

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Simon Castets, "Andro Wekua," *Pin-Up Magazine*,
Spring Summer 2012, p. 199-211.

PIN-UP

Clémence Selles, p. 77

"In Berlin you find a huge range of creators with many different ways of working."



Francis Kéré, p. 118

"I wanted to see how Berlin was built."



Magazine

BERLIN

for

SPECIAL



David Chipperfield, p. 24

"The city is coming to terms with its own identity, which I think is fascinating."

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"Berlin is the producer, the lab, the studio — ideas get condensed somewhere else."



Architectural

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"I like that you can have lots of space and quiet here."



Entertainment



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Andro



Installation view of Andro Wekua's *Pink Wave Hunter* at Kunsthalle
Fridericianum, 2011. Photograph by Nils Klinger. Courtesy Andro Wekua
and Gladstone Gallery, New York/Brussels.

The artist

Andro Wekua

works in many

Wekua media —

collage, sculpture, painting,

and film — but he is best

known for delicate room-size

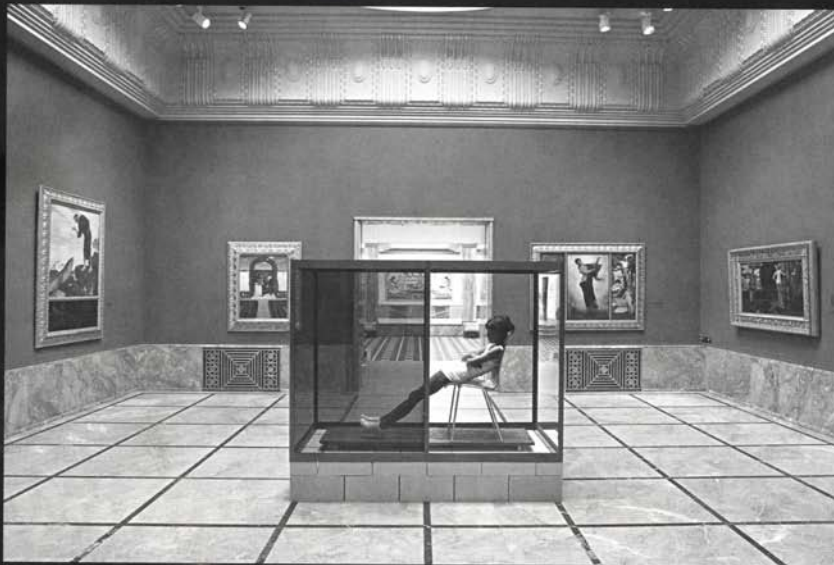
Interview
by
Simon Castets

Photography
by
Thomas Dozol

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installations framing mannequins disposed in uncomfortable positions. His studio in Berlin is located in a quiet semi-industrial area north of the Tiergarten, overlooking the River Spree. On the walls of the 280-square-meter space hang carefully arranged reference images (film stills, found photographs, postcards), while works in progress, including models and paintings, dot the concrete floor. He moved to the German capital in 2006, after ten years in Switzerland, where he went to art school, and to this day he speaks German with a charming Helvetian lilt.



Gott ist tot aber das Mädchen nicht (2008);
Wax figure, hair, colored plexiglass, brass coating;
59.1 x 79.9 x 40.6 inches. Exhibition view:
Kunsthau Zurich, 2008. Courtesy Sammlung
Goetz, Munich.

All this is a long way from Sukhumi, Wekua's birthplace, an ancient town in the Abkhaz region of Georgia, which enjoys a semi-tropical climate on the northern shore of the Black Sea. In the twilight years of the czars, Sukhumi was developed as a sophisticated and rather grand resort, a role it maintained throughout Soviet rule. But the town's fortunes changed dramatically on the break-up of the USSR, when ethnic violence degenerated into an all-out war between the Georgian authorities and Abkhaz separatists in 1992-93. Wekua's father, a leading political activist, was killed, forcing the rest of the family into exile in Tbilisi. To this day the self-proclaimed Republic of Abkhazia — whose capital is Sukhumi — remains closed to Georgian nationals. In response to the brutal randomness of the historical events of his youth, Wekua conceived the installation *Pink Wave Hunter* (2011), which he first presented at the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel, and then at the Venice Art Biennale.

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Wekua's *Pink Wave Hunter* building series installation at
Kunsthalle Fridericianum in 2011. The series was subsequently
shown at the Venice Biennale of the same year.
Photograph by Nils Klinger. Courtesy Andro Wekua and
Gladstone Gallery, New York/Brussels.



