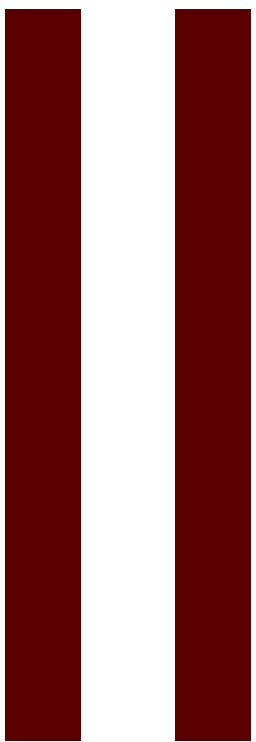


*A reader*

قلقله

*(Qalqalah)*



**Antariksa** →

**Biljana Ciric** →

**Maxime Guitton** →

**Marianna Hovhannisyan** →

**Otobong Nkanga** →

**Victoria Noorthoorn** →

**Sarah Rifky** →

**Simon Soon** →

**Bétonsalon – Center for Art and Research  
Kadist Art Foundation**

*Archive-Practice* is a research-based curatorial project by Marianna Hovhannisyan (2008-ongoing). It focuses on curating a contemporary art collection as an environmental and archaeological set of relations, in which a collection of artifacts and interviews with artists takes the form of “a book that doesn’t exist yet, set within a dialogue that does.”

The project works with past initiatives by Armenian artists/curators who established alternative creative practices and institutions through the 1990s, in the early stages of independent/post-Soviet Armenia. I have produced a series of audio/video interviews with artists and selected subject-related artifacts to form the collection that serves as the project core, thus activating the contemporary state of now-absent past initiatives—failed, forgotten, and fragmented. Through this unregistered history, the project opens up a new space of enquiry and methodology, where the collection becomes a record of “unfinishedness” attached to the project of identity of the neoliberal state of Armenia, and the ways these “absences” are matched by “unattended objects”—the markers of artistic practices.



## # 12 In Between Lines

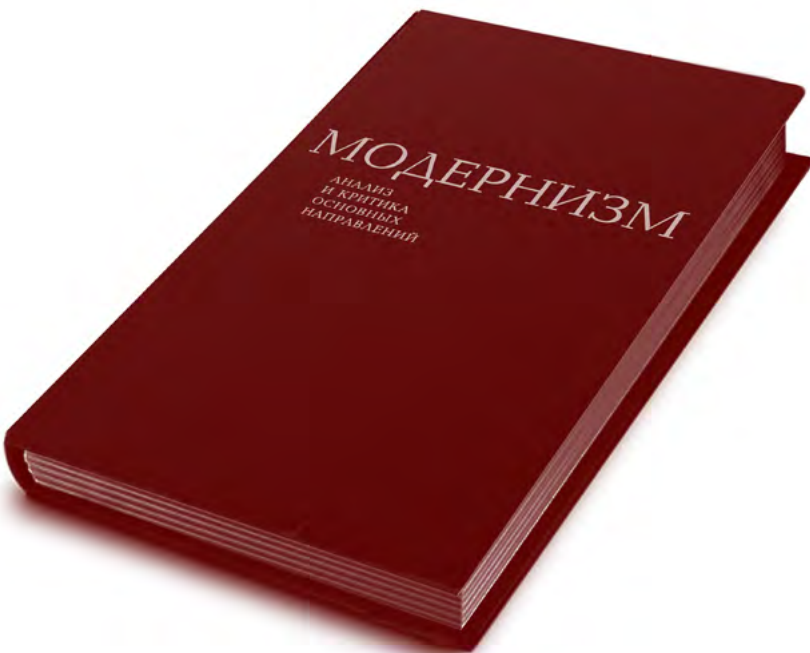
Artifact: Модернизм. Анализ и критика основных направлений (*Modernism: Analysis and Critique of Main Tendencies*) book, 1972<sup>1</sup> →

Contributor: Artist Grigor Khachatryan, 2011

*Modernism: Analysis and Critique of Main Tendencies* book-artifact from the collection of *Archive-Practice* curatorial project is the marker of reading in between lines—a common practice among several artists in the 1970s in the Soviet Union and in Soviet Armenia.

