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The Doe-Eyed Girl: The Face of Post-Stalinist Georgian Modernism

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Abstract: In 1968 a Polish journalist, describing her visit to Tbilisi, wrote of a certain face in the crowd she seemed to encounter at every step. It was the face of a girl, a "Doe-eyed girl" whom she first encountered in the lobby of Hotel "Tbilisi": "She appeared in profile, her head was turned downwards, lost in thought….I lost count of my meetings with this girl… At almost every step I run into her face to face." This face in the crowd was, in fact, an endlessly reproduced embossed metal fresco (Russian and Georgian *chekanka*, Georgian *ch'eduri*) of an ethnographically typical Khevsur Georgian girl of the mountains, who becomes the stereotypical "face" of Georgian post-Stalinist "traditional-modernist" art, especially a secularized revival of metallic frescos traditionally associated with sacred icons. This "[traditional] face in the [modern] crowd", its insistent iconographic secularization and inversion of the religious icon, and recurrent distribution across modernist urban spaces, formed a local Georgian version of what Krisztina Fehérváry has elsewhere called, with respect to Hungary, "socialist modernism", a local Georgian version of a series of post-Stalinist modernist forms across socialist space that became, in each context, the local "brand of socialism". At the same time as the *chekanka*, as a form, represents a specifically socialist achievement of post-Stalinist modernist aesthetics, its iconography makes the *chekanka* a secular socialist version of the sacred icon, in which the 2-dimensional space of the *chekanka* depicts an unattainable, mythic secular "elsewhere" of the nation in contrast with socialist modernity. The face of the Khevsur girl reveals the ambiguities of the daydreams of the Georgian urban intelligentsia, a city filled with modernist buildings decorated with mythic images of the national past. The stereotyped face [Russian *tipazh*, Georgian *t'ip'azhi*] of the Khevsur girl, facing away, looking down at a flower, replaces both the religious image of the saint on the icon and the socialist *tipazh*em> of the worker or peasant in the propaganada poster. The world of the *chekanka*em> embodies a new kind of secular mythology of the

nation, which flattens out and decouples characters from genres of myth, legend, folklore, history and fantasy. It produces a kind of timeless daydream "elsewhere" of the national essence opposed to the workaday world of socialism which now had two complementary or competing teleologies, the timeless world of the nation and the coming world of communism.

Keywords: Soviet art, thaw, faces, socialist realism, icon

A Face in the City

In 1968 a Polish journalist, describing her visit to Tbilisi, the capital of the Georgian socialist republic, wrote of a certain face in the crowd she seemed to encounter at every step, the face of a "doe-eyed girl":

> I first noticed this girl in the hotel 'Tbilisi.' She appeared in profile, she was looking downwards, lost in thought, her eyes resembled those of a doe, her hair cut in bangs, she wore some kind of embroidered blouse. I saw the unknown girl the second time when I was leafing through newspapers in a kiosk on Rustaveli boulevard, her face reflected the sun, completely golden, and it was as if she was happier. After that I lost count of my encounters with this girl. I have seen her face in a modern restaurant, in the Metro station, whilst wandering in blind alleys in Old Tbilisi. At almost every step I run into her face to face. (Ivashkevichi 1968: 28)

For this journalist, Tbilisi seemed to be haunted by the face of this girl with downcast eyes. The enigma of this ubiquitous stranger is soon resolved: this face is a face embossed in metal, the face of a Khevsur Girl, that is, a girl from the most traditional mountain region of Georgia. The specific image she is speaking of, entitled simply "Khevsur Girl" (Guram Gabashvili 1962), is a particularly famous exhibition piece of the type, but it is neither unique nor original: in the 1960s, a whole series of images of Khevsur girls were made by young Georgian artists, including Irak'li Ochiauri or Koba Guruli, innovators in this form, as well as many other similar images or copies produced en masse by nameless artists sold for home decoration (Figure 1) in the SSP (*Sakartvelos Samkhat'vro Pondi*, Georgian Art Fund) salon on Rustaveli avenue in Tbilisi (Figure 2). Tbilisi, from the 1960s on, was indeed a place where one might encounter the face of this Khevsur girl with downcast eyes, or countless others like her, at every step. The cityscape of Tbilisi—emblematic of Georgian socialist modernity—was haunted by the idealized face

of a traditional girl from the remote mountains of Georgia—emblematic of the timeless Georgian nation.

Figure 1. Left: Gabashvili's "Khevsur Girl" (1962), right: Ochiauri's "Khevsur Girl" (1967).

In terms of both iconography, material and technique, the face of this "Khevsur Girl" is emblematic of a new art form that characterized Georgian Post-Stalinist art of the 1960s, Georgian embossed metal work (*Chekanka* informally in Russian and Georgian, in Georgian the formal term is *ch'eduroba, ch'eduri khelovneba*, I will henceforth use the term chekanka for all versions of this metal art form, from monumental forms to those designed for interior display.) Chekanka was one of a series of new Georgian art forms originated by Georgian artists during the Khrushchev Thaw, including ceramics, that was paradoxically both contemporary and yet seemingly steeped in national traditions of technique and iconography, "simultaneously young and old. It has been born before our eyes but its origins belong to the deepest antiquity" (Erlashova 1974: 16). By the early 1960s, chekanka, specifically in the form of embossed images of Khevsur girls that had been pioneered by the artist Irakli Ochiauri, himself a Khevsur, had become a particularly visible, even ubiquitous, exemplar of the post-Stalinist aesthetic turn, and came to emblematize the new modern face of the socialist city of Tbilisi at the same time. The Polish journalist assiduously traces all the places in Tbilisi where she encountered the face of this girl. The journalist concludes: "The 'Khevsur Girl' is as if a symbol of the renaissance of old Georgian metalwork. The face of the Khevsur girl today smiles at us from the covers of tourist brochures (catalogs), post cards, posters. She is part of the interiors of restaurants, movie theatres, and stores, adorns bracelets, medallions, cups." (Ivashkevichi 1968: 28)

Somehow the chekanka became the most ubiquitous exemplar of Georgian post-socialist art in the Soviet Union, becoming so identified with Georgian late socialism that it is now seen as one of the most despised forms of socialist kitsch (Ketevan Gurchiani, personal communication). Tracking the emergence of this art form, its form and iconography allows us to attend to many sea changes in material culture and aesthetics under late socialism. The success of chekanka owed a great deal to its material and ideological adaptability, and its alliances with post-Stalinist socialist aesthetic ideology, Georgian nationalism, architecture and film of the 1960s. The Khevsur girl makes a demure sideward glance both at the norms of socialist realism which she is replacing and at the sacred art of the Georgian icon that she is secularizing. Ubiquitously displayed in urban spaces, but depicting a timeless Georgian world absolutely opposed to urban modernity, she mediates between Georgian urban modernity and Georgian daydreams of a timeless nation, two worlds that would come to a head in the war-torn first years of postsocialist independence (Manning 2009).

A Brief History of the Chekanka

If one were to walk into the Georgian Art Fond (SSP) salon on Rustaveli Avenue next to the Theatre Institute at any time from the late 1960s to just after the end of socialism, one would be confronted with a wall of souvenir versions of these chekankas (P'et'erait'i 1968, Amirejibi 1971) (Figure 2). This would be a wall of faces, for the most part, of idealized Georgian women, usually in profile with a vaguely archaic style, reminiscent of a portrait from an ancient Greek vase, sold as souvenirs or for the decoration of the socialist domestic interior, itself a new “public” for Soviet art (Reid 2011).

Figure 2. Chekankas on the wall at Georgian Artfond (SSP) shop in late socialism, (Author, Date Unknown).

Such idealized faces of Georgian women, particularly “Khevsur Girls” in traditional garb, the work of artists like Irak’li Ochiauri, Guram Gabashvili or Koba Guruli, began appearing in public exhibitions in the early 1960s. Such faces eventually became the recognizable “face” of a new emblematic post-Stalinist Georgian modernist metalwork art form during the period of Khrushchev’s “Thaw.” This was an art form whose paradoxes and possibilities suited the new artistic environment of the post-Stalin period (Reid 1997, 2006, 2011): at once contemporary, modernist and socialist, and yet traditional and national in form as well as content, it represented an artistic renaissance with no direct connection or analogy in the past, but filled thematically with traditional images from the historical and ethnographic mythology of the nation. Chekankas could be found decorating not only in restaurants and homes in Georgia, but across the Soviet Union.

This didn’t happen all at once. Before the Khevsur girl could appear in the SSP salon, she needed to appear in an official exhibition (see Reid 2006 for the process). Ochiauri submitted two chekankas for exhibition in 1953 (along with two wood sculptures), one a bronze female portrait of the type that would later become famous, the other a more conventionally acceptable portrait of his teacher, Yakov Nikoladze. Neither work attracted much attention, and he did not submit another metal work to an exhibition for seven years (P'et'erait'i 1968, Melentievi 1976: 57). In the meantime, Ochiauri’s chekankas circulated informally and more successfully in the shadows as small miniatures on silver jewelry in the 1950s for personal adornment (Erlashova 1974: 18, Machabeli 1967: 42), inspired by similar artisanal jewelry appearing in Tbilisi from the Baltic Republics at that time, “there was born a desire for our own, national ornaments” and these silver miniatures fulfilled this desire (Qenia 1966: 12).

By the early 1960s, larger exhibition pieces by Ochiauri and Gabashvili began to appear at official exhibitions, and the form finally received the official stamp of approval, since it was one of many forms that filled a void at the end of the Stalin period: a need for a specifically Georgian version of the “contemporary style” (Reid 2011). But while it had desirable ideological properties, its formal properties ensured it could easily move from merely being acceptable to being ubiquitous in a short time. Chekanka could be adapted to diverse purposes and different scales from adding a monumental decoration onto the spare lines of new contemporary style buildings, to smaller pieces suitable for providing decoration for the interior of the socialist home and miniatures for personal decoration (Ochiauri 1973: 64) (Figure 3).