**Composed of 15
architectural
models placed
on a long plinth,**

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**the piece
represents
different
buildings
from his
hometown,
reconstituted from
childhood memories,**



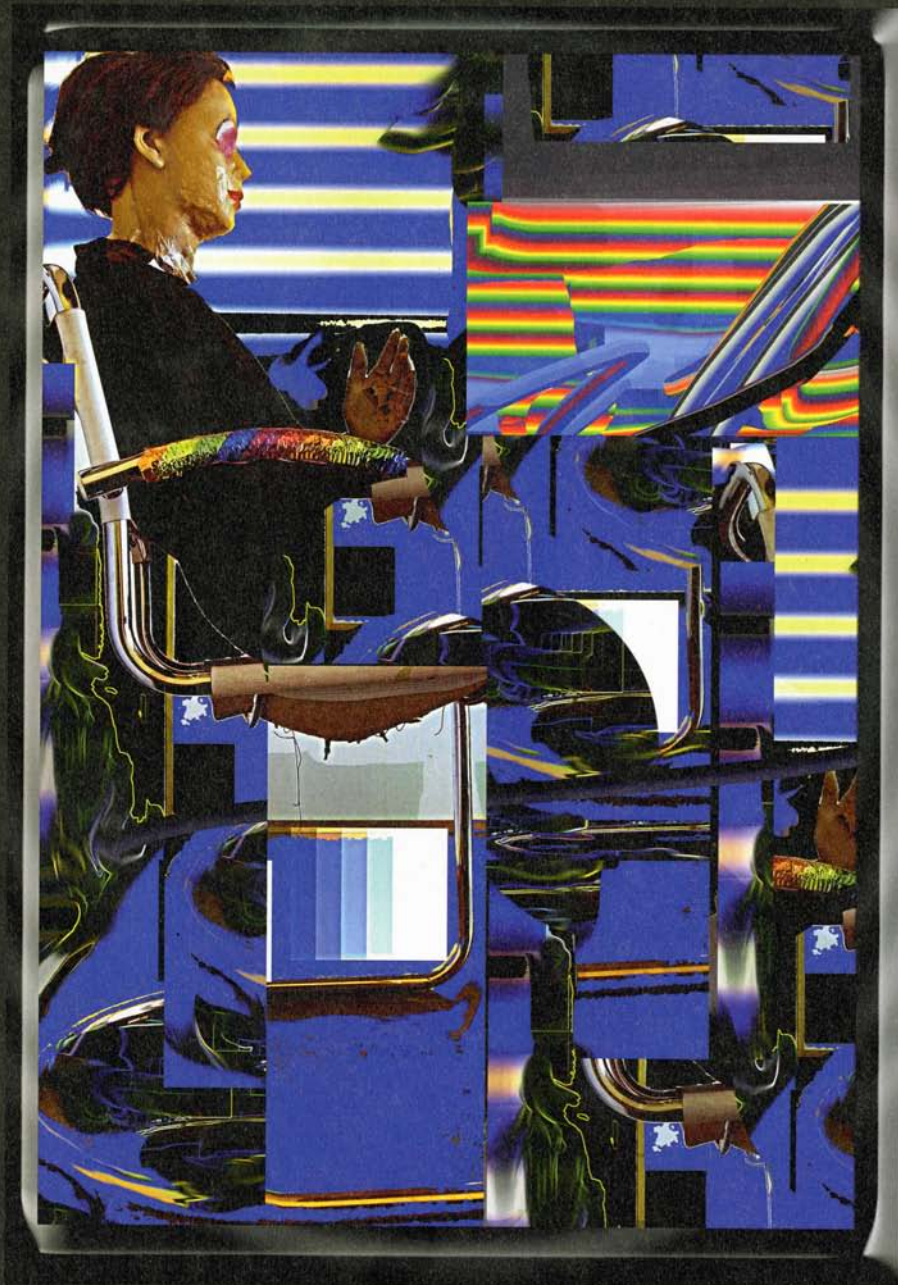
Pink Wave Hunter, Private House (2011);
Acrylic plaster, MDF; 29.5 x 25.6 x 18.5 inches. Exhibition
view: Kunsthalle Fridericianum, 2011. Photograph by
Nils Klinger. Courtesy Andro Wekua and Gladstone
Gallery, New York/Brussels.



