Hanna Paulouskaya, "Entry on: Narcissus [Нарцисс (Nartsiss)] by Vakhtang Bakhtadze", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/796. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Vakhtang Bakhtadze

Narcissus [Нарцисс (Nartsiss)]

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1964)

TAGS: Aphrodite Echo Eros Narcissus Pottery / Vases



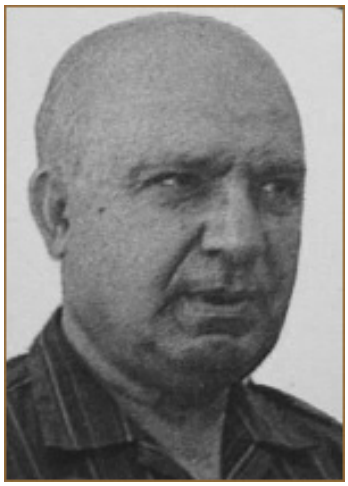


We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Narcissus [Нарцисс (Nartsiss)]
Studio/Production Company	Georgia Film
Country of the First Edition	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)
Country/countries of popularity	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Original Language	Georgian / Russian
First Edition Date	1964
First Edition Details	*Нарцисс* [Narcissus (Nartsiss)]. Directed by Vakhtang Bakhtadze. Script by Nina Benashvili and Vakhtang Bakhtadze. Composer Nugzar Vatsadze. Tbilisi: Georgia Film, 1964.
Genre	Animated films, Cameraless animation films , Humor, Myths, Satirical films, Short films
Target Audience	Crossover (Youth 12+)
Author of the Entry	Hanna Paulouskaya, University of Warsaw, hannapa@al.uw.edu.pl
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Creators



Portrait of Vakhtang Bakhtadze — courtesy of the web-site kino-teatr.ru (accessed: July 15, 2019).

Vakhtang Bakhtadze , 1914 - 1991
(Director)

Vakhtang Bakhtadze (Вахтанг Бахтадзе) was a Georgian animator and director. He was an honoured artist of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In 1933 he started to work on animation with Lado Mujiri at Goskinprom Gruzii and worked on the first Georgian animated film *The Argonauts* . At the same time he studied art at the Georgian Academy of Arts. He also studied philology at the University of Tbilisi. From 1950 he made his own animations, firstly as an assistant director, and from 1953 independently. His most famous character was *Самоделкин* (Makeshifter) – a robot-like figure made of a battery, screw, nut, and other parts of a construction set.

Sources:

Kapkov, Sergei, ed., *Энциклопедия отечественной мультипликации* [The Encyclopaedia of National Aniomation]. Moscow: Algoritm, 2006, 99–100.

Iakubovich, Odissei, *Вахтанг Бахтадзе* [Vakhtang Bakhtadze], Moscow: Vsesoiuznoe biuro propagandy kinoiskusstva, 1985.

Asenin, Sergei, *Мудрость вымысла* [The Wisdom of the Fantasy], Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1983, 45–49.

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Additional information

Summary

The action starts in a museum, in the Greek antiquities department. Among statues and frescos, we see Greek vases. The camera stops at a vase with a silhouette of a young man with a bow. The narrator says: “Long ago, in ancient Greece, according to tradition, Narcissus lived. The young man was extremely handsome, but heartless and inaccessible.” At this moment the image on the red-figure vase gets full colours and Narcissus steps off the vase and off the frame. The same happens to Echo. A standard description of the myth starts: “Echo loved Narcissus. But the poor girl couldn’t say it, she could only respond to the voices of others.” Echo gives to Narcissus her heart, but he plays with it and throws it up in the air. The heart falls and is broken. The goddess of love Aphrodite gets angry with him “because of such treatment of a loving heart” and sends her son Eros to “destroy him with the arrow”. Narcissus falls in love with himself and, crying, sinks into the water.

But the film does not stop at this point. The narrator says: “According to the testimonies of the ancients, selfish Narcissus has died. However later, it turned out that…” Narcissus comes out from the water of the lake and starts passing through historical periods: as a medieval knight, a Renaissance man, an Enlightenment man, a dandy and as a contemporary young adult. He is coming to a construction site in a limo, wearing tight-fitting pants and a T-shirt, having sporting a fancyluxuriant moustache, smoking a cigarette. “As you may see, Narcissus is alive” the narrator concludes. The second part of the film starts here.

