

QURAQ IN THE CONTEMPORARY ART OF CENTRAL ASIA: SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE AND ARTISTIC TEXT

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Abstract. A piece of fabric and products, made from it, are called *quraq* by the Kazakhs, in the past and now it occupy a special place in the cultural practice of the peoples of Central Asia; and today its renaissance is taking place in modern art both as an image itself and as an artistic device. This is due to its wide expressive technical and artistic, semantic and communicative capabilities.

In general, authors of the article understand the term of *quraq* as the traditional patchwork technique as such and the whole variety of products made with this technique. The analysis of modern works of art from the point of view of semiotics showed that a piece of fabric (as a sign and as a symbol) is able to demonstrate various ways of encoding ethnocultural information.

The main methodological tool of this study is the semiotic approach, where a piece of fabric is considered at the level of semantics as a sign of the symbolic language, and from the standpoint of pragmatics as a text representing relationship between the sign (a piece of fabric) and those who use it (an artist, a viewer). The study also uses general scientific methods of observation, comparison, analysis and synthesis. It seems that this approach is relevant in a study of modern visual art.

Based on the semiotic approach and the artistic experience of contemporary artists of Central Asia, this study aims to demonstrate new vectors of Kazakh cultural studies and art criticism.

Concerning the materials used in this article, they come from a variety of sources: the field research carried out by the Russian Ethnographic Museum during the period from 2019 to 2021, a number of regional studies museums in Kazakhstan, as well as online collections of the Central Asian region presented at the International Quilt Museum (Nebraska, USA).

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Keywords: art, Central Asia, a piece of fabric, quraq, ritual and ceremonial practices, language of culture, artistic text.

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Introduction

For the bearers of a certain culture any visual image acts as a means of “direct” action as a self-sufficient and self-presenting phenomenon that does not require additional communication resources (speech/words, explanations, etc.). Cultural meanings, being fixed in the form of visual signs, become available for transmission and perception (communicative environment) in a synchronous and diachronic dimension; and semiotically visual practice demonstrates ways to encode meaningful information.

In the XXth century, in the cultural environment of many peoples of Central Asia, due to various historical and political reasons, there was a “rupture” of historical memory and the loss/ deformation of much significant socio-cultural knowledge, which today, through the efforts of artists and designers, are made relevant on the materials of modern visual culture. This knowledge also includes the practice of using a piece of fabric/patch, which historically is not only a spectacular and specific artistic technique, but also a complex system of semantic communications.

The scientific basis of the study is grounded on the works in the field of semiotics of culture, first of all by such masters as M. Y. Lotman, A. K. Bayburin and many others. The works of the following scientists stand out from recent works in the field of visual semiotics: Francesco Buscemi, who analyzes the role of color in the representation of animals in Nazi propaganda; Euvripides Zantides, who explores the signs of national identity through the design of print advertising in the Republic of Cyprus; Steven Skaggs, who developed a four-part classification scheme for design logos based on the separation of pictograms/indexes/symbols by Piers; E. M. Dumnova, who is dedicated to the visualization

of traditional aesthetic principles in modern architecture in Japan; L. A. Alyabyeva and A. Fers, who explore semiotic aspects of the interaction of fashion and performance; E. R. Kotlyar, who represents a symbolic and semantic analysis of the main range of elements of architectural decor characteristic of the decorative and applied arts of the peoples of the Crimea and many others.

In Central Asia, a number of scientists are engaged in the problems of visual semiotics. First of all, the works of art historian E. Gyul should be noted. Her works are mainly devoted to the reconstruction of meanings and values of traditional images of artistic culture. Other notable scholars are I. Bogoslavskaya, who explores the images and symbols of the Karakalpak ornament; G. E. Sadykova, who dedicated her work to the symbols of Kyrgyz culture, etc.

Particularly noteworthy is the report by the art historian N. R. Akhmedova (318), who examines the role and significance of traditional textiles in the conceptual discourse of Central Asia through the examples of the works of well-known artists such as A. Menlibayeva, U. Japarov, V. Akhunov, V. Usseinov, and D. Kaipova.

