



GRAVITATIONAL SINGULARITY OF THE «EURASIAN UTOPIA»

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Abstract:

The review deals with the exhibition «Eurasian Utopia: Post Scriptum» which surveys the work of Kazakhstani artists of the 20th and 21st century whose work combines international aspects of modernism along with local features the traditional culture of Kazakhstan. Using the work and theories of Rustam Khalfin - who is considered as one of the father of contemporary art in the region – as a focal point the exhibition connected several generations of artists to explore the formation and development of art in Kazakhstan. The exhibition was the part of ambitious project entitled «Focus Kazakhstan» and presents an effort to offer an overview into modern and contemporary Kazakhstani art on an international stage. Taking place from September 2018 to March 2019, Focus Kazakhstan comprises a four-part exhibition programmed in the four cities of London (UK), Berlin (Germany), Suwon (South Korea) and Jersey City (USA). Focus Kazakhstan is a collaboration between the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and Ruhani Zhangyru Program. The curator of Focus Kazakhstan was Roza Abenova, Head of Centre of Modern and Contemporary Art at the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The show «Eurasian Utopia: Post Scriptum» was curated by Yuliya Sorokina (Kazakhstan) and Shin Eun Young (South Korea) and took place from 27th of November, 2018 to 3rd of March, 2019 at Suwon Ipark Museum of Art.

Key words: Local Modernity, Glocality, Pulota, Nomadology, Obscuration, Singularity, Eurasian Utopia

The idea of a mega-project called «Eurasian Utopia» which manifesting strategy of collective artistic identity in the territory of Kazakhstan belongs to the artist Rustam Khalfin (1949-2008) who is recognized here as the patriarch of contemporary art. The «Eurasian Utopia» as a concept of critical thinking about the dream of a non-existed beautiful country connecting Europe and Asia allows to show the art of Kazakhstan in a fairly complete time-space continuum of discursive and formative searches of artists from several generations (Figure 1).



Figure 1 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani modern art

We are talking about the masters of the 20th-21st centuries who are uniting in their work the international skills of modernism and local features of the

traditional culture of Kazakhstan. In world practice, art with such indicators is called the «local modernity» or local modernism. It is necessary to emphasize that the basis of Kazakhstani modern art is the co-existence of two phenomenas - «glokality» (Appadurai, AB. Oliva) [1], [2] and «local modernity» (D. Agamben, C. Esche) [3], [4]. That means that on the one hand, our artists speak in international (global) language of art, revealing the local features of our time. On the other hand, our artists of different generations for the last 30 years have been actively rethinking the legacy of modernism (modernity), giving it local features («nomadic modernism» by Rustam Khalfin, according to Y. Sorokina) [5]. The novelty of Khalfin's approach to the development of basic features and development strategies of the new art of the new state on the territory of the Great Steppe (Eurasia¹⁶) is associated with the complex, syncretic type of his artistic practice. He managed to anticipate his time and offer to contemporaries such a model of the collective identity of Kazakhstani art, which, firstly, would unite all artists of a multinational country on an essential, but not on an ethnic, cultural basis; secondly, this model absorbed and processed all the main universalities of the heritage of modernism from the point of view of local topos, that is, in fact, a model of local modernity. According to Khalfin, the strategy should be built on the basis of a few things: the philosophy of the traditional nomadic world outlook and a new nomadic mentality according to the «nomadology» by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari [6], which should be a formative element of an renovated identity. Khalfin forwarded new formal elements of contemporary art

into the local art process, and constantly updated and conceptualized the archaic and conservative artistic environment, actively introducing the concept of «discourse» in everyday life. For the first time in the region, he began to present to the public innovative projects in the forms of installations, environments and performances. At the same time, he insisted on the need to choose a particular path of Kazakhstani art and again called for a return to the plastic first principles. As often happens in the history of art, Khalfin's efforts during his lifetime were not appreciated sufficiently by his colleagues. Nevertheless, the artistic process after his death develops according to the scenario proposed by Khalfin. Therefore, it is logical to build a retrospective display of Kazakhstani art on the basis of the «Eurasian Utopia», but with temporary and conceptual nuances introduced by different generations of artists before and after Khalfin's life with the «Post Scriptum» amendment.

Discursive determination of Kazakhstan's art allows us to identify a number of sustainable areas that emphasize its character and create a single image, each articulating the country's cultural singularity in its own way, focusing on its sensitivity points, about which Gilles Deleuze wrote: «These are turning points and folding points; bottlenecks, nodes, runways and centers; melting points, condensation and boiling points; points of tears and laughter, sickness and health, hope and despondency, points of sensitivity» [7].

Avant-garde Discourse

The earliest work in the exposition Sergey Kalmykov's Red Horses¹⁷ was not

¹⁶ Eurasia is not only the mainland, which united Europe and Asia, but a geo-political concept, meaning the complementary commonality and mutual influence of the cultures of European and Asian people. The term is popular in the Republic of Kazakhstan, thanks to the idea of «Eurasianism», introduced by the cultural expert Lev Gumilyov.

¹⁷ There is a legend that Kalmykov draw the sketch Red Horses, in the classroom in the workshop of his teacher Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, this sketch inspired the teacher to create the famous painting Bathing of the Red Horse (1912).

accidentally marked by the year 1911. This is the very point of the fold of the era when the avant-garde, as a revolutionary artistic movement that emerged in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century, rapidly broke into the world. Kazakhstan, by virtue of its geo-political affiliation, first to the Russian Empire, then to the USSR, was in the orbit of the influence of avant-garde artistic searches. Sergey Kalmykov, who called himself «the last avant-gardist of the first call», arrived in Almaty from Orenburg in 1935 at the invitation of the Musical Theater¹⁸ and immediately recognized this place as his home - his utopian universe, where he painted fantastic pictures and made enchanting exits to the city in self-made costumes of unimaginable styles. During the time of total lack of freedom and the Stalinist terror, he managed to survive (apparently he was mistaken for a madman), and his mythological creations influenced many generations of Kazakhstani artists. He practiced artistic formats unbelievable for the time of Socialist realism - such as round in Circle 2 (1964) or triangular in During the Night in the Dark series (1956-57), while developing his own recognizable artistic language – a mixture of figurative and abstraction with linear inclusions and font references situated directly in the body of the text. He can also be called the forerunner of conceptual art, since he made his images for example in the dark, or included his body in the context of artistic expression, anticipating the discourse of tactility.

