

Zurab Tsereteli

ZURAB TSERETELI

LARGER THAN LIFE

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Duke of York's HQ
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oil on canvas, 240 x 140 cm

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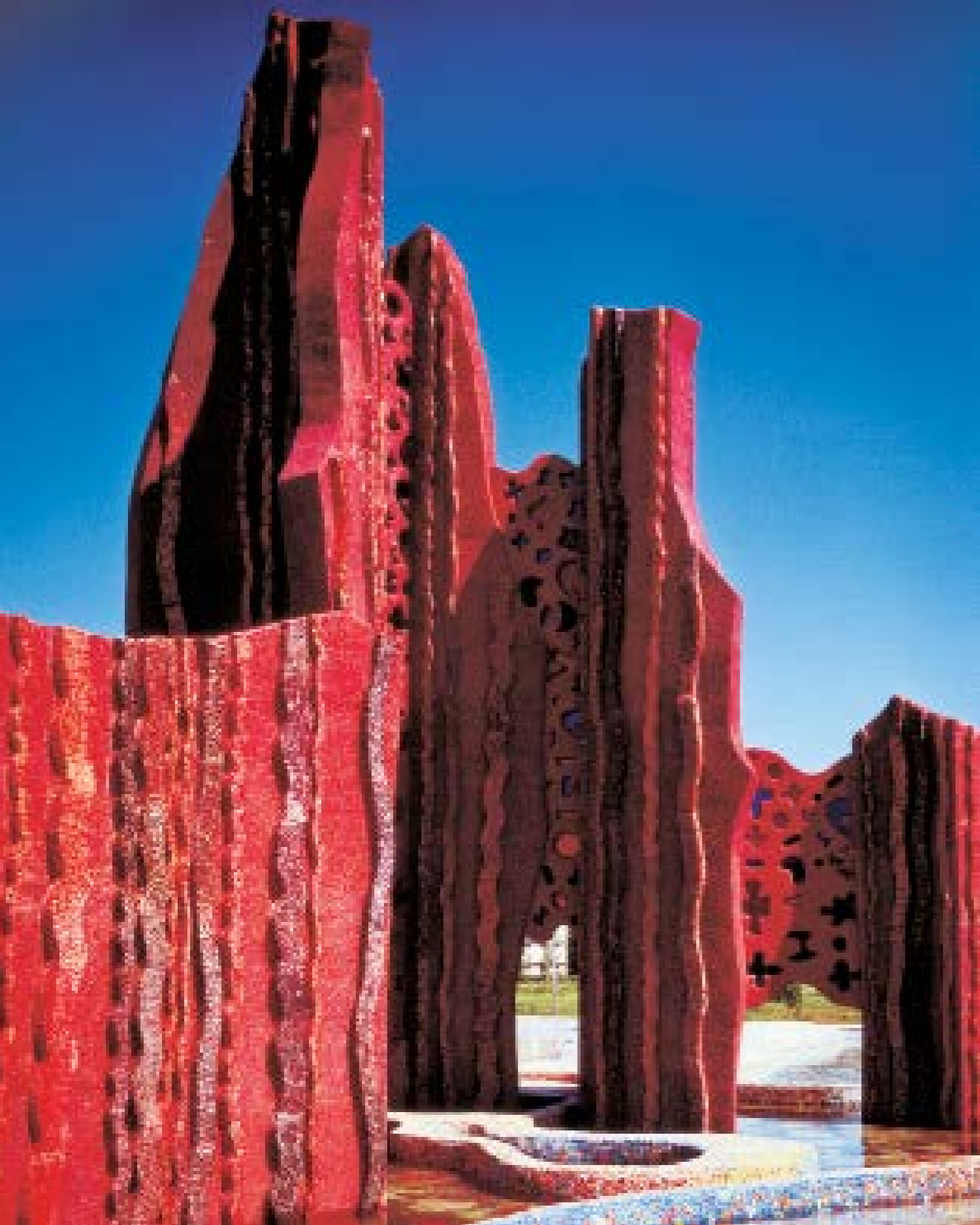
LARGER THAN LIFE

