



Crafting Women's Stories: *Lives in Georgian Felt*

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and with support from the Center for Book and Paper at Columbia College Chicago.

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in the Kakheti region, Republic of Georgia, in workshops at the:
Center for Civic Engagement, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Telavi;
Maya Purtskhvanidze, Director
Kachreti Vocational School, Alvani; Nugzar Dzamukashvili, Director
Workshops of Napareuli; Maya Natsvlishvili, Director
Besik Mamiauri Akhmeta Municipal School of Art; Nato Itoshvili, Director

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and April Sheridan at the Columbia College Chicago
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Mariam Gagoshashvili, Program Coordinator; and Ida Bakhturidze.
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Robert Chenciner, *Ethnographer*
Inge Evers, Beth Vogel, Catherine Nash, Mary Neal Meador, and Rene Aranzamendez
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CRAFTING WOMEN'S STORIES: *Lives in Georgian Felt* represents a unique cultural collaboration between artists in the Republic of Georgia and the United States. The authors, who are educators and artists at the Center for Book and Paper, Columbia College Chicago's, travelled to Georgia to lead workshops in the towns of Alvani, Napareuli, Telavi and Akhmeta that combined felting, a regional craft, with exercises in using felt to make expressive, artistic objects, especially one-of-a-kind books.

Participants in five two-day workshops in January 2013 made felted autobiographical books that achieved a level of self-expression new in the above communities, where opportunities for self-realization have been traditionally limited. The Arts and Culture Program of the George Soros-supported Open Society Foundations funded the project.

The workshops built on programs established by NGOs, including the Peace Corps and the Women's Fund in Georgia, that had already begun to address the issue of domestic violence in a region whose inhabitants largely believe such matters should be kept private and within the family. *Crafting Women's Stories* also collected historical, ethnographic and social histories of Georgian felt making, and worked to improve relationships among such relevant parties as Georgia's Ministry of Culture, local felters, educators and museum leaders. The Women's Fund in Georgia kicked off the project with a day-long training session to tutor project investigators about women's rights in Georgia.

Ida Bakhturidze, from the Women's Fund and Melissa Potter felted a banner for each workshop to further discussions on women's rights. The banners combined symbols common in Georgian felt design with slogans such as "My Body, My Choice" and "Equal Pay for Equal Work." The banners helped the workshops engage these and related issues, and supported every woman's right to personal safety. The authors photographed the banners in each town.

Professionals and non-professionals alike participated in *Crafting Women's Stories*, including artisans, craft school directors, museum curators, members of the Georgian Textile Group (www.geotexart.org); staff and volunteers from the Women's Fund in Georgia, the Peace Corps and USAID; teenagers in Georgian foster care; fine art students in Telavi, Tbilisi and Chicago; and managers for UNESCO's intangible heritage program.

In addition to introducing Georgian women to an innovative form of self-expression and helping them examine some of the hardships they experience, the authors wanted to highlight the endangered Georgian craft of felting, which is sustained primarily by Georgian women. Through the workshops, the authors were able to suggest a new skill set that may encourage new revenue-generating options. In this way and others, *Crafting Women's Stories* sought to help strengthen the economy of Georgian communities through

increased craft sales, grants, organization, exhibitions, and other special programs.

Beneficial project outcomes also included the creation by more than 70 women of one-of-a-kind artist books that will be exhibited in both Georgia and the U.S., and new alliances in Georgia among cultural and social organizations, the Peace Corps, independent artists, the Ministry of Education, the Women's Fund in Georgia, and U.S.-based institutions like the Center for Book and Paper.

Project translator Nana Magradze was so moved by the dire circumstances of some local artisans, she began raising funds to create a union of women artisans to promote good business practices in Kakheti. She also met with Peace Corps business volunteers to develop an artisan bazaar in Telavi, the state capital.

Crafting Women's Stories received considerable media attention in Georgia, including interviews about the project on Georgian television in Telavi and Tbilisi. As a result, Meador and Schaer conducted artist book workshops at Telavi State University, and at the Fine Arts Academy in Tbilisi, and all three authors discussed their artistic practices in a presentation at the Fine Arts Academy in Tbilisi. In addition, the feminist felt banners created by Bakhturidze and Potter in each of the workshops were featured in the first International Women's Day March held in Tbilisi in March 2013.

