

Pirosmani

USSR | 1969 | 105 minutes

Credits

Director	Giorgi Shengelaya
Screenplay	Erlom Akhvlediani, Giorgi Shengelaya
Photography	Konstantin Apryatin, Dudar Margievi, Aleqsandre Rekhviashvil
Music	Nodar Gabunia, V. Kukhianidze

Cast

Nico Pirosmanichvili	Avtandil Varazi
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In Brief

A slow and sensitive portrait of the great Georgian primitive artist who died in 1918 and whose work is still not widely known outside Russia, Pirosmani effectively keeps its distance from the central character. Proud and lonely, Pirosmani forsakes all security to paint, exchanging his work in city bars for food, drink and a bed. His isolation is conveyed through composition and image, while his private life (alcoholism and an inability to make contact with a singer he silently worships) is hinted rather than stressed. A restrained film, possibly too non-involving for some, beautifully shot in muted colours, and composed of studies with the subjects often looking posed and self-conscious, as the artist must have seen them. It's not often that an artist gets the film he deserves.

Time Out

A man leaves his home-town to take his life into his own hands. The plot is well-known and has often been put on screen, especially in the Soviet Union (e. g. the Soviet classic *Mimino* by Giorgi Danelia), and yet Giorgi Shengelaia's *Pirosmani* is a movie whose originality in many ways lives up to the idiosyncrasy of its protagonist. The film about the naïve painter Pirosmani was one of Shengelaia's earlier movies but is nevertheless widely considered among his most important works.

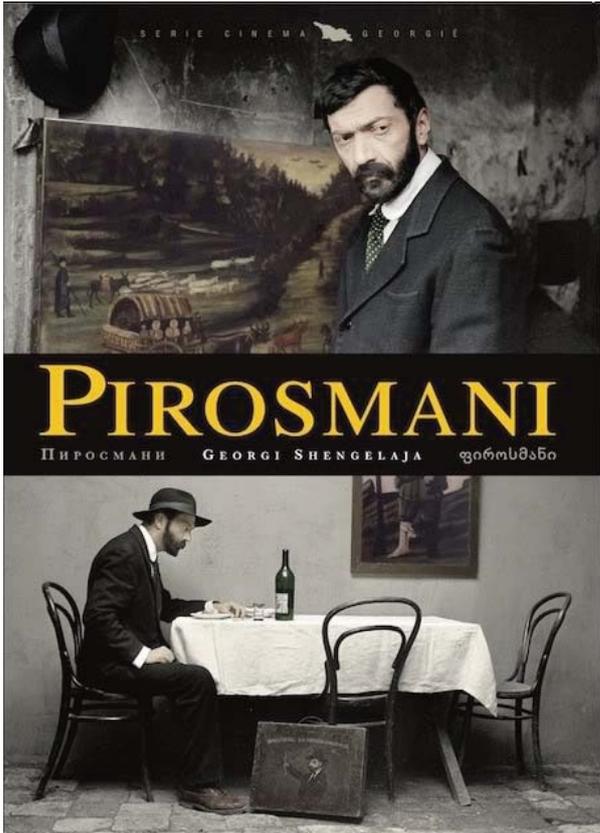
Nikoloz Pirosmani was a Georgian painter active around the turn of the 20th century and is considered an important representant of naïve art. However, like many artists growing up on the countryside, he was discovered very late and lived a big part of his life in poverty. In *Pirosmani*, Shengelaia shows the audience the tragic tale of a man who does not find his place in society. At the same time, it is also a movie told through images. In short episodes that are introduced by paintings of Pirosmani, we follow the protagonist (played by Avtandil Varazi) walking down from one end of the frame to the other, searching for a place where he is welcome. The protagonist manifests his talent by painting out walls, letterings or paintings that ornament the many restaurants of Tbilisi, Georgia's capital.

The world that Shengelaia depicts in his movie is over-shadowed by a strong feeling of melancholy. In spite of the fact that most scenes are set in restaurants, wine cellars and at feasts, the audience is exposed to a sad and desolate world that lacks true communication. The protagonist is not following a clear goal; he is searching for understanding that in the end remains uncommunicable. Accepting his fate, we see Pirosmani crouched down in the end of the movie, rejecting the world he was rejected by. In this sense, Shengelaia's work is not a simple biography or the attempt to illustrate the life of a great artist. The picture stands for a time and finally for a nation. Tragically, it is *Pirosmani* – the only person who seems to look behind the façade- who is left unheard.