Pink Wave Hunter, Hotel Abchasia (2011); MDF, wax, aluminum sheet;
52.8 x 47.6 x 21.3 inches. Photograph by Viktor Kolibal. Courtesy Andro Wekua and
Gladstone Gallery, New York/Brussels.

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Self-Portrait On The Black Sea (2009); Framed, digitally retouched photograph, 16.5 x 12.6 inches.

Courtesy Andro Wekua and Gladstone Gallery, New York/Brussels.

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found images, and Google Street View. Often amputated not only by the destructiveness of war but also by personal and collective forgetfulness, the buildings of *Pink Wave Hunter* speak of the frail state of memory in the face of historical trauma.



Wekua grew up in Georgia, went to art school in Switzerland, and has been working in Berlin since 2007, where he lives with his wife and child.

Simon Castets What exactly is a pink wave? When I Googled it I got some funny results, such as a Cypriot holiday entertainment agency or a blog on feminism!

Andreo Wekua The idea came one night when I woke up sweating in my bed. I didn't understand what was happening. I went out onto the balcony to get a breath of air and saw a huge pink wave pass me by. Since then I've been trying to find this pink wave again because it was an indescribable experience. So the title just came to me that way. In my working process each piece leads to the next, so everything is a product of things that came prior to it. And this title came the same way, and it just made sense to me.

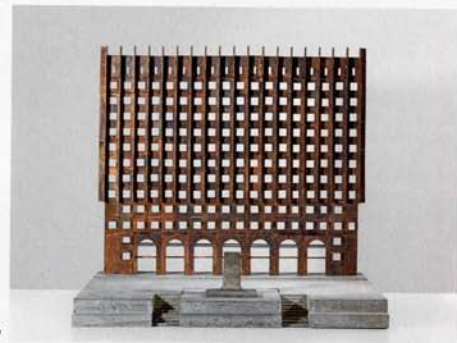
SC When you first showed *Pink Wave Hunter* you had all the walls painted bright blue. It made the place look like a TV set or a cinema studio.

AW Yes, it was done with the idea of stage design in mind. It's a color that was very present in Sukhumi at the time, in the cafés and bars. It's also the color of the sea and the sky. I thought it would be a good background for the buildings.

SC Did you use the color to contrast with the bleakness of the buildings?
AW Exactly. In Sukhumi, the weather is almost always good — it's a warm place with blue skies. Then

the war came.
SC In contrast to the violence of the Abkhazo-Georgian war, *Pink Wave Hunter* could be seen as hushed. Why are the buildings so devoid of human presence?

Pink Wave Hunter, Government Building (2011); Cast bronze, steel scaffolding, concrete; 47.2 x 44.9 x 44.9 inches. Photograph by Viktor Kolibal. Courtesy Andro Wekua and Gladstone Gallery, New York/Brussels.



seen as hushed. Why are the buildings so devoid of human presence?

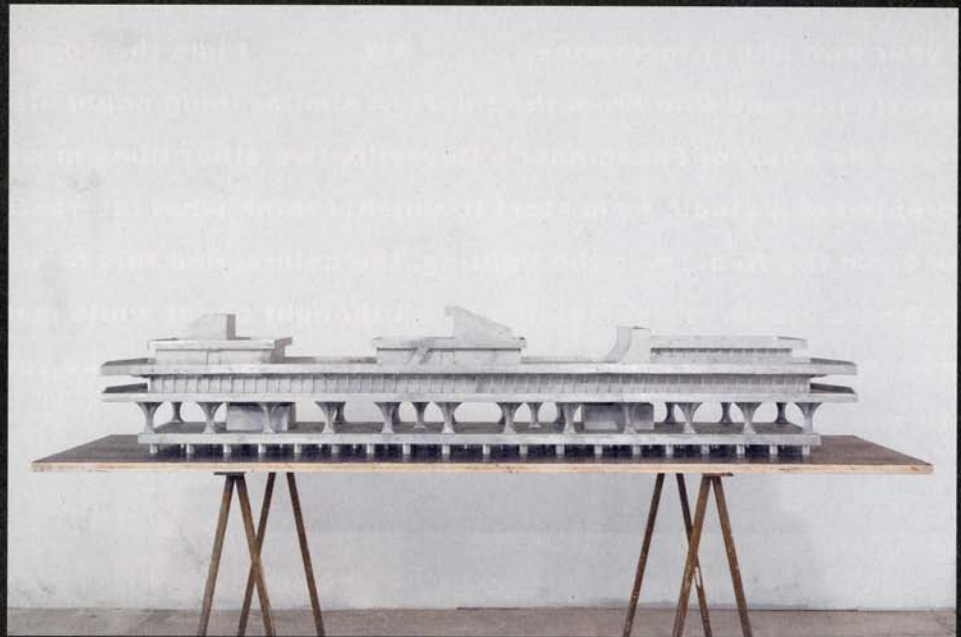
AW *Pink Wave Hunter* is not directly related to the war in Abkhazia. The buildings come from images of Sukhumi taken after the war, when the city was, as it is now, mostly empty. It's like a stage where something once took place and maybe will take place again — like film sets where they build whole cities made up of just façades and, once filming is finished, the city of façades still stands and waits to be used for a different movie.

