

Press release | April 2025

EDI HILA | THEA DJORDJADZE

25 April to 5 October 2025

Press conference: Thursday, 24 April 2025, 11 a.m.

Opening: Thursday, 24 April 2025, 7 p.m.

EDI HILA | THEA DJORDJADZE is a trans-generational exhibition of two major artists from Albania and Georgia, both countries with a communist past linked to Soviet Union, and to Eastern Europe and Western Asia history.

Edi Hila (b. 1944 in Shkodër, Albania) is a seminal and highly praised artist of the Balkan region. Having witnessed and captured the social and political history of Albania, he is often referred to as »the painter of the Albanian transition«. This important survey exhibition of Edi Hila at the Hamburger Kunsthalle (Germany) and Moderna Museet Malmö (Sweden), initiated and curated by Dr. Corinne Diserens and Joa Ljungberg, has been organized in close dialogue with the artist. It includes paintings, works on paper, and maquettes, and is accompanied by a comprehensive publication published in English, German, and Swedish.

Tracing key moments from the artist's formative years, among the works on show is Edi Hila's infamous 1971 painting, *Planting of Trees*, which, because of its expressive use of colour and form (that ran contrary to the approved doctrine of socialist realism), led to him being sentenced to three years of forced labour. The exhibition also explores the artist's practice through the 1990s, when he carefully observed life after the fall of dictator Enver Hoxha's regime, depicting the realities of the Albanian transformation on the precipice of the new millennium.

Limiting himself to a palette of muted colours and systematically excluding superfluous details, Hila creates dense compositions that transcend straightforward narratives. Series such as *Comfort*, *Migrations*, *Paradox*, *Threat*, *Roadside Objects*, *Transitional Landscapes*, *Penthouse*, *Relations*, *Martyrs of the Nation Boulevard*, and *A Tent on the Roof of a Car* all reflect aspects of societal upheaval while also transmitting a sense of reverence, tempered by melancholy and subtle irony.

Layers of architectural history and the everchanging urban environment witnessed in Albania's towns and cities often set the stage. The famous master plan, with its complex of public buildings in Tirana's centre, designed by the Florentine architect Gherardo Bosio during the fascist regime, critically inspired Edi Hila's Boulevard series. In these paintings, which resemble the backdrops of tactical war game videos, profound imagery draws the viewer into a world devoid of shadows and with few signs of human life.

The exhibition also focuses on Edi Hila's recent works, which reveal the limitations and pitfalls of the transformation more than its promises, offering careful obser-



Edi Hila (*1944)

House Surrounded by Wall (from the series *Transitional Landscapes*), 2000
Acryl auf Leinwand, 131 x 163 cm
Collection of the artist, courtesy Mitterrand gallery

© Edi Hila. Courtesy of Mitterrand, Paris

Foto: Rebecca Fanuele



Thea Djordjadze (*1971)

Installationsansicht *EDI HILA | THEA DJORDJADZE*, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, 2025

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Foto: Fred Dott

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ventions and subtle psychological insights.

Edi Hila lives and works in Tirana, Albania. From the 1990s he was Professor and Dean at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Tirana.

Exhibitions (Selection): 2023 *Edi Hila. Territore te pervojave te jetuara*, Center for Openness and Dialogue, Tirana; *Edi Hila. Experienced Territories*, Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Milan; 2020 *Edi Hila. The Sound of the Tuba*, Secession, Vienna; 2018 *Edi Hila: Painter of Transformation*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; National Gallery of Arts Tirana; Kontakt Collection, Vienna; 2017 documenta 14, Athens/Kassel; 2014 *Potential Monuments of Unrealised Futures (with Adrian Paci)*, Architectural Association, London; Albanian Pavilion 14th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia

The **publication** titled *EDI HILA* (edited by Corinne Diserens; German/English; 200 pages) is accompanying the exhibition, with texts by Corinne Diserens, Edi Hila, Olsi Lelaj, Joa Ljungberg, Jana Pfort, Gëzim Qëndro and Lea Ypi. It is published by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Cologne. The book is available at the bookstore (38 euro) and in the museum shop (34 euro) and can be ordered online at www.freunde-der-kunsthalle.de.