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ZURAB TSERETELI IN CONVERSATION WITH HERVE MIKAELOFF

“Larger than Life” is an exhibition that offers an exploration of the unique universe of Zurab Tsereteli. Taking place in the four galleries of the second floor of the prestigious Saatchi Gallery, London, it invites the visitor to discover a corpus of unique large-scale paintings. A focus has been made on portraits to reveal the extraordinary and distinctive use of colors by the artist. Monochrome and colored drawings provide a glimpse into the creation process of Tsereteli, as well as the richness and diversity of his palette. Ever-experimenting and prolific, he is a specialist of enamels, and we are delighted to share with the public five of them. All of the themes cherished by the artist are shown – including music, the circus, landscape and, of course, the human likeness.

The diversity and the quantity of art works you have created and still are creating is very impressive. Thousands of paintings, drawings, enamels, sculptures, monumental installations, two museums in Georgia and in Russia...

Every artist dreams of creating his or her own museum, but before creating my own, I founded the Moscow Museum of Modern Art. I had always dreamt of helping artists, of creating a place for today’s young artists, and together with my grandson Vasili Tsereteli I set up a contemporary art museum, the first of its kind in Russia, which is called the Moscow Museum of Modern Art. It has seven sites and carries out unique exhibition projects. After that, I started working on my own personal museum for people who like my art and who are interested in it, a place where I can show all the layers of my diverse art and continue to create as much as possible. It is my whole life, I could not live without it.

Some artists know from an early age that they are going to become artists. Was it the same for you, or was it a conscious decision?

I was brought up in a house with my aunt, mother and her brother, my uncle Giorgi Nijaradze. He was a very interesting man – good-looking, keen on sports, and also an artist. I thought that, if I became an artist, I would be good-looking and good at sports too. It didn’t work out like that, but I did become an artist. I ran along behind him when he walked down the street – women would stop and stare at him. I am grateful to him for spending time with me: he took me to the zoo and out into the countryside. He drew what he saw, and I did too. Later I understood why he did this – it was to train his eyes and hands.

*The Coral, 1973, Adler Resort
Playground Complex, Adler, Russia*



Zurab Tsereteli teaching at the College in Brockport, 1978

I saw from a young age how my uncle worked from morning till night to feed his family. He took a lot of commissions as well as doing his own work. When I was a bit older and before I entered the Academy, I helped him with his commissions. I got used to the smell of paints and pencils and I feel as if they have been with me ever since I was born. My parents and my uncle told me that the earliest works I did were drawings, and then I started to work with oils, which I continue to do today.

I graduated from the Academy in Tbilisi and became a senior figure in the artists' guild. I worked in Brazil, Portugal and Syria. At that time in Russia, when it was still the USSR, there was strong emphasis on architecture and monumental art. Monumental art included works in cast metal, mosaic and monumental painting, and work with plaster. I had experience of all those media when I was the chief artist at the Institute of Ethnography and Archaeology, and that helped me a lot. I worked with Mikhail Posokhin at Mosproject (the Moscow urban planning agency): the artist's hand was everywhere at that time, and architecture didn't exist without art – it was a whole system. The first job I had was working with the main architect on a new museum for children in Tbilisi. I was invited to make sketches for the museum.

I don't really remember what my first drawing as a child looked like. The first time I was given coloured pencils to draw was in kindergarten. I can remember how the teacher went round and looked at what each of the children was doing and chose me and somebody else from among 12 children. My parents weren't keen on me becoming an artist. My father was an engineer and wanted me to follow in his footsteps, but my mother wasn't against it and my uncle wanted it. I was quite a handsome lad, like my uncle had been.

Peter the Great, or The 300th Anniversary of The Russian Navy, 1997, Moscow, Russia

