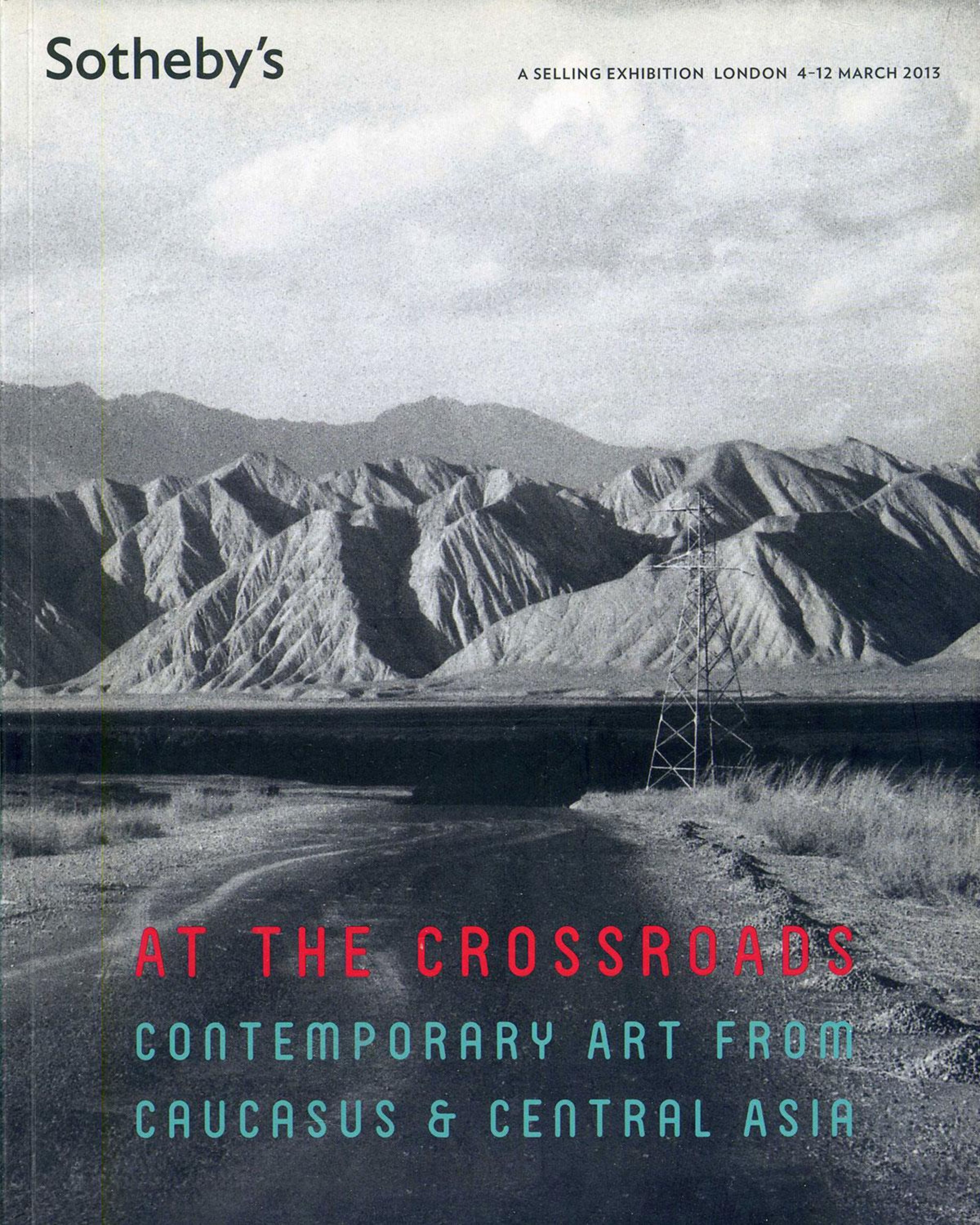


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AT THE CROSSROADS  
CONTEMPORARY ART FROM  
CAUCASUS & CENTRAL ASIA

# AT THE CROSSROADS

## CONTEMPORARY ART FROM CAUCASUS & CENTRAL ASIA

A Selling Exhibition 4 - 12 March 2013

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Jo Vickery  
*Senior Director, Head of Russian Department*  
jo.vickery@sothebys.com

Suad Garayeva  
*Curator*  
suad.garayeva@sothebys.com

Elif Bayoglu  
*Deputy Director, Middle East Department*  
elif.bayoglu@sothebys.com

Alina Davey  
*Director, Private Client Group*  
alina.davey@sothebys.com

Irina Kronrod  
*Deputy Director, Private Client Group*  
irina.kronrod@sothebys.com