The book was published in 1969 by “Art” publisher in Moscow and edited by Y. Kollinskih and V. Vanslov. It was reprinted many times—in 1972, 1980, and 1987, as it had a demand. It was an anthology of articles written in Russian about the 20th century modernist tendencies of art developed in the West, such as Expressionism, Cubism, Fauvism and so on. The anthology was an “official” linguistic, theoretical criticism from the socialist positions, where the set of articles and opinions criticized the so-called Western tendencies in art from the Soviet ideological perspective of art history. Paradoxically, this book served as a turning point for some artists living in the Soviet Union to grasp and to be influenced by modernist ideas through reading their negative criticism.

As contemporary artist Grigor Khachatryan from Armenia states in his interview (2011): “My perceptions changed dramatically when I read a book about bourgeois dissident art called Модернизм. Анализ и критика основных направлений (*Modernism: Analysis and Critique of Main Tendencies* published in 1972). It was from the viewpoint of socialist realism, an entirely Soviet art criticism, but we were used to reading between the lines.”



Audio/video interview with artist Grigor Khachatryan on August 17, 2011, in Yerevan.

Marianna Hovhannisyan: Reflecting on the chronological and ideological development of your artistic practice, what can we consider to be the relationship between *Grigor Khachatryan*—an artist who performatively articulates his name as *the contemporary*—and Grigor Khachatryan, who since 2003 has been involved in educational work?

Grigor Khachatryan: The school I'm familiar with was during the Soviet Union—the school of dread and fear. Though I spent my student years mocking the educational process, I was laughing at the absurdness called “Soviet.” It was why I was kicked out of university in 1976, and why I had to apply a second time in 1980. For about twenty, twenty-five years after graduating, I kept jumping up in my sleep, dreaming about being back in school and my university years. My mocking was a kind of involuntary performative form of resistance long before I encountered it in the field of arts.

My friends and my involvement in educational activities at the Mkhitar Sebastatsi Educational Complex in the suburbs of the city could be considered an escape from the center of Yerevan, like an exile, a political asylum. I can't say either that we were looking for comfort. One needs an independent source of power in order to avoid the path of falsification and comfort in art. Nowadays students are free from the nightmares of school during the Soviet Union; we arm the students with professional skills, with social and cultural values, and we send them like disciples into their homes, streets and yards, so they can shatter their friends' and parents' perceptions of art.

*Grigor Khachatryan* before 1972—that is, before I turned twenty—is when I studied the arts by reading, painting and imitating Picasso, the Fauvists and the Impressionists, and the Renaissance period. This was what was accepted by the Soviet Union, and why it was available to us.

My perceptions changed dramatically when I read a book about bourgeois dissident art called Модернизм. Анализ и критика основных направлений (*Modernism: Analysis and Critique of Main Tendencies published in 1972*).<sup>2</sup> It was from the viewpoint of socialist realism—it was entirely Soviet art criticism, but we were used to reading between the lines.



In 1973 I began to receive a Polish magazine I had long desired called *projekt*—the reason for my interest in posters up to this day. At the back of the magazine there was a Russian translation of the texts, and when I read these interviews, I was truly surprised to discover how it was possible to interview an artist! It was completely different—some kind of revelation for a reader of Soviet art history. I understood at that moment that until then I had been filling my brain with empty, nonsensical things. The cultural and informational blockade had been smashed. Also, being beatniks, we were already obsessed with hard rock concerts, which in Yerevan took place nearly every day, and which could be heard from our art studios in the evenings.

The first significant works for me were in 1972. These were performances with my artist friend Suren Navasardyan and my musician friend Gagik Harutyunyan. They took place where the Hayastan shopping center is now. Near the big clock at the traffic crossing, we rented a studio, where we prepared for the Pedagogical Institute entrance exams.