SC I remember you once said that your memories of Sukhumi were so powerful that they often seem like a film in your head. I was reminded of this when I saw an image here in your studio from Francis Ford Coppola's *One From the Heart*. Instead of shooting the movie on location in Las Vegas, Coppola had a set designer rebuild everything in a studio, including the airport, which created a much eerier atmosphere. In a similar way, in *Pink Wave Hunter*,

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the



Pink Wave Hunter, Port (2011); Cast aluminum, 98.4 x 23.6 x 18.1 inches. Photograph by Viktor Kolibal.
Courtesy Andro Wekua and Gladstone Gallery, New York/Brussels.

reproductions



of

The visual language in Wekua's work is often inspired by his love for cinema. Some of his favorite films include Coppola's *One From the Heart*, Fassbinder's *Querelle*, and Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*.

buildings

ANDRO

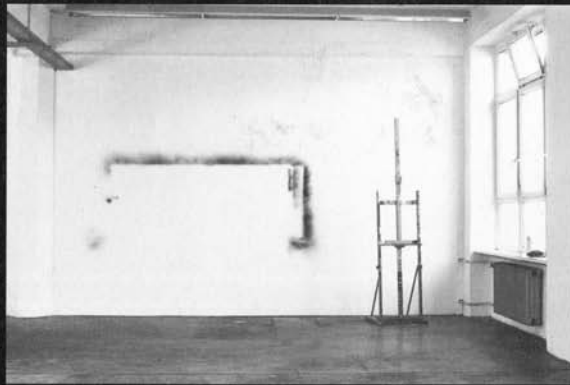
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WEKUA

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in Sukhumi are based on Internet images, postcards, Google Street View, as well as on your own blurry memories. **AW** I like the comparison between *Pink Wave Hunter* and *One From the Heart*. A similar thing could also be said of Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, or Fassbinder's *Querelle*, two other films in which everything was recreated in a studio from start to finish. I think what interested me specifically in *One From the Heart* was the lighting, the colors, and this feeling of reality taking place on a stage. It's something I also thought about while making my film *Never Sleep with a Strawberry in your Mouth* (2011). But, just like you said, my memories determined much



The windows of Wekua's 280-square-meter Berlin studio allow for unobstructed views of the river and of the tourist boats that intermittently pass by.

of what the sculptures look like. These were famous buildings in Sukhumi, and I mostly remembered their façades. Today in Sukhumi, due to lack of funding, they have been renovating only the façades of these empty, deteriorating buildings. That was actually one of the starting points for the work. Another starting point was that since I left Sukhumi, I've been dreaming of the city. In my dreams I always look for ways to get out of there. So one day I began to draw the streets, just to check how much I remembered. Whatever I did not remember and could not find in photographs stayed blank. You also see that in the sculptures. **SC** Which of the buildings in *Pink Wave Hunter* did you have personal knowledge of? **AW** I went inside a good number of them — cafés, hotels, houses, the train station, even some government buildings. Some of them were on my way to school. **SC** Do they reflect your daily experience of the city, or did you decide to include some that were linked to exceptional moments in your personal history? **AW** The installation is more concerned with elements of day-to-day life.

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But my

house

isn't

there, my

school isn't there,

my kindergarten

isn't there, so it's



The 35-year-old artist in a moment of repose from his preparations for an upcoming solo show at Gladstone Gallery, New York, scheduled to open on September 21, 2012.