Thea Djordjadze (b. in 1971 in Tbilisi, Georgia) was still a fine arts student when Georgia became one of the first countries to declare its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, after which a civil war broke out that lasted for two years. She continued her training in Western Europe. After a stint at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam, she went to a newly reunified Germany. She studied at the Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, with Dieter Krieg and Rosemarie Trockel, before moving to Berlin, where she has been based since the mid-2000s.

In her experimental practice, Thea Djordjadze proceeds by means of an informed intuition. Her sculptures, photographs, paintings, and environments that emerge from the artist's acute engagement with the active and latent energies of a space use a large range of materials in assemblages of singular poetry. Djordjadze's artistic process-driven practice explores and responds to the specific place, sometimes reflectively, sometimes as an immediate reaction to the given conditions. Often images, forms, and ideas from literature, design, painting, art history, and architecture—particularly, but not limited to, Modernism—flow into her work, leaving an imprint like an echo of the artist's encounter with them.

Thea Djordjadze's pieces are unstable; sometimes they can jump out, fall, or break until the right point of tension is found. The artist constructs a model of the exhibition space but doesn't make use of it except as a point of reference so as not to forget, to visualize the space, and to understand what has been given to her. Djordjadze is involved with the exhibition as a medium, a landscape where everything is in flux, stirred by an artistic language that slowly deploys its beauty.

For the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Thea Djordjadze has conceived and produced a new body of work, which offers viewers a spatial, physical, and psychological experience and an awareness of how one moves throughout the whole space, prompting people to look elsewhere than usual. Our habitual perspectives are extremely limited: we only perceive small sections of our environment. Doing so, the artist challenges not only the formal and material qualities of the Gallery of Contemporary Art building's first floor and atrium but also reveals their sensitive context, negative spaces, and source of light which plays on the works, walls, and floor, amplify the perceptible architectonic and spatial conditions.

Thea Djordjadze lives and works in Berlin.

Exhibitions (Selection): 2023 *Thea Djordjadze: the ceiling of a courtyard*, WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels; 2022 *Thea Djordjadze. Se souvenir et témoigner*, Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain (MAMC), Saint-Etienne Métropole; 2021 *Thea Djordjadze: All building as making*, Gropius Bau, Berlin; 2018 *Thea Djordjadze: o potio n.*, Portikus, Frankfurt; 2016 *Projects 103: Thea Djordjadze*, MoMA PS 1, New York; *To be in an upright position on the feet (studio visit)*, Secession, Vienna; 2012 documenta 13, Kassel

In May 2025 the accompanying **publication** titled *THEA DJORDJADZE* (edited by Corinne Diserens; German/English; 288 pages) will be published by DISTANZ, with texts by Mihaela Chiriac, Corinne Diserens, Tinatin Gurgenzidze, Andrew Maerke and Vazha Pshavela. The book is available in the bookstore (40 euro) and in the museum shop (36 euro) or can be ordered online at www.freunde-der-kunsthalle.de. The publication was realised with support of the Philipp Otto Runge Stiftung.

Curator: Dr. Corinne Diserens

Assistant Curator: Leona Marie Ahrens; Research assistant: Jana Pfort

The exhibition is supported by:



Accompanying Events:

25 April 2025, 11 a.m.

ARTIST TALK: ENCOUNTER WITH THE ARTIST EDI HILA

In dialogue with the art critic and curator Edi Muka

Venue: In the exhibition

Participation: Included in admission. Registration required at veranstaltung@hamburger-kunsthalle.de

The event is limited to 25 participants.

The discussion will be held in Albanian and translated into English.

21 September 2025, 4 p.m.

ARTIST TALK: ENCOUNTER WITH THE ARTIST THEA DJORDJADZE

Venue: In the exhibition

Participation: Included in admission. Registration required at veranstaltung@hamburger-kunsthalle.de

The event is limited to 25 participants.