It was a *subbotnik*,<sup>3</sup> which was dedicated to May 1st. At the entrance to the studio, I hung a five-meter wind-torn banner that read “Ketse!”.<sup>4</sup> Standing on the balcony of the studio I read out the May 1st slogans that filled every page of the *Soviet Armenia* newspaper’s May 1st edition. At the same time, Suren and Gagik were shoveling construction waste into a truck parked directly below the balcony. Every slogan I read equaled one shovel of rubbish and one minute of applause. Laborers whose shovels we had borrowed also joined in.

Our next performance was at the same place, during a military parade. We attached a piece of paper to a brush like a flag, stood next to the soldier leading the march and shouted out orders just like him. Our public performances at the entrance of the studio continued until we were kicked out of the place.

In 1973, I was obsessed with Modernism. Eight paintings remain that were never exhibited; it was forbidden to show such things at the time, and besides it was somehow anachronistic. Between 1974 and 1990 I engaged only in abstraction—I mean, until the contemporary art scene developed in Armenia, for example, with a group of artists in the 1980s called Մև քառակուսի (*Sev Qarakusi*, in English “Black Square”), Միջուկային կենտրոն (*Mijukayin kentron*, in English “Nuclear Centre”), and later *The 3rd Floor*. I did not join *The 3rd Floor*<sup>5</sup> when they first began because their early work reminded me of my 1972 performances—a phase I had already passed. It was only later that I participated in their exhibits.





Grigor Khachatryan  
"Grigor Khachatryan" Prize  
The physical test of "Grigor Khachatryan" Prize  
by Ashot Hovhannisyan, 1974

Awarding "Grigor Khachatryan"  
Prize to Georgian artist Nadia Tsulukidze, 2007  
Image: Courtesy of the Artist

**projekt**

SZTUKA WIZUALNA  
I WZORNICTWO  
VISUAL ART & DESIGN

4'75 | 107

28  
Rueben 10 nos 5 nr 67  
cerampan 12 ug 37/64



An image of *projekt* Polish magazine, April 1975  
Image: Courtesy of Grigor Khachatryan





# III-

Grigor Khachatryan  
*Official Meetings, 2008 - ongoing*  
Photo series of performances



Grigor Khachatryan  
*A Head*, 1973  
Oil on cardboard, 49,5 × 35 cm  
Image: Courtesy of the Artist



Grigor Khachatryan  
*Paintings-1*, 1974  
Oil on canvas, 60 × 80 cm  
Image: Courtesy of the Artist

### III-



Grigor Khachatryan  
*Paintings-1*, 1989  
Oil on canvas, 114 × 156 cm  
Image: Courtesy of the Artist

MH: In your work relating to contemporary art since 1991, mass media and performance were the main modes of expression. How did you shape the relationship between the means and methods you were developing at that time, and concepts that needed urgent addressing? I am thinking specifically of your lengthy experience with AR TV (1996-2001) as an artistic director. You were also art director for Գարուն (*Garoun*),<sup>6</sup> an alternative magazine, from 1987 to 1996.

GKH: Reading Immanuel Kant's *Aesthetics* in 1980, I came across the statement "Art is purposiveness without a purpose." This statement guided me for a long time. Subsequently, I compared my actions to those of a child. When a child is curious about something, he just points it out and tries to draw attention to it; to turn the invisible into the visible, the intangible into the tangible, the understandable into the mis-understandable, and vice versa. We just need to find the appropriate means of expression. It can be a video, a performance, an installation, a painting, or a poster with text. An artist needs to figure out not what he wants, but what form is required. It is highly important to alienate yourself maximally, no matter how complicated it may be, because you are always subordinate to aesthetic norms, and your work will derive from that influence. In this situation, you will not contribute properly to disentangling the concept. You should recognize that you are free because you are making visible and tangible what no one else has noticed or made understandable before. The feeling of your freedom lasts until the completion of the work, and sometimes afterwards, when on occasion you come across the work.