In the time of the film’s present (most probably in Soviet Georgia), his Echo is a crane operator Mzia. She falls in love with Narcissus as do many other girls. The film depicts selfishness of the young man in a few episodes, emphasizing that Narcissuses are everywhere (in a street, at a football match, in a park, or in a restaurant). Eventually Narcissus takes Mzia’s scooter, when she cannot start the engine: “Of course, Narcissus has to impress here, too. The motor is the heart of the car, and Narcissus always makes hearts beat.” At some point Mzia gives her heart to Narcissus, and he wants to play with it as usual. “But Mzia is not Echo!” the narrator says. She notices his selfishness and unwillingness to help others and at the finale, again at the construction site, she lifts him up using a crane. All the hearts fall out of his pockets, and the girls pick them up. Mzia also recovers her

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heart. She throws Narcissus from the machine, he runs leaving his pants in the crane. A usual comic chase scene ends with Narcissus running up the painted stairs to a museum and after he finds his own vase, he jumps onto it.

Analysis

Bakhtadze said that the idea of the film came to him in a restaurant: "At the next table I noticed a strange couple. A young man kept looking past a girl with a loving gaze. He admired his own reflection in the mirror. Narcissus! One to one. This picture of my life I have brought to the screen."* It's not by chance that this is the scene that became a turning point of the movie. Choosing a myth of Narcissus to present a problem of contemporary society indicates that the myth was well known and it was possible to use it to make a satire. However the author starts the film with a detailed description of the myth.

Using a museum as a starting and finishing points of the film is also important. Bakhtadze states that antiquity and Greek mythology are commonly perceived as a nice, but dead culture, belonging to museums. However animation has the magic power to bring the old (vase) paintings to life. And due to animation we may see that old mythical prototypes are still topical and eager to teach modern youth.

The contemporary world is depicted as Soviet Georgia. We can see it in the Georgian alphabet used on signs in the city. People in restaurants dance traditional Georgian dances; they often look Georgian. The construction site scenery was typical for Soviet cinema, longing to present a modern "realist" world. Making a woman as a strong protagonist was also in the spirit of Soviet feminism ideology.

The phrase "But Mzia is not Echo!" emphasizes the advantage of ordinary Soviet people over Greek nymphs (and Greek heroes). This film is the only one, in my knowledge, that says this explicitly. As Mzia, in contrast with Echo, is a crane worker, we may assume that the work is essential to transform a human into a hero. The emphasis is on the controversy between Mzia and Narcissus, depicted as a lazy handsome slacker, who does his pedicure at home, but cannot clean up the spilled water (leaving it to his mother).

A pedicure, tight-fitting clothes, a limo were perceived as redundant and were denounced as vice of the society. Bakhtadze made another

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film *О мода, мода!* (Oh, Fashion, Fashion, 1968) rebuking young people's desire to have fashionable foreign branded clothing.**

Depicting Narcissus as a feminine type and Mzia as having a typical masculine profession questions gender stereotypes. However the film follows the common Soviet understanding of feminism: women were given rights to perform masculine work, but their "feminine duties" were still obligatory (it is Narcissus's mother who cleans the house; or all the girls wear similar dresses fitting at the waist, popular at that time, if they are not working in uniforms)

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* Iakubovich, Odissei, *Вахтанг Бахтадзе* [Vakhtang Bakhtadze]. Moscow: Vsesoiuznoe biuro propagandy kinoiskusstva, 1985, 51–53.

** More on popularity of western culture in the USSR see Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City...* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Echo Eros Narcissus Pottery / Vases
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Fashion Gender Humour Love Modernity Past Revenge Self Social class

Further Reading

Asenin, Sergei [Асенин, Сергей], *Волшебники экрана* [Wizards of the Screen (Volshebniki ėkrana)], Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974, 237–238.

Asenin, Sergei [Асенин, Сергей], *Мудрость вымысла* [The Wisdom of the Fantasy (Mudrost' vymysla)], Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1983, 45–49.

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Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960–1985*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Information about the film in movie databases:

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kino-teatr.ru (accessed July 15, 2019).

Addenda

Language: Georgian / Russian:

IMDB states Georgian version of the film (*Nartsisi*, accessed: July 15, 2019). However I had access only to a Russian version.

Cinematography:

Sarra Sparsiashvili

Artists:

Albert Nersesov;

Iosif Samsonadze

Animators:

Mikhail Bakhanov;

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Avenir Khuskivadze;

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