Kote Mikaberidze, editors Soso Dumbadze, Nino Dzandzava. Tbilisi, Sa.Ga. Publishing for Society, 2018, 505 pp., illustrations, filmography, paperback, ISBN 978-9941-8-0427-4

From Ivan Perestiani and Nikoloz Shengelaia to Tengiz Abuladze and Otar Ioseliani, Georgian cinema is internationally known as a pantheon of auteurs with unique visual and narrative talents. The new volume on Kote Mikaberidze (1896-1973) introduces to the international audience another important and often unjustly overlooked filmmaker known primarily for his stunning directorial debut *My Grandmother* (1929). Yet the volume, conceived and edited by Soso Dumbadze and Nino Dzandzava, is more than a biographical account. It is a fascinating piece of archival archaeology which goes beyond the auteur-centered logic to reconstruct the fabric of the Georgian and broader Soviet film industry in which Mikaberidze worked or, more often than not, strove to get creative work done.

Mikaberidze started as an actor in 1921 and later turned to filmmaking, making as his directorial debut the eccentric satire *My Grandmother* (1929), which was co-written with Giorgi Mdivani and featured original stage design by Irakli Gamrekeli and bold camerawork by Anton Polikevich and Vladimir Poznan. This avant-garde burlesque on Soviet red tape and nepotism was banned as “formalist” and remained shelved until its “rediscovery” in 1967. Following the ban, Mikaberidze made a *kulturfilm* (*Agrominimumi*, 1930), a film promoting kolkhozes in Georgia (*Hassan*, 1932), a historical costume drama based on an episode from a medieval poem by Shota Rustaveli “The Knight in the Panther's Skin” (*Kajeti*, 1936), a collective farm comedy (*The Fiancé Who Was Too Late*, 1939), a war propaganda film (*The Outpost*, 1941), puppet animation (*Zuriko and Mariko*, 1952), and a newsreel on the visit of an Albanian delegation to Soviet Georgia (1952); by the end of his career he was working at a dubbing studio. Similar to Dziga Vertov and Alexander Medvedkin, with whom he shared the passion for innovative and critical filmmaking, Mikaberidze’s professional itinerary might be seen as a quick rise and a gradual downward career spiral. But rather than suggesting a victimizing narrative, the materials in the volume suggest a complex agency of the artist, whose support of the ideological premises coexisted with resistance to the policy of creative energy annihilation.

The massive volume opens with introductory essays by the editors sketching out the biographical canvas and introducing the milestones of Mikaberidze’s professional achievements, followed by an overview of his films in the international context by film historian Thomas Tode. The larger part of the volume includes materials introducing Mikaberidze as actor, director, scriptwriter, public speaker, diary-writer, and victim of political persecution. It includes primary sources covering Mikaberidze’s trial for a series of anti-Soviet letters he sent out in 1956. Particularly interesting for understanding the mechanics of Soviet cultural politics are the internal discussions on the works in progress, materials on incomplete, interrupted, or banned projects, as well as scripts and diary entries, included in the volume. At the same time, the editors highlight the

limitations their book project faced: of the four letters written by Mikaberidze, only two were allowed to be published by the Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The volume allows the readers to grasp the growing control and at the same time the arbitrariness of Soviet cultural management. It provides interesting new materials on the Mikaberidze's relationship with other filmmakers-turned administrators such as Mikhail (Mikhael) Chiaureli and Mikhail Kalatozov (Mikhael Kalatozishvili), as well as Moscow-based writers and film consultants Viktor Shklovsky and Sergei Tretiakov, who were actively involved with Georgian cinema in the 1920s. The wealth of visual material deserves special mention – family photographs, facsimiles of several documents, rare film posters in various languages, photographs from the production set and rare film stills, as well as Mikaberidze's own graphics, sketches, and caricatures - are a testimony to the multisided nature of his talent.

Providing a wealth of contextual information on the Georgian art scene from the early 1920s to the early 1960s, the volume contributes to a nuanced understanding of the history of Soviet cinema, as well as making accessible in English new materials for understanding the power dynamic between film industries in Tbilisi and Moscow. The editors worked in 14 public and private archives, including the Georgian National Film Center, the Georgian State Museum of Theater, Music, Cinema, and Choreography, The Archive of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, a multitude of private collections, and archives in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Altogether 76 archival sources have been translated and published for the first time in English, making the volume a treasure trove for film historians. It will be useful for the international community of scholars working on Georgian cinema and more broadly Soviet cultural politics, as well as for a wide range of readers interested in responses to the mechanisms of control and coercion in cinematography at times of increasing ideological pressure.

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Review for *"Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema"* (London)