For a long time, I was satisfied with my work in *Garoun* magazine. I liked how the work of art rapidly proliferated. It allowed for a deep interaction and communication with society... and TV was even faster, and more influential. Nowadays we have no cultural magazines, no cultural TV shows where contemporary art, artists, works of art, analysis and criticism can be presented. At the moment there is one exception—a new online magazine called *Arteria*<sup>137</sup>. I think it's very important that the discourse be open to large circles of society, otherwise we would only have an elitist discourse of art.

We need to demolish the borders between art and life, consciousness and sub-consciousness. We need total art and cultural dictatorship. At *Garoun* magazine I presented all *The 3rd Floor* exhibitions, and always contemporary artists. With art critic and curator Nazareth Karoyan



we made the *EX VOTO* cultural pages. For AR TV, I presented contemporary art as well as contemporary artists, and nearly all the exhibitions, and musical and theatre projects at the NPAK.<sup>8</sup>→ Video art and films about artists that were shown on AR TV are now kept at the Centre Pompidou's National Museum of Modern Art in France. The film project *Քաղաք (Qaghag, in English "City")*↳ was also made with the support of AR TV, and some of these films were recently bought by the Museum of Art in Lodz, Poland. With the help of curator and art critic Ruben Arevshatyan we created the cultural TV show "Արիստոտել" (Aristotle), with cultural theoretician Vardan Jaloyan we made the cultural broadcast "Դիվադար" (Divadar) and with Karen Mkhitaryan the "Ուրբաթախոս (Էսսեներ)՝ նորագույն ավանդապատումներ", *Urbatakhos*, (Essays/Newest Tales) broadcast with artist Arman Grigoryan we made an art history broadcast called "Veda" — and all of this thanks to enthusiasm! You see, Marianna, right now I'm also shocked at how much was done! If you add up all the TV programs today, together they wouldn't come close to having as many cultural broadcasts as we had—and we're not even talking about their quality! Nowadays, there are some indications, we can expect things, on networks and the internet. That is why many political forces are considering censorship and restrictions.



Grigor Khachatryan

An installation of the history of *Caroun* magazine

*Future in the Past* exhibition, Kalents Museum, Yerevan, 2014

Image: Courtesy of the Artist



3.92

Grigor Khachatryan  
*Garoun* magazine cover-design by Grigor Khachatryan, March, 1992  
Image: Courtesy of the Artist

MH: In order to make all these critical practices available to society, we need, for example, state awareness in the form of specific elaborated programs, which are absent in Armenia. There are a few initiatives, but always from the inside—decentralized and marginal. Where do you see a solution now for accessibility, since in the 1990s at least the communication and interrelation with communities of interest and public spheres were regular and direct—due, indeed, to the enthusiasm of contemporary artists and their diverse and multifaceted propositions, projects, and so on?

GKH: At last, we come to the politics that exist in Armenia. Nearly all contemporary artists believe that we need revolution in order to have a democratic country; the other representatives with their actions and silence serve only the criminal-oligarchic class. In art there is a relationship between the private and public sectors and it is necessary that the dialogue between these two becomes closer. It is necessary for mass media to be independent and free, but this is impossible under the current authorities. Contemporary art is politicized art by necessity—either it is politicized, or it is not contemporary.

MH: In the 1990s the establishment and occupation of new territories were essential. Though it always strikes me that there has never been a comprehensive collaboration or relationship with the establishment—with fine arts or academic institutions, or the ministry of culture, for example. The contemporary artists who created the art scene of the 1990s are still today in some sort of marginal state. Were there any discussions or plans in the 1990s to build relationships with the state or academia, since at that time a spirit of cultural change was underway?

