



SUBMITTED

From left: Contemporary Art Space Batumi curator Irakli Dzneldze, Northeastern Nevada Museum representative Catherine Wines, Betsy Dovydenas, artist Jonas Dovydenas, Iveta Gedvilaite, Lithuanian Ambassador Giedrius Puodziunas.

Museum collection travels

ELKO — Part of the permanent art collection of the Northeastern Nevada Museum traveled overseas in October and was exhibited in the Republic of Georgia on the shores of the Black Sea.

The story started in Nevada much earlier than that.

In 1968, Jonas Dovydenas, then a young, freelance photographer based in Chicago, fell in love with Nevada. Dovydenas has said, "I love the beauty of the desert mornings, the endless roads under an endless sky, the sage, the ranchers, miners, hands and buckaroos, all one-of-a-kind, larger-than-life, individuals in a world of individualists."

He returned to Nevada each year for the next 10 years, making friends, taking pictures, and gradually a story emerged. It is a meditation on the vast openness of America, and the forces of life in desert and town. A book of his photographs, "Nevada, a Journey," was published in 1987.

Dovydenas donated the original photographs depicted in the book to the Northeastern Nevada Museum a few years later.

Fast forward to 2017 and half-way around the world in Batumi, Georgia. The Contemporary Art Gallery Batumi expressed interest in showcasing the diversity

„ნევადა, მოგზაურობა“

"Nevada A Journey" in the Georgian language

and almost alien sites and people of the American West.

In comes Iveta Gedvilaite to help make the connection. She is the wife of the Lithuanian Ambassador Giedrius Puodziunas and also a great lover of art. She is familiar with Dovydenas's work because they both share a Lithuanian ancestry.

Dovydenas was born in Lithuania in 1939. His family was forced to flee the country in 1944 to escape the Soviet occupation. In the USA, he studied and became an award-winning, world-class photographer, concentrating most of his work in his native Lithuania, Afghanistan, and surprisingly, Nevada.

Gedvilaite and Dovydenas made a connection and 20 of the museum's photographs headed to Georgia and their international debut.

The collection of photos shares the same title as the book. Reprints of the photos that were selected were on exhibit during October and November and remain in that country because of

the possibility that they will be exhibited in more places in the region, including Armenia and Ukraine.

The artist and his wife, Betsy, traveled from Massachusetts with the show to attend a reception on Oct. 20. They invited Catherine Wines of Elko to join them and represent the museum and the people of Nevada.

Ambassador Puodziunas and Iveta also were in attendance at the show, along with many Georgian dignitaries including that country's Secretary of Culture.

While there, it became apparent to both the Dovydenases and Wines why the show was so sought after by the gallery. The people of Georgia and that entire region of Eastern Europe are fascinated with the huge, stark landscape and vastness of the American West and the characters that live there, especially the deserts of Nevada. The curator of the show, Irakli Dzneldze, called the photographs "an ode to grand space and landscape and the life there."

At the reception, Dovydenas and Wines both spoke to the crowd, who all were fluent in English. Dovydenas gave an account of his many journeys through Nevada, his photography career and putting the book together. Wines gave a detailed description of the Northeastern Nevada Museum and its art collection and also talked briefly about Elko, the Great Basin, and the American West. Wines was the exhibits coordinator at the museum from 2005-2011.

The rest of the trip for the Dovydenases and Wines were filled with interesting sightseeing, making new acquaintances and sampling much of the local cuisine in both Batumi and the Georgian capital, Tbilisi.

Georgia is a country at the intersection of Europe and Asia with a population just more than 4 million. It is part of the former Soviet republic and is home to Caucasus Mountains, centuries old villages, Roman Empire ruins, and Black Sea beaches. It's famous for wine-growing. Georgians will tell you the first time grapes were fermented and made into a drink was in the Kakheti region of Georgia, around 4,000 BC.

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"I didn't know what to expect when I traveled to Georgia, but I really didn't expect this" said Wines. "The landscape is some-

what like northern California, it has beautiful mountains, rolling hills and vineyards — lots and lots of vineyards."

The Georgian language has its own unique script and writing system which dates back to the first mil-

lennium BC. The language, much like the more familiar Basque language, has no ancestral roots to any other written language and is completely unique in both written and spoken form.

Since liberation from the Soviet Union in April of 1991 Georgia has returned to its Christian roots and fully embraced democracy and western ideas in both politics and culture. Today it is a very modern, diverse society with interesting architecture, unique traditions and incredibly warm hospitality.

"The most memorable part of the trip for me was the Georgian people, they were all so nice. One of our taxi drivers even took us to his parents' farm. They fed us and gave us a bottle of their own homegrown wine to take with us. It was incredible," said Wines.

Each year brings increased U.S. economic and political influence to Georgia and its people,

along with a desire to align with the U.S. and the West culturally. Art is a heavy influence to the modern culture and now a piece of that artistic story includes some photographs that make their home in Elko.

Dovydenas was very happy about the show.

"I couldn't be happier with how they hung the pictures, and how they looked in the space," he said. "It was a great turnout at the reception and a really great show altogether. I'm so glad we all got to experience this."

An invitation was extended to Irakli, the ambassador and his wife and others from the show to visit Nevada and experience the American West, Elko and the Northeastern Nevada Museum in person.

For more information on this or any other exhibits or events at the Northeastern Nevada Museum visit www.MuseumElko.org or call 775-738-3418.

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