

Mariam Akubardia

b. 1991, Gali, Georgia

"When I was six years old, I wanted to understand what had happened inside abandoned houses and bombed buildings in our neighborhood. I think my artistic journey started there."

Mariam Akubardia's multidisciplinary practice examines the spatial and psychological architecture of displacement, tracing the enduring consequences of political rupture across the landscapes of the South Caucasus. Working across painting, installation, and collaborative public projects, Akubardia constructs complex visual narratives where the human figure and its surrounding environment carry equal weight. Her work serves as a vital repository of memory, bearing witness to communities still negotiating the lasting imprint of ethno-political conflict.

Born in Abkhazia, Akubardia and her family were displaced during the war in the early 1990s, later returning to the occupied Gali region where she spent her formative years. Growing up in a destabilised territory — moving between temporary shelters and abandoned properties — profoundly informed her understanding of belonging and impermanence. The artist locates the genesis of her visual language in these early experiences: following her grandmother through war-scarred neighbourhoods, entering empty houses, and encountering bombed structures. This early necessity to comprehend the histories embedded within ruined spaces remains the catalyst for her ongoing inquiry.

Observation and sustained dialogue form the bedrock of Akubardia's methodology. Her paintings are the distillation of rigorous documentary research, repeated returns to occupied territories, and long-term engagement with internally displaced persons. This commitment to collective testimony is exemplified by *6200* (2020), a collaborative graphic novel initiated with Giorgi Jibladze that archives the intergenerational experiences of IDPs from Abkhazia. For Akubardia, the act of painting is the culmination of this profound listening — a space where archival truth meets emotional resonance.

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Architectural spaces recur throughout Akubardia's canvases, operating not as passive backgrounds but as active protagonists. Schools, sanatoriums, apartment blocks, and domestic interiors are rendered as vessels of lived experience. These structures — many of which became ad-hoc shelters for displaced families for decades — speak to the slow violence of social marginalisation, revealing how temporary forms of refuge solidify into the permanent conditions of everyday life. Fragments of Soviet mosaics frequently interrupt these environments; once the visual embodiment of utopian collective progress, they reappear in Akubardia's work to expose the tension between failed ideological promises and contemporary realities.

Nature occupies a similarly complex position within her visual lexicon. The subtropical environment of Abkhazia — its dense vegetation, citrus trees, and cacti — threads through her storytelling. Informed by memories of her grandmother's garden as a rare site of childhood stability, nature in Akubardia's work is never merely idyllic. It exists in uneasy coexistence with damaged infrastructure, persisting and reclaiming space regardless of human circumstance. This tension between destruction and regeneration imbues her landscapes with a distinctive, melancholic vitality.

Akubardia's figures are inextricably bound to these environments, often appearing absorbed in an interior temporality. Their gestures and relationships to the surrounding architecture suggest that the trauma of war extends far beyond geography, fundamentally altering how individuals inhabit time itself. While her practice is deeply rooted in the specific history of Abkhazia, it fiercely resists reducing political experience to mere autobiography. Through her work, Akubardia articulates a broader, universal condition: how occupation and displacement continue to reshape individual perception and social structures long after the immediate violence of conflict has ceased.

EDUCATION

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|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2017 | M.A. in Fine Arts (Painting), Tbilisi State Academy of Arts, Tbilisi, Georgia |
| 2013 | B.A. in Fine Arts (Painting), Tbilisi State Academy of Arts, Tbilisi, Georgia |

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EXHIBITIONS

- 2025 "Common Breathturn" / Yerevan, Armenia
- 2025 NADA Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
- 2025 Bonhams Auction, London, United Kingdom
- 2025 Group Exhibition, Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney, Australia
- 2023 Istanbul Art Fair, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2023 Group Exhibition and Cultural Exchange Program, Agra, India
- 2022 Dubai Art Fair, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- 2022 "Painted Walls Create an Illusion of Reality" / The Why Not Gallery, Tbilisi, Georgia
- 2021 "Sometimes Water Bursts Out from Dried-Up Fountains" / The Why Not Gallery, Tbilisi, Georgia
- 2020 "Art & Freedom" / Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Tbilisi, Georgia
- 2019 "Citrus Trees Covered Against the Frost", Public Installation (Winner of the Bauhaus Women Competition) / Heinrich Böll Foundation South Caucasus, Tbilisi, Georgia
- 2017 "Personal Existence", Venice Biennale Parallel Project / Palazzo Mora, Venice, Italy
- 2016 Group Exhibition, Phoenix Gallery, Chelsea, New York, USA

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RESIDENCIES

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| 2026 | Weltkunstzimmer Residency / Düsseldorf, Germany (Aug–Nov) |
| 2022 | Ria Kiburia Foundation Residency / Kachreti, Georgia |
| 2022 | Seven Sentences on Time Residency / Kachreti, Georgia |
| 2021 | In the Shadow of the Big Trees Residency / Tbilisi, Georgia |
| 2020 | Tbilisi Online Biennale Residency Program / Tbilisi, Georgia |
| 2017 | European Cultural Centre Residency Program / Venice, Italy |

AWARDS, RECOGNITIONS & PUBLICATIONS

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| 2025– 2026 | Work discussed in the academic essay Violence of Tropicalization: On the Politics of Cold and Whiteness in the Subtropics of the Caucasus |
| 2025 | Night Rooms for Unfinished Goodbyes featured in Catapult – The New Munchies Art Club Magazine, text by Dominique Catherina Foertig |
| 2023 | Featured by Harper's Bazaar Germany as one of the most important emerging artists |
| 2023 | 6200 (co-authored with Giorgi Jibladze), graphic novel on the lives of internally displaced people, published by ZTSCRPT, Berlin |
| 2019 | Winner of the Bauhaus Women Competition / Heinrich Böll Foundation South Caucasus & Bauhaus Project, Tbilisi, Georgia |