However not many artists were so lucky to be free creators during the times of the Stalin regime. Many of them moved to

Kazakhstan against their will, as a result of mass repressions of the intelligentsia (1928-1954) and evacuation during the Second World War (1941-1945). Among others were: V. Sterligov, T. Glebova, V. Eifert, P. Zaltsman etc.

Vladimir Eifert, who was exiled to Karaganda in 1941 as a special settler of German origin, was a multifaceted personality in the full sense - a graduate of VHUTEMAS; former Antiques, former director of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, he was forced to live in the Karaganda region, in the collective farm and later in Karaganda city¹⁹. Nevertheless, the artist works in the cultural club, where he runs the art studio. In parallel, he continues to work as an artist, creating works combining the search for a harmonious combination of new artistic forms and thematic challenges of the era. The Storming of the Virgin Soil (1954) illustrates the author's approach showing the plowing on tractors almost like the military action of machines against nature. The pathos of constructive labor ambivalently coexists here with criticism of human ambitions. The artist does not say anything in the forehead, formally joining the two sides of the process of developing of natural resources.

A representative of the school of Analytical Art²⁰, a pupil of the famous Pavel Filonov – Pavel Zaltsman was evacuated to Alma-Ata as an artist of Lenfilm cinema studio, but for a long time it was forbidden to him to leave the city, due to his status as a special settler of German origin. Zaltsman became the chief artist of Kazakhfilm cinema studio and the artistic director of many films, continuing to create

¹⁸ Now – Abay State Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet.

¹⁹ Karaganda region was the territory of a vast area of the Stalinist labor camps, known under the common title KARLAG. Here cultural figures and dissidents from the central cities of the USSR, as well as representatives of ethnic groups, regarded by Stalin as possible accomplices of fascist Germany (Germans, Poles, etc.) have been exiled.

²⁰ Analytical art is a method developed by Pavel Filonov and his students, starting from the principles of cubism, but enriching it with the principle of «organic growth» of the image from the particular to the general.

paintings and graphic works, illustrations, writing prose and poetry, guided by his commitment to the group of Oberiuists²¹. Keeping faithful to the principles of the method of Analytical art, Salzman continued to build a picture from a point, developing the plot from the particular to the general. Practically all his works were made using this method, including the portraits presented on display: *Warriors of Amangeldy* (1956), *Girl Student* (1980), *The Carpetmakers* (1982).

The avant-garde protagonists, who lived and worked in Kazakhstan due to various circumstances of their personal destiny, predetermined the fate of Kazakhstan's advanced art, influencing the local artistic community and the very process of development of art in the territory of their forced habitat. They brought in local art, which had just begun to take shape professionally, the powerful breath of the advanced views of the era, while at the same time engaging the Kazakh thematic agenda in the discursive field of the avant-garde (Figure 2).



Figure 2 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani modern art. A few works by Sergey Kalmykov

Discourse of romantic realism

In parallel with the avant-garde search in Kazakhstan, the realistic school that flourished in the era of the dictate of Social Realism have been developed dominantly. Kazakh artists often received education in Moscow or Leningrad art universities, but

despite a certain unification, they were able to bring their poetic note into superficial hymn to labor, spread everywhere by Soviet cultural bureaucrats. By and large, it is difficult to find social realism of sufficient purity in Kazakhstani art. All realistic works wonderfully fanned by a touch of provincial romantic. This is especially felt in the works of the 60s and 70s in watercolor portraits by Uke Azhiyev, in sophisticated landscapes by Ural Tansykbaev and pasty landscapes by Zhanaty Shardenov, the genre nomadic pastorals by Kanafiya Telzhanov, portraits of the astronauts by Alexei Stepanov, panoramic hymns to the Virgin land workers by Altynbai Moldabekov, in life-descriptions by Oralbek Nurzhumayev and Adil Rakhmanov. But especially brightly poetic realism is manifested in the autolithographs by Yevgeniy Sidorkin. Sidorkin managed to create his own archetype of protagonists of Kazakh myths and historical events. The plastic persuasiveness of his illustrations to the novels of Saken Seifulin and the generalization of folk images in the Kazakh epics developed into the symbolic monumentality of his graffiti, which adorn Almaty public buildings. The artist who came from Russia managed to get closer to the idea of Kazakh identity, opening the way for generations of artists of the period of Independence (Figure 3).

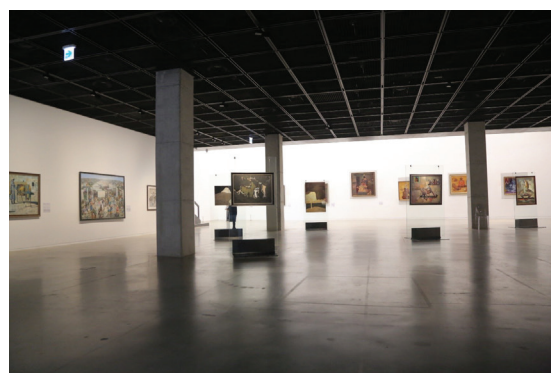


Figure 3 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani modern art. Art of the 2nd part and the end of 20 century

²¹ OBERIU is a literary group (Leningrad, 1927- early 30s), which declared a rejection of traditional forms of art, cultivated grotesque, allogism, poetics of the absurd.

