akhvlediani, just as the other artists of her generation – David Kakabadze, Lado Gudiashvili and Keto Magalashvili – started her works in the early decades of the twentieth century. These masters' achievements, based on the legacy of national and European cultures, have largely determined the distinctive features of Georgian art and have not lost their importance to this day.

The interests of Akhvlediani were diverse and included painting, drawing, stage and costume design, and book illustration. But she has gone down in the history of Georgian art as, above all, a master of genre and lyrical landscape painting. Especially prominent in her artistic legacy are the views of Tbilisi, the city in which she had lived many years, which she loved as her own, and to the preservation of whose historical peculiarities she had given much of her energies. The artist's studio, in one of the Tbilisi twisting streets, was indeed a cultural center. The place where artists, actors, musicians, poets and her numerous friends often gathered. The character and inclinations of Akhvlediani had formed in her childhood and had little changed with the passing of time.

Her parents were people out of the common. Her father, Dimity Akhvlediani, born in a poor family, in his youth earned his living by giving private lessons. After finishing secondary school in 1884, he became a student of the Kharkov university medical department. His participation in students' disturbances, arrest and the subsequent expulsion and blacklisting would have deprived him of the opportunity of completing his education, if not for the protection of one of the professors, who supported the talented student.

Dimity Akhvlediani entered the Odessa university, this time the natural sciences department. His works as a student on the structure of the Odessa granite and the origin of oil were met with much interest among specialists and opened up bright prospects to the young man. Nevertheless the love of medicine proved stronger, and, having finished the university, Akhvlediani entered the St. Petersburg military medical academy. Again years of study followed under the guidance of such most prominent specialists as S. Botkin, I. Pavlov and I. Tarkhanov. His studies at the academy completed, he returned to Georgia and wholly devoted himself to his favourite occupation. Purposefulness and will in Dimity Akhvlediani were combined with his natural subtlety, feeling and imagination.

We still have his poems which he dedicated to his wife, Elizabeth Eristavi. They were an excellent couple. Elizabeth, a princess by birth, shared her husband's democratic views and helped him in all his undertakings, including the establishment of a free outpatient clinic. Elizabeth also had to shoulder the family cares: the education of five children, singing lessons, and book reading in the evening. One could often hear Georgian songs sung in their home.

Elena Akhvlediani had a beautiful voice. As it was her dream to become a singer, she intensively studied singing. Having chosen the profession of an artist, she did not give up music. "Indeed, I love music more than all other arts, even my own," she wrote in one of her letters. But that was later.

In 1922 Akhvlediani entered the painting department of the Tiflis Academy of Arts. The class was conducted by Gigo Gabashvili, the acknowledged master of genre and portrait painting, who had received education in Russia and followed the traditions of Russian realistic painting. He loved his native Tiflis and created an interesting series of images of its typical inhabitants: artisans, butchers, hawkers, as well as men and women of the wealthy sections. Akhvlediani, however, was attracted not so much by portrait as by genre and urban landscape painting. While studying at the Academy, she continued sketching in the Tiflis streets under the direction of Boris Fogel. "<...>The northerner, keenly sensitive of the rich colours of the south," like as many others, was charmed by the inimitability of the city, and that could not but influence his students' attitude to work.



Akhvlediani watched with interest the everyday life of Tiflis and of the Georgian provinces, the range of her favourite subjects gradually taking shape. They were the cosy quiet Telavi, the seaside Batumi with its tearooms and bazaars, the interior of the old houses, and architectural monuments. Her attention was attracted by the peasants from Kakheta in their national costumes, the musha porters carrying with the perseverance of ants most diverse loads over the Tiflis pavements. One can feel in the pencil drawings and in the water-colours of that time free use of the material and the ability to generalize and to convey what is most typical. Unfortunately, few drawings made in Tiflis itself have been preserved. These few sketches proved very useful abroad, where Akhvlediani, a first-year student who showed considerable abilities, was sent in 1922 as a scholarship-holder of the Academy of Arts.

She spent about two years in Italy. Rome, Milan and especially Venice stunned her by their beauty. Akhvlediani tried to see as much as possible and deeply to understand the culture of the wonderful country. She studied the Italian language and was drawing a great deal. She did not have, of course, time enough, and, regretting it, the artist left this characteristic inscription on one of the books: "Oh, what an idiot I am, God forgive me! I am sitting at the tailor's and waiting for my jacket to be ready, reading this book and, overjoyed because I understood almost everything. I was about to kiss the tailor! On the one hand, I want to see things and, on the other, how exasperatingly fast time passes, and I am doing nothing, though sometimes my fingers itch to work..."

During her work of several decades, Akhvlediani made stage and costume designs for over seventy plays. She cooperated with different stage directors but her association with Mardjanishvili and his profound and precise criticisms and advice were of special importance to her. , From the mid-thirties and then in the fifties Akhvlediani made a great deal of drawings for books. She illustrated works of foreign classics and Georgian writers, mostly for children and the youth. Not every interpretation of book illustration can now be accepted but mention must certainly be made of the graphic culture and mastery of execution of most of the works and Akhvlediani's striving to find her own way in art.