GKH: I can only describe what there was in the 1990s, and what there is not now. The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia organized an exhibition in Bochum, Germany [1995], where our contemporary art was exhibited perfectly. Later, it was exhibited in Moscow. That was when the NPAK was created, and it was granted permission to present Armenia at the 46th Venice Biennale for the first time.<sup>9></sup> Then the Hay-Art Cultural Center<sup>10></sup> opened, which brought with it a range of important



projects. In the Museum of Literature, the galleries of Nazareth Karoyan, Charlie Khachatryan and Tatul Arakyan opened one after the other. *The 3rd Floor* almost completely occupied the Artists Union, and the Gyumri International Biennial of Contemporary Art was founded [in 1997]—and the Modern Art Museum of Yerevan<sup>11</sup> had already opened long before. Today, the Hay-Art Cultural Center no longer exists, and handing the Modern Art Museum to a brother meant that he treated it like his own home... it could be called The Henrik Igityan Collection, but it is not a museum of modern art. In 1991, I regretfully declined to donate my works to the Modern Art Museum's permanent exhibition because by then it had already become irrelevant to its name—even though I had aspired to be exhibited there, and they had once held important exhibitions. The existence of the NPAK depends on the good will of the authorities and it is financed by donors, whereas the Gyumri Biennial and the National Association of Art Critics [founded in 2005], receive no support from the state. This sad situation first emerged as the authoritarian regime was forming in 2008. A1+ channel was closed [in 2002] and the rest [of the media] became easily controlled. Contemporary art and its representatives are a real headache for these authorities. They want to get rid of us, or make us nationalistic servants to the tastes and displays of false patriotism. It is these devotees to contemporary art who are creating the art scene, and presenting it both here and to the outside, while the Ministry of Culture of Armenia is busy organizing extravagant events and anniversaries.

MH: The “*I Am Grigor Khachatryan*” manifesto was a turning point in your biography as an artist. It signaled a turning away from traditional art forms towards more conceptual positions and practices. Were there already preconditions that existed for it—for example, Armenia's independence from the Soviet Union and the political context at the beginning of the 1990s<sup>12</sup>—or was it a gradual transition towards exploring a new, different space?

GKH: Traditional artists shed salty tears when they bid farewell to painting and drawing, whereas artists on the other bank are still applauding loudly. From 1970 until 1996, I rented art studios in different parts of the city, but starting in 1990 I didn't need to do so because the art and art studios began moving with *Grigor Khachatryan*. I started to use the material and objects around me, the things we live with and in. Art is not just a picture





hanging on a wall, it is an environment. I reconnected with the performances of 1972, which had no continuation because of the absence of a contemporary milieu. Yes, the prerequisites were created by our active participation, and I don't mean to make the reasons sound grandiloquent, but it was due to a common concern about the future of the country. Nationalistic problems, which resulted from the war condition, were important for many people, but for most of the artists, the building of an open society was never secondary. There was some horizontal communication with many state members who politely accepted the criticism directed at them, not only in the mass media but also in public places.

At the annual exhibition of the Union of Artists entitled *Exhibition of One Work*, every member had the right to exhibit one work of his or her choice. This was in 1990. The *Manifesto* was exhibited for two or three days, and then it was removed because a woman said it was a disgrace. The *Manifesto* was about total openness, about not being hidden and not hiding—it was a rejection of secrets and the disavowal of knowledge gained from eating the forbidden fruit. It was about accountability for being naked, and simply, most importantly, about not prioritizing the nakedness.

I think the *Manifesto* was important: you have no place of retreat, you have not given yourself room to change, and no clothes will save you. I think the manifestation of the rejection of wisdom by refusing the apple of Eden was behind the formation and subsequent dissolution of the *Party of Fools*<sup>13</sup> that existed in the form of articles, including a series of press statements issued in the 1990s. I dissolved the *Party* by joining the government, by writing statements and declarations announcing how well they assumed the titles and carried on the functions of a party of fools.

Everybody has the right to be a fool, and let there be nothing except common sense upon our altar of freedom.



Grigor Khachatryan  
*Manifesto*, 1990

"I am not a man, I am Grigor Khachatryan, you are not men, you are Grigor Khachatryan's contemporary. Grigor Khachatryan a name high and delightful."