Identity Discourse

In the 80s the art of Kazakhstan already had a tendency to search for national identity, anticipating the processes in the art of the Independence period. The new generation of artists has made the transition from poetic realism to national symbolism, using the legacy of international modernism and reanimating national traditions and historical memory. Such artists as Salihitdin Aitbayev, who managed to sing traditional Kazakh values - family commitment in *Grandfather with grandson* (1992) and folk traditions in *Girl in national costume* (1977) in a new manner that was influenced by European and Latin American modernism. The artists of the Perestroika and Glasnost era, thanks to the informational possibilities that have opened after the Iron Curtain²², are actively experimenting with new formal approaches and problematizing the issues of the day through indirect, symbolic statements. The situation was extremely aggravated by the harshly repressed protest meetings of students in Almaty in December 1986. After these tragic events, such dramatic pictures as the *Dog Eating it's Puppies* (1989) by Abdrashit Sydykhanov, which symbolically referring to the tragedy, or the *Family* (1988) by Dulat Aliyev, which conveying the anxiety of the crisis time, appeared. On the one hand, all the authors sought to find a formal language corresponding to the epoch; on the other hand they try to reflect the local peculiarities of the Kazakhstani situation. With the attainment of state independence, the process of searching for identity has become extremely aggravated. Artists of the Kazakh New Wave, who are actualizing the search for a special formal language again and reflecting the national mentality, actively declare themselves.

Based on formal modernist experiments, they create a linguistic system that limits figurative utterances to the utmost, turning them practically into symbolic patterns. The themes of their utterances included aul (kazakh village) motifs, as in the *Noon* (2005) and *Chemalgan* (2005) by Askar Esdaulet paintings, historical heritage artifacts (balbals, holy places, etc.) or even basic elements of entity (soil, air, water) in *Untitled* (1993) by Galym Madanov. The deliberate lapidary of these statements manifested a return to the values of the nomadic culture, but at the same time it sharply showed the inadequacy of easel art methods, their discrepancy to the time and the need to move to the plane of new paradigm of contemporary art.

The Rider's Discourse

In the context of the basic idea of nomadic culture, the Rider's discourse is certainly central. The rider has always been a figure of everyday life in Kazakhstan, but in the period of the emergence of contemporary art, he plays the role of a cultural indicator in the critical polylogue of contemporary artists.

Rustam Khalfin was one of the first who conceptualized this topic, for whom the rider was the main figure in the author's mythology, along with the «pulota», which was created by him. Khalfin turns an eyepiece formed with the hand folded into a telescope into a body instrument for exploring the world. Moving in his perceptual research by touch, both in the direct (creating a plastic object «pulota») and in a figurative sense (using a cam forming fist, like an eyepiece), Khalfin developed a palpable eye tactics, making the perception tactile. It embodies pulotas - the empty space between clenched fingers, between the feet and knees, making the body a frame of world

²² The common figurative name of the Cold War era, when information flows were blocked in the USSR.

perception. Pulota appears in his projects as a separate “surplus element of art” (according to K. Malevich) [8]. In the installation Pulotas (2004), Halfin puts out the outlines of the pulota in the form of black plane figures, connecting them into a composition, adding here the Finger ornament (1995) – the photo series of his wife and colleague Lydia Blinova.

The idea of tactility as the basis of the nomadic culture of perception was for the first time presented in its full complexity in the performance In Honor of the Rider. The Ideal Saddle. The performance was a creative act resembling a rite of some kind of initiation. A naked rider brought his racer on stage; then the artist arranged a prepared mixture of clay on the horse's croup, after which the rider leaped onto the saddle and thus created a clay mould in the form of a saddle with parts of the human body.

To a certain degree, the resultant imprint could be called another version of pulota, that is, an emptiness filled with clay and the moving act of the human body. Only this time the fingers and palms were substituted by the horse's croup and the rider's seat and the work of the eye was replaced by the work of the locomotory system, which formed the clay imprint (Figure 4).



Figure 4 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani contemporary art. On the left: Rustam Khalfin. In Honor of the Rider. Ideal Saddle (1997). On the right: Rustam Khalfin. Pulotas (2004) with Lidia Blinova's Fingers Ornament (2004)

Khalfin declared the rider as a sign, marking the belonging to the Nomadology, but for other artists who demonstrate the authenticity of their land and culture, the rider is part of their being. In particular, Said Atabekov articulates the tradition of coexistence with a horse as an important cultural aspect of modern Kazakhstan. He turns to the theme of the Rider in projects of different years again and again. In 2017, the artist brings together various mediums with this theme – the video installation Steppe Wolves. From the Battle for the Square series (2017), the Coca-Cola Saddle ceramic object (2017) and the series of photos Steppe Wolves (2017).

The Battle for the Square series represents Kazakh national game Kok-par at the level of universal epic values. Large shots taken from above, fragmented footage of the “battle” remind of great military battles and images of legendary heroes of unclear epic and history. The shots last painfully for a long time and eventually suggest an actual-critical reading of the action, which gathers up to a hundred riders fighting for a certain «square». Atabekov leaves the image monochrome depriving him, thus, of real correlation with the colorful moments of life «here and now» and bringing his statement to the archetypal level. The two-channel video installation of the same title (2017) extends the eternal «battle» by doubling the image on the two adjacent screens. A simple device repeatedly increases the power of perception of the epic nature of the battle, acting almost hypnotically.

The photo-series Steppe Wolves represent the participants of the game Kok-par as if personally, although it shows them from the back (we see the back of the rider and the tail of the horse). The ambivalence of the image,

its personification and at the same time unification again (following Khalfin) turns concrete riders into a multitude of symbolic horsemen, creating a kind of community. At the same time, all horsemen are additionally labeled with various logos of international trade brands (Dolce & Gabbana, Adidas, Coca-Cola, etc.), emphasizing the consumerist commitment of nowadays. The ceramic object Coca-Cola Saddle is presented as material evidence, an artifact of the real existence of the Steppe Wolves, and at the same time a certain sacrality, despite an unequivocal hint at the global dictate of international corporations, as a new form of colonialism (Figure 5).