Stateside, *Crafting Women's Stories* was included in *Concept and Craft — Hand-Made in the 21st Century*, a panel discussion at the Aljira Center for Contemporary Art in Newark, NJ. The panel, moderated by Alyson Pou, focused on artists who use craft media.

The project will resume in June 2013, when Potter and Schaer return to Tbilisi to continue their work with women interested in learning how to make felt, and large felt banners. They were invited to return by the Women's Fund in Georgia, and to work as well on a street activism program with Partisan Girls, the Independent Group of Feminists, and other Georgian organizations.

In addition, Schaer will pursue an earlier project, *Babies (Not) On Board*, about societal views of women without children. She will meet with individuals in Georgia to solicit their views, and to work on an artistic treatment of the subject. Historically, women have been able to discuss personal issues while working together on communal craft projects.

All three authors have been invited to conduct projects similar to those in Georgia with women in Serbia as part of a new Serbian initiative to address domestic violence. They anticipate exploring further how craft practices and artistic empowerment can improve the lives of women artists worldwide.



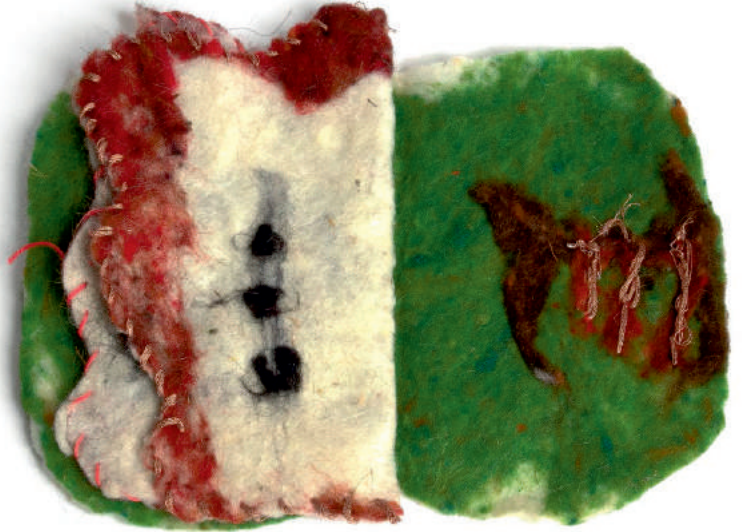


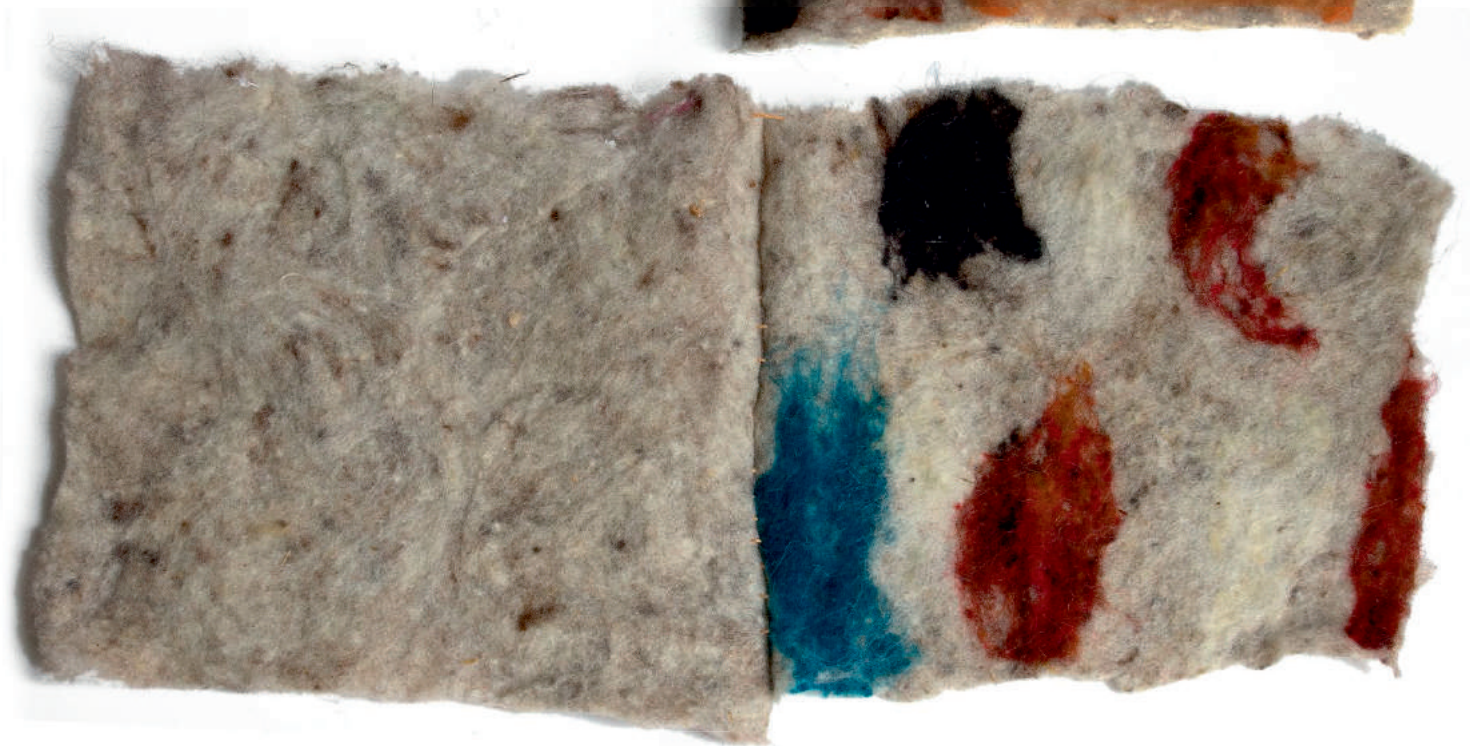






Nino Khanchelishvili





Nato Khaadze





Shorena Jokharidze





Shorena Tskhovrebadze



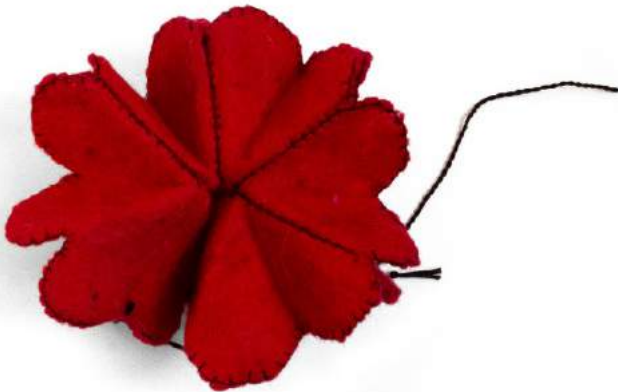


Veriko Ghogelashvili





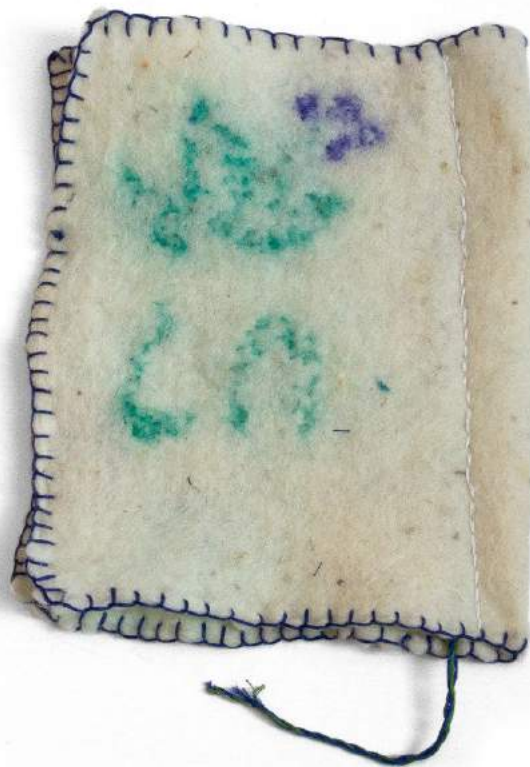
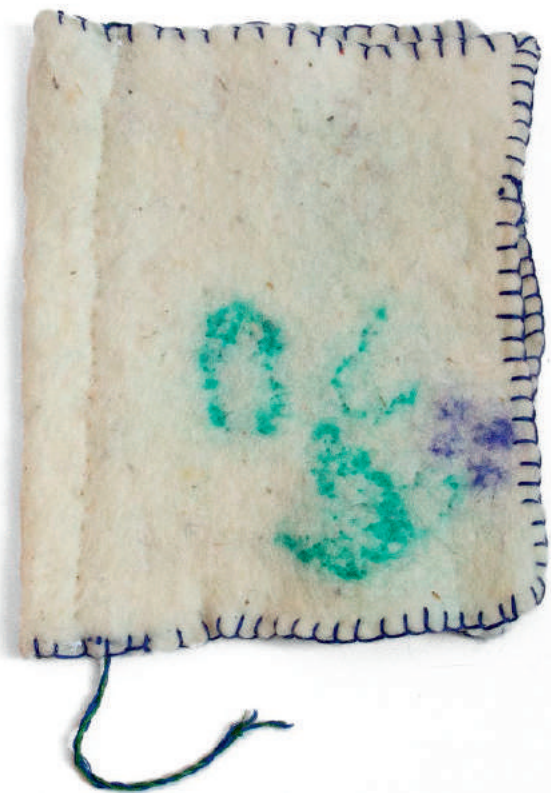
Ekaterine Prodeuli





Khatia Suikhanishvilia









Tamila Bakhturidze,
Mariam Karsmauli



Khatia Bordzikidze,
Nani Khavazulashvili,
Lali Darchiashvili



Lali Darchiashvili
Maya Devdaraidze



Khristine Mozaidze,
Lali Seturi,
Nino Melaidze



Nana Eliboshvili,
Natia Rainauli,
Darina Sakhaushvili



Lali Gigoidze,
Manana Tavberidze,
Khatuna Arshausidze



Tsiala Bashinuridze,
Rusudan Otaridze,
Tamila Mozaidze



Tsitsino Arshaulide,
Ketevan Devdaraidze



Manana Tavberidze