In Kazakhstan’s realities, N. Volodeva, A. Kenzhetayeva and A. Alisheva and A. Agibayeva are productively engaged in various aspects of visual semiotics, which focus on the semiotic analysis of the Kazakh traditional costume and the work of modern designers of Central Asia; methodological aspects of ethnosymbolism is considered by A. Naurzabayeva and A. Ibragimov, etc.

Some aspects of a patch, its ritual forms of existence and artistic and technological features of the patchwork technique of Central Asia are consecrated in the works of A. K. Pisarchik and M. A. Khamidzhanova, I. V. Oktyabrskaya and Z. K. Suraganova, N. S. Terletskiy, G. S. Mukhtarova;

the study of traditional patchwork products of Kazakhs is reflected in the album of the same name by A. M. Sekeyeva.

The purpose of this study is to analyse and explore the role of patchwork as a cultural language from antiquity to the present, using materials from Central Asian artistic practices. The study of patchwork in the historical and cultural context allows us to identify its original symbolic meanings, and in modern artistic practice aspects of “secondary” comprehension and filling with new meanings.

Methods

Methodology of the present study, in accordance with the set aim and objectives, is focused on semiotic, structural-functional and comparative approaches, which allow us to consider the patch phenomenon as one of the languages of culture that organizes a complex artistic text. In this regard, the issues of semantics and pragmatics are relevant: semantics of a patchwork product is considered through the prism of symbolic language, and its pragmatics represents the relationship between the patch (a sign) and those who use it (an artist, a viewer), resulting in disclosure of artistic text meaning.

The main idea is that in traditional culture, a patch/patchwork product as an object/thing acts as a sign system, i.e. it carries information and thereby has a potential to reproduce the world in which they were created. The language of expressiveness is based on principles of artistry and aesthetics: color, shape, combination of constituent elements, etc., but, unfortunately, the limited volume of the article does not allow us to consider the whole set of ways to create a figurative vision of the product. From here, to understand the true meaning of the patchwork thing, the first part of the article looks at the symbolism

of the basic elements that make up the *quraq* (triangle, square, rhombus and their various combinations).

In the second part of the article, an attempt is made to explain the mechanisms of recreating traditional symbols in the contemporary art of Central Asia, which, first of all, means and shows its inexhaustible potential not only in enriching the visual language and artistic text, but also as one of the “relevant makers” of forgotten layers of artistic and aesthetic memory. The hermeneutical approach allows us to uncover forgotten meanings, to discover new ones in a different cultural and historical context.

Of course, general scientific methods of observation, comparison, analysis, and synthesis are also used in the study.

Discussion

Magic of geometry: signs and symbols of traditional *quraq*. One of the traditional types of visual communication — *quraq* — did not require special knowledge to understand; all information was perceived at an intuitive level (depending on the combined elements). The main set of the composition of *quraq* was based on basic geometric elements: triangle, square, rhombus, rectangle, etc., and then the combination of these elements has created a meaning, an encrypted code. On the one hand, these are the most popular motifs of the traditional art, and, on the other hand, it is easy to create any geometric pattern out of these elements. They have parallels in a number of ethnocultures of Central Asia. Without setting the task of considering all the elements, we will limit ourselves to the most popular ones.

Technically, the basis for making patterns of patchwork products was a module — a square or rectangle. It could consist of small fragments of fabric of different sizes: squares, rectangles,

triangles, etc. The simplest combinations of patches with different colors of fabric could give many variants of ornaments, which in traditional culture have their own names and contain different meanings. At the same time, of course, every element of visual communication expressed something. For example, a triangle called *tumar*, *tumarsha* is a powerful amulet of universal character that symbolizes reliability and strength. And also “the triangular shape of the amulet was associated with ancient magical and protective representations of phallic, hunting cults, and was also an established emblem of shamanic amulets of spiritual and vital forces of men” (Aliyeva, 136).

The same ornamental motif, for example a combination of triangles in one direction (the top of one resting at the base of another), according to A. K. Pisarchik and M. A. Khamidzhanova (215), had several names among Tajiks: *dumaki bosha* (a tail of a red-footed falcon), *rahak* (a path), *rahband* (closing the way for evil spirits); Kyrgyz and Kazakhs called it *tyrnaqatar* (a string of cranes). The latter can be considered as a visual projection of movement. In our opinion, the idea of a Road/Path appears in this motif, which can be interpreted differently depending on the use in the overall composition of the product. For example, as an edging motif (border) of the product it most likely expresses a protective function, a kind of “closing the way to evil forces”.