A comparison of the books illustrated by the artist shows, above all, the diversity of manners and styles. Illustrations for Mark Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* are pen-and-ink drawings. They include both swift line drawings and scenes drawn in detail.

The illustrations for the Georgian fairy-tale *A Woman Butterfly* arouse admiration by the finesse of the pen drawing and the impressive contrast of large black and white surfaces. Illustrating Pshavela's tales, Akhvlediani in her pen-and-ink drawings approached more than in other books, the style of woodcut, while in the illustrations for Ninoshvili's short stories, made in gouache, her style was close to that of linocut. Akhvlediani's rich colouring has its own character and its own sources to be found in the peculiarities of her creative work. The impact of the theatre is undoubtedly felt here. The influence is evident in the compositional aspect of such pictures as *Kakheta* (1960) and *Approaching Storm* (1971), in which space is dealt with as a stage. A sunbeam piercing the clouds illumines like a spotlight the central part of the picture, whereas the foreground and the background, as frequently also the sides are plunged in semi-darkness. On the whole Akhvlediani's landscapes are characterized by diversity of spatial constructions. They contain various series of compositions emphasizing the depth. Space can be develop upwards or diagonally. Sometimes on the canvas the artist combines various fragments of landscapes. The desire to diversify compositional and spatial solutions is especially evident in the landscapes of the sixties and the seventies. At that time the artist travelled a great deal in Georgia, together with a group of painters and graphic artists she had organized. The works she created as the result of these journeys show little towns and mountain villages, architectural monuments, and landscapes of splendid harmony. One of Akhvlediani's interesting landscape cycles is devoted to Djvari, a superb monument of medieval Georgian architecture. In her pictures the temple appears in different aspects: now it severely and powerfully comes forward from the folds of the hills and then looms against the sky as a fantastic mirage. Akhvlediani's rich colouring has its own character and its own sources to be found in the peculiarities of her creative work. The impact of the theatre is undoubtedly felt here. The influence is evident in the compositional aspect of such pictures as *Kakheta* (1960) and *Approaching Storm* (1971), in which space is dealt with as a stage.