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not that intimate. SC Which only contributes to the sense of
alienation... AW Absolutely. SC Do you know
these Louise Bourgeois sculptures called *The Rectory* and *The Institute*?
Both are buildings that are displayed in sort of cages with circular mirrors
on the side. They are meticulously reproduced and no detail seems to be
omitted, whereas her different house sculptures are far more freely
rendered. Do you see a difference in your own work between buildings you
have a personal attachment to and more anonymous structures? AW
It's funny because I made a small sculpture of the house where I grew up in
Sukhumi, and it is much more detailed than the buildings in *Pink Wave
Hunter*. SC So it's the contrary: the intimate is replicated with
more precision than the institutional? AW Once I saw the
finished sculpture, I started remembering some details that I had no
recollection of before and which had actually been falsely represented in
the piece. Another interesting experience was building something that you
remember as being much bigger than it is as a model-size object. But to get
back to Louise Bourgeois — they're all beautiful works — although the
piece that actually came to my mind while working on *Pink Wave Hunter*
was Mike Kelley's *Educational Complex*. SC In some works
from the *Educational Complex* series, Mike Kelley included indications as
to what type of people were present in and around the space, such as
rednecks, hillbillies, greasers, etc. Is there also a human element in your
memories of Sukhumi? AW In terms of my personal
recollection, of course, I remember friends, relatives, and a lot of Russian
tourists, but in *Pink Wave Hunter* what was important were the places and
their emptiness. SC After living in Sukhumi, you moved to Tbilisi.
Do you also have memories from there that you reference in your work? AW
I haven't really used them in that way. SC How often do you go back
to Tbilisi? AW Not so much, maybe once a year. SC And
would you like to go back to Sukhumi if you were allowed? AW I have
been thinking about it a lot. When something is forbidden, you want it more,

*Pink Wave Hunter, Highrise Building (2011); Cast aluminum, 41.3 x 22.8 x 40.4 inches. Photograph by Viktor Kolibal.
Courtesy of Andro Wekua and Gladstone Gallery, New York/Brussels.*

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somehow. So of course I want to go back. I will do it one day, if it's possible. But maybe the reality of things there today has nothing to do with what I have in my head. I often wonder if I want to keep all the things that I have created in my mind, or if I want to confront reality. I know it will be something different. SC Do

you think Sukhumi will ever regain its reputation as the "Nice of the Black Sea"? AW I hope that one day it will at least

become normal again. But when I grew up, Sukhumi was very much a place of Soviet times. For example there was no advertising, no billboards on the streets. It will never be like that again, of course. Which is okay — it doesn't have to become the same. SC

Now that you live in Berlin do you think a lot about East Berlin's Soviet past and the socialist architecture here? AW

I'm not that drawn to it. I have no nostalgia about Soviet times at all. I moved to Berlin after spending time here in 2006 when I was showing at the Berlin Biennale. I liked that you can have lots of space and quiet here. So my then girlfriend — who is now my wife — and I decided to move here from Zürich. I really enjoy it, but that doesn't mean I wouldn't move somewhere else. SC

Thanks to smartphones, Google Street View, and the like, it's now impossible to get lost anywhere in the world. Do you think that will have an effect on our memory? Will our brains have more space for new types of memories? AW Well, I don't remember

any phone numbers any more, not even my own! I always liked to get lost in an unknown city — I enjoyed the feeling of being estranged and of losing orientation. This kind of thing won't happen with smartphones. But I don't believe that if you don't think of one thing, you have more space for other things. I think if you have to think about space, it helps you think better about other things. The more things that you have to think about the more mental space you have. SC

In 1998, Pierre Joseph drew a map of the world from memory and entitled it *Le Monde Erotique*. The title has always stayed with me because of its particular use of the word "erotic." AW Well, memory and the creation of

something new are almost identical for me. What Pierre Joseph did from memory is to create something new, a map that didn't exist before. So, by that token, creating something new can be erotic.

SC Last summer I read a front-page article in the *International Herald Tribune* whose headline ran: "Visions of a plague grip Tbilisi, but the vermin are hard to find." It described an alleged invasion of snakes and scorpions in the Georgian capital and the inhabitants' emotional response. The journalist implied that Georgians were highly superstitious and that their reactions were perhaps overblown, notably because the Georgian word snake can also mean Satan. It conveyed a sense of Georgia as a very remote, uncharted territory. Why do you think Georgia remains that kind of place in the media's eye?

AW [Laughs.] I remember seeing something on Georgian TV about snakebites. The situation in Georgia has been open-ended and uncertain for a while now, which always makes people feel unsure and superstitious. There are huge shifts between generations as well. But somehow people love those kinds of stories everywhere. It seems to me that such uncanny things can come out in American culture too at particular times, with all the insect invasion movies and such. In Georgia, there's no budget for movies so maybe people tell these stories on TV instead.