Giorgi Shengelaia's work is representative for a New Wave that is still almost undiscovered: like in France or the Czech Republic, in Georgia, too, the 60s generation (*Samozianelebi*) was the high-point of cinematic culture. In fear of the restrictive censorship under the Soviet Union, Georgian cinema developed a distinct fable language. The movies said little openly, the story was often set in the past, the messages hidden behind the curtain of time. The directors of the 60s generation- Tengiz Abuladze, Rezo Chkheidze, Mikheil Kobakhidze, Giorgi Shengelaia, Merab Kokochashvili and finally Otar Iosseliani, probably internationally the best-known Georgian director who is now active in France, dealt with epic conflicts and a Georgia that was searching for its identity. Even if Iosseliani stands out of the Wave as he did not pick up the fable language, his films are marked by vagueness and forsakenness, recurring themes of the Georgian 60s generation that root both in the *Zeitgeist* and the circumstances under the Soviet Union. But the restrictions in the story also led to a film that was visually funded: the 60s generation is not only the high-point of Georgian cinema, it is also the high-point of Georgian cinematography. It is a movement of big images that can arguably be compared to the cinemas of the big film countries France or Italy.

Director Giorgi Shengelaia comes from a family of film-makers: his older brother Eldar Shengelaia directed some of the classics of Georgian comedy; their father – Nikoloz Shengelaia – was the father of Georgian silent film, their mother – Nato Vachnadze – the leading role in many of Nikoloz's films.





In Pirosmani, the leading role is played by Avtandil Varazi, who delivers a persuasive and insightful performance. Varazi was himself a painter and was also responsible for the colorful and atmospheric art design of the film. Nevertheless, he was not an actor and did not commit to an acting career even after the film which brought him considerable fame in Georgia. His performance is minimalist and in its unconditional certainty resembles that of a great actor; an actor who understands and gives in to his character.

Pirosmani (and lastly the 60s generation) is a story that communicates many aspects of Georgian society and themes hidden behind beautiful cinematography. It is a film that asks to be viewed, and understood.

Konstanty Kuzma, <http://eefb.org>

Niko Pirosmani (1862 — 1918)

Pirosmani was born in the Georgian village of Mirzaani to a peasant family in Kakheti province. His parents, Aslan Pirosmashvili and Tekle Toklikishvili, were farmers, who owned a small vineyard, with a few cows and oxen. He was later orphaned and left in the care of his two elder sisters, Mariam and Pepe. He moved with them to Tbilisi in 1870. In 1872, while living in a little apartment not far from Tbilisi railway station, he worked as a servant to wealthy families and learned to read and write Russian and Georgian. In 1876, he returned to Mirzaani and worked as a herdsman.

Pirosmani gradually taught himself to paint. One of his specialties was painting directly into black oilcloth. In 1882, with self-taught George Zaziashvili, he opened a painting workshop, where they made signboards. In 1890, he

worked as a railroad conductor. In 1893, he co-founded a dairy farm in Tbilisi, which he left in 1901. Throughout his life, Pirosmani, who was poor, was willing to take ordinary jobs including housepainting and whitewashing buildings. He also worked for shopkeepers in Tbilisi, creating signboards, paintings, and portraits, according to their orders. Although his paintings had some local popularity (about 200 survive) his relationship with professional artists remained uneasy; making a living was always more important to him than aesthetic abstractions.