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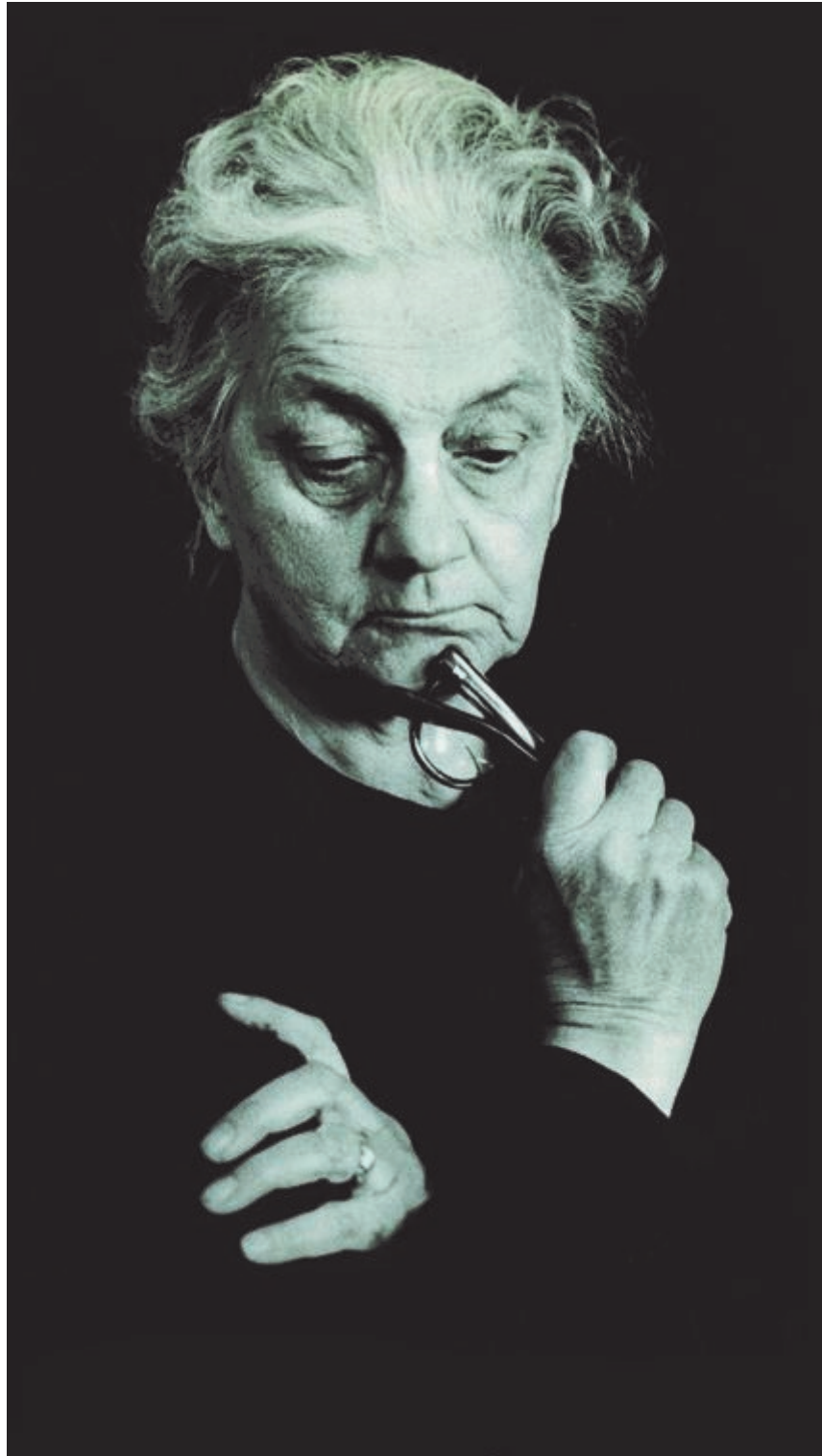
Without leaving painting, Akhvlediani in the last decade of her life was paying ever more attention to drawing. The technique of her graphic works of that time is of special interest. In one sheet use is made simultaneously of lead pencil, water-colours or gouache, which the artist does over with pastel, crayon or wax chalk, Indian ink or felt-pen. Each of these material has its structure, its own unique quality and, frequently, its strictly definite colour. But when applied to white or coloured paper, it has a different quality. Experimenting with materials, laying one over another and combining in one work the transparency of watercolour, the silvery quality of the lead pencil and the velvety quality of pastel, the artist achieved complicated pictorial and structural effects. Its city views began losing their former decorativeness and became more subtle as regards their colours. In Tbilisi landscapes, there appeared a wonderfully delicate silvery-grey tone, in the opinion of many who know this city, its characteristic dominant colour. The views of Tbilisi, the work of several decades, make up a sort of a chronicle of the city. In the sixties and seventies, the theme of the old Tbilisi ever more frequently appeared in Akhvlediani's art. With special pleasure the artist finds picturesque details of the life of the old streets and houses pressed by the new buildings. Now and then she as though reconstructs the recent past of her native city, portraying a row of carpet stalls or an old dukhan (a Caucasian inn). But behind the amusing details of the outgoing life, noticed with such subtle humour, one can feel excruciating nostalgia for the city of her youth becoming a thing of the past, for the simple and somewhat patriarchal relations between neighbours that had developed in the traditional Tiflis home, where each one of the inhabitants is seen through by the other. The outgoing, rapidly changing city meant, moreover, the departing friends, to whom Akhvlediani was infinitely devoted. The artist's life is inconceivable in isolation from the people who surrounded her. People attracted her and she attracted people, although her temper could not be called easy. She was an uncompromising person who could not tolerate duplicity in relations. "Awfully just," as one of her friends put it, she was sometimes very harsh in her words, appraisals and actions but that was because she was invariably pained by her friends' mistakes because she loved them so much and had a truly kind and generous heart. Those who were closely acquainted with her invariably realized that. Her studio less of all resembled a temple of art where masterpieces were created in silence and seclusion. Someone of the friends or colleagues would always drop in. A student of architecture, who happened to enter the house in search of lodging for the period of his studies in Tbilisi, lived several years in the attic of her flat. Akhvlediani took care of him and strictly controlled his studies. The studio was frequented by her neighbours' children. To children the artist gave special attention. It was in her studio that the city's first exhibition of children's drawings was held. The artist also helped to create the children's picture gallery in Tbilisi, which has now become one of the most interesting centres of aesthetic education named after her. In her studio the artist often arranged personal exhibitions of works of her colleagues: V. Beletskaya, V. Shukhayev and, of course, report-back exhibitions of the members of the team of painters she organized for the tour of the republic, which had played a considerable role in the development of Georgian landscape painting: Natalia Pilavandishvili, Pyotr Bletkin, Eteri Andronikashvili, Anna Shalikashvili, Klara Kvess, and others. A festive, unconstrained atmosphere prevailed on the opening days. There were so many people that the floors of the old house seemed to be about to give way. There were held also musical and literary soirees, the performers including such outstanding musicians of our time as Neigauz and Richter.

The studio was a cultural centre of the city, and it has remained one after the opening in 1978 of the Akhvlediani Memorial House. As in the artist's lifetime, it is always crowded. The staff of the museum carefully preserve the interiors of the studio ingeniously furnished by Akhvlediani herself, and also books and collections. They carry on important research work, collecting material about the life and work of Elena Akhvlediani, and are compiling a full catalogue of her productions. It is remarkable how its special atmosphere has been preserved in this wonderful house, where today, too, one can often hear poetry, music and Georgian songs and where friends of the artist come together.