Figure 5 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani contemporary art. From left to right: Said Atabekov. Steppe Wolves. 2017. C-print, 250x400cm; Steppe Wolves. From the series Battle for the Square. 2017. Video-projection; Saddle Coca-Cola. 2017. Ceramic, 30x30x47 cm.

Anvar Musrepov presents a new generational approach to the image of the Rider. In the media installation Jiggiting (2017), the artist creates 3D animation – a self-portrait in the form of a circus rider on a virtual phantom horse. The author's irony is aimed at the speculative use of the rider's theme in the mass culture of Kazakhstan and at the same time at creating self-identification in the wake of the nation-wide idea of the «state of nomads». As if the author's virtual identification Chapan (2018) made of blue plastic bags of the IKEA store echoes and complements the virtual identification

of the author. By a strange analogy, the decoration of the bags resembles the golden pattern of the Kazakhstan's blue flag, by virtue of which the object explicitly hints at the consumerization of the Kazakh national idea.

Discourse of the Topos

In contrast to the artists who chose the model of identity based on nomadic culture, other Kazakhstani authors develop an ontological approach that marks the place of action as well as the basic concepts and structures that determine the nature of Kazakhstan's art as part of the modern world. With this approach, there is a fusion of important structural arguments of the language of modern art and thematic tracks that define the characteristics of the life realities of Kazakhstan. At the same time, the artist does not label themselves as an authentic protagonists of local culture, but appear as a «men of the world».

Yelena and Viktor Vorobyevs, artists who formed a family and creative couple, constructing their own seemingly separate artistic world. This world categorically rejects every pathos and touches the most important essential issues of forming mass culture as in the Baiterek photo-series (2010), which traced the entire technological chain of creating a state symbol - from the president's drawing to numerous naive repetitions of the country's main architectural object. Vorobyevs openly play with their world, making fun of the post-Soviet love of the pompous red walkway in the Red Carpet felt object (2011), or reflecting on new trends in the philology of the post-Soviet countries in the quadriptych Global Text (2018). It is characteristic of the Vorobyevs' creativity – to involve in the orbit of their action the diverse questions of the surrounding reality and

the equally diverse media techniques. Such polymodality of mediums emphasizes the existential nature of the artists, «... the work of the Vorobyevs can be called the visual phenomenology of modern Kazakhstan and, more broadly, of all the former Soviet republics – a reflection of the social, political and economic processes that took place in this region <...>. In all these projects, changes in the appearance of the social environment are carefully recorded, as well as unchanged, which is determined, let's say, by the nature of the landscape...» (A. Fomenko, 2015) [9] (Figure 6).



Figure 6 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani contemporary art. From left to right: Yelena and Viktor Vorobyevs. Baiterek. 2010. Color photographs, Dimensions Variable; Global Text. 2018. Color print on canvas, acrylic, 4 pieces 140 x 200 cm each; Red Carpet. 2011. Felt carpet, Dimensions Variable.

It is oddly enough but the artists who don't touch at all the issues of national, nomad or Asian identity, but reveal questions of the post-Soviet, post-modern generality of Central Asia and the whole world are closer to Khalfin's heritage. In his work, Alexander Ugay has explored the boundaries between medium, image and memory. Ugay is characterized by the use of materials by other artists as organic tools for constructing his message.

A visual dialogue with Gilles Deleuze, with the artifacts of the past and present in time and space is made explicit in Ugay's film *The Earth and the Shape* (2013-15). The footage of architectural landscapes from different corners of

the world – Astana, Karaganda, Almaty, Tashkent, St Petersburg, Seoul, Istanbul, Sophia and others is not mere geography but, according to Deleuze, the geography of the mind. It is not a certain city or a certain land, but a new global mega polis in the state of no-shape. This freely forming space is distorted by phantomlike figures from Leni Riefenstahl's films. Athletes from *Olympia* (1938) serve as gestalt shapes from time to time appearing among the streets, squares and courtyards of the new city as if summoned by a certain power to mould the moveable no-shape in a concrete structure.

Obscuratons (2017) are an author's innovation, which allows capturing and objectifying the image of a certain place in the space-time continuum, while adding additional meanings and narratives. The object works on the principle of a pinhole camera – the simplest analogue of a photo apparatus, the walls of which are not only the shape and surface of the object, but also the body of a photographic image (the object is covered with a photosensitive layer from the inside). *Obscuraton Pulota* (2017) refers to the heritage of the famous Almaty artist and architect Rustam Khalfin (Figure 7).

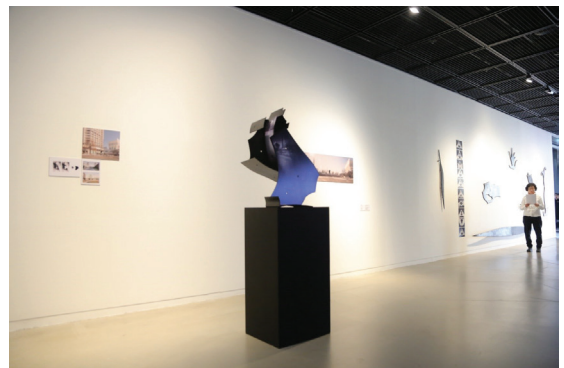


Figure 7 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani contemporary art. Alexander Ugay *Pulota* (*Obscuraton #5*). 2017. 60x65x45cm, Installation, wood, black and white photography, C-prints, negatives. Latitude 43°14'22.14"N. Longitude 76°56'43.37"E

Obscuraton The vertical horizon (2018) serves as a visible axis of coordinates, which declares *obscuraton* as «monuments

of concentration» of different imperatives of the post-epoch, creating an image claiming «perception slots» – peripheral vision and visual anxiety simultaneously.

The Ornament Discourse

Following the appeal of Khalfin to return to the plastic first principles of art, the artists of the new generation working with ornamental patterns as with an updated tool of contemporary art, allowing to open a new singularity of the country with a rich decorative heritage.

