

Architectural and Artistic Features of the House of Culture in the Village of Shroma

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Abstract During the Soviet period, significant attention was paid to the architectural and artistic design of Houses of Culture. Due to shared stylistic traits, as well as specific location, climate, and various other factors, Houses of Culture built across the Soviet Union emerged as unique architectural monuments and represent as distinguished examples of Soviet architecture.

This article presents an architectural and artistic analysis of the House of Culture in the village of Shroma, Ozurgeti Municipality, in Guria, Georgia, which was built in 1956 according to the project of architect Levan Tsomaia.

The article discusses the samples of monumental painting created for this building by Robert Sturua. Featuring portrait depictions of local peasants, these works have become a chronicle of the village's history and its inhabitants.

In terms of its architecture, interior spatial organization, and the use of artistic-decorative elements, the House of Culture is undoubtedly a highly interesting monument of Soviet heritage. Consequently, its preservation has been placed on the agenda of the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia.

Keywords: House of culture, Soviet architecture, Artistic Features, Wall painting.

Introduction

The village of Shroma is located in the Ozurgeti Municipality of Guria, in Georgia. During the Soviet period, it was among the leading villages in the region. At that time, extensive tea plantations and a tea factory constructed in 1933 contributed significantly to the rapid development of the local economy.

In 1956, under the leadership of Mikhako Oragvelidze—chairman of the collective farm

in Shroma, a Hero of Socialist Labor, and a deputy of the Supreme Council of the Georgian SSR (fourth convocation)—two buildings were constructed (Figure 1) [4]. One of these is the House of Culture, built with the project of architect Levan Tsomaia. By an order (No. N02/42) issued on July 3, 2020, the



building was granted the status of an immovable monument of cultural heritage.

Fig. 1

By that time, however, the structure was in a severely deteriorated condition and required urgent rehabilitation. Accordingly, in 2024, under the supervision of the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia, rehabilitation works commenced on the basis of a project prepared in 2023.

Research Methodology and Objectives: The research methodology comprises the review of existing scholarly literature, the examination of archival materials and documentation, and the conduct of fieldwork. It further includes photographic documentation (photo fixation) and the subsequent description and analysis of the recorded visual material.

Main Part

During the Soviet period, considerable attention was devoted to the architectural and

artistic design of Houses of Culture. Key considerations included the time and location of construction, the specific Soviet republic in which the building was erected, and the scale of the settlement it was intended to serve. While these buildings shared a number of common features, they also developed distinctive characteristics that contributed to their individuality. In this context, the House of Culture in Shroma stands out among those constructed in Georgia during this period.

The two-story House of Culture is accessed via a portico on the principal façade, approached by three steps and supported by two columns. Two columns of the portico and the pilasters symmetrically arranged on either side of the rectangular entrance, which is framed by a profiled surround are similar. Both the columns and the engaged columns rest on bases; their shafts are articulated with fluting and are crowned with Corinthian capitals.

The portico entablature comprises a plain architrave, a dentil frieze, and a cornice adorned with medallions and floral motifs. On either side of the single-story portico, rectangular window openings are arranged across both floors. A single rectangular window is positioned on the second floor directly above the portico. Each window is enclosed within a simple profiled frame.

To the left of the portico, the first floor features eight blind (false) windows. Between the window bays, pilasters decorated with fluting, acanthus leaves, and Ionic ornamental elements are rhythmically articulated, extending across the full height of both stories. Beneath the windows—arranged in two tiers on both floors, with the exception of the opening above the portico—rectangular panels containing vegetal decorative motifs are inserted.

The upper section of the façade echoes the compositional logic of a portico, incorporating a dentilled decorative motif, a profiled band, and a cornice-like element, likewise enriched with medallions and floral ornamentation.

The solution of the southern facade of the building is similar to the northern (main) facade, but there are also differences. For example: the basement part is separated from

the main part of the facade by a rusticated wall. The shape and framing of the window openings are the same, although in this case, mascarons are used to decorate the windows of the second floor. Between the windows, there are again pilasters decorated with flutes, acanthus leaves and ionics, reaching up to the height of two floors, although we have two different, shorter pilasters. The above-mentioned pilasters are inserted only between the window openings cut on the second floor.

It should also be noted that the main building of the House of Culture has a two-story additional building from the late period on the southeast side. Access to the additional building is possible from a staircase added to the southern facade. The shape of the doors and windows in this part of the building is also rectangular. The walls were covered with tin sheets until 2024 (the aforementioned sheets were removed during the rehabilitation works that began in 2024 under the leadership of the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Protection). The recovered material does not allow us to speak about the condition of this part of the building before the reconstruction, although it is likely that, like the part of the southern facade that has come down to us in more or less its original form, the solution of the southeastern part should have been similar to the main facade.

It is also possible to enter the building through the door on the eastern facade. The project prepared by the Cultural Heritage Agency in 2023 envisages the reconstruction of this part. Before the rehabilitation works began, this facade of the building was severely damaged. There were no artistic and decorative elements on the walls. The orientation of the door and window openings here is also rectangular. The entrance part opened to the courtyard with three rectangular arches (one arch facing north, the other two facing east).