Source:

Elene Akhvlediani

[Wikipedia – Elene Akhvlediani](#)





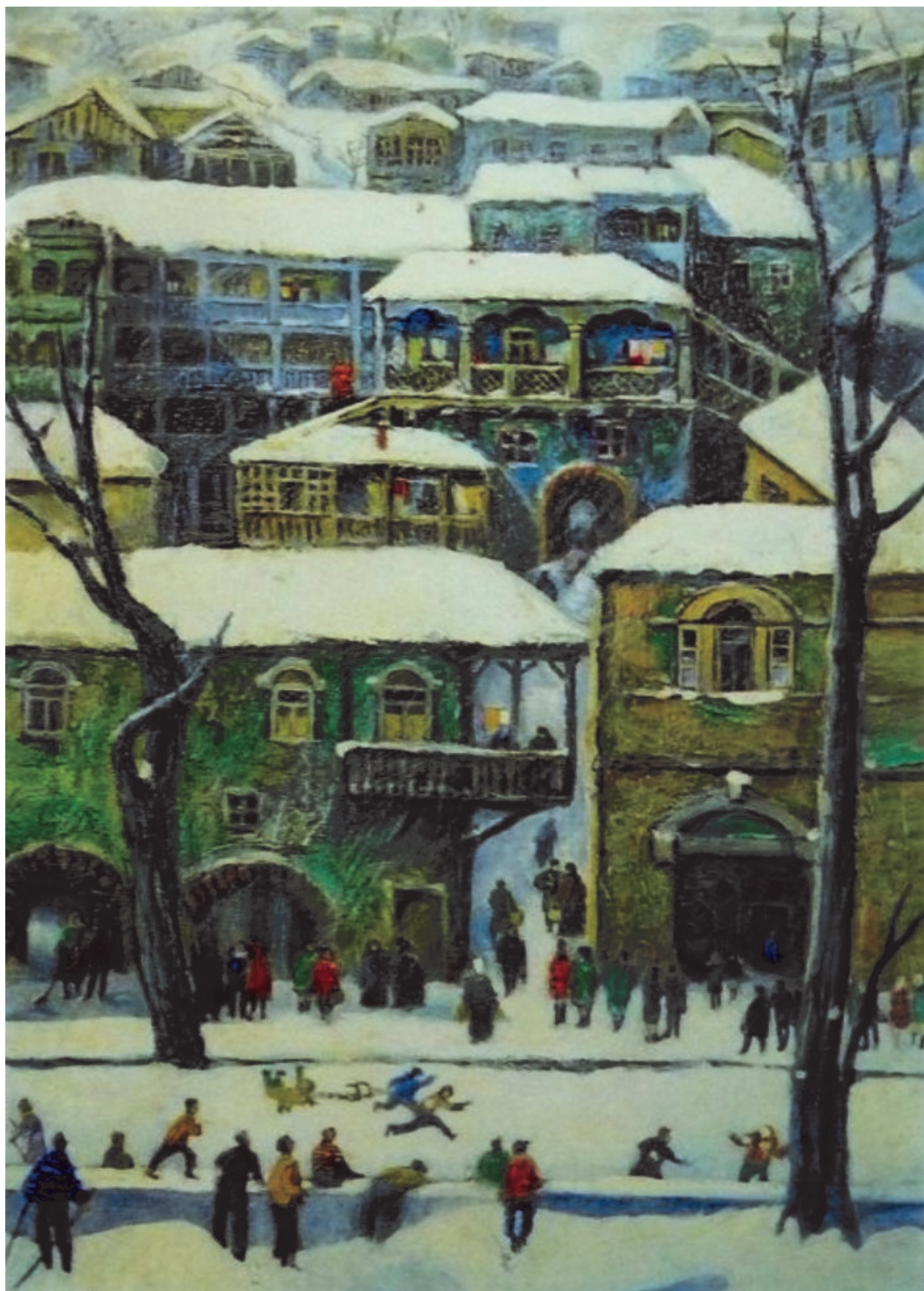








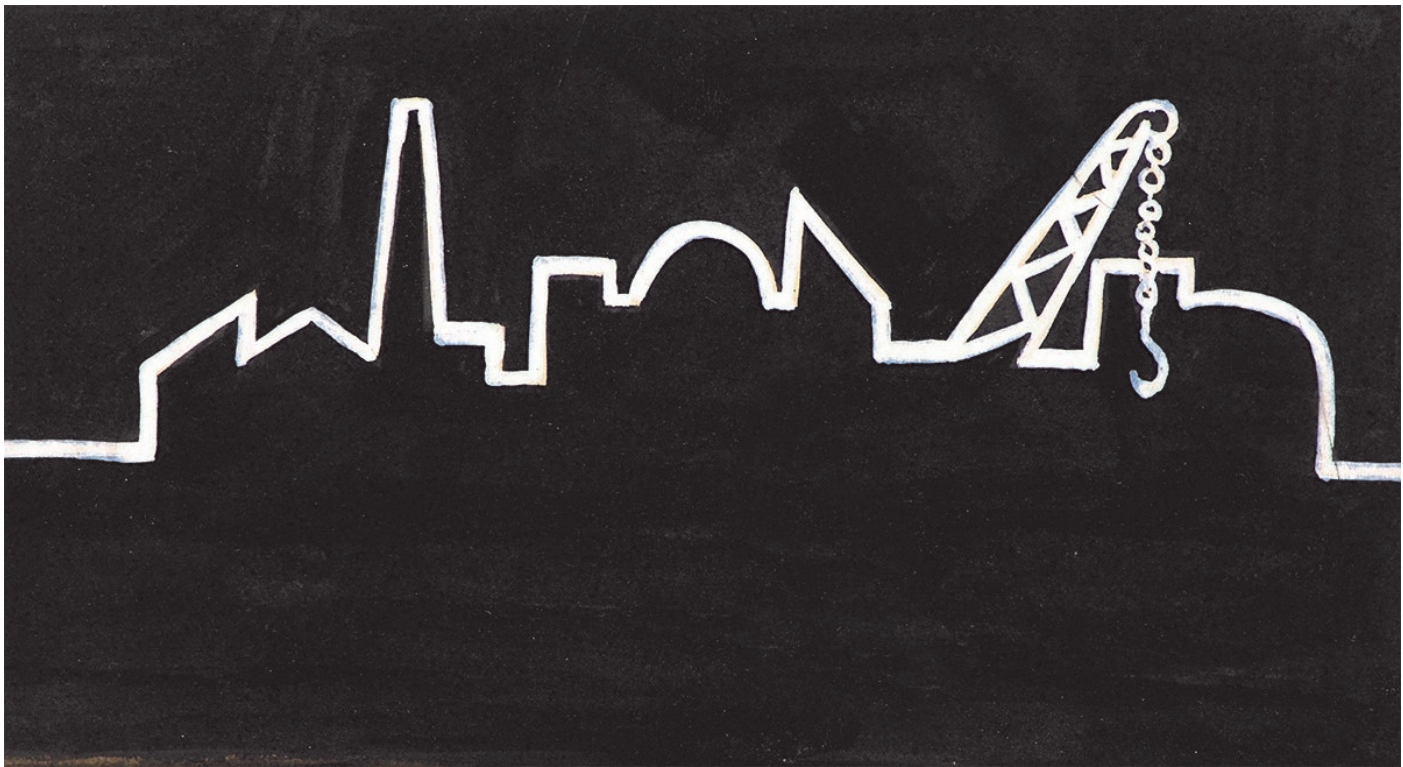