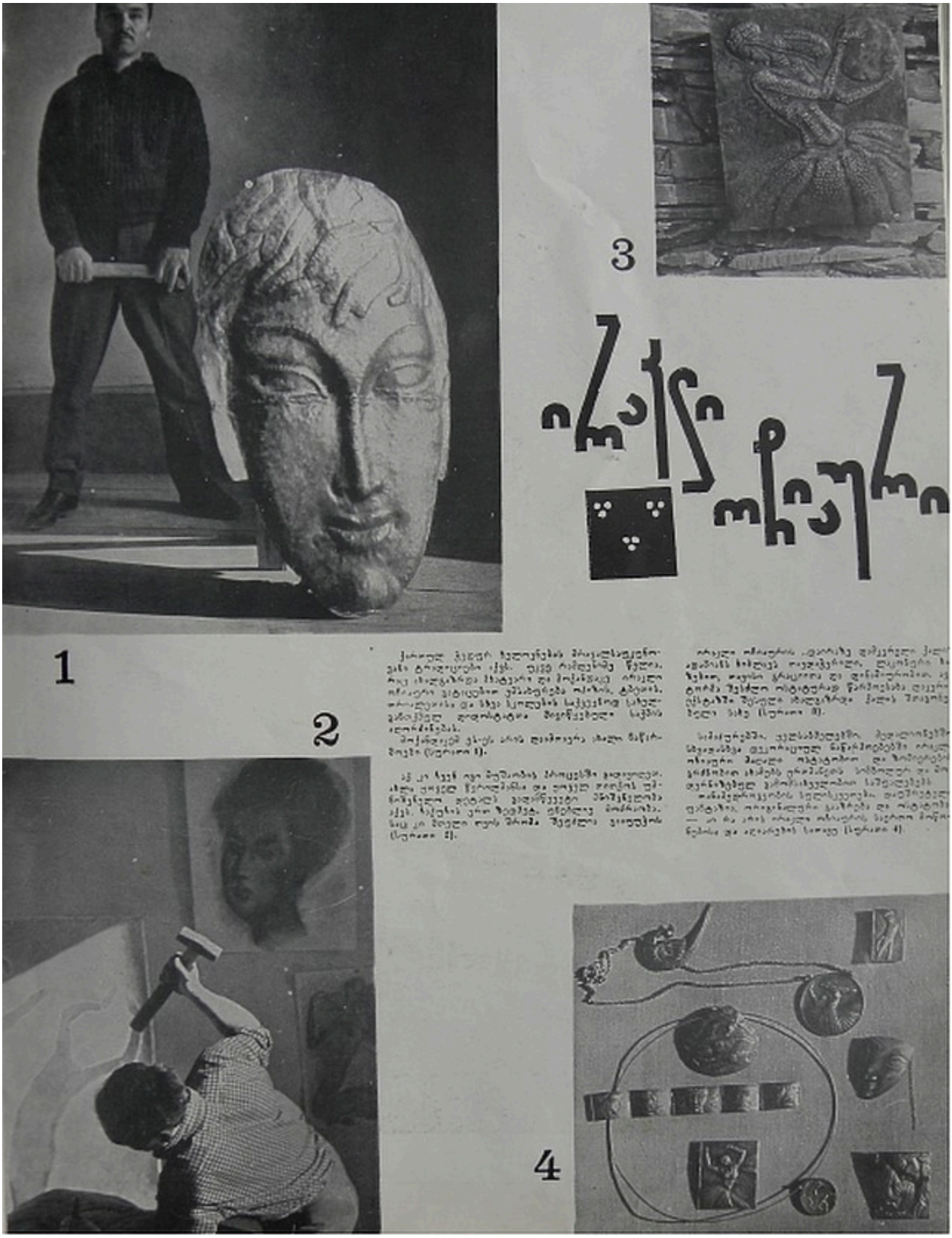

Figure 3. Irak'li Ochiauri's work in different scales and media: (1) Monumental-Exhibition, (2) sketch work and metal work, (3) decorative panels for the home or, as here, a "traditional" Khevsur domestic interior in a film set of the 1965 film *Khevsur Ballad*, (4) jewelry for personal decorations (Drosha 1965).

The “Khevsur Girl” is emblematic of what was variously called a (secular) “resurrection,” “revival,” or “renaissance” of a long dead Georgian tradition of gold metal art used primarily for religious icons. The way this form moved from being completely unknown in the 1950s to ubiquity in the 1960s indexes many sea changes within socialism at the level of ideology as well as material culture. But neither of the new forms of characteristic Georgian art of this period, ceramics and chekanka (Erlashova 1974), were created by some top-down official fiat: put in overly simple terms, the story is more one of “bottom up” artistic experimentation happening to meet up with a niche created for a new art form by ideological-aesthetic changes “at the top.”

First, the death of Stalin in 1953 and the subsequent “Thaw” under Khrushchev changed what was permissible as a socialist art form. A whole series of related, but distinct, aesthetic experiments of socialist modern aesthetics, a series of interrelated “contemporary styles” loosely inspired perhaps by Scandinavian modernism, became “the signature style of socialism” (Fehérváry 2009: 452) across the whole socialist space (Reid 1997, Buchli 1997, Crowley 1998, Fehérváry 2009). As in other Soviet socialist countries (Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact), the end of Stalinist aesthetic programs meant in part the autonomy of aesthetics or form from reference or narrative: “decoration,” “beauty,” practical applications of aesthetics to utilitarian objects of “everyday life,” and the use of the term “design” [*dizain*], all became permissible (Reid 1997: 178-180, Buchli 1997: 161-164).

Where Stalinism limited art to mimetic realism with a strong narrative tendency centered around classical forms of expression like easel painting (Reid 1997: 178, 2011: 362-363), artists were now free to explore both decoration and design for its own sake, engage in “formalist” experimentation with materiality without worries about reference, mimesis or narrative (concerns of “realism”), and apply art to the utilitarian concerns and reform of “everyday life”. As Erlashova (1974: 18) points out, the formal and technical properties of the chekanka positioned it as an intermediate form between “sculptural relief and the jeweler’s art of finish,” giving it an advantageous “specific duality” which allowed it to be exhibited either in the imitative art section or the decorative and applied arts section of a Soviet exhibition.

Furthermore, as Susan Reid argues, part of this sea-change involved recognizing that the socialist slogan “art for the masses” didn’t only mean monumental public art, a market that was difficult for new artists to get into, but that “art for the masses” could also mean “art for the *masses’ homes*, for individual, private consumption in domestic space, rather than streets, squares and museums” (Reid 2011: 358, original emphasis). This meant new legitimate publics for art under socialism: alongside state purchase for monumental display, there could also be quasi-private purchase for domestic display through the Art

Fond salons (Reid 2011: 358-361). Reid argues that such "formalist projects that valorized the autonomy of aesthetics and taste provided the means by which the *intelligentsia* could reconstitute itself and claim authority in the post-Stalin period: in these art forms, the 1960s marked a 'renaissance of the intelligentsia'" (Reid 1997: 180). Not only did this mean that the intelligentsia could reassert their autonomy, but at the same time they could position their *dizain* work as directed at the global reform of everyday life (*byt*), making it part of the traditional way the intelligentsia constituted their own authority in general (see Reid 1997: 178-180, Buchli 1997: 161-164; also Manning 2012a (and references there) on the role of the reform of *byt* (Georgian *q'opa*) in the self-constitution of the intelligentsia from the 1860s onwards). The chekanka, then, marks not merely a minor artistic renaissance, an emancipation of aesthetics from the shackles of socialist realism, but a renaissance of the intelligentsia as a whole.[1]

Socialist and Modern: The Chekanka and Urban Space

Two specific local forms of "contemporary style" emerged side by side in Georgia of the 1960s, both of which had claims to being, in some sense, a revival of traditional art forms: chekanka and ceramics. They shared a kind of "archaic modernist" aesthetic, but their differences in form guided the way they would become adapted to socialism. Chekanka became focused on pure decoration, on scales ranging from personal jewelry, to the adornment of the home (see Reid 2011), to monumental adjuncts to architecture (in effect, all the "publics" or markets that were available in the "Thaw" period (on which see Reid 2006, 2011)). Meanwhile, ceramics quickly colonized the traditional forms of domestic display such as the Georgian feast or supra; the former concentrated on two-dimensional forms, displaying ethnographic or mythological themes, while the latter focused on producing drinking vessels in stylized zoomorphic form, particularly those that are used at the Georgian feast or *supra*. These drinking vessels are called *ganskhvavebuli* ("different"), meaning aesthetically-foregrounded drinking vessels ("different" from normal ones) for drinking special classes of toasts (see Manning 2012b: 148-176) (Figure 4). While ceramics primarily created an iconographic domain focusing on stylized zoomorphic animals from the late 1950s onwards, occasionally the hegemony of the chekanka in the 1960s became visible in the in sporadic exploration of stylized ethnographic images of Khevsurs (Figure 5). Three-dimensional ceramics were not well-adapted to purely aesthetic interior or exterior display, but exhibit a newly permissible concern for the aesthetic "design" [*dizain*] of everyday objects of utility. As a result, ceramics colonized the sphere of domestic status display, the ritual feast or supra, producing a huge range of ceramic drinking vessels for ritual use, with drinking vessels usually taking the stylized form of animals, while the chekanka restricted itself to purely decorative two-dimensional forms of ever-increasing scales (pioneers like Irak'li Ochiauri beginning with small scale jewelry in the 1950s and finally moving to monumental themes by the 1960s [see above figure 3]).

Figure 4. Stylized ceramic deer drinking vessel (Sh. Narimanishvili 1960).

Figure 5. Stylized "Khevsur Family" drinking set (J. Pochkhidze 1962)

Chekanka panels are well-suited to monumental purposes (Glezuri 1966: 10), answering the needs of contemporary architecture (Machabeli 1967: 47-8), particularly for decorating the walls of new contemporary modernist style buildings in Tbilisi. The affordances of the chekanka (durability, flatness, monumentality) seemed a perfect fit for the new spaces created by modern architecture, and thus offered a distinctively Georgian "synthesis" of art and architecture, paralleling the more widespread use of mosaics and frescos in Georgia and other union republics (Iustenkaiai 1972). As a result, monumental chekankas became a ubiquitous, integral feature of the artistic-architectural ensembles that characterized the new public building projects of Tbilisi in the 1960s: versions of it were to found in the House of Weddings, restaurants, hotels and cafes, and even cruise liners (Ochiauri 1973: 64, Machabeli 1976: 41-42). The synthesis of art and architecture represented by the chekanka also meant it gained a symbiotic relation with state projects and state funding. The focal example was the alliance between the chekanka and the defining architectural achievement of 1960s Tbilisi: the Tbilisi Metro, some of whose first stations, Rustaveli and 300 Aragveli, were decorated in precisely this style.

Through these associations grounded in the formal, material affordances of the chekanka —its ability to aesthetically complement diverse architectural forms at different scales—

the ubiquitous face of the Khevsur girl became associated with socialist urban modernity of modern 1960s Tbilisi (Ivashkevichi 1968). According to a standardized catechism of this artistic renaissance, this art form, archaic and practically lost in the 1950s, by the 1960s occupied

> a prominent place in the life of present-day Tbilisi. This means not only indoor work, like metal panels on various themes in the Metro, the Musical Comedy Theatre, the Palace of Weddings and hotels, and small pieces on the walls of public buildings and private flats in Tbilisi, but also the fact that the very streets of Tbilisi are today studded with metal-engravings…. The numerous plates outside important institutions, shops, cafes and hotels, worked in copper, brass, or aluminum, lend a picturesque-ness all their own, a filigree chain linking the ages and the many-balconied mansions of Old Tbilisi …. And the many contemporary skyscrapers into harmonious architectural unison. (Melentievi 1976: 51)

Chekankas were particularly well-adapted to decorate the large, blank expanses of space of modernist buildings. Like ceramics, however, they could also be scaled down as smaller flat panels, suitable for the decoration of the socialist home, which represented a relatively new "public" and market for Soviet art alongside the existing publics of exhibition and monumental pieces for public display (Reid 2011). As a result, chekanka became the most widespread and well-known Georgian form of such socialist domestic decoration in Georgia and the Soviet Union as a whole (Ochiauri 1973: 64, Erlashova 1974: 18).