The motif of the triangle with the top up (usually *tau* – mountain) or their sequence, called *tuye orkesh* (camel hump), according to Kazakh, symbolizes prosperity, addition to the family and herd. As you know, the mountain in Turkic mythology is a symbol of the spiritual Path, the ascent of the spirit, while a chain of such figures can also mean protection. The figure itself is a divine sign, the personification of aspiration upward, and a symbol of life. In meaning, it is close

to the World Mountain, which unites all three worlds – heavenly, earthly and underground. And the triangle with the top down symbolized “the womb of a woman associated with ideas about fertility” (Fakhretdinova 55). The same triangular motif, called *emshek* (breast) by the Kazakhs, was also interpreted as a symbol of fertility. Thus, the triangle with the top up indicates the masculine origin, and the top down indicates the feminine one, i.e. the same figure expresses the opposition of masculine and feminine origins.

In turn, the combination of triangles, where their tops are directed in opposite directions, is called in Tajik *kelinu khushdoman* – a bride and a mother-in-law, since in families these representatives of two generations often quarrel and hold opposite views on everything, according to A. K. Pisarchik and M. A. Khamidzhanova (215).

Another element often found in *quraq* is a square (*sharshy*). The Kazakhs considered it a sign of the earth, home. J.-P. Roux notes that the Turkic concept of the structure of the World says that there is a Center of the World in the form of a square that covers the Celestial dome, with the exception of four corners (211–212). Perhaps that is why the square in the patchwork technique occurs in various combinations. The most popular one – a small square placed in the center of a large square contrasting in color – is called by the Tajiks *chashmaki gov* (an eye of a cow/ox); and the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs call it *bota koz* (an eye of a camel). According to experts, this is one of the oldest and most common elements of patchwork ornament – both geographically and in its application in a wide variety of things (Pisarchik and Khamidzhanova, 215). It is especially often found on children's things, pillows, blankets, wedding curtains. Another variant of the patchwork ornament *bota*

koz is a rhombus in a square. Hence, it is understood as a magical pattern personifying fertility, reproductive functions, and protection.

In big objects, it is combined with various shapes. In general, *sharshy* in the Turkic culture is a symbol of stability, which is associated with the four cardinal directions, corresponds to the elements of the earth and is a sign of the material world. The creation of an ornamental motif from a chain of squares, contrasting in color, in our opinion, is a visual metaphor of life or an artistic device that allows you to express the doubled and even tripled power of a sign/symbol. It is noteworthy that the complex medallion from *bota koz* is called by the Kyrgyz *kattama quraq* (apparently from *katlama quraq*, i.e. *quraq* in the form of puff pastry), experts say (Pisarchik and Khamidzhanova 216).

The combination of a square and triangles forming a star-shaped figure is called *zhuldyz* by the Kazakhs; *guli guza* by Tajiks (cotton pattern), who also named a composite and multi-patterned one *guli chandgula*; and Kyrgyz called it *chulduzquraq* (star pattern). It seems that the “imprinting” of the cotton flower in the *quraqs*, for example, among the Tajiks, is explained by the direct dependence of well-being on the harvest, and among the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, the stars express sacralization of heavenly bodies as such influencing the successful pastoral activity of nomads.

Another most popular motif of patchwork is the rhombus. In it (the connection of the bases of two triangles), some scholars see a union of opposites – male and female, heavenly and earthly symbolizing the union of two worlds, the beginning of a new life (Boguslavskaya 137). In addition, scholars note that the rhombus is the oldest image of a person (according to informants of Pisarchik and Khamidzhanova 219). Analyzing some Karakalpak artifacts, I. Boguslavskaya believes that the rhombus,

as the most stable element of the ornaments of the Karakalpak applied art, is associated with the ideas of the Ancestral Mother and is a symbol of fertility and family (138). For example, a carpet with a rhombic ornament is considered a symbol of the Umai Turkic goddess.