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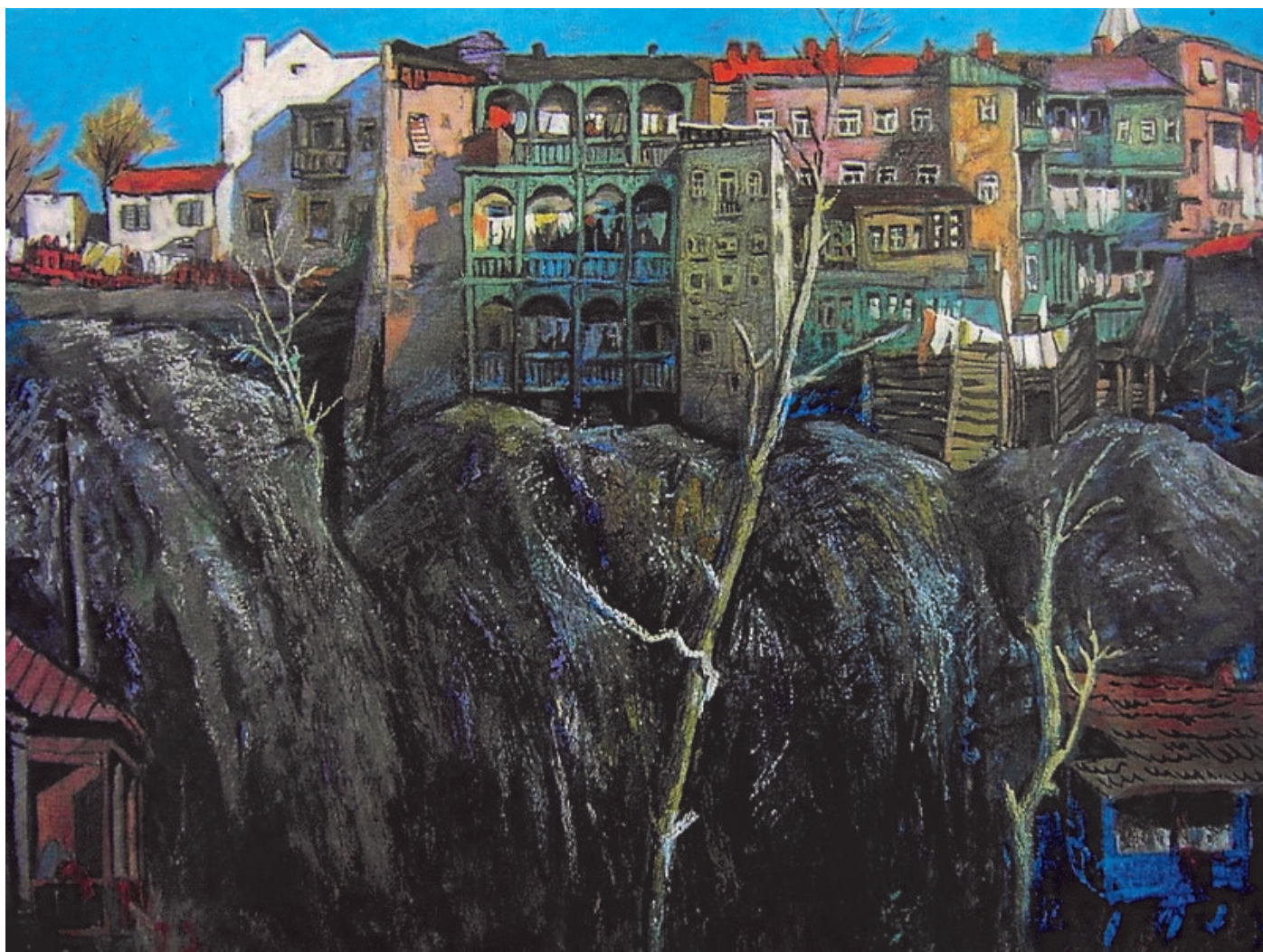




