Katia Nounou  
*Client Relations Manager, Middle East Department*  
katia.nounou@sothebys.com

General Enquiries  
+44 (0)20 7293 5570 CCA@sothebys.com

Sotheby's, 34-35 New Bond Street, London W1A 2AA

Monday 4 March 9 am - 4.30 pm  
Tuesday 5 March 9 am - 4.30 pm  
Wednesday 6 March 9 am - 4.30 pm  
Thursday 7 March 9 am - 12 pm  
Friday 8 March 9 am - 4.30 pm  
Saturday 9 March 12 pm - 5 pm  
Sunday 10 March 12 pm - 5 pm  
Monday 11 March 9 am - 4.30 pm  
Tuesday 12 March 9 am - 12 pm

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11th century fresco of Ateni Sion Temple, Georgia.  
 Courtesy S. Qobuladze Monuments Photo Recording  
 Lab. of G. Chubinashvili National Research Centre  
 for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation

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## MERAB ABRAMISHVILI 1950-2006

### *Maneater of Kumaon*

signed; signed, titled and dated 2005 on the reverse  
 tempera on linen mounted on plywood  
 76.1 by 100.2cm.; 30 by 39½ in.

#### *Provenance*

Estate of the Artist  
 Baia Gallery, Tbilisi

#### *Exhibited*

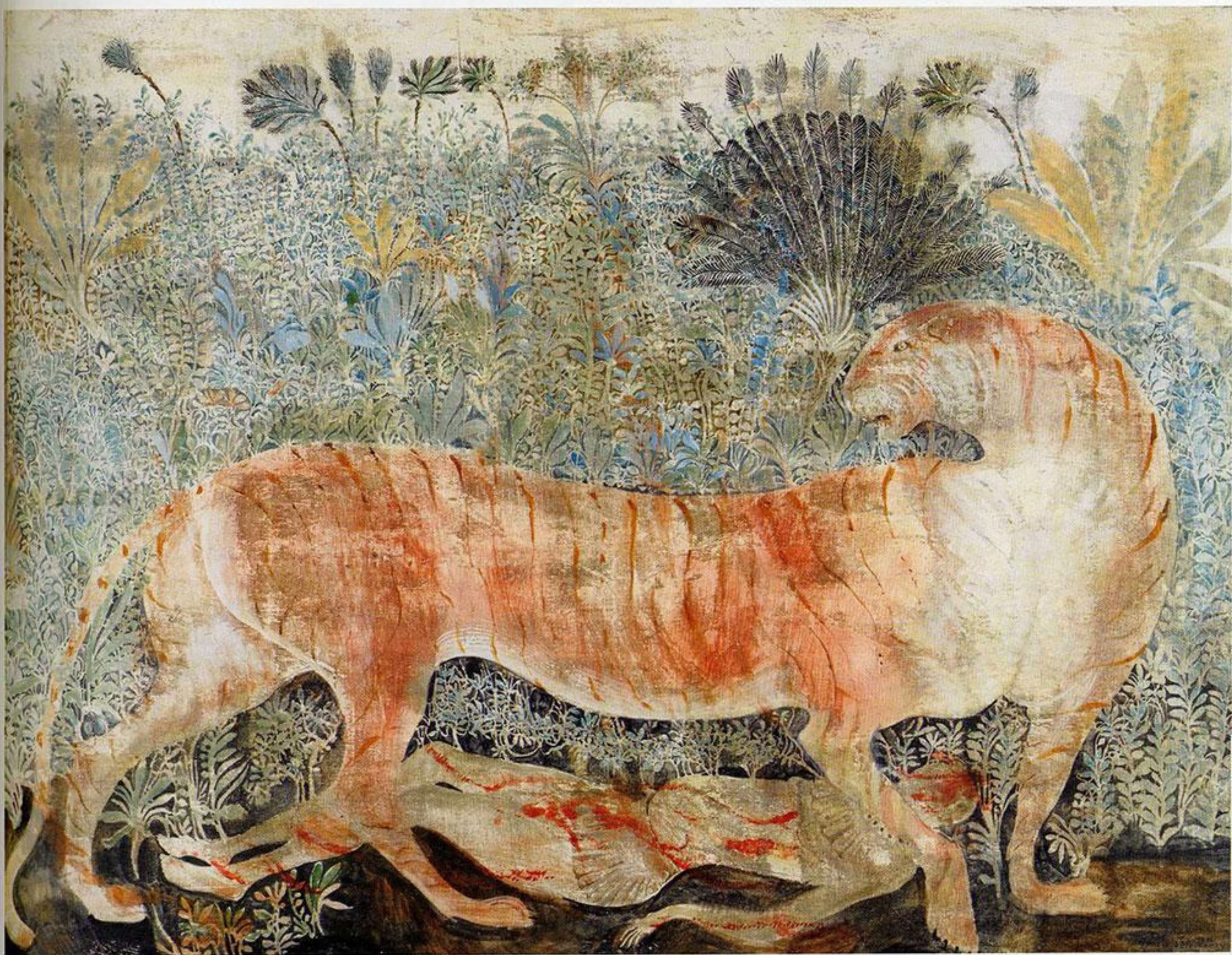
Tbilisi, Baia Gallery, *Merab Abramishvili*, 2012, n.p., illustrated

#### *Literature*

Nina Shervashidze, Ed., *Merab Abramishvili: Painting, Graphics*,  
 Tbilisi 2010, pp. 171 & 239, illustrated in colour

Merab Abramishvili was among Georgia's most prominent painters of the last thirty years. His father, Dr. Guram Abramishvili, an expert in Georgian medieval art, held a position with the Museum of Fine Arts and introduced his eager son to the collections of Georgian and Oriental antiquities. Inspired by Georgian frescoes and Orientalist miniatures, Merab later merged the two aesthetics to create his own unique visual language. Having travelled on research expeditions to study the Georgian frescoes of the 7th century Ateni Sioni Church, located 12km from Gori, the artist adopted the gesso technique from the frescoes in his easel painting as well.

Abramishvili began his formal artistic education in the early seventies in the studio of Alexander Bandzeladze, who encouraged the young artist to develop his own





Merab Abramishvili, *Maneater of Kumaon*, 1995. Courtesy of Baia Gallery, Tbilisi

pictorial style. Using his favoured gesso technique to create the texture of a mural, Abramishvili created an oeuvre of painterly images that cannot easily be ascribed to any one culture or philosophy. He was equally interested in medieval Christianity, Oriental mythology and pagan mysticism and these diverse philosophies combine in his paintings to a new symbiosis of cultural aesthetics. The transcendental harmony of this synthesis sheds light on the artist's own mind set and evokes a similar sublimation in the viewer.

Abramishvili returned to his favourite subjects over and over again; numerous renderings of *Apple of Paradise*, *Last Supper*, *Underworld*, as well as those of *Prostitute*, demonstrate the artist's ability to seamlessly shift from transcendental subjects to the seemingly base. His oeuvre is rich with representations of wild animals: panthers, leopards, bisons and hyenas. But despite his close observation of nature, his are highly aestheticised, almost ethereal depictions of beasts in a world beyond that of humans. The artist believed that if there was paradise on Earth, it would be in Africa<sup>[1]</sup> a view fully expressed in his paintings.

*Maneater of Kumaon* is an important example of Abramishvili's preoccupation with mystical beasts. A tiger is set against a meticulous and elaborate exotic garden. Lace-like foliage is painstakingly painted in tempera, yet smudged over with a layer of almost transparent paint, in places creating the effect of a soiled antique mural. The tiger itself appears elongated and delicate like a sublime beast that might have stepped out of an Oriental miniature. Abramishvili's thin, meticulous brushstrokes

carefully outlining the figures turn into smudges and dribbles of paint to produce the overall impression of a mirage. Gazing out into the distance the heroic tiger is so other worldly that the victim at his feet can easily pass unnoticed. Covered with streaks of red, (s)he lies lifeless and forgotten. The subdued violence of this work exemplifies the concealed qualities of the artist's utopian visions.

Abramishvili witnessed the turbulent decade preceding the break-up of the Soviet Union that brought with it an unforeseen change in the status quo. The generation of artists from the 80s juxtaposed their own constructed worlds against aggression, political instability and socio-economic uncertainty. Perhaps as a result of such escapism, painting in Georgia experienced a revival not seen since the 1960s. Abramishvili's practice can therefore also be read as a type of resistance and hopefully striving for a better future.

Abramishvili painted a first version of *Maneater of Kumaon* in 1995. However, this earlier version lacks the overall detail and delicacy of the later 2005 work presented here. The colours are of darker brown shades and the smudging is more pervasive across the surface. The earlier beast itself also significantly lacks the grace and majestic presence of its successor. His later works tend to be more ornamentally exquisite. Without ever becoming purely decorative they carry the artist into the depths of his own mystical worlds of tolerance, spirituality and beauty, inviting the viewer along with him.

<sup>[1]</sup> N. Shervashidze, Merab Abramishvili: Painting, Graphics, Tbilisi, 2010, p. 2

