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Press Release

**KONSTANTIN TOTIBADZE: HISTORY OF THE PRESENT**  
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For his first exhibition with the gallery, entitled *History of the Present*, Konstantin Totibadze (b. 1969 in Tbilisi, Georgia) created series of new works (2022-2023) with oil on canvas. Selected works represent two favorite artist's themes – still life and one-object composition with a vase as symbolical image.

Still life has always been the genre in which the virtuoso capability of painting, the deceptively real portrayal of objects and their surfaces, could be directly implemented. A carefully constructed arrangement of different things on a table with lighting from the side that makes the surfaces of the material and objects glow. Time seems to pause, thus making its relentless onward march all the more conscious.

Konstantin Totibadze revives the rich tradition of the European still life painting in a surprising new way, establishing the link between past and present by implementing and developing values, vision, technique, and visual codes of XVI – XVIII centuries' paintings and the genre of still life particularly. Totibadze's objects, remarkable by their very realistic representation and the impression of being part of material life, form a system of codes and symbols which follows and develops tradition of still life painting. The food, vases and tableware painted by the artist are not only aesthetic objects, but also symbols of life, as was the case at the end of the 16th century when the still life genre had developed in Europe. Symbolical meanings are crucial for the depicted objects which he organizes with almost mathematical accuracy in one-line compositions.

In most of Totibadze's still lifes there is a basic installation: you see a few objects lined up on an elongated table and this table is covered by a tablecloth, simply white or with a sophisticated ornament which immediately catch the eye. There is hardly any stylistic element in painting that refers so strongly to a specific cultural context as ornament, which has often developed and refined its special characteristics over centuries. The artist creates and explores the system of ornaments as sedimented cultural history and a kind of cipher that can only be deciphered directly by those rooted in tradition. You will find ornaments in his compositions that come from all possible regions of the world. Totibadze deliberately refrained from copying these ornaments from a template. As a rule, he paints them from memory, even if he imagines a specific pattern such as a Persian or ancient ornament. Obviously, with these combinations of forms, in which a very specific culture with its history and tradition manifests itself, he is not at all concerned with an authentic and faithful reproduction.

In Totibadze's still life, ornament becomes a concept, something one would associate more with avant-garde art than with a realistic painting style. This type of conceptual painting was probably not intended and only became concrete over the years and through the artist's mimesis of his own world of experience.

In his works the artist takes up different stylistic tools of earlier historical art epochs which can stand side by side in the same picture without causing a striking break in style. Here we find, for example, a decanter which could have come from a picture by Willem Kalf, a piece of cheese with the drawing

hardness of the early German still life painter Georg Flegel or an orange whose surface reminds one of the picturesque melting of Jean Siméon Chardin.

His works are not postmodern collages. There are no quotation marks which define the style or pictorial references on a meta-level. This would be postmodern according to Umberto Eco. Totibadze's updating of the seemingly outdated is a different one. It gives him a power in the immediate sense.

Another work series represent compositions with only one single empty vase, some of these mystical objects measure over two meters in size. Then the size of the vase corresponds approximately to that of the human body and, thus, the vase becomes a figure. However, the large vases are rooted in the tradition of surrealism; the enigmatic alienation of the world of things.

Some of the compositions with a vase as a single object feature an almost monochromatic coloring and the pastose application of paint which suggests the surface of stone and reminds one not only of pre-impressionist "plein air" painting but also of the subdued palette of Giorgio Morandi. The famous still life specialist renounced the presentation of details in favor of the almost sculptural modeling of a consistent, overall form. Totibadze, on the other hand, reproduces the flowers and leaves in the bowls as accurately as the painters of the late Middle Ages did.

The artist often depicts the vases in front of a deep black background, into which they almost disappear, so that the emphasis is less on their volume and more on the rich details on their surfaces. The same applies for the still lifes where more objects are arranged on a table. The evenly falling tablecloth makes up a large portion of the painting and has the effect of an abstract area in which the patterned, internal structure is portrayed in detail. Such a play with surface and space is specific for Totibadze's compositions. When life-size motifs are depicted, as in most of his still life paintings, there is often the impression that one could enter the pictorial space. But the ingenious illusion of reality that Totibadze exercises on the surface of the objects does not span over the entire picture space and the composition of his paintings. Here, the artist rather follows the paths of modernity, where, for example in Paul Cézanne or Pierre Bonnard, frontal and top views are interlocked so that the uniformed, perspective space is tipped into the surface, so to speak. Totibadze conceals such fractures in space, similar to his breaks in style, in such a way that he elegantly covers them up through the composition instead of ostentatiously emphasizing them.

Konstantin Totibadze's way of reviewing the art history of still life in a painterly and motivic way would have made him an ingenious forger. It takes a detective's eye to discover all the intricate details, such as single drops of water on the side of the vase. However, the artist does not compete with the accuracy of the technical image. While, for example, Gerhard Richter transfers photographically captured light reflections into painting, Totibadze makes the light roll off the color, as Vermeer did. But when Richter depicts a single candle, there is a direct connection to Totibadze's vases, which sometimes resemble urns. Both motifs remind us, in the classical tradition of still life, of the transience of existence.

Born in 1969 in Tbilisi (Georgia), Konstantin Totibadze lives and works in Kronberg (Germany). He studied in Moscow Academic Art School in 1985 -1988, at the Tbilisi Art University named after Y. Nikoladze in 1988, at the Tbilisi Art Academy in 1989 -1991. Konstantin Totibadze's works are in the collections of State Museum of Art of the Orient (Moscow, RU), Moscow Museum of Modern Art (RU) and in private collections in USA, Japan, Hong Kong, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Russia, Great Britain, Portugal and the Netherlands. In 2013 and 2014 his paintings were sold at Phillips auction house in London and New York, as well as at auctions at Bonhams auction house in London in 2021 and 2023. Furthermore, at online auction "KunstKontor" in Germany in 2022.

***Solo exhibitions include among others:***

Gallery "Kunsthandel Hagemeyer" Frankfurt/Main (DE), 2023; Stadtgalerie Badehaus, Bad Soden am Taunus, (DE), 2023, Art fair "Discovery Art Fair" Frankfurt (DE), 2021; "Totibadze Gallery" Moscow (RU), 2018, "Redline Gallery" GUM, Moscow (RU), 2019; "Totibadze Gallery" Moscow (RU), 2016; "Landscapes", Moscow Museum of Modern Art (RU), 2012; "Atlas Group", Moscow (RU); 2009: "Paradise Garden" VP Studio, Moscow (RU), 2007; "King Gallery", Berkley, CA (USA), 2001; "Midsummer Night Dreams", The State Museum of the Art of The Orient, Moscow (RU), 1996; "Gallery within a Gallery", The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (RU), 1996.

***Group exhibitions include among others:***

Gallery "Kunstkontor" Wiesbaden (DE), 2022; Art Fair "Da Moscow" Moscow (RU), 2021; Art Fair "Da Moscow" Moscow (RU), 2019; Gallery "Proun" Moscow (RU), 2015; "Mosfilm Gallery", Moscow (RU), 2010; Art Fair "Art Manezh", Moscow (RU), 2006; "Gourmaniada, Art Play, Moscow (RU), 2005; "Art Party" at the Yakut Gallery, Moscow (RU), 2004.