The building is bordered to the west by a school building.

The interior of the building is decorated with decorative elements made of plaster and examples of monumental painting.

The hall of the House of Culture is located in the eastern part of the building (Figure 2).



Fig. 2

The monumental painting of the hall is the work of Robert Sturua, a Georgian painter-monumentalist and People's Artist of the Georgian SSR [3]. The artist sought to depict real individuals; to this end, he invited local peasants to serve as models over several weeks. After completing their daily work, they would gather in the theater space, where the artist carefully observed and rendered the life of Gurian peasants, striving for a high degree of accuracy in representing their physical features, attire, and emotional expressions [1]. More than half a century after the completion of the paintings, members of the local community still recognize relatives, neighbors, and ancestors portrayed in the interior by Sturua.

The ceiling and walls of the hall are decorated with multi-figure compositions depicting Gurian peasants, dressed in period-appropriate clothing and presented as a unified, communal whole. These scenes illustrate various aspects of rural life, including the harvesting and storage of crops, as well as moments of celebration—dancing, singing, and collective festivity. Upon entering the hall, particular attention is drawn to the framed plafond composition entitled “*Friendship of Peoples*” (Figure 3).

The largest portion of the composition is occupied by a depiction of the sky. Surrounding it, it is framed by the figural representations of Gurian peasants. Within one group, individuals hold a waving cloth bearing a bilingual inscription in Georgian and Russian, on which the slogan “Friendship of

Peoples” is clearly visible. Along the frame of the central composition, Soviet symbols—namely the hammer and sickle and the five-pointed star—are rhythmically repeated (Figure 4).

Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Four additional compositions are placed within a plaster frame at the edges of the ceiling (Figure 5).



Fig. 5

A richly decorated cornice frames the upper part of the hall walls. Below it, a row of lamps set in rhythmically distributed plaster medallions (Figure 6) (Figure 6).



Fig. 6

Another cornice divides the walls of the hall into two storeys. In the lower part, two opposite walls are separated by pilasters. In the upper part, between the rectangular window openings, the artist presented us with images of Gurian peasants on a landscape background (Figure 7).

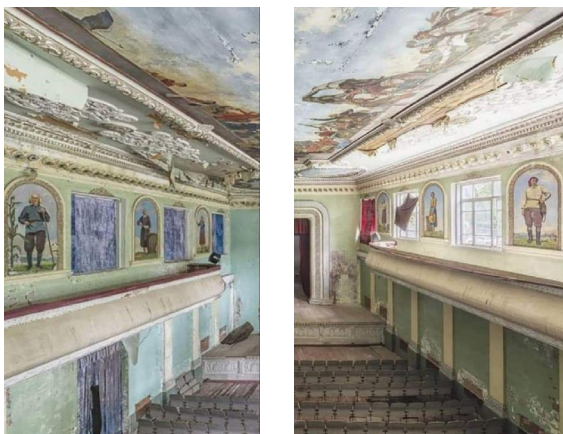


Fig. 7

Whether it is the portraits of men and women depicted in a semicircular frame between rectangular window openings on the second floor, or the panels presented on the ceiling (e.g., the multi-figure composition of the plafond), in each one occupies a fairly large space with a segment of the sky, which in turn gives the aforementioned compositions airiness and lightness.

In discussing the work of Robert Sturua, Igor Urushadze notes that the painter's visual language, compositional principles, color

scheme, and narrative structure collectively generate the elevated mood characteristic of Socialist Realism [2], beneath which, however, the arduous labor of working people and, in many cases, the tragic life experiences of individuals remain hidden. In this respect, Robert Sturua, as in the plafond of the Chiatura Theater, constructs direct, optimistic compositions executed in his characteristic manner.

The stage is represented by a decorative frame. The central part of this frame is emphasized by the coat of arms of Soviet Georgia, while on its right and left sides are symmetrically arranged figures of a woman holding a Chonguri and a singing man (Figure 8).



Fig. 8

In 2021, during our initial visit to the House of Culture (from which the interior photographs date), both the interior and exterior of the building were in a severely deteriorated condition. Owing to several factors, including water infiltration caused by a damaged roof, the building's artistic and decorative elements, as well as its examples of monumental painting, had suffered significant damage.

The rehabilitation works initiated under the project of the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia are expected to be completed in the near future, after which visitors will once again have the opportunity to experience this highly distinctive architectural monument.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be stated that the House

of Culture, built with the project of architect Levan Tsomaia and enriched with monumental paintings by artist Robert Sturua, fully corresponds to the architectural and artistic tendencies of its time. At the same time, it should be emphasized that it was Sturua's distinctive artistic approach that largely shaped the building's highly original visual character.

Over the years, the House of Culture has become an important social and cultural gathering place for the people of Guria (and beyond), while also serving as a visual chronicle of the local community and its ancestors who are still remembered today (Figure 9).



Fig. 9

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