Archaic, yet Contemporary: The Iconography of the Chekanka World

Discourses surrounding chekanka, as it rose in popularity, revolved around paradoxes of the form as at once old and new, and as both familiar and strange. By the 1970s there was a standard critical line glossing the ideological and aesthetic genealogy and tendencies of the chekanka, which stressed its *new* and yet *old* (or perhaps, *timeless*) qualities:

> When [these] works began to appear at exhibitions in the early exhibitions, soon it became clear that these metal plates with embossed pictures of women in national costumes, fearless warriors, heroes of epics and stylized animals, represented a new tendency in modern Georgian art—a tendency connected, however, with the ancient national art by thousands of invisible ties (Erlashova 1974: 15).

At once Soviet and contemporary and yet with an air of stylized “archaism” and “ethnographism,” the form represented a kind of paradoxical “provincial-modernism” (Ochiauri 1973: 64). Russian commentators saw in this self-conscious ethnographic exoticism and archaism a reflection of an ancient and exotic Georgian national difference, which was strange, and yet reassuringly familiar (Scott 2016). They particularly exulted over the way that Georgian metal art (“chasing”) in particular seemed to reflect the mysterious, temperamental and romantic Georgian national character:

> In their search for a new form and style Georgian artists have displayed a strong bent for romanticism. This is only natural, because a romantic disposition, a fiery temperament, and the observance even in everyday life of emphatically solemn, dramatic rituals have always features peculiar to the Georgian character. Romantic thinking engenders romantic art. More than any other technique, the Georgian art of chasing echoed these sentiments. (Erlashova 1974: 5)

For Georgians, the chekanka form seemed to represent a search for a kind of “internal elsewhere” (Yurchak 2006) of the nation within the Soviet present. At the same time, the romantic self-exoticism of chased metal art was one of the many ways that Georgians performed their own national identity as a kind of romanticized and exoticized “familiar stranger” within Soviet space (Scott 2012, 2016), a kind of “export version” of Georgian ethnic identity alongside Georgian food. Certainly, the fact that both ceramics and chekanka are strongly associated with the décor of restaurants and cafes in both Georgia and Russia points to the same underlying association of Georgianness with food, since, as Scott discusses in detail (Scott 2012, 2016), Georgian food and related feasting traditions (the supra) were canonized by Stalin as the exotic food par excellence of the Soviet Union (also Manning 2012b, 2017b). Similarly, the fact that the chekanka focused thematically on unattainable, yet intimate idealized ethnographic images of young Georgian women was consonant with the expectations of this “export” exoticism and the more pervasive eroticism which Layton (1992, 2005) argues dominates Russian representations of Georgia as an oriental woman (see also Shatirishvili and Manning 2011). The “Khevsur girl” thus has a long genealogy in Georgian auto-orientalist representations of the national self and Russian orientalist representations of Georgia as an exotic and yet familiar other (Scott 2016), as well as the very specific, exotic and erotic, role played by Khevsureti in this Russo-Georgian imaginary of the Caucasus mountains (Layton 1992, Manning 2015).

Figure 6. Chekankas, various authors and themes, warehoused in the Parliamentary Library Collection (Davit Toklikishvili Photo).

Internal Elsewheres: The Chekanka World as Alternative to the Socialist Present

The chekanka for the most part developed romanticized themes from mythology, legend, epic, folklore and ethnography: a mythopoetic vision of the timeless Georgian nation (Zurabishvili 2002: 50-2), which served as an "elsewhere" to the contemporary world of everyday socialism. The chekanka hammered together a series of diegetic narrative space-times—the "worlds" of folktale, myth, legend—into the flat non-narrative visual space of a single Georgian "elsewhere" opposed to the socialist present (Figure 6). These interchangeable elsewheres drawn from the narrative repertoire of the timeless nation parallel the paradoxical "intimate and yet unattainable" "internal elsewheres" discussed by Yurchak (2006: 160-1), which haunted the banality of late Socialist everyday life of the 1960s:

> The presence within the Soviet universe of spatially and temporally distant worlds was manifested by the explosion of interest in the 1960s in various cultural and intellectual pursuits based on the experience of a faraway 'elsewhere'—foreign languages and Asian philosophy, medieval poetry and Hemingway's novels, astronomy and science fiction [….] Vail' and Genis referred to these Soviet worlds of the 1960s as 'some unknown and wonderful country of

> Dolphinia (*strana Del'finiia*)…[that] could exist anywhere—in other galaxies, as in science fiction books, or in one's room…. (Yurchak 2006: 160)

In the chekanka, different narrative worlds, different narrative space-times or Bakhtinian "chronotopes" (Bakhtin 1981, in the sense used in Silverstein 2005, Manning 2017a, 2019), are folded together into a single homogeneous exotic and erotic elsewhere and else*when*, a secular mythology of the "nation": historical, folkloric, legendary, ethnographic and even mythological figures and themes (Figure 7, (Machabeli 1976:16, Khalvashi 2018) are all flattened out onto the same ontological plane by interchangeably occupying the same diegetic space of the flat, two-dimensional metallic panel.

Figure 7. *Abduction of Medea* (K. Guruli 1966) on the cruise ship Shota Rustaveli (Japaridze 1971: 49).

One can see the generic outlines of the Georgian secular-sacred national mythology of the 1990s (see Manning 2009) that would dominate late socialist and early postsocialist imaginations of the nation, arising in this where characters belonging to different narrative genres, each with their own specific and different chronotope (mythic, historical, legendary, folktale and ethnographic, see Manning 2017a) are removed from their narrative contexts and chronotopes, and come to belong to a single two-dimensional "elsewhere" of the nation.[2]

Within this pantheon of works of various scales with diverse publics, ranging from monumental and exhibition pieces to household wall decoration chekankas, it is particularly in the forms reserved for more intimate private publics, the household and personal decoration, that intimate images like “the Khevsur Girl” predominate. Here, a suggestion made by Reid seems particularly apropos: that in such minor genres designated for domestic spaces “the domestic realm remained as an untouched resource, a heterotopic reserve of potential alternatives to hegemonic culture if not of resistance” (Reid 2011: 362, see also Gal 2002 on the domestic space as a site of resistance [“antipolitics”]). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that however assiduously secular the discussions of the thematics of this art form were in the socialist period, at least some of the artists later made it clear in postsocialism that their art was grounded in a specifically anti-socialist narrative of the sacred mission of the Georgian nation that came to dominate the politics of early postsocialism (Guruli 2008).

The Thaw: The Chekanka as Anti-socialist Realism

The chekanka was not created by some top-down order of the Soviet state in the Kurshchev period, but it proved to be remarkably suited to the needs of a new regime that wanted to distance itself from the socialist-realist aesthetics of Stalinism. At the same time, its relationship to socialism was vague, producing an image of the timeless nation that was separate from the socialist state. In terms of form, style and thematic content, this “contemporary style” (across all genres) stands opposed to the Stalinist model of socialist realism, which preferred classical forms (e.g. easel painting) and naturalist realism (Reid 2011). In terms of Bakhtinian chronotope or diegetic “world,” the timeless nation of the chekanka also stands in opposition to shining future of socialist realism: where socialist realism depicted an idealized world-that-is-coming-to-be, prefigurations of the shining future of communism (Fitzpatrick 1992, Clark 1981), the chekanka portrays an equally idealized *archaic nationalist* chronotope of an undifferentiated and timeless national mythological past, where myth, legend, fairytale and ethnography all commingle. Moreover, Stalinist aesthetics inherited from 19th century intelligentsia like Chernyshevsky a preference for a reductive “literary” or *narrative* aesthetics, which privileged art forms that “could be retold in words: theme, plot, development of character” (Reid 2011: 357, 2006: 170). This preference was typified by the large “narrative picture” [thematic *kartina*], “a civic painting, a large, multifigural composition depicting a theme or event of contemporary public significance” (Reid 2006: 170).

By contrast, the characters of even public chekanka are not necessarily portraits of historical figures of public significance, and the figures of decorative chekanka for the home are almost always nameless, idealized exponents of a type rather than portraits of specific individuals (Erlashova 1974:19-21, Japaridze 1971: 19-21), with only a few exceptions for mythologized historical figures of the medieval period like King Tamar, the

poet Shota Rustaveli (Japaridze 1971: 20-21) (Figure 8). More often than not, these national figures, too, are portrayed without any narrative context, historical or otherwise, in a highly stylized archaicized fashion that resembles a secular version of a sacred orthodox icon. Like the icon (Kenna 1985: 355-6), rather than a realist portrait of an individual, their name is part of the composition, and it is done in a style that exactly mimics an icon. Unlike the icon (Kenna 1985: 356), they are viewed in (secular) profile rather than (sacred) frontal view (which I discuss below in more detail).

Figure 8. Chekanka-icon of Queen Tamar (K. Guruli, 1965).

In order to understand how radical a departure the chekanka portrait is from Stalinist aesthetics, a terminological distinction borrowed from Japanese subcultural aesthetics is useful here between *characters* (*kyarakutaa*, fully fleshed out characters subordinated to a

narrative context) and *chara* (*kyara*, pared-down characters extracted from their narrative context or with no narrative context) (Lamarre 2011):

> *Kyarakutaa* remains subordinate to the narrative world of the manga…Thus confined to the manga's world, *kyarakutaa* sustains a certain sense of realism. In contrast, the pared-down design of *kyara* allows it not only to move across different narrative worlds but also to generate new worlds wherever its users see fit. Kyara takes on a life of its own. It imparts a feeling that it truly exists or actually lives. (Lamarre 2011: 129)

Stalinist aesthetics of the *kartina* focused on the former kind of characters, that is, fully-fleshed out, named historical figures situated within or subordinated to a narrative context, situated within real events and an aesthetics of realism. By contrast, the deformed, non-realist, stripped-down, nameless figures of chekanka art, particularly the series of faces of Georgian (Khevsur) women, are similar to *chara* (*kyara*), characters removed from or devoid of any narrative context.

As Silvio argues, such stripped-down, incomplete characters (the example she uses is Hello Kitty) are affectively engaging because their incompleteness leaves them open to projection or completion by the viewer (Silvio 2010: 431-2), giving the character a kind of "virtual potential" to produce affective engagements (Galbraith 2009). As I have argued elsewhere (Manning 2014, 2015), something analogous to this virtual potential is also found with respect to imagining the lost "world" from which these Khevsur characters come, where the ethnographic narrative context is fragmentary, full of gaps and voids in which the imagination can take root to "complete" the character and its ethnographic world.

What kinds of affects are produced by the virtual potential of these images? Chekanka images of Khevsur women mixed exoticism and eroticism in equal measures. Like *kyara*, the female figures of chekanka were intimate and yet unattainable. Characters without depth, without narrative encumbrances and without any connection to reality, they could become objects of pure fantasy, giving them a "virtual potential" (Galbraith 2009), enabling them to serve as a kind of intimate heterotopic reserve of resistance or escapism (Reid 2006). They could be deployed to decorate the intimate, domestic, "Georgian" spaces of the home, which becomes an "internal elsewhere" (Yurchak 2006) opposed to the socialist present outside the front door. In these intimate household "souvenir" chekanka, two kinds of desire are linked together: a desire for the exoticism of this "elsewhere," which represents Georgia as a whole for foreigners, and for Georgians, the idealized Georgia of Khevsureti, combined with the eroticism of the figure of the Khevsur girl, who represents

again, the generalized eroticized image of Georgia for Russians, and for Georgians, the eroticized image of the mountains of Khevsureti (see Manning 2015).