Bakhyt Bubikanova pursues a policy of shocking the public with desacralizing, barbaric gestures, of the artist, but in the variant of another gender – diva-superstar of Kazakhstani contemporary art. Her pictorial ornamental «parsons», photo collages and graphic sheets are replete with patterns of gender identity, performances «lead» the game of hide and seek and the search for some Other. Bubikanova can look for modern modifications of the Black Square, as the point of no return and a hackneyed symbol of crisis time, or to parody the postures of official horse monuments in the nude. Whatever she does, it is always a search for a breakthrough into a new artistic dimension. The multimedia assemblage presented on display broadcasts the idea of national carpet as the main sacral body of traditional art. Preceding the theme is Lono acrylic painting (2016) simulating an oriental carpet, part of which is «cut out» or enriched with the shape of a female womb, simplified to an ornamental symbol. The womb, following Khalfin, ramifies the space of the carpet with its shape, snatching out key pattern points. In unison to the pictorial canvas, the installation *Fractal* (2018) and the accompanying performance *Defragmentation of the Carpet* (2018) sound. Bubikanova produces a public dissension of the Kazakh carpet into

separate fragments, increasing the scale with each action. As a result, the carpet appears as a skinned animal carcass – in the form of an outer frame, an inner field and a central pattern removed from it. Elements of the ornament after destructive gesture became fractals – self-similar keys or portals in Euclidean space. Destruction incomprehensibly deepens the value and complexity of carpet ornamentation (Figure 8).



Figure 8 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani contemporary art. On the left: Bakhyt Bubikanova. *Fractal*. From a series of carpet destructuring. Assemblage, object and performance "Carpet Defragmentation". 2018. Carpet parts, 200x300cm. Video documentation of the artwork, 6' 25"; on the right: Anvar Musrepov. *Jiggiting*. 2017. Media installation, 1' 15"

Saule Dussenbina produces research that leads her to the questions of the formation of the archetype and its introduction into the structure of convergent culture of nowadays. To solve such a complex task, she chooses the exact medium – the field of applied design – the design of interiors and household items and embodies her ideas in several series. In the series *Landscapes of Astana* (2017) the artist makes sketches of various architectural objects of Astana adapted for a splint print illustration, hypertrophying the absurdity of her quasi-stylistics. The sketches imitate the traditional Dutch tile in both the blue color of the mural, and the square shape, and the compositional pattern of the motifs. *Landscapes of Astana* transform a large genre into a caricature, and then it seems

to implant it into the mass consciousness through the subject of interior decoration – decorative ceramic plates. The Landscapes of Astana, like all the series of Dussenbina with patterns, as if playing with tactile and optical perception in ping-pong, then snatching familiar images and translating them into objects of thoughtful contemplation, then making these objects part of our home «shell», return them to tactile zone (Figure 9).



Figure 9 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani contemporary art. Saule Dussenbina Landscapes of Astana. 2017. 10 plates with prints, 20x20cm each; The Seasons. 2017. Single video, 3' 46", I Want Chapan. 2017. Print from 10 drawings, 29.7x42cm each; on the back: Sergey Maslov (1952-2002), Yelena and Viktor Vorobyev. Survival Instructions for Citizens of the Former USSR. 2005. Installation of the 10 texts by Sergei Maslov (1997), translated into 15 languages of the former Soviet republics.

In the series I Want Chapan (2017) Dussenbina suggests to the popular protagonists of art-world to try on the Kazakh national robe, as if changing their identity. As a result, the chapan ends up on Van Gogh, the Vitruvian man, Lenin speaking at the rally, Rembrandt's Danae and others. Trying on chapan on others, the artist invites everyone to try it on and looking, easily imposing his presence in this context. The presence in the context creates the effect of an obsessive idea, which is, in fact, each of these cliché-patterns, which are constantly juggled by the adherents of the new national propaganda in Kazakhstan. Although, in truth, this juggling is typical for any part of the world, just the patterns change,

crossing the borders of countries, archetypes and genres.

Natalia Dyu Melancholia multimedia interactive project (2006) is her attempt to “try on” the classic art of Southeast Asia. The project features an artist who, with a wave of a hand, creates fantastic 3D images-patterns that poeticize the ordinary world. The picture is complemented by quotes from the poems of Basho and other classics of Japanese poetry. Thus, Dyu indirectly investigates the roots of her identity (she is a descendant of Koreans deported from the Far East) and actualizes it with the help of her technological skills.

Syrlybek Bekbotaev structurises ornamental patterns in his graphic sheets Untitled (2018). His structures acquire three-dimension and volume, germinating and mutated. Despite the abstract appearance, such a reincarnation of an archaic cultural unit is a plastic metaphor of modern Kazakhstani society – essentially archaic, heterogeneous in mental structure, but with signs of technological mutation.

The Archive Discourse

The reverse side or a reflection of patterning can be a growing interest among artists in the method of expressing statements through archiving. The creation of structured series, artistic books, collections and diaries revives both the Soviet tradition of family and production albums, and the desire to generalize the typical phenomena of contemporaneity.

Being a sculptor by training, Yerbossyn Meldibekov in any media uses his inherent talent as a convincing plastic solution. In his hands, the enameled basins and pots take on the shape of the ridge of the Pamir Mountains, with which people change their names as their political attitudes change – in the project Lenin Peak (2007-2014). The artist collects these names and, with

ingenious figurative simplicity, raises the conceptual problem of «washing the linen of history».