The Kazakh *quraq* often uses the motif of *ush koz* (three eyes). The motif of three rhombuses is a classic technique in the decorative and applied arts of many peoples of Eurasia symbolizing the tree of life. Three rhombuses connected in one chain vertically personified the three-part system of the universe embodied in the world tree, writes A. M. Sekeyeva (176). But, in general, rhythmic repetition of the same element can be considered as a way to strengthen the main idea that demonstrates the special power of the composition. Also, *ush koz* can demonstrate the idea of the all-seeing eye (the divine principle).

The Kazakhs call a chain of four rhombuses *tort tuligi say*; in our opinion, it metaphorically reflects the expression *tort tulik – ma*. This is a popular understanding of the sacredness of four types of livestock: camels, horses, cows and sheep-goats. They, being the main source of life support, also served as a kind of zoomarkers of the sacred world, because in the understanding of the Kazakhs: *shki – saytannan* (goat – from the devil); *koi – ottan* (ram – from the fire); *tuye – sordan* (camel – from the earth); *zhylky – zhelden* (horse – from the wind); *siyr – sudan* (cow – from water). In this form, the nomads imagined four natural elements: fire, air, earth and water, and such a motif in *quraq* was often used in the decoration of pillowcases. In this case, the motif is intended to reflect the idea – “to increase wealth, to give offspring”, to bring in a “fertile beginning”, A. M. Sekeyeva notes (178).

Another common motif in the patchwork technique of the peoples of Central Asia

is the cross, the crosspiece. This element symbolizes “the basic laws of being, the solar symbol, as well as the symbol of the center, a sign ordering space, giving orientation, pointing to the four cardinal directions” (Sekeyeva 182). It is known that in various mythological systems, the world center was endowed with maximum sacred power, was a source of order, a place of creation. At the same time, the sign center could be marked by another smaller sign of the same size, clearly acting as a microcosm and the “source” of the entire image. Thus, the cruciform figures known from ceramic decor since the Neolithic time were associated with an idea of the Sun, and, accordingly, heavenly, divine patronage, which was reflected not only in the *quraq*, but also in the entire decorative and applied art of Central Asia.

One of the variants of the cross among the Kazakhs is called *bestanba*, which is mainly interpreted as a sign – the center of ordered space, the presence of the family head. In general, there are about more than 40 variants of the ornament of Kazakh patchwork quilts, which reflect the most significant cultural universals: protection of the sky (*zhuldyz* – star, *ay* – moon, etc.), ideas of fertility (*irek* – zigzag, *kempir kosak* – rainbow, etc.), protection and prosperity (*kos muyiz* – motif of paired horns, *koshkar muyiz* – motif of a ram’s horn, etc.) and many others.

The traditional name of the technique – *quraq* derived from the word *quru* revealed two meanings of this word. The first one – “death”, “to die”, “to disappear”, “to vanish”, “to be destroyed”, and the other one – “creation”, “to create”, “to compose”, “to build”, “to connect” – demonstrate two mutually exclusive semantic meanings: “from destruction to creation”, which is basically laid down in the very semantic content of patchwork products: from death to birth, from chaos to harmony, from a funeral to a wedding,

etc., which we interpret as a symbolic expression of the world duality, and the patchwork itself is according to I. V. Oktyabrskaya and Z. K. Suraganova is a material expression of “symbol of the balance of opposites” (437). In addition, the patchwork sewing among Azerbaijanis called *gurama* (literally tied, connected) also reflects the idea of connecting/uniting parts into a whole. This perfectly reflects the tradition of distributing rags (*zhyrtys*) to all those present at important events – a wedding, a birth of a baby, a funeral of the very old people – as common among many peoples of Central Asia. It was believed that the multiplicity of patches affects abundance: the increase of offspring, the multiplication of property, producing offspring of livestock, etc. Women of Central Asia still believe that receiving scraps from any celebration presupposes a speedy and successful holding of such a celebration already in their family, and “not-receiving” it can turn into a deep offense and cause for disagreement in the women’s community.