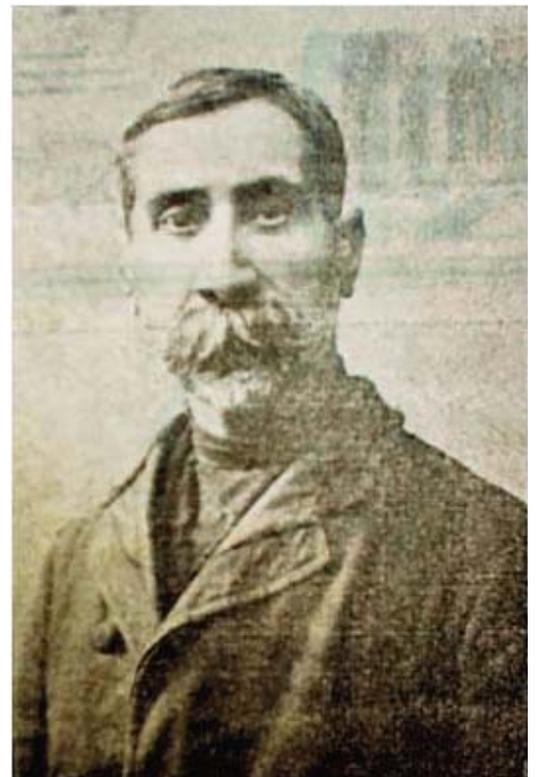
In April 1918, he died of malnutrition and liver failure. He was buried at the Nino cemetery; the exact location was not registered and is unknown.

Pirosmani's paintings were influenced by the social conditions of his time and place. There are many works about merchants, shopkeepers, workmen, and noblemen groups. Pirosmashvili was fond of nature and rural life. He rarely employed city landscapes. He made many animal paintings. He was the only Georgian animalist. Pirosmani also was attracted by historical figures and themes such as Shota Rustaveli, Queen Tamar, Giorgi Saakadze, as well as ordinary Georgian people and their everyday lives.

Usually, Pirosmani painted on oilcloth. Unlike other artists, Niko didn't aim at a pure imitation of the nature and paid no attention to details. Some of his paintings are monochrome. His paintings demonstrate the author's sharp compositional consideration. Placements of the figures are frontal, while faces do not demonstrate a specific mood.

In the 1910s, he won the enthusiasm of the Russian poet Mikhail Le-Dantyu and the artist Kirill Zdanevich and his brother Ilia Zdanevich. Ilia Zdanevich wrote a letter about Pirosmani to the newspaper Zakavkazskaia Rech, which it published on February 13, 1913. He undertook to publicise Pirosmani's painting in Moscow. The Moscow newspaper Moskovskaia Gazeta of 7 January wrote about the exhibition "Mishen" where self-taught painters exhibited, among them four works by Pirosmani: "Portrait of Zdanevich", "Still Life", "Woman with a Beer Mug", and "The Roe". Critics writing later in the same newspaper were impressed with his talent. In the same year, an article about Niko Pirosmani and his art was published in Georgian newspaper Temi.

The Society of Georgian Painters, founded in 1916 by Dito Shevardnadze, invited





Pirosmani to its meetings and began to take him up, but his relations with the society were always uneasy. He presented his painting "Georgian Wedding" to the Society. One of the members published a caricature of him, which greatly offended him. His continuing poverty, compounded by the economic problems caused by the First World War, meant that his life ended with his work little recognised.

Niko Pirosmashvili's paintings were represented at the first big exhibition of Georgian painters in 1918. From 1920, few articles were published about him. Interest in Pirosmani increased in the 1950s. A biographical film and plays were created, and music was composed. His paintings were exhibited

in places, including the Soviet Union and Western Europe. A monument was installed in Tbilisi and a museum opened in Mirzaani. Today, the 146 of his works are shown in the Art Museum of Georgia. Sixteen paintings are exhibited in the Historical-Ethnographic Museum of Signaghi.

He developed an international reputation after the war, when he became admired as a 'naïve' painter in Paris and elsewhere. The first book on Pirosmani was published (in Georgian, Russian, and French) in 1926. He inspired a portrait sketch by Pablo Picasso (1972). Exhibitions of his work have been held in Kiev (1931), Warsaw (1968), Paris (The Louvre) (1969), Vienna (1969), Nice and Marseilles (1983), Tokyo (1986), Zurich (1995), Turin (2002), Kiev, Istanbul (2008), Minsk, Vézelay and Vilnius (2008–2009). The paintings have been seen by more than 350,000 viewers.

Pirosmani is depicted on the one Georgian lari bill. The periodic newspaper Pirosmani is published in two languages in Istanbul. In March 2011, it was discovered that the writing on the door of Qrvishvilebi's wine-cellar in Ozaani was made by Pirosmani. On 31 May 2011, during an investigation, experts discovered a painting, which proved to be "Wounded Soldier" by Pirosmani. The painting was given to the National Gallery of Georgia.

Wikipedia

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