Meldibekov says that he loves working with various materials and facts, mixing everything to create his own mythology and history. He often jokes that it is the “time of the pharaohs” now, and all ideological institutions, including history, are subordinated to the needs of this time. *Transformer* (2013) and *Competition* (2010-13) projects are devoted to the phenomenon of history subordination and attitude to it as a game. The phenomenon of variability of seemingly timeless monuments is considered in the project *Family Album* (2006-2011) that contains photos of the artist's family, taken at the same place in the old days and «twenty years later». People remain the same, but the monumental background is changing absolutely, according to the political agenda. Through the artistic archiving of facts, the artist conceptually presents a changeable reality, which is facilitated by the extreme simplicity of the form that avoids technical special effects. He allows himself only one specific technique - in his work there is always a note of black humor. The ontological lapidary of the works by Meldibekov produces a powerful suggestive effect of painful empathy for the desire for change, latently demanded by society and the author (Figure 10).

For several years, young artist Gaisha Madanova has been working on the draft conceptual magazine-exhibition *Aluan* (2017), acting as the author of the idea and artist, inviting her fellow artists and an international curator to collaborate. The first edition of the magazine is dedicated to Almaty city and its artistic communities and presents a thematic archive of relevant texts and artifacts.

The duet of Nurbol Nurakhmet and



Figure 10 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani contemporary art. From the left to right: Yerbossyn Meldibekov. *Transformer*. 2013; *Contest*. 2010-2013. In collaboration with Boris Golender; *Lenin Peak*. 2007-2014. In the middle: Gaisha Madanova. *ALUAN Exhibition-Journal* (2017).

Sabina Kuangaliyeva was appeared due to the overlapping ideas of creating a manuscript book. The book is about the dialogue for the important counterpoints of the current cultural situation in Kazakhstan. The book *Qitap* (2017) includes the texts of the artists' scribes, their drawings, collages, sketches and, in fact, is a personal archive, fixing the points of view of the present through the prism of the subjective worldview of two young people (Figure 11).



Figure 11 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani contemporary art. Nurbol Nurakhmet, Sabina Kuangaliyeva *Qitap (The Book)*. 2017. Handmade book, 21x29cm

The individualized form of the archive involves the viewer in a personal dialogue-reflection on the problems posed by artists and returns to art an enlightening role somewhat lost during the times of Soviet propaganda and spectacular post-Soviet art.

The Myth Discourse

Along with the factual, conceptual approach to the construction of an artistic language in Kazakhstani art, a figurative mythological approach can be traced. Against the background of a lack of scientific information about the long and recent past, artists have the opportunity to build their own order in the cultural universe. Mythmakers create their fantastic worlds, putting forward hypotheses and creating attractive artifacts.

Sergey Maslov (1952–2002), can rightly be called the main figure of myth-making in contemporary art of Kazakhstan. He not only invented myths, but also clothed them in the verbal form of remarkable texts, which professional philologists recognize as good literature. For Maslov, the texts were an art project. He knew how to catch the main thing in the absurd signs of post-Soviet life and transform them into a bright artistic image, such as, for example, in the project *Survival Instructions for the citizens of the former USSR* (1998). Maslov wrote ten instructions, which were subsequently visualized by Yelena and Viktor Vorobyevs in the form of a conceptual installation. The artists translated the Instructions into 15 languages of former republics of Soviet Union and displayed them in the form of 15 tablets with ten texts on each. This gesture in the style of the Tower of Babel emphasized the impossibility of the coexistence of the author's message to help compatriots, as well as the complete lack of understanding of most of the declared languages, despite the myth of the Soviet «friendship of nations».

Maslov masterfully invented and convincingly presented the most incredible and absurd stories. The multimedia project *Baikonur 2* (2002) presents

Maslov as a clever mystifier. He claimed that the Kazakhs are the keepers of the secret knowledge of alien spacecraft. This hypothesis is confirmed by a real felt yurt, stretched upwards and resembling a rocket shape. Inside the yurt, on the old chest, there is a TV set showing strange, supposedly archival photographs depicting the presence of newcomers and their communication with the ancient Kazakhs. The installation is accompanied by a traditional melody performed on a Kazakh clay flute. The absurdity of the statement and the formal extravagance do not prevent the viewer from plunging into the postmodern fun and knocking down the inexorable pressure of serious nationalism that has replaced Soviet modernist internationalism.

Even more improbable, but also formally convincing are cosmogonic objects by Saken Narynov. The artist has developed a technique that allows him to create artifacts illustrating science-fiction theories linked to the laws of the construction of the universe and space. *Objects Over time and space* (2014) and *On the banks of the space river* (2015) clearly demonstrate our understanding of the structure of cosmic bodies, causing the aesthetic joy of recognition. Narynov embodies the dream of space. His technique of assembling objects from small metal parts resembles a crystal grid, as if ordered by nature itself. The artist is a demiurge-mythmaker who works at the intersection of science, fiction, art and architecture. Sometimes the merry intonation of a magician slips through the academic seriousness of his reasoning, forcing audience to think about the plausibility of this artistic world (Figure 12).

The members of the group *Kyzyl Traktor* (The Red Tractor) Moldakul Narymbetov, Said Atabekov, Arystan Shalbaev, Smail Bayaliev and Vitaliy Simakov are driven by



Figure 12 — The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstan contemporary art. From left to right: Sergey Maslov (1952-2002). Baykonur 2. 2002. Multi-media project, Dimensions Variable; Georgiy Tryakin-Bukharov. Genocide. 1990. Assemblage mixed technique, 250x100 cm, Requiem: A Mass of funeral. 2013, Reproduction of 1989 work, Mixed media, 78x62x108cm; Saken Narynov. On the shore of the cosmic sea. 2015. Metal, 60x60x30cm. Over Time and Space. 2014. Metal, 120x120x60cm.

the desire to present the Kazakh identity as a unique part of the human civilisation in all their artistic manifestations. Initially the leaders of the group positioned their movement as the Kazakh trans-avant-garde appropriating and adapting the ideas of eminent Post-modernist theorists and practitioners to the Kazakh context. The artists reveal themselves to the world as a new valid object whose novelty is linked to the references to the archaic roots of nomadic culture. They make use of the whole range of Kazakh rituals and traditions: shamanism and Sufism as the core elements of the spiritual heritage; mythology and poetics of the traditional musical heritage; the symbolism of the local everyday objects; authentic spectacles and specific features of traditional everyday life. Although all the above mentioned tools are used by the group within a critical discourse, they always have a Narcissist connotation. In the works, especially in the video objects of the representatives of the group, there is one more «surplus» quality – they, like the autochthonous representatives of the divine Tengrian principle, broadcast the viewer, in shamanic fashion, somewhat more than what the authors originally

meant (Figure 13).