Self—portrait



A corner of Old Tbilisi



Abastumani



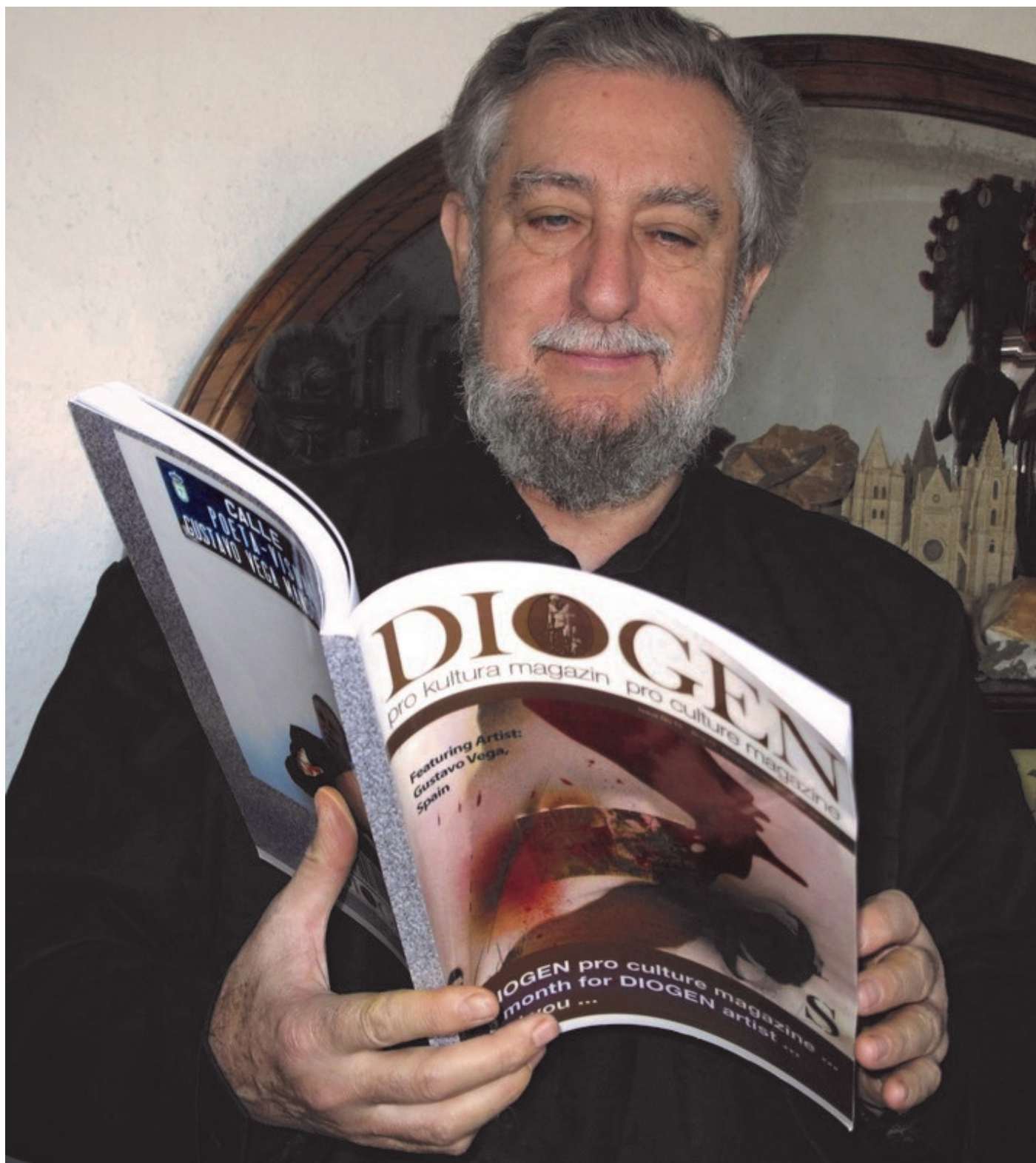
Ananuri



Bakuriani, winter



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Landscape



Landscape





Old Tbilisi



Old Tbilisi



Old Tbilisi



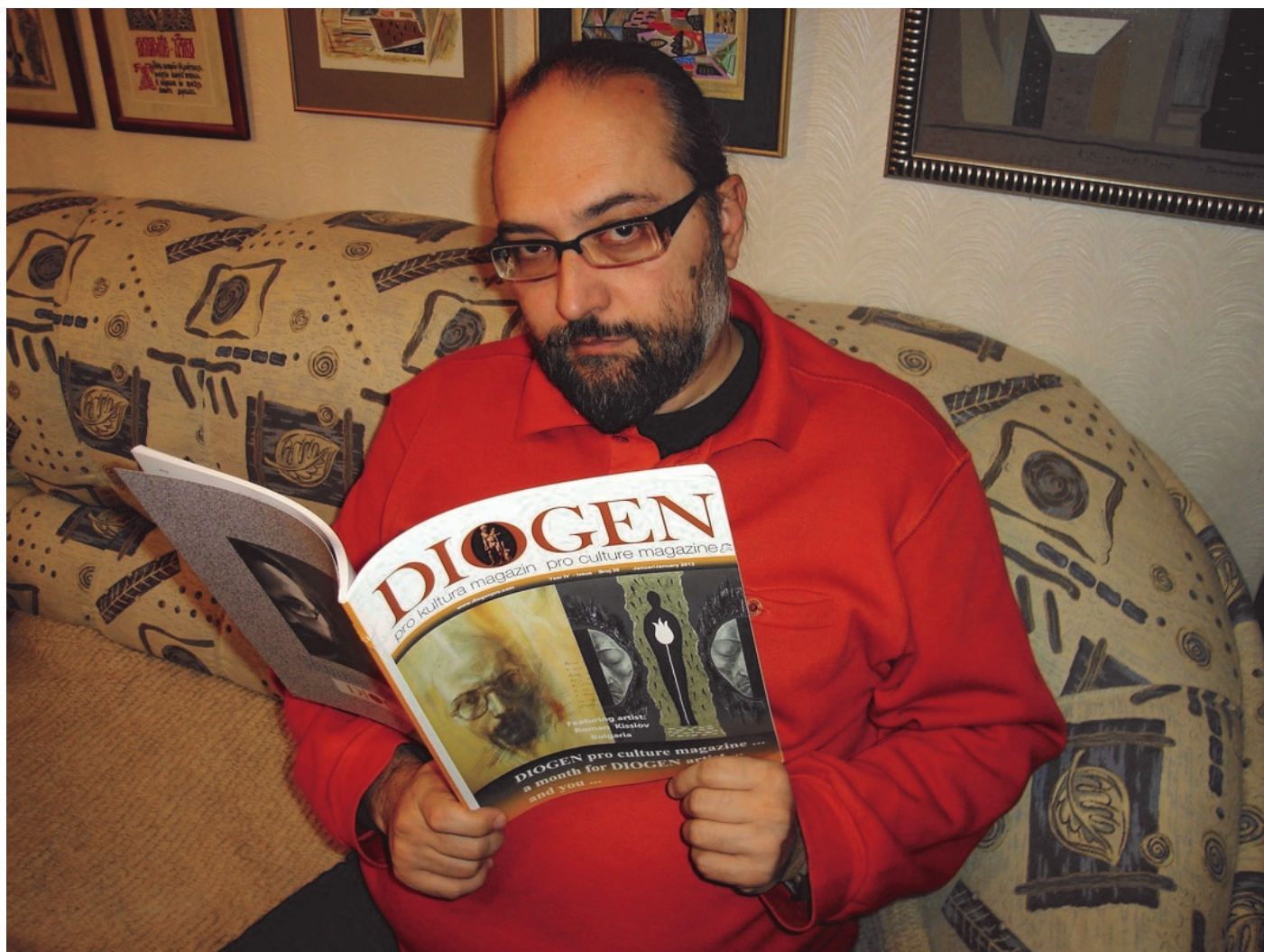
Paris



