

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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Georgian Gothic

By **Andrew Russeth**

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© Andro Wekua, courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, Brussels

Andro Wekua, "At Night I" (2010). Oil on canvas, 52.5 x 62.5 x 5.8 cm.

BRUSSELS, Belgium—When [Pablo Picasso](#) painted his iconic portrait of [Gertrude Stein](#) in 1906, he ultimately required her to visit his studio 90 times. In contrast, it seems possible that **Andro Wekua** could use a single sitting to produce 90 paintings.

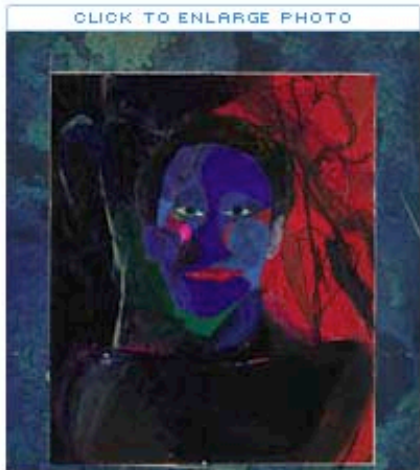
Wekua frequently repeats subjects across multiple works. Beautiful young women, for instance, have figured prominently in his output for years, and they return in a handful of new works currently on view at the [Barbara Gladstone Gallery](#) in Brussels, with hair of gold, black, and crimson, floating dreamily through empty space. Most of the women have long, sloping jaws and alabaster skin. It could be the same model in each.

It's not fair to begrudge an artist his prolificacy, of course, as long as the quality of the work remains consistent. As Wekua has tallied museum shows across Europe, deservedly earning the admiration of collectors like the **Rubells** and the **Rachofskys**, he's largely succeeded on that measure. Since fleeing civil strife in his native Georgia in his late teens for Western Europe in 1995 (the exhibition's title), he has become a dependable painter. If they want one, a reasonably serious collector can purchase a reasonably good Wekua.

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© Andro Wekua, courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, Brussels

Andro Wekua, "Me" (2010). Mixed media on paper, 43.8 x 46 x 3.2 cm.

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Many of Wekua's best new paintings are dark, almost Gothic. The stretches of neon and rainbow that filled much of his earlier work have been replaced with dark nights and long shadows. In a self-portrait, *Me* (all work 2010), a short, pink patch on his cheek and a wash of green that traces a shadow across his neck also hints at [Kees van Dongen](#) and a newfound interest in classical modernism. If it weren't for the occasional spray-painted section and the rare photograph included in a painting, one could mistake Wekua's work as that of a castoff Fauvist or a forgotten German Expressionist.

In a ghostly portrait hung over one of Gladstone's fireplaces, *at night I*, a woman's hair and blouse — both pitch-black — nearly disappear into the background. She could vanish with the blow of a candle. In the painting's sequel, *at night II*, another woman is cloaked in blues, alternately rich and smoky; her face is distorted, as if seen through a crystal ball. They're hauntingly memorable works.

Wekua *can* falter, though, particularly in his sculptures. A purple ceramic bust adorned with bright makeup and a disheveled wig looks slapdash, while a flesh-pink head lying decapitated on a pedestal and bearing a paler pink heart across its face is a student's callow riff on ovoid modernist sculpture, from **Brancusi** through **Nauman**. The two works' best features are their names: respectively, *Inga*, *My Russian Teacher*, and *Never Sleep with a Strawberry in Your Mouth*.

In the show's title work, *1995*, Wekua has affixed a black-and-white photograph between pink, red, and blue passages of color that appear to have been applied in fits and bursts. The photograph shows a young man — the artist? — clad in a white dinner jacket and bow tie sitting at a bar next to an icy aristocrat in a long gown and earrings dripping with gems. The photo catches him glancing to his side with a suspicious look, perhaps planning another caper: snatching her jewels and vaulting for the door. If no one catches him, he'll go far.

Andro Wekua, "1995," is on view at the [Barbara Gladstone Gallery](#), 12 Rue du Grand Cerf, Brussels, Belgium, through March 6, 2010.