For the remainder of the paper I will focus only on the iconography of these most emblematic, and most commonplace, kind of chekanka, those that depict the faces of idealized Georgian women, particularly Khevsur girls. Virtually every artist who worked in this form managed to produce at least one depiction of a "Khevsur Girl," and some artists, like Irak'li Ochiauri (Machabeli 1967: 46) or Guram Gabashvili (Qenia 1966: 13, Machabeli 1975: 35), each produced a whole series of such images (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Irak'li Ochiauri (In Khevsur garb) with some of his "Khevsur women" (Author photo).

A Girl from the Mountains

> Here [in the mountains], in this homeland the Pshav-Khevsur have preserved unchanged until today their ancient, ancestral customs, life, past traditions. In this respect the Pshav-Khevsur is more Georgian (if it can be said so), than the Georgian himself. The Georgian lives more in the present, in the future…. What form this [new Georgian] form of life will take, the future will show us. Right now it can only be said that this form will not be a photographic picture of the past, of ancestral traditions. That picture can only be found in [the mountains of] Pshav-Khevsureti. (N. Khizanashvili "Urbneli"), *Ethnographic Writings*, 1940 [1887]: 1)

First of all, why *Khevsur* girls? Part of the answer lies in the fact that one of the pioneers of chekanka, Irak'li Ochiauri, was himself a Khevsur, from a family whose members included several noted ethnographers of Khevsureti (his mother, Natela Baliauri, his father, Aleksi Ochiauri, and his sister Tinatin Ochiauri all wrote notable ethnographies of Khevsureti (Manning 2007, 2014, 2015)). But this just defers the question: why was Khevsureti so central to the Georgian ethnographic imagining of the nation? From the 19th century into the late socialist period, the mountains, and Khevsureti in particular, represented a particularly salient heterotopic "elsewhere" (Manning 2007, 2014, 2015, Manning and Uplisashvili 2007): a "photographic picture" of a world lost in the plains and cities of Georgia. Within this secular mythology of the Georgian nation, the free, bold, mountain-dwelling Khevsurs in particular represented the chivalric and romantic face of traditional Georgia, the stereotypical traditional ethnographic "other" who was also the purest representative of the mythic national "self." The "Khevsur Girl" is in the first instance a representative of the romance of the Khevsurs in general, the recognizable "face" of a new movement that celebrated the mythology of the Georgian nation in a qualitatively new modernist art form (Tevzadze 1973: 106-17).

She was thus a representative of the ethnographic romance of the Khevsurs, but she is also but one of many exotic Georgian women celebrated in the chekanka. By focusing on the beauty of the Georgian woman in particular as a central theme, these portraits aligned themselves with a well-known Georgian nationalist narrative, canonized under Stalinism by Pavle Ingoroqva in his introduction to the medieval epic romance *The Knight in Tiger's Skin* (1937) and continuing to the present, that Georgian women were in no need of emancipation, since they were already in effect equals of men, worshipped as part of a Georgian "cult of women" and chivalry which rendered Georgian woman different from those of the "Muslim East" (Ingoroqva 1937: xxxviii, see also Shatirishvili and Manning 2011: 216). The chekanka becomes like a secular icon of this "cult of women," with the Khevsur girl having a privileged position within this secular iconostasis (Manning 2015: 127).

The Iconography of Faces

The Polish journalist Ivashkevichi cited above describes the essential features that would come to characterize the *t'ip'azhi* (Georgian, "type, typification; character type": Russian *tipazh*) of virtually all these idealized images of Georgian women, Khevsur or otherwise: "She appeared in profile, she was looking downwards, lost in thought, her eyes resembled those of a doe, her hair cut in bangs, she wore some kind of embroidered blouse" (Ivashkevichi 1968: 28). This description could fairly be a characterization of the emergent generalized "character type" of all the other "Georgian woman" found in chekankas (Japaridze 1971: 20, Qenia 1966: 13) (Figure 1):

> The generalized [*chekanka*] portraits of "Georgian women" made by various artists, along with their differences, have a great deal in common. In them we always find a simple one-figure composition that takes up the whole field of the metal sheet, maidens portrayed from the chest up, in profile or in three-quarter perspective, a longish face with beautiful eyes, refined, shapely features, and eyes and eyelashes stretched out to one side, with decorative national headgear and clothing. (Japaridze 1971: 19-20)[3]

Japaridze adds that a specific feature of Guram Gabashvili's "Khevsur" or "Tush" girls is that the background of such images includes stylized plant and animal, especially deer, motifs (Japaridze 1971: 20). In souvenir versions of the chekanka, these background motifs become figures in the foreground on the same level as the principal human figure, so much so that when I ask a Georgian to describe a typical chekanka, some mention will always be made of this visual complement that absorbs the attention of the figure of the woman: a flower, a candle or a deer, are the most common of these in my own collection (Figure 10).

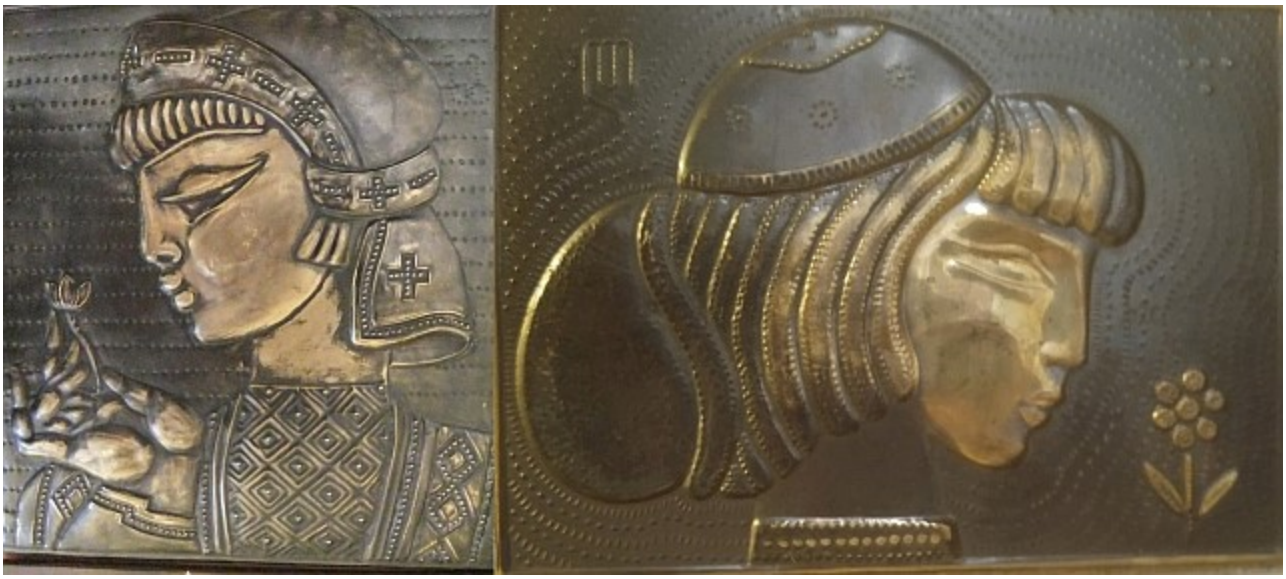

Figure 10. Two anonymous chekankas: Khevsur girl looking at a flower (left), Georgian girl looking at a flower (right), from the author's collection (Author photo).

These portraits are adduced a kind of a generalized, idealized typification (Georgian *t'ip'azhi*, Russian *tipazh*) of the Georgian woman. Japaridze notes that Guram Gabashvili's t'ip'azhi of Khevsur and Tush girls are idealized, but adds that his idealization matches the "the imagination of our folk" (1971: 20). The word *t'ip'azhi* (Russian *tipazh*) here has a special significance in socialist realist parlance, since socialist poster art included very specific rules about the "correct rendering of a particular social category. The essence of tipazh [in socialist realism of the 1930s] was not typicality but rather, typecasting or

typicalization" (Bonnell 1997: 38) of certain revolutionary social types like the worker or peasant. Socialist realist conventions of the tipazh centered on the correct portrayal of the face including "a certain demeanor and expression. As one poster critic wrote in 1935, the depiction of the worker should include a 'healthy, lively, intelligent, intellectual face. He is the prototype of the new man, a combination of physical strength, energy, fortitude and intelligence'" (Bonnell 1997: 39). Such a tipazh was usually grounded in photomontage realism, basing their images on actual photographs, creating a quintessentially socialist realist "image of 'is' where before there had been only 'ought'. Since photographs conveyed, as did no other medium except for film, a seemingly 'real' picture of the world, photomontage perpetrated the illusion that the future and the present were indistinguishable" (Bonnell 1997: 40). These quasi-indexical elements of the iconography of the socialist realist tipazh of the worker's face were paired with another indexical feature of the direct gaze, which reversed the relationship of viewer and viewed, so that, like an Orthodox icon, the viewer was the object of the image's gaze (Bonnell 1997: 42).

The use of the term tipazh brings up a series of clear contrasts between this new face of post-Stalinist art and the typical face of Stalinist socialist realism. The iconography of the type portrayed, of course, is totally different: a Khevsur Girl, a feminine figure of the mythic national past, replaces a heroic male worker, a socialist figure of the world that is coming to be. The Khevsur girl is portrayed in an archaic style reminiscent of an ancient Greek vase (P'et'erait'i 1968), whereas the worker is portrayed in a realist quasi-indexical photomontage. The Khevsur girl—presented in profile or 3/4 view—demurely avoids the gaze of the onlooker, where the heroic worker looks out upon the viewer in direct political address. When in profile, the socialist worker or peasant often looks ahead, engaging with the real world as it is, ready to act, or upwards, as if in a kind of secular version of the "devotional gaze" of medieval art (Sand 2014), in which figures express their piety by gazing heavenwards, in this case towards the coming world of communism. When socialist leaders, peasants and workers look down, it's a fair bet they are reading, not contemplating, but the girl in the chekanka almost always has downcast eyes, usually absorbed in contemplating an object that either has covert religious meaning (the candle), or is an expression of nature (the deer, the flower).

At the same time, the chekanka is defined by a kind of dialogic relation or tension with the icon. Socialist criticism treats the chekanka as a secular soviet descendent of—and anthesis of—the metal orthodox sacred icon (see for example, Amirejebi 1971: 8). But at the same time as the chekanka casts a sideward glance at the icon, it also decorously defines itself in contrast to the icon. Diagnostic features of the icon are missing:

1. The icon is a portrayal of a specific saint, and no icon is complete without the name of the saint on the icon (Kenna 1985), whereas the chekanka is instead an image of a social type with no names. The major exception here are the small number of secular

historical figures like King Tamar (Figure 5), which often follow the icon very closely in this respect, having the name engraved in the manner of an icon.
2. Where icons were made of gold or silver, socialism only permitted larger display pieces to be made of base metals: brass, bronze, iron, tin, aluminum (Japaridze 1971: 13-14, Erlashova 1974:18, Guruli 2008: 79).[4]
3. Thematically, too, socialist critics dwelled on the chekanka as a secularized form of the religious icon, especially devoted to portraying typified characters (*t'ip'azhi*) from traditional ethnographic life, particularly Georgian women, representing a movement away from portraying "the fantastic images of Christian religion" to portraying "the ideal of the Georgian woman, her beauty" (Japaridze 1971: 20).
4. Lastly, the most important difference is that the gaze of the icon is typically frontal, and that of the chekanka is typically in profile. Even a chekanka like that of Tamar (Figure 5) that borrows a great deal from the icon by having a name engraved on it nevertheless is unlike the icon in appearing in profile, thus indicating that this is not a sacred image of a saint, but a secular image of a queen.