The rain



The rest on the way





Shatili



Signagi



Streets of Paris



Trees



Winter in Tbilisi





Winter in the village



Winter



Winter



Winter



Yar in Imereti







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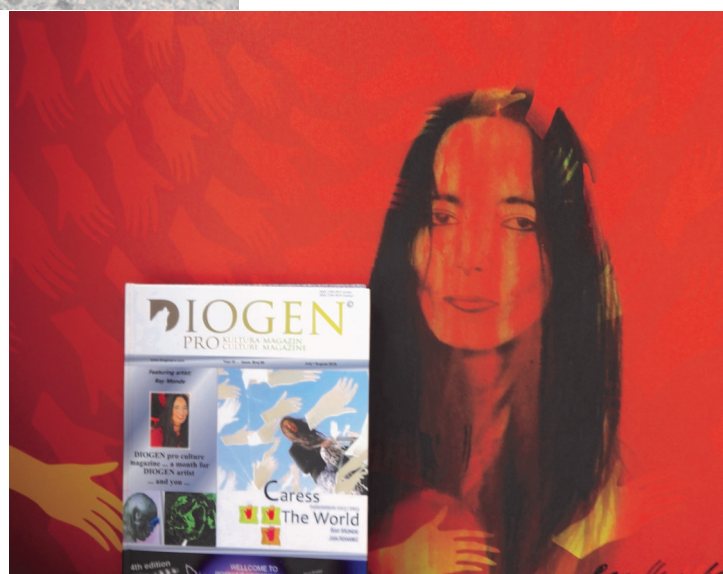
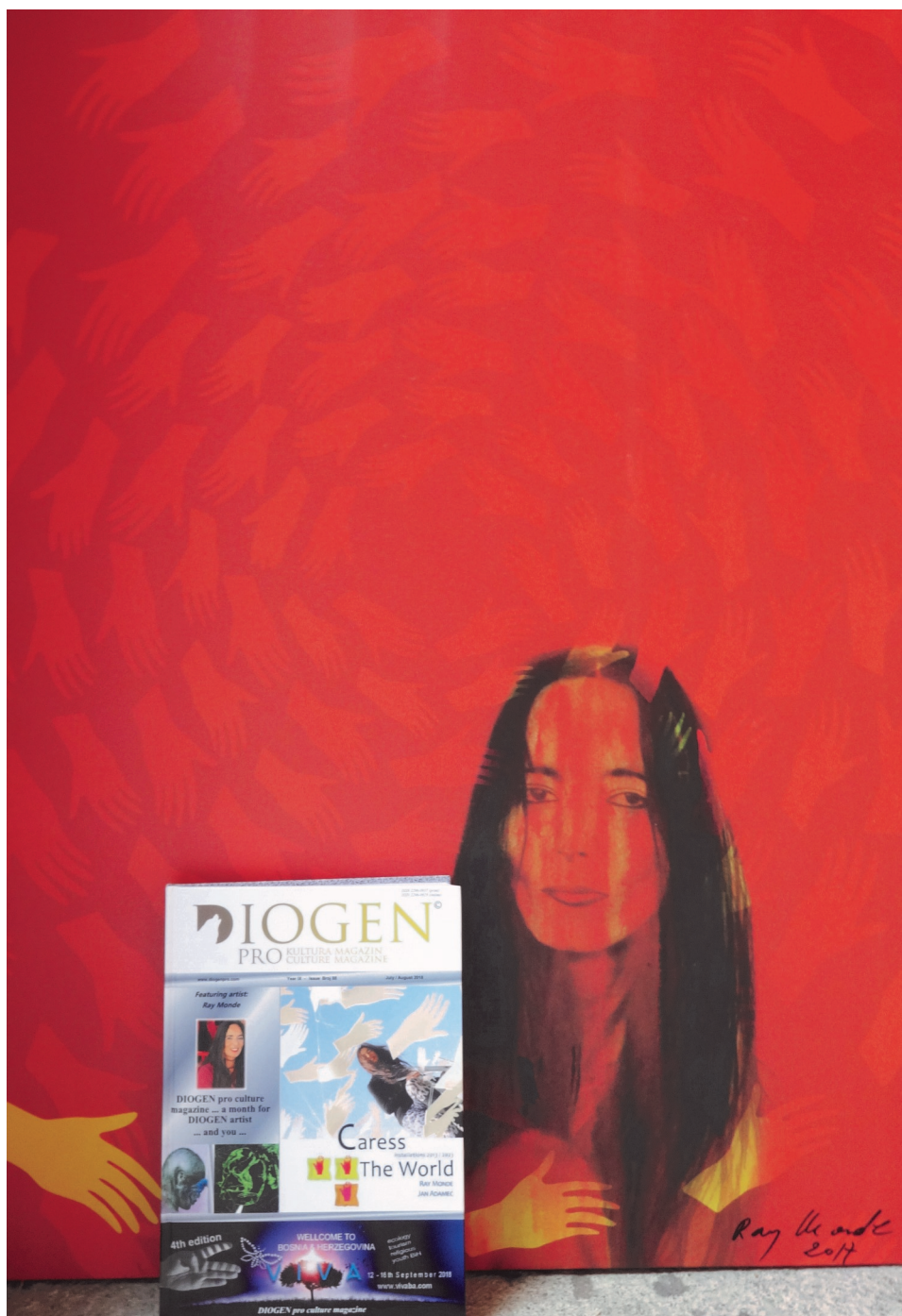
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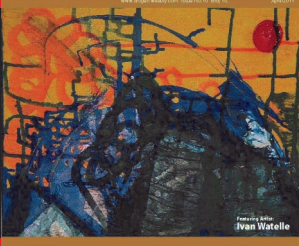
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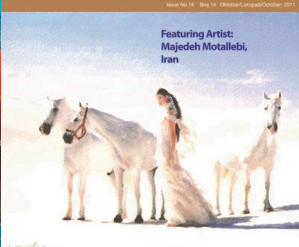




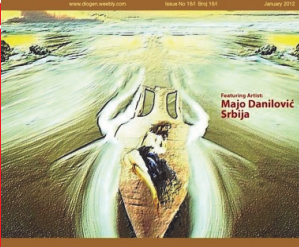
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