Crafting Women's Stories:
Workshop Participants



Khatura Revazishvili



Leila Tarxhishvili



Nino Khanchelishvili



Tina Pkhovelishvili



Nino Mamalashvili



Ketevan Sebiskveradze



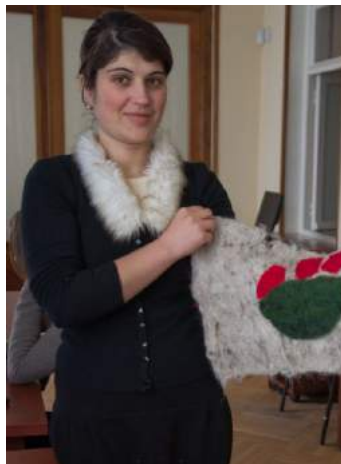
Nana Garjikauli



Lia Imerlishvili



Eliko Sidonashili



Nino Omanadze



Ida Bakhturidze

Participants in Telavi: January 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th.



Sopo Potolashvili



Veriko Ghogelashvili



Madona Bluishvili



Ekaterine Prodeuli



Shorena Tskhovrebadze



Tamari Kosalashvili



Khatia Suikhanishvili



Megi Metreveli

Participants in Napareuli: January 15th and 16th.



Khristine Mozaidze,
Lali Seturi,
Nino Melaidze



Khatia Bordzikidze,
Nani Khavazulashvili,
Lali Darchiashvili



Tamila Bakhturidze,
Mariam Karsmauli



Tsiala Bashinuridze,
Rusudan Otaridze,
Tamila Mozaidze



Lali Gigoidze,
Manana Tavberidze,
Khatuna Arshaushidze



Nana Eliboshivili,
Natia Rainauli,
Darina Sakhaushvili



Tsitsino Arshaulide,
Ketevan Devdaraidze

Participants in Alvani: January 17th and 18th.