In general, the ornamental composition of the *quraq* and its elegance depended on the level of skill, but all its technical nuances preserved the understanding of the patchwork product as a reflection of the Universe, a family amulet, and its presence in the dowry is interpreted as a kind of a talisman of a young, newly created family.

As can be seen from the above materials, sometimes one element and its combinations by different ethnocultures (even living in one region) projects several meanings, i.e. compositions can be multi-valued, and detailed identification of all levels of meaning seems to us a very difficult task due to the lack of a full amount of information for modern scholars on the peculiarities of the traditional patchwork technique of the region. Unfortunately, the earliest artifacts date

back to the end of the XIX century – the beginning of the XX century (without taking into account the elements of patchwork found in the Pazyryk mounds). Thus, the meaning perception of meaning of a visual appeal depends on many cultural, historical, and situational nuances; it is very ephemeral and can change depending on the context.

However, it is unequivocal that in traditional culture, works of art were closely associated with magic and ritual (wedding, funeral, the practice of venerating sacred places, etc.), and frequently repeating the same visual metaphors reflect stable formulas for describing certain plots and ideas about the World, which had a great pragmatic value.

Due to its relatively simple and harmonious structure, *quraq* has become widely spread all over the world; and a succinctly philosophically “unwanted” patch (“not sewn” into the system of the universe) is expressed in the Kazakh concept of *zhety zhut* (seven troubles): an unwanted word, a depopulated land, a lake without birds, a people without a leader, a brave husband deprived of his homeland, an old man deprived of his peers and – unstitched patches. So, according to E. Gyul, unstitched patches are perceived as the destruction of ties – kindred, social, natural. In turn, the sewn *quraq* is a model and a guarantor of the integrity of the world (84).

Results

Creating a New Harmony: *quraq* in the Contemporary Art of Central Asia. *Quraq* as a symbol and image often appears in paintings of Central Asia. An example of this is the work of a number of artists: Meirzhan Nurgozhin, Duzhan Magzumov, Zuhur Khabibulanev, Maksujon Mirmukhamedov, Yuritanbek Shigayeva, Gulnur Mukazhanova and many others.

Quraq korpe literally becomes one of the iconic elements of work of Kazakh artist Meirzhan Nurgozhin. These are such works as *Red Shoes* (2017); *Baldauren* (2019); *To the Hunt* (2019); *Patchwork Quilt* (2019), and the latter has many earlier author’s versions; *Guest* (2021), etc. In almost any painting by the artist, *quraq* is associated with childhood, with children. Analyzing his work, G. K. Shalabayeva writes: in Meirzhan’s works, it is felt that the pictures of the world and nature drawn by him come from within, from the soul, from memory, that everything that he draws is familiar to him not from postcard views for tourists, they come from his childhood. As a boy, he spent all his summer holidays with his relatives – shepherds in a village and on pastures. Hence, there is deep folk flavor, the national mentality.

The artist plays with the plot of the *quraq korpe* in various ways: any work where the artist uses the *quraq korpe* is firmly connected with the world of childhood, creating a special flavor and, as it were, centering and emphasizing the visual narrative of the Universe, starting from home. The *To the Hunt* (see fig. 1) captures a game of children, where two boys are sitting on a horse on a bright *quraq korpe*, and a little girl is watching everything that is happening. Here, *quraq* with its naturally bright structure contrasts sharply with the almost monotonously blue sky, attracting viewers attention but still not distracting viewers from the plot – the children’s games. *Quraq korpe* for an artist is a thing, undoubtedly, connected with children, with childhood memories – bright, shining joyful colors like the blanket itself.

The composition of a Kokshetau artist – Duzhan Magzumov of *Azhemnin Tany* (2008) – attracts attention, which we consider as a kind of continuation of the eternal spiritual path of each of us. This path begins with our birth and lasts a lifetime. The work is devoted to the



Fig. 1. Meyrzhan Nurgozhin. "On the Hunt". 2019. Canvas, oil. Source: <https://zhaukhar.kz>

mundane and at the same time deeply sacred process of preparing the morning meal by *Azhe*. Against the background of a powerful tree – the earthly embodiment of the World Tree – *Bayterek*, white mare and *kubi* (dishes for whipping *kumis*), *Azhