

RUSSIAN **ART + CULTURE**



SUMMER **GUIDE**

RUSSIAN ART WEEK, LONDON ■ 31 MAY - 7 JUNE 2019

RUSSIAN ART + CULTURE



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Above: Mamuka Didebashvili, *Sommelier*, 2016, oil and glazing on linen canvas, 127 x 71cm

Cover: Natalia Goncharova, *Gardening* 1908. Tate © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2019

THE MAGIC OF IMAGINATION

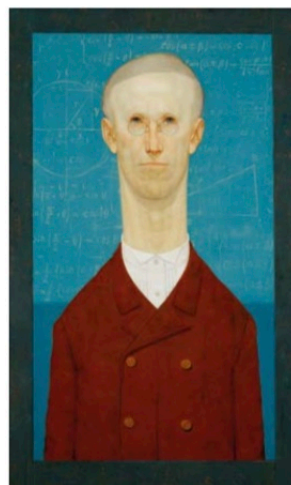
Mamuka Dideba's Paintings, **Shapero Rare Books Gallery, London. 1-6 JUNE**



Sommelier, 2016



Gladiator, 2018



Mathematician, 2014

Each artist is a universe in their own right. Like magicians, artists conjure up whole new realms and make them visible. Some of these realms are the utmost delight to explore. This can be undoubtedly said of the *Magical Worlds of Mamuka Dideba* (Didebashvili) and the characters that dwell in these worlds: engaging, determined, quixotic, stern or serene, occasionally pompous, they nevertheless remain playful, naïve and somewhat childlike. The artist's fantastic world is inhabited by multiple eccentric figures, such as wandering vagabonds, philosophers, warriors, revellers,

jesters, house-keepers and all possible human types represented with love and gentle humour. Although life-like, they are generalisations, an artist's meditation on the human condition and human personality. As Dideba himself points out, 'I strive to present them in such a way that their essential character could be glimpsed from hints at their occupation and descent. I also display their personal accessories because they are informative and add to our ability to understand and interpret the characters.' When looking at Dideba's figurative compositions and portraits, one cannot help

to notice his intrinsic connection with the Renaissance, both Italian and Northern. His *Sommelier* (2016) is as regal as Bronzino's *Cosimo di Medici* or Quentin Matsys's *Portrait of an Old Man*. A double portrait of husband and wife is iconographically related to the famous Uffizi diptych of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza by Piero della Francesca, whilst the female image of the *Key Keeper* (2015) is reminiscent of Rogier van der Weyden portraits or of some seventeenth-century Flemish genre scenes. His *Water Seller* (2015) almost directly points to the bodegon by Velasquez of the same title. His *Old Warrior* (2015) is introspective and contemplative, while the *Gladiator* (2018) turning towards the viewer has something Brueghelesque in his features and bearing (it is not by chance that Dideba was dubbed 'Georgia's Breughel'). Breughel - *Self-Portrait* (2014) somehow reminds us of Pontormo's *Castiglione*.

We may infinitely continue this intellectual game and keep on finding more and more art historical parallels and prototypes without establishing any direct source. Dideba's works are not imitations of Renaissance portraiture, but a visual synthesis supplied by memory. The Tbilisi-born artist must have also been inspired by everyday scenes from Georgian life. Although referring to the Renaissance, Dideba's paintings possess an unmistakably Georgian quality: cheerful, philosophical and life-celebrating. These visions, memories and impressions have been transformed and elevated by the artist's imagination. As he once acknowledged, 'my main goal is to transform

the mundane and the realistic into something special and elevated.' As a result, each painting turns into something mythical, monumental and replete with visual allusions.

Moreover, not only does Dideba borrow visual idioms of Renaissance and Early Baroque art, but he also displays extreme technical mastery in adapting the imprimatura, a multi-layered Renaissance technique which requires skill, patience and knowledge of pigment properties, to his artistic and expressive purposes.

He does not stop here, though. In his typical manner, Dideba continues to experiment with Old Master techniques and uses it in his abstract compositions to achieve an astonishing effect. His geometrically and colouristically complex abstractions take on new contemplative and expressive dimensions. The painterly surface radiates light, adding to the mysteriousness, emotion and depth of the artwork, as it can be seen in *Autumn Prelude (Night)* (2017).

Some of the paintings can be finally seen and admired at *The Magical Worlds of Mamuka Dideba*, the artist's solo show in London organised by Katrine Levin Galleries in partnership with:

**Russian Art and Culture at
Shapero Rare Books Gallery,
32 St George St, Mayfair, London W1S 2EA
Between 1-6 June (Sunday, 2 June included)**

For more information please visit
www.katrinelevin.com