With these differences in mind, I will explore the three key diagnostic elements of the face of the chekanka: the eyes, the direction of their gaze, and the object of their gaze. In the final section, I will discuss the ambiguous relations between the chekanka and the icon, since officially the chekanka is the secular socialist answer to the religious icon, but in private life, and after socialism too, the latent resemblance between chekanka and icon becomes much clearer.

Otherworldly Eyes

The iconography of the face of the Khevsur girl centers on the eyes: their otherworldly shape and the direction of the gaze. Various features of the iconography of the Khevsur girl are archaic, ethnographic, or ethereal. The exoticism of the Khevsur girl is reinforced by her distinctive embroidered blouse and headgear, and hair cut in bangs (the stereotypical Khevsur female hairstyle). Other "Georgian women" take from this prototype their stylized headgear, ranging from the ethnographic to the purely fantastic, which helps to place them in an ethnographic or fantastic elsewhere different from our contemporary world. The stylized, straight, simplified lines of the face reinforce this archaism, having more in common with an ancient Greek vase or an orthodox icon than a realist portrait of a woman. But it is the long "doe" or "almond" eyes that draw particular attention for all viewers. In addition to being long, the eyes of the chekanka have no pupils, especially the most popular examples. These long eyes are the diagnostic feature of virtually all chekankas. It could be said that the chekanka form as a whole can be recognized by the distinctive form of the eyes, in much the same way that Manga and Anime characters, aliens, or indeed Orthodox saints are recognizable by the otherworldly forms of their eyes.

Several stories could be told about these eyes. First, there is a family legend about the eyes: Ochiauri's daughter Lela informs me that Ochiauri's wife (Irine Jandieri) had long, exotic eyes, and in effect, all his portraits of idealized Georgian women are simply portraits

of his wife. Ochiauri himself specifically cites early 20th century modernists like Lado Gudiashvili (1896-1980) as inspirations for his work (Melentievi 1976: 55), connecting 1960s Georgian modernism of the chekanka to its 1930s forebears across the broad abyss of socialist realism in between, a period during which Gudiashvili was forced to abandon artistic formalism and adopt socialist realism. The eyes now have an intertextual function of artistic filiation to this earlier Georgian modernism, and at the same time a latent repudiation of socialist realism: Gudiashvili's figures often have exotic, long eyes very similar to those of the chekanka. More importantly perhaps, Gudiashvili has not a few portraits of idealized Georgian women with long eyes who are devoting their attention, somewhat improbably, to a deer (Figure 11). This singular "abundance of women's faces," usually exotic, mysterious, doe-eyed women contemplating does, defines Gudiahsvili's work from the 1930s to the 1940s (Gvakharia 2003, Ketevan Gurchiani, personal communication). Since these images are typically pagan goddesses or Muses, they belong to a collection of pagan motifs and mythological allegories that also characterized Gudiashvili's work and are clearly a central influence on the iconography of the chenkanka.

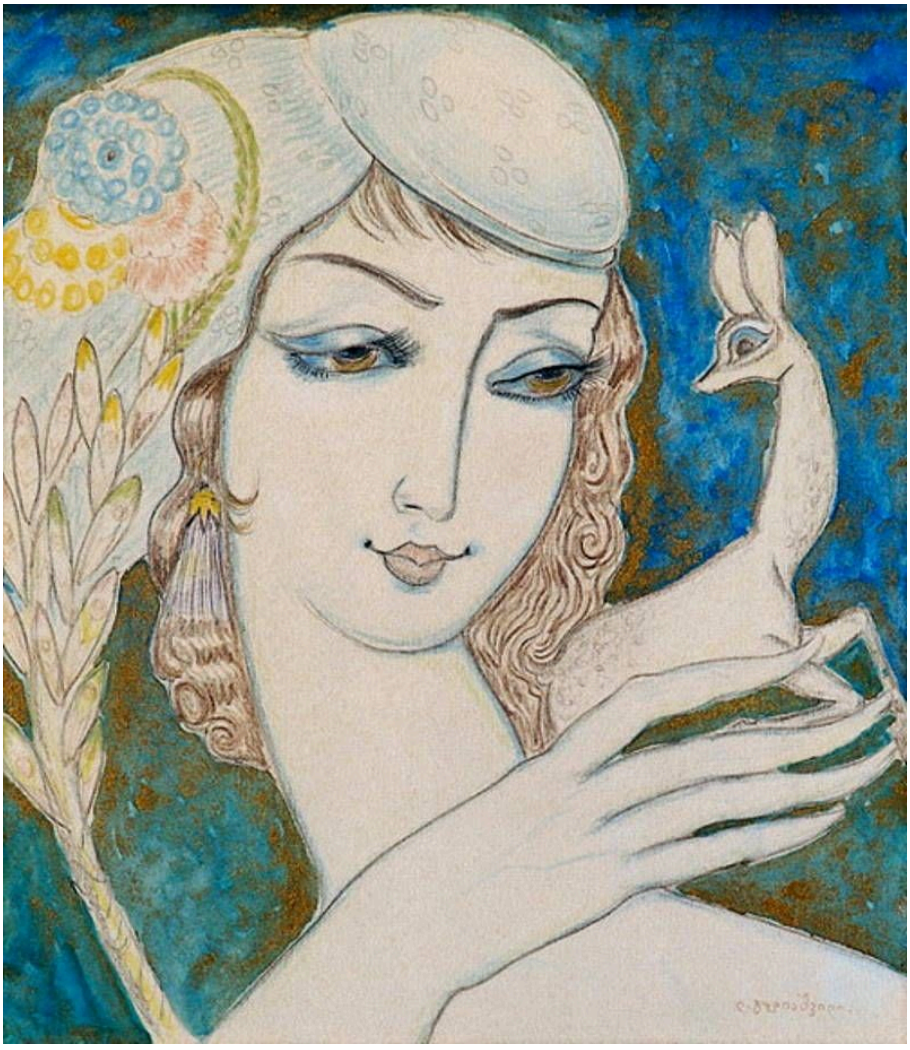

Figure 11. Lado Gudashvili (title and date unknown).

Unlike many other modernists, Gudiashvili continued to work under socialism and had students who directly replicated many of these features of his style, notably the mixed media artist Arsen Pochkhua (Pochkhua 1986), whose work is contemporary with the chekanka. In the 1960s to the 1980s Pochkhua also produced a series of artworks in different media with a virtually identical iconography to that we find in the chekanka; and indeed, some of his pieces were reproduced as souvenir chekankas (Figure 12).

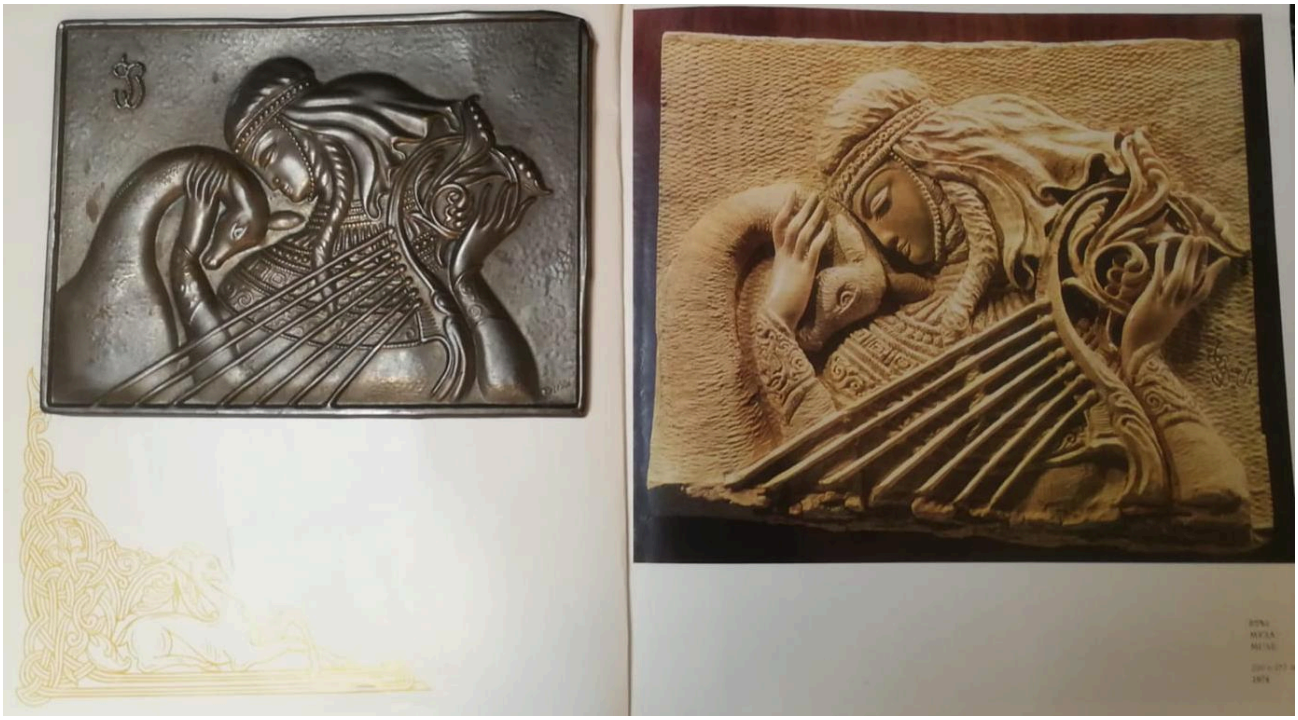

Figure 12. Muse (A. Pochkhua, 1974): (Right) Original, (Left) Chekanka Copy (Author photo).

While their origins produce an intertextual filiation between old (1930s) and new (1960s) Georgian modernisms, these long dark eyes also have the anti-realist effect of placing these idealized Georgian women in a fantastic elsewhere opposed to our own world. In this sense, they are similar to the oft-discussed eyes of anime characters which establish that they are, after all, fictional characters in a two-dimensional universe opposed to our own three-dimensional universe. Here again, I am inspired by the semiotics of "dimensionality" of manga/anime images (on which see Galbraith 2009, Lamarre 2011, Nozawa 2013), in which "2D" is the universe of fictional characters, "3D" is the universe in which we live, and "2.5D" is used for fantasies where these two universes come into contact. Similarly, Orthodox icons feature ascetic faces with otherworldly large eyes, where "the size of the eyes is said to indicate preoccupation with spiritual matters" (Kenna 1985: 354). The distinctive deformation of the eyes, in all these cases, has in common that it unites all the characters of *that world* in opposition to our own world. The eye becomes an element of the chronotopic figuration. Where photomontage realism of the socialist

realist poster seeks to undermine the opposition between that world and this world, here the peculiar eyes produce an otherworld of fantasy, not reality. I add that virtually whenever I show these images in the West, the figures are always compared by my audiences either to anime figures or elves, both otherworldly fantastic figures, and the basis for this comparison is always the eyes.