The young artist Aida Adilbekova joined the tradition of the mythmaking by presenting the performance Zhestyrnak (2018), conducting a cruel self-identification with the monstrous heroine of Kazakh fairy tales. The artist made jewelry objects in the form of metal nails of a murderer woman, into which she seemed to reincarnate during a performance. The public chopping off of her own nails (in the sense of the destruction of an archaic monster in herself) was accompanied by the singing of a national song. The rite of initiation of a person from the myth convinces her to work on the dangerous side of physicality and to refer to the heritage of Kazakh folklore in conjunction with the heritage of the classic performance.



Figure 13 — The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstan contemporary art. Kyzyl Tractor Group. Series of Headscarves with Group Logo Fabric, Enamel printing, 70x70cm each and Video-archive 2010-2017.

Political gesture discourse

Despite the gravity to the language of allegory, developed by the artists due to certain historical and political reasons, the ideas of actualization and critical understanding of social processes are close to Kazakhstani art. Many artists in one way or another politicize the questions posed by history and life itself «here and now».

Georgiy Tryakin-Bukharov is a recognized master of thrash sculpture.

His favorite materials are all those items that have outlived their respectable age – wheel tires, old furniture, used clothes, and so on, and that turned out to be at a flea market or in a garbage dump. The artist gives these objects a second life, in a sense, more spiritual, doing upsaykling and turning this stuff into works of art. Its objects dedicated to the Red Terror and the Stalinist repressions carry a particularly pressing note. *Genocide* (1990) objectifies the figure of a monstrous dictator in the form of an ogre consisting of small objects of human existence. As witnesses in court, all these details admit that we create idols by ourselves and allow them to terrorize everyone and everything. *Requiem* (2013) appears as a monument to those who died in the Stalinist labor camps. The trinity of big-eyed shovels unequivocally hints at the invocation of the highest heavenly court, since earthly existence does not guarantee a person freedom and happiness. The poetics of Tryakin-Bukharov is directly connected with the conceptual transformation of objects that serve him as a material. Familiar to all the images of things served allow actual artifacts to acquire a vertical historical attitude, which naturally gives them a monumental sound.

Rashid Nurekeyev basically works with the classical medium of painting, although he often becomes cramped within one plane, and he makes strange objects out of metal, cardboard or plywood, which also carry fragments of his painting quest. He himself says that the algorithm of his work resembles a fixing camera. The artist simply randomly sketches his thoughts and, after accumulating enough material, collages them on canvas or on an object. However, his works very accurately and timely reflect current problems with all the features. Nurekeyev investigates the facts of daily Kazakhstani life, often

excitingly incredible. His serial investigation resembles sketches of a criminalist, reflecting the train of thought and their associative connection. He objectively fixes faktazh and material evidence – all items that fall into the field of his investigation, become eyewitnesses to actual incidents. And the conclusions, hovering in the subtext, add up to the Hamlet's question of the artist: why did he come to the December square of Alma-Ata in 1986 and suffered, defending his patriotic ideals? *The Kitchen Hatchet Series* (2013-14) is built up in an associative stream that is quite recognizable and obvious, but rather paradoxical. The painter-free artist calls witnesses to picturesque meters of the 20th century - from Baselitz to Rauschenberg, voicing testimony in the Kazakh language, introducing it into the field of pictorial text (Figure 14).



Figure 14 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani contemporary art. Rashid Nurekeyev. *Bones and Aspiring Dogs*. 2016-2017. C-print series of 5 photos on canvas, 90x120cm each, *Kitchen Hatchet Series*. 2013-2014. Tin, acrylic, photo collage. 59x100cm, 66x140cm, 70x130cm, 98x101cm, 98x109cm

Photo series *Bones and aspiring dogs* (2015-2018) provide deadly beautiful evidence of the frailty of physical bodies (the actual bone). Strangely enough, they are not perceived as symbols of transition from this world, to afterworld, or as an object of desire of some conditional «dogs». They are self-sufficient, objectified, abstracted and aestheticized. The bones are so laconic in their utmost immanence

that we want to suspect the artist in deeply hidden political senses. The artist modestly «holds back» what he actually wanted to say, and those guiding encodings that are read by a sophisticated spectator familiar with the history of art, in fact, appear to be traps, ironically placed by the author.

Interestingly, the tradition of indirect, metaphoric statement was adopted by artists of the young generation of contemporary art in Kazakhstan. At first glance, their statements are fundamentally different from the style of their predecessors by their deliberately playful character and bright fresh media approach. But a careful analysis reveals all the same «melting points, condensation and boiling points» of history and modernity.

Zoya Falkova brightly colored textile installation *Cut* (2016) deceptively lures with abstract comfort, but in fact tells about a new redrawing of the world map, transforming the established order into something shapeless. The artist randomly sewed cut garments, which are sold as rags in the secondhand. The bright photo-series by Marat Dilman Kazakhstan (2014-18), snatching camera-enlarged fragments of the country's life, is devoted to the problem of discreteness, mosaicity and diversity of the image of the homeland (Figure 15).



Figure 15 – The view of the exhibition display of Kazakhstani contemporary art. From left to right: Aida Adilbekova. *Jezyrnaq*. 2018. Performance photo/video documentation, Mixed media. Dimensions Variable, video 10'31"; Performance Program Featuring Young Kazakhstani Artists. 2017-18. 13'13"; Video Program Featuring Young Kazakhstani Artists. 2012-18. 26'07".