Image: Courtesy of the Artist

Grigor Khachatryan (1952) works and lives in Yerevan. Khachatryan has played a prominent role in the development of the contemporary, alternative art scene in Armenia. Since the early 1990s his artistic practice has been focused on his name and body as the main concepts of his art works and projects (*"Grigor Khachatryan"* Prize since 1974 or *Manifesto*, 1990). He is known for his radical performances and public actions, as well as for long-term projects such as *The International Center of Planning Accidents* or his engagement in the mass media field. Khachatryan was the art editor of *Caroun* magazine (1987-1996) and the artistic director of AR TV Company (1996-2002). He works at the Fine Arts High-School at Mkhitar Sebastatsi educational complex as a master designer. Selected exhibitions include: *Future in the Past*, Kalentz Museum (Yerevan, 2014); Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum (2012); the 54th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, Armenian Pavilion (2011); *From Armenia...* (Quimper, 2007), the 20th International *Poster* Biennial of Warsaw (2006); *Adieu Parajanov* (Vienna, 2003), as well as *Parallel reality* exhibition in the Hay-Art Cultural Center and the 1st International Biennial of Gyumri (1998).



Translators: Christopher Gasparian and Lusine Hovhannisyan. Special thanks to Fareed Armaly, Samvel Baghdasaryan, Grigor Khachatryan and Elodie Royer for their support in various ways.

# Notes:

1. The first edition dates back to 1969. The current title is translated from Russian. ←
2. *ibid.* ←
3. Subbotniks were days of community and volunteer work in the Soviet Union. ←
4. "Hurrah!" in Armenian. ←
5. The most active period of the **The 3rd Floor** (sometimes called a group, sometimes an artistic-cultural movement) was from 1987 to 1994. Its name came from the first happening-intervention that took place on the third floor of the Artists' Union in Yerevan in 1987. As art historian Vardan Azatyan argues, its creation was anchored in the context of Perestroika. **The 3rd Floor** drew together a group of artists, writers, musicians and theoreticians to resist the dominant ideological traditions of socialist realism, through happenings, performances, manifestos, and an artistic approach to painting using expressive gestures and intentions. ←
6. "Spring" in Armenian. The independent, literary, cultural and social magazine founded in 1967. ←
7. Available at <http://www.arteria.am> ↪. ←
8. The Center for Contemporary Experimental Art or ACCEA, known as NPAK, was officially founded in 1994. See <http://www.accea.info/en> ↪. ←
9. In 1995, the first official pavilion of the Republic of Armenia at the Venice Biennale was organized by the NPAK, presenting the work of artists Samvel Baghdasaryan and Karen Andreasian. ←
10. The Hay-Art Cultural Center (1997-2004, artistic director Ruben Arevshatyan) was one of the largest contemporary art centers in Yerevan initiated and run by the local artistic community. For years it produced collaborative projects within the local art scene, and within an international network. In 2004, the municipality of Yerevan closed down the cultural center. Nowadays the center holds occasional exhibitions. ←
11. The Modern Art Museum of Yerevan was founded in 1972 by art historian Henrik Igityan (director of the museum until 2009) and with the strong support of Armenian artists active in the 1960s (considered late modernists). It was the first modern art museum in the entire Soviet bloc. Various generations of artists from the 1960s until today have based their artistic biographies and practices on either their direct or indirect relationship to the museum, or their opposition to and criticism of its position in the development of art in Armenia after the 1980s. For the museum's current activities, see <http://www.mamy.am> ↪. ←
12. In reference to Perestroika, the Nagorno-Karabakh war, and the new economic and cultural development of Armenia towards the definition of a democratic, open society. ←
13. A performance project by Grigor Khachatryan created in 2006.←



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Syndicat

**Qalqalah** is the name of a polyglot heroine invented by curator and writer Sarah Rifky, who gradually loses her memory in a not-so-distant future where notions of language, art and economy as we know them today have collapsed. This heroine is appearing in two of Sarah Rifky's texts published in **Qalqalah 1** ↗ and **2**.

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Bétonsalon – Center for art and research strives to develop a space to reflect on and in society. Integrated into the site of the University Paris 7 at the very heart of neighborhood undergoing reconstruction, the ZAC Paris Rive Gauche in the 13th district of Paris, Bétonsalon works at the confluence of art and university research with the ambition to question normalized forms of production, classification and distribution of knowledge; Villa Vassilieff, in the 15th arrondissement, is its second location.

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