The Gaze: Frontality and Profile

From the shape of the eyes, we move to the direction of their gaze. Here the complicated relations between the secular chekanka and the sacred icon come into sharp relief. There are two key differences between the icon and the chekanka here: First, the gaze of a two-dimensional figure in relation to the three-dimensional space that contains the viewer can be profile, ¾ view or frontal view. Here, the figure of the chekanka demurely averts her gaze from the viewer, while the icon is strongly associated with inescapable frontality. Secondly, if the gaze is in profile or ¾ view, the gaze can also be upwards or heavenwards (the medieval "devotional gaze" discussed by Sand 2014), outwardly gazing at the diegetic world, or downcast demurely in a kind of private, intimate, contemplative gaze. Here, again, the chekanka tends to look downwards, its gaze usually absorbed in an object.

Paralleling many other sacred or apotropaic registers of art elsewhere, the orthodox icon involves direct indexical address, the icon looks at you as you look at it, establishing an indexical *phatic* connection (Nozawa 2015), a channel connecting the world of the diegesis and the world of the viewer. Frontal facing is a very general property of all Orthodox icons.[5] Kenna's comments on the facing of Greek orthodox icons seem apropos:

> Nearly all the human forms depicted in icons are shown full or three-quarter face, gazing directly or obliquely out of the icon. Full-face and three-quarter-face representations both depict a person as gazing out of the icon toward, if not directly at, an onlooker or devotee. Profile views are very seldom used except for the heads of those, like Judas, whose gaze must not meet that of the viewer because it is not a channel of divine grace…There is a further consideration: someone in profile—whether in real life or in a picture—can be observed without involvement; the observer is in total control of the situation. Full- or three-quarter-face encounters involve both parties and offer the opportunity for the initiation of a relationship….This gaze out from the icon, into the space where the onlooker stands, demands a response from the onlooker. The gaze must be returned or rejected. It is not possible to let one's eyes wander over the painting: they are caught by the gaze of the saint whose painted eye cannot blind, offering a contest that the onlooker is bound to lose. (Kenna 1985: 356)

The chekanka, with its preference for profile or ¾ view, by contrast, systematically avoids such an indexical address or encounter (reciprocity of gaze). For example, the image of King Tamar above (figure 8) clearly owes a great deal to the iconography of the icon (including the diagnostic incorporation of the name into the picture (Kenna 1985: 355-6)), but it stands apart by using profile view. The icon, one might say, through drawn in a 2D space, nevertheless strays outside the image with its gaze, so that it occupies what could be called an interdimensional 2.5D space, making a direct "indexical" address of the viewer: you cannot see it without it seeing you. The gaze of the chekanka, by contrast, stays resolutely within this otherworldly 2D space, allowing the observer to look without involvement and indicating the girl's virtuous shame, discussed below.

I have but one example in my collection (of around 30 or so chekankas) of a chekanka in full frontal view; it is, again, a Khevsur girl, and examples from named artists are equally rare. In such examples, both made by masters and apprentices, the *absence of pupils* in the eyes, seen but unnoticed in profile chekankas, comes into sharp relief. The image seems like a death mask, with empty, unseeing "alien" eyes that face the viewer but do not see them. Even the exceptional cases of overlap of gaze between the icon and the chekanka seem to bring them into clearer opposition (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Front view: (Left) anonymous "Khevsur Girl" chekanka, (right) "Girl with Pomegranite" (I. D. Koiava 1965) (Author photo).

An interesting space of overlap between the icon and the chekanka is the use of ¾ view, where unlike profile, the gaze of the image strays outside the space of the image, but unlike frontal view, does not necessarily make eye contact with the viewer. In the case of the chekanka, ¾ view is usually only found with the art of actual masters like Ochiauri

(Figure 1, 3). I have no examples of it in my souvenir chekanka collection. One might interpret the ¾ view of the icon as being less "indexical" than the frontal view, which is "an indexical mode whose frontal address acknowledges the viewer and institutes an iconic (that is, divine) presence" (Jain 2003: 49). The ¾ view is used in icons for the most part when the main figure (Mother of God) is looking down at her child, but with the chekanka it seems more appropriate to interpret it as an image of woman looking away, demurely averting her gaze from her admirer. This brings me to the next set of points about the gaze of the chekanka: that unlike the icon, she is represented as *looking away*, and this feature connects together the remaining features of the gaze, profile or ¾ view, downcast eyes, and the object of her gaze.

Downcast Eyes: *Morideba* "Shyness, Avoidance"

> *What Uncle Sandro really enjoyed, however, was to stand on the CEC balcony on a nice day and just look down at the passing crowds, among whom there were many people he knew and many beautiful women…. There were a few women who snickered at his flirtatious posing on the balcony. Uncle Sandro did not take offense, he merely lost interest in them: Oh, you don't like me? Well, I don't like you either.*
>
> *The ones he liked best were the women who blushed when their eyes met, only to lower their heads and walk quickly on. Uncle Sandro believed that shame was the finest ornament a woman could wear.* — Fazil Iskander, *Sandro Of Chegem* (1983:168).

Before Ochiauri's work came to center on idealized portraits of Khevsur girls, a major theme of his earlier work from small silver forms ("Dancer" 1955) to larger forms ("Girl with Tambourine" 1966, "Dancing girl" 1967, "Dance" 1968, "*Samaia*" [the name of a circular dance] 1972) was Georgian dancers, usually beautiful women, often portrayed in full or half body (Figure 14). Versions of this figure of the dancing girl, dressed usually in the costume of the dance *Kartuli*, are extremely common: I have one souvenir version in my collection. Another ("Girl with Tambourine") appears on the wall in the set of the 1966 film *Khevsur Ballad* (figure 3, item 3, above). Though the focus of this set is on the whole dancer's body, the features of the face have all the iconographic features of the portrait faces: the eyes, the traditional garb, faces in profile or at most ¾ view, and most notably, like the portraits, the downcast eyes. These are images of poses, rather than faces, and the pose includes stereotyped features of direction of gaze along with bodily movement that are rigid elements of the *kartuli* dance, part of opposed gendered registers of pose

and gaze that define the gendered relationships between male and female dancers, where: “The man focuses his eyes on his partner as if she were the only woman in the whole world…. The woman keeps her eyes downcast at all times in a demure manner and glides like a swan on the smooth surface of a lake.”[6]

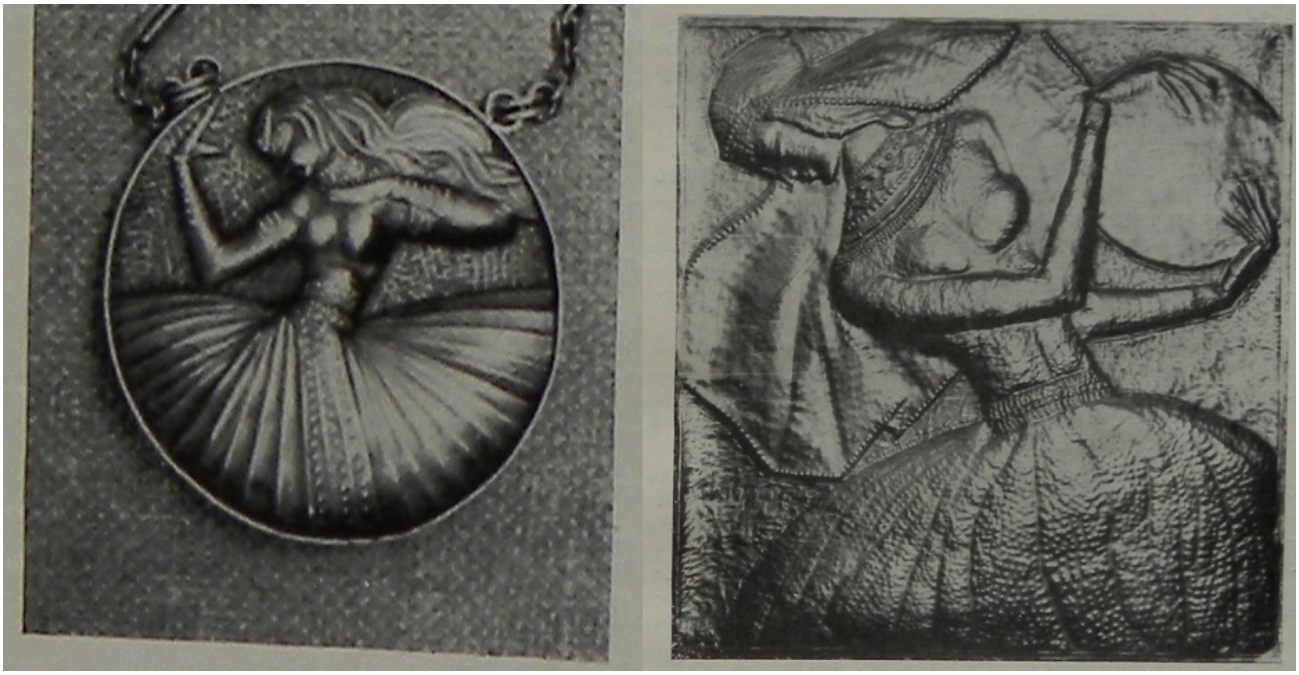

Figure 14. Ochiauri’s “Dancer” (1955, Left), “Girl with Tambourine” (1966, right).

This pose becomes part of the gendered aesthetic encounter between the viewer and the dancer. First, the fact that the girl is in profile remediates the way that the Georgian dance codifies male versus female as directed gaze (the man looking at the woman) versus averted gaze (the woman averts her eyes from the man, an exaggerated gesture of comportment, *morideba*). This feature of the female dancer’s pose both exaggerates a normative feature of everyday feminine comportment, *morideba*: “(1) deference; reserve, inhibition; (2) avoidance. Also contains notions of shyness and (feminine) modesty” (Manning 2015: 140)). Similarly, Naficy (1991: 35) points out that in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, “Modesty of vision is encoded not only in the strategies of veiling and unveiling and in spectator positioning but also in the gaze itself, resulting in the construction and inscription in cinema of what I have called the ‘averted look,’ the veiled look.” At the same time, the aymmetry of gaze between viewer and image in the chekanka also parallels Kenna’s observation of the way “someone in profile — whether in real life or in a picture—can be observed without involvement; the observer is in total control of the situation” (Kenna 1985: 356, see also Mulvey 1989, Naficy 1991).

But it is not merely that she averts her eyes, but moreover that her eyes, like those of a Georgian dancer, are *downcast*. The directed, but not returned, gaze of the viewer

parallels that of the Georgian male dancer, and by extension the Georgian man, representing a dominating, scopophiliac, “male gaze” (Mulvey 1989, Naficy 1991), and the profile image of the dancing girl, her gaze averted and with downcast eyes, parallels the pose of the female Georgian dancer and the norms of generic feminine comportment. From the dancer, then, the general features of the averted, downcast gaze of the Georgian girl in portraits take on their meaning as signs of avoidance (*morideba*). The image of the Georgian girl in profile, with downcast eyes, becomes in relation to the viewer a sign of her demure feminine *morideba*.

The Object of the Gaze: Flower, Deer, Candle

This brings me to the last feature which is extremely typical of the chekanka: the complementary figure of the flower, the candle or the deer, which absorbs the gaze of the human figure, allowing her to be completely involved in her own world. Obviously, in iconographic terms, the candle indirectly suggests otherworldly piety, since candles are burnt before icons. Much more common is the flower and the deer: both of these seemingly suggest that the Georgian woman lives in harmony with nature, an acceptable socialist motif. The motif of the deer, as mentioned above, also acts intertextually to connect these works to a recurrent motif in the works of Lado Gudiashvili. But what is more important is that the positioning of a specific object (flower, deer, candle) within the frame as the object of her gaze further removes the possibility that her gaze or attention will overflow the image into the shared 2.5D space between the viewer and the viewed, since this possibility is absorbed by the object she is looking at. She is further lost in her own world. In her two-dimensional mythic universe, she is as if unaware of her three-dimensional admirer.

Both secular image and religious image open up onto unattainable objects of desire located in otherworldly elsewheres, and this takes us to the significant differences, of course, between these series of images, which have to do with the semiotics of the gaze. The Khevsur woman is seldom found “looking out of the picture” like an icon. The icon (whether painted or metalwork) is either ¾ view or frontal, while the Khevsur woman more usually demurely looks away. Her gaze rarely strays outside the boundaries of the picture. She seems preoccupied with a flower, a deer, or a candle (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Various anonymous souvenir chekankas with girl contemplating a flower, a deer or a candle (Author photo).

The Chekanka as Boundary Work

The similarity and difference between the chekanka and the icon is not simply an appropriation of religious imagery for secular means but, rather, sits in tension with it, as becomes clear in examining the work of two notable chekanka artists, which I show in this last section. This tension became clear to me when I, like many others before me, made a visit to Ochiauri's house in the "Georgian Parnassus" on Nutsubidze, where most artists

had homes in the socialist period. Ochiauri's house was already in the socialist period a kind of "house-museum" (Japaradze 1971: 23-4), and when I arrived there, it struck me that I had been there before. In fact, I stupidly realized this. Irak'li Ochiauri's house was also the house of the Khevsur ethnographer Tinatin Ochiauri, the artist's sister, whom I had interviewed years before while researching my book on the ethnography of Khevsur romance (Manning 2014, 2015).

Upon re-entering his house-museum, I was struck by how this theme of the beauty of adumbrated Georgian women serially dominates his artwork, not only in metalwork, but also in sketches, paintings, and other forms. But I was also struck by how these secular images belonging to what Georgians sometimes call the Georgian "cult of women" sat side by side with a fairly large collection of actual orthodox icons, some painted, some in metalwork (Figures 16-18). Socialist period visitors to this house museum could not help but draw comparisons between his secular artwork and the sacred icons that once decorated churches and houses in the past (Japaradize 1971: 23-24), but they decorously make no reference to the huge collection of *actual* icons that then, as now, were part of his personal collection, and which probably inspired them to make this comparison. Following Japaradze's hinted comparison, we might think of it not as a "house-museum" but rather another kind of hybrid between secular and sacred, a "museum-temple."

Figure 16. Some of the icons in the Ochiauri house-museum (Author photo).

Alongside this insistent juxtaposition of secular images of feminine beauty and traditional icons, there are series of what Morson calls “boundary works”, in which “it is uncertain which of two mutually exclusive sets of conventions governs a work” (Morson 1981: 48). These are images of his own hand that fuse these two registers, secular and sacred, the cult of women and Orthodox religion (Figure 9-10). But the paintings differed from the chekankas in being, more often than not, frontal view, and many of them were more or less clearly modeled as secular versions of a Mother of God icon motif.

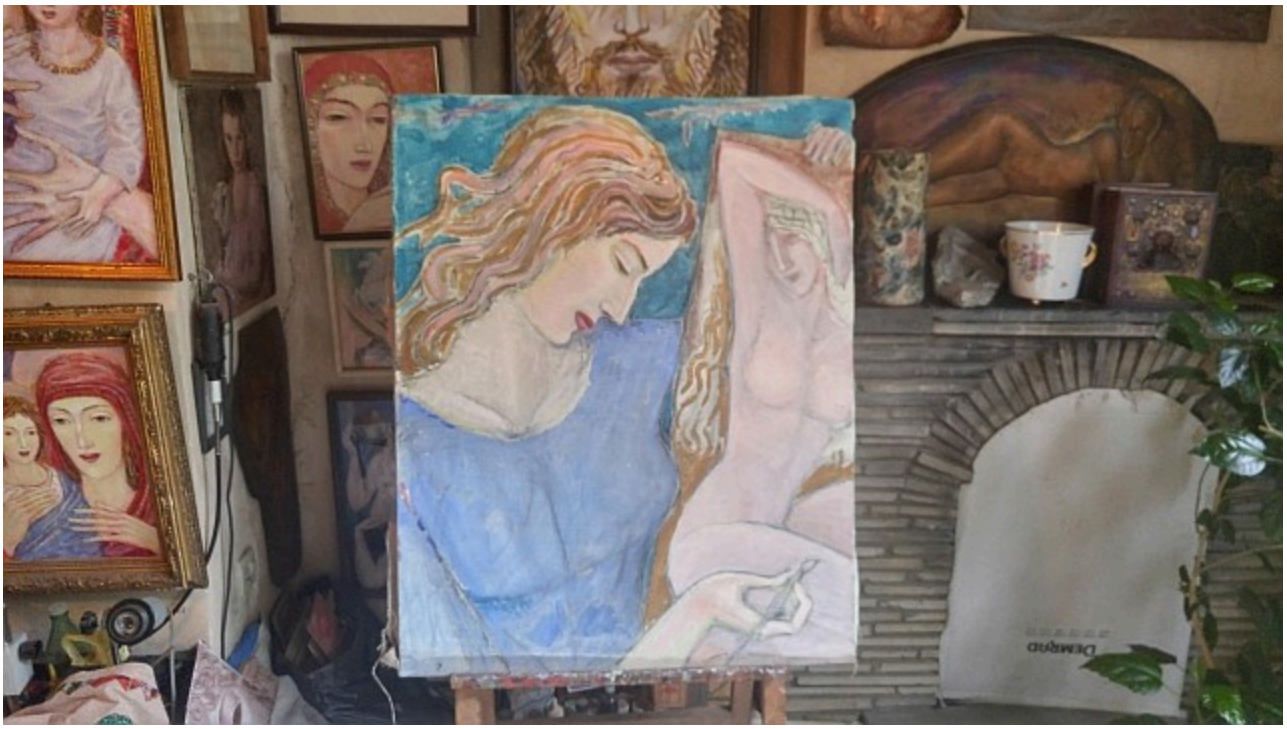

Figure 17. Quasi-icon art from Ochiauri House-Museum (Author photo).

Meanwhile, his chekankas, specially those intended to be displayed during the socialist period, were more often in profile or ¾ view. Sometimes – unsurprisingly, considering how many icons and artworks were jumbled together in the house – I found an actual Orthodox icon and one of his chekankas juxtaposed, as if to underline this contrast (figure 18).

Figure 18. Chekanka (top left) and icon (bottom right) in Ochiauri House-Museum (Author photo).

As the daydream nationalism of late socialism drifted in the postsocialist mythopoetic nationalism of the first government (Manning 2009), and then into the Orthodox revival of later postsocialism (Gurchiani 2017a, 2017b), the chekanka tended to fold back into the icon. Artists like K'oba Guruli are particularly instructive here, since we can see in his postsocialist work and his commentary a strong trend towards mystical nationalism. Guruli's chekanka work is perhaps the most recognizable and stylized (Figure 19).

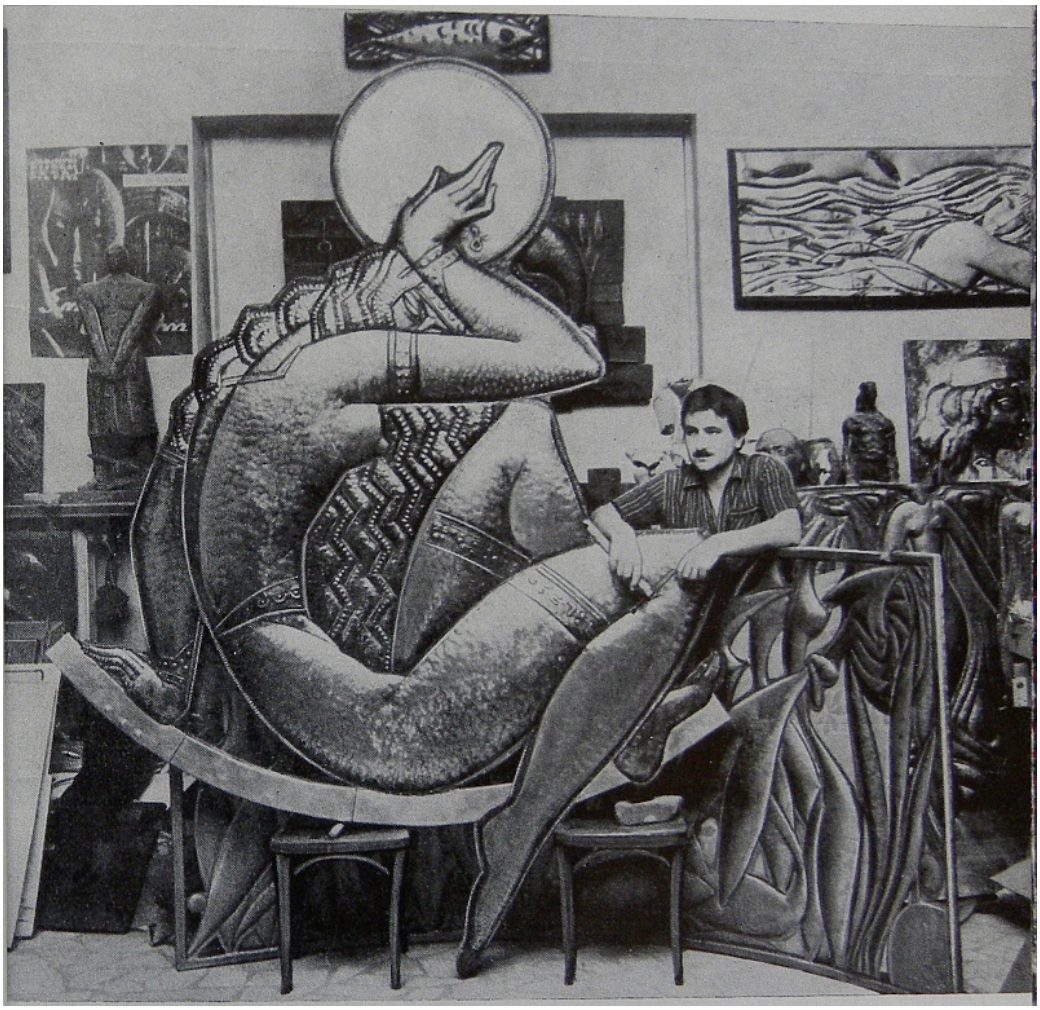

Figure 19. K'oba Guruli in his studio (1973).

Like other chekanka artists, Guruli avoided recognizable religious themes in the socialist period, but at the same time he was the most resistant to socialist norms of representation of socialist tipazh: he created a whole series of standard socialist "types" (worker, peasant, student, actor, writer) as a series of headless torsos. This act of cutting of their heads he specifically associates with opposition to socialist canons of representation and the leader cult, he later revealed (Guruli 2008: 80).

Speaking retrospectively, unhindered by socialist censorship, Guruli (2008) also portrayed his art as being motivated by his contemporary account of himself as being an Orthodox Christian, albeit one with the mystical, nationalist tendencies of the same widespread general sort associated later with the first postsocialist president Zviad Gamsakhudia, the so-called "spiritual mission of Georgia," which is the nationalist doublet of a related tendency of the Orthodox Church to engage in what is called the "philetist" heresy of conflating nation with religion (see also Manning 2008). Some of this tendency comes out in his socialist-period attempts to create secular icons of medieval national figures king Queen Tamar (Figure 8).

However, his unambiguous embrace of Orthodoxy seems to have followed a period of more ambiguous spirituality inspired by the ambiguously “animist and yet Orthodox” Pshav-Khevsur that otherwise formed a major theme within chekanka art (On the ambiguous position of Pshav-Khevsur folk religion within a resurgent Orthodoxy see Manning 2008, Darieva et al 2018. See also Gurchiani 2017a, 2017b for an exploration of various “in-between” sacred-secular lay-official forms of religion in contemporary Georgia). Indeed, whereas Guruli presents himself as being essentially some form of Orthodox mystic, many contemporaries remember him in earlier times as being something of a pagan. His backyard garden seems to have elements of Pshav-Khevsur pagan shrine, as well as Orthodox religion, with a chekanka (Figure 20): if Ochiauri’s house-museum reminds us of a hybrid museum-temple, then Guruli’s garden is similarly a hybrid “garden-shrine.” He did not confine his shrine-making activities to his own garden. He consecrated at least one huge stone (which he had moved there himself) and one tree in public parks in his urban neighborhood of Saburtalo as shrines for this animistic worship (Giorgi Chubinidze, Personal Communication).

Figure 20. K’oba Guruli’s shrine-garden: note the chekanka (middle left) (Gogeshvili 2009).

The mingling of Orthodox crosses and chekankas in his garden-shrine echoes the way that the Pshav-Khevsur shrines that inspired chekanka art represent a kind of boundary form: Pshav-Khevsurs could be regarded either as Christians who made do without churches or Pagans who worshipped trees and rocks, making Phsav-Khevsur religious practices and shrines a set of “boundary works” between Orthodoxy and Paganism (see Manning 2008, 2018b; Darieva et al 2018).

Like the rest of chekanka art, the otherwordly elsewheres of Guruli’s art seemingly anticipated the mythopoetic mystical nationalism of the first post-socialist president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia (so-called “Zviadism”), an ideology which included not only a belief – grounded in philology, anthroposophy and esoteric Christianity – in the uniqueness of the Georgian nation, but also a belief that the Georgian nation had a unique “spiritual mission” (Gamsakhurdia 1991). As the Orthodox church asserted its hegemony over the national narrative in the 2000s, religious nationalism moved away from the rather more secular, philologically-grounded, esotericism of Zviadism. It appears that in this period Guruli eventually produced artworks that were much more clearly religious icons (though his work always flirted with this; see, for example, his representation of Tamar, which is very close to an Orthodox icon). At the same time, as with the work of Gudiashvili in 1930s-1940s modernism and other chekanka art of the 1960s-1970s, there is was a strong mythological pagan tendency in his art that would, after all, have been more or less acceptable under socialism, particularly since Pshav-Khevsur “animism” was not regarded as having the undesirable dualisms between “nature” and “supernature” of Christian religion. A notable example would be Guruli’s socialist period work on a frankly pagan theme, “I am the fountain” (“Me tsq’aro var” 1979, Figure 21), in which a stylized depiction of a naiad, a fountain nymph, can be contrasted with his postsocialist artwork, which is more clearly Orthodox in inspiration in both content and form.

Figure 21. “I am the fountain” (*me ts’q’aro var*, Guruli 1979) (Author Photo).

Conclusion

The socialist chekanka reveals the ambiguities of the daydreams of the Georgian urban intelligentsia (see also Manning 2009). At a time in the 1960s when Tbilisi was rapidly

expanding in size, adding the new neighbourhoods of Vake and Saburtalo that were associated with intelligentsia and where artists like Ochiauri would have have their homes, the chekanka portrays a mythic, sacred yet secular, image of the people or nation as a beautiful woman in primarily rural milieus. Such images appeared in various forms, scales and contexts, either a monumental addition to new public buildings but also in restaurants and homes, in the very home of the intelligentsia, Tbilisi. Indeed, by the end of socialism the chekanka was so ubiquitous that it became emblematic of the period itself, ending up as a kind of socialist kitsch (Ketevan Gurchiani, personal communication).

The chekanka neatly portrays the urban intelligentsia imaginary of the rural Georgian nation as a rural diegesis of the timeless folk displayed in the modern spaces of the city, just as it represents itself as an artform rooted in the world before socialism, creatively autonomous from the very state which is the monopolistic patron and monopsonic buyer of all their works, in much the same way that "The intelligentsia imagined itself as being in a symbiotic relation to the people in ideal terms (from which it was separated in practical terms), and in practical terms it existed in a symbiotic relation to the state (from which it distantiated itself in ideal terms)" (Manning 2009: 74).[7]

The chekanka in its form echoed these daydreams of the new late socialist intelligentsia across several formal levels. Like many art forms favored in the Khrushchev Thaw, it was a clear departure from the norms of Stalinist socialist realist art. The deployment of motifs drawn from ethnography, folklore, and mythology to fill the void left by the end of socialist realism can be connected to the post-Stalinist revitalization of fields like ethnography, folklore and archaeology, as well as parallel trends in cinema (Erik Scott, personal communication): After all, Irak'li Ochiauri's sister Tinatin was a well-known ethnographer of Khevsureti, and his chekanka work figured prominently in a popular film *Khevsur Ballad* (1966) (Manning 2015). The pensive, doe-eyed girl with downcast eyes living in the mythic, timeless, daydream nation stood opposed to the revolutionary image of the female peasant looking optimistically upwards at the bright coming world of communism. The chekanka seldom told stories about the future, or indeed, any stories at all: the focus is not on a heroic figure situated within a narrative context, like most Stalinist period paintings, but on a perfectly still figure outside of any narrative context.

Just as the creative intelligentsia formed themselves into circles focusing on imagined worlds that were implicitly "elsewheres" to engagement with the world of socialism, so they made art that confounded the norms of socialism, and created a sacred, yet secular, mythic world of the nation as the Eternal Feminine. The figure of the Khevsur girl continues both a widespread iconographic tendency to portray the nation as a woman (Erik Scott, personal communication), but also a Russian colonial narrative figuring Georgia as an exotic woman (Layton 1992, Shatirishvili and Manning 2011). The chekanka

world in the 1960s and 1970s created a kind of secular mythology of the nation, which flattened out differences between genres of myth, legend, folklore, history and fantasy, to produce a kind of timeless daydream "elsewhere" of the national essence, opposed to the workaday world of socialism which now had two complementary or competing teleologies: the timeless world of the nation and the coming world of communism. Just as the chekanka demurely turned its face away from the iconography of socialist realism, its otherworldly iconography tended to be pagan, and avoided the iconography of the decidedly religious world of the Orthodox icon. But, as I have shown, within the chekanka there lay a series of latent continuities with the icon: the private collections of artists like Ochiauri were filled with actual religious icons that sat side by side with secular chekankas, and certain examples of their own artwork more closely resembled Orthodox icons than the more public works, which referenced classical Greek profile. With Guruli, we see how an acceptable set of pagan mythological motifs under socialism could slide through an ambiguous mythology of the nation of the 1990s into the less ambiguous Orthodox religious nationalism of the last decade.

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Endnotes

1 As I discuss in a separate paper on 1960s art and Georgian films (Manning, in preparation), these new art forms are consistently connected to a new kind of socialist filmic hero. Heroes are not only workers and peasants, but artists and architects, members of the intelligentsia.↩

2 My analysis here of characters being removed from narrative contexts and consumed not as characters embedded in narratives but as characters who are transferred to a single imaginative elsewhere and consumed as characters without depth, without narrative context, owes a great deal to the semiotics of characters as analyzed by theorists of Japanese popular culture (Galbraith 2009, Lamarre 2011, Nozawa 2013, see also Manning 2018a).↩

3 Similarly, another writer characterizes a whole series of faces of Georgian women by Ochiauri as follows: “The type is almost unchanging – a straight-proportioned face, large almond-shaped eyes beneath drawn [*mok’almuli*] eyebrows, thick wavy hair.” (Machabeli 1967: 46, 1976:13-14)↩

4 As Amirejibi (1971) notes, just as the secular chekanka made of base metal continues and yet replaces the golden medieval icon, so metalwork decorative covers for bibles could be continued for secular books of the national cultural pantheon like Shota Rustaveli’s medieval *Knight in Tiger’s Skin* (an innovation of artist Koba Guruli, apparently), thereby turning such a book into a secular heirloom item for the household (much in line with earlier pre-socialist and socialist period decorated deluxe editions of this work (Manning and Shatirishvili N.D.).↩

5 For the first point, a parallel division of images into “distinct registers of signification” according to gaze is discussed by Jain, with respect to Indian art, distinguishing with respect to different images of Krishna in the same advertisement, between a “representational register that uses perspectival naturalism… to evoke an allegorical reading” and “an indexical register whose frontal address acknowledges the viewer and institutes an iconic (that is, divine) presence” (Jain 2007: 123). For a discussion of different visual modalities in India, reciprocity of gaze associated with indexical presence with images very similar to Orthodoxy (*darshan*) and the more dangerous, potentially sexualized *nazar* (asssociated with the evil eye) see Bhatti and Pinney 2011. For a discussion of the controlling logic of the male gaze in the West and in Iran, see Mulvey (1989) and Naficy (1991), respectively. Similarly, in his striking discussion of the iconography of the face of Gorgo, Vernant shows that all images of Gorgo are distinguished from other figures by a particular combination of the iconography of monstrosity, along with mixtures of opposed categories (Vernant 1991: 113), but most importantly, her frontality: “in contrast to the figurative conventions determining Greek pictorial space in the archaic period, the Gorgon is always, without exception, represented in full face. Either mask or full figure, the Gorgon’s face is at all times turned frontally toward the spectator who gazes back at her” (Vernant 1991: 112) (see also Barker, Introduction to this issue)↩

6 https://georgiaabout.com/2012/09/03/about-culture-georgian-dance-part-1/↩

7 The nostalgic vision of the chekanka is complemented by another narrative of “Old Tbilisi” (Manning 2009, Manning and Shatirishvili 2011) that also inflects intelligentsia artistic productions from the period and is sometimes, albeit rarely, reflected in the chekanka.↩

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