Two video selections of performances and videoart by young artists demonstrate a new vision of the recent socio-political and personal context. The compilation of video art presents the authors using video medium in different ways to broadcast their political creeds. Memories of the fateful dates of history can be traced in the *Window* (2016) by Roman Zakharov; the fusion of consumerism and religious renaissance rises in Aida Adilbekova's *Neighbors* (2016); the occupation character of Islamic fanaticism is updated in the clip *The Dark Side of the Moon* (2017) by Arman Sein; the networks of traditions limiting the new are shown in Leonid Khan's *Dance on the Carpet* (2017); surprises of historical memory and its oblivion appear in *Mnemosyne Dreams* (2012) by Zoya Falkova; The speculative use of historical stamps is presented in *The Конец* (2018) by Bakhyt Bubikanova. The video program of the performance presents the authors, participants of the School of Artistic Gesture, who are actively working in the performance technique. The program broadcasts a range of painful problems of the younger generation and the future of humanity: *More / Less* (2017) by Roman Zakharov and Arman Sein beats up the situation of acceptance and adaptation of artistic heritage; Aida Adilbekova demonstrates the consumerist user character of modern life in the performance *The Hoax* (2017); Dana Iskakova and Danamy art group present an interactive action *I want children from Vlad* (2017), where with the help of a special softwhere involving the audience in an experiment on human design; Bakhyt Bubikanova sings out her pain associated with the artist's struggle with the disease in the performance *Boztorgay* (2018), which reproduces the traditional Kazakh song-crying (Figure 16).

Post Scriptum (to be continued)
The Universe of Eurasian Utopia, as a special region of space-time without clear geodesic boundaries, attracts many discourses, messages, various mediums and contexts. All of them are subject to certain, but not always explicable

gravity, sometimes accompanied by discontinuities and distortions. But this is precisely why there is an utopian hope that through these distortions and gaps the art community of Kazakhstan will be able to move into another reality of the new artistic paradigm...

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ГРАВИТАЦИОННАЯ ОСОБЕННОСТЬ «ЕВРАЗИЙСКОЙ УТОПИИ»

Обзор выставки: Рецензия посвящена выставке «Евразийская утопия: Post Scriptum», показывающей творчество казахстанских художников XX и XXI веков, где сочетаются международные аспекты модернизма и местные особенности традиционной культуры Казахстана. Используя проект и теорию Рустама Халфина - который считается одним из отцов современного искусства в регионе - в качестве центра внимания, выставка объединила несколько поколений художников для изучения становления и развития искусства в Казахстане. Выставка была частью амбициозного проекта под названием «Фокус Казахстан» и является обзором модерн и контемпорари арт Казахстана для международной арены. Выставка Focus Kazakhstan, проходящая с сентября 2018 года по март 2019 года, состояла из четырех частей, и проходила в четырех городах: Лондоне (Великобритания), Берлине (Германия), Сувоне (Южная Корея) и Джерси-Сити (США). Focus Kazakhstan - это сотрудничество между Министерством культуры и спорта Республики Казахстан, Национальным музеем Республики Казахстан и Программой Рухани Жангыру. Куратором Focus Kazakhstan выступила Роза Абендова, руководитель Центра современного искусства в Национальном музее Республики Казахстан. Шоу «Евразийская утопия: Post Scriptum» курировали Юлия Сорокина (Казахстан) и Шин Ын Янг (Южная Корея); даты проведения с 27 ноября 2018 года по 3 марта 2019 года в Музее искусств Сувон Ипарк.

Ключевые слова: локальная новация, глокальность, пулота, номадология, обскураторн, сингулярность, евразийская утопия.

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«ЕУРАЗИЯЛЫҚ УТОПИЯНЫҢ» ТАРТЫМДЫЛЫҚ ЕРЕКШЕЛІГІ

Көрмеге жазылған пікір: Пікір XX және XXI ғасырлардағы қазақстандық суретшілер шығармашылығының «Еуразиялық утопия: посткриптур» атты көрмесі және осы көрмедегі Қазақстанның дәстүрлі ерекшеліктері мен халықаралық модерндік аспектілерінің үйлесімдерін талдауға арналған. Қазақстандық заманауи өнерінің қалыптасуы мен дамуын зерттеу мен талдау үшін көрменің негізгі назарына аймақтағы қазіргі заман өнері бастауларының бірі болып саналатын Рустама Халфиннің жұмысы мен оның теориясы алынды. Көрме «Фокус Қазақстан» деп аталатын амбициялы жобаның бір бөлігі, сонымен қатар заманауи өнер тенденцияларға шолу әрі қазіргі заманғы қазақстанды халықаралық аренада көрсетудің бір мүмкіндігі тәрізді. «Focus Kazakhstan» көрмесі 2018 жылдың қыркүйек айынан бастап 2019 жылғы наурызда өтуі төрт қалаларда бағдарланған: Лондонда (Великобритания), Берлинде (Германия), Сувоне (Оңтүстік Корея), Джерси-Сити (АҚШ) және төрт бөлімнен тұрады. «Focus Kazakhstan» - Қазақстан Республикасының Мәдениет және спорт министрлігінің, Қазақстан Республикасының Ұлттық музейі мен Рухани Жанғыру бағдарламасының арасындағы ынтымақтастық пен шығармашылық байланысқа құрылған. «Focus Kazakhstan» көрмесі кураторы Роза Абенова, Қазақстан Республикасының Ұлттық музейіндегі заманауи өнер орталығының жетекшісі. «Еуразиялық Утопия: посткриптур» шоуына жетекші болғандар Юлия Сорокина (Қазақстан) және Шин Юн Янг (Оңтүстік Корея) және 2018 жылы 27-ші қарашадан 2019 жылғы 3 наурызына дейін Сувон Ипарк өнер мұражайында көрсетілді.

Тірек сөздер: жергілікті заманауилық, жаһандық, пулота, номадология, тұтылу, сингулярлық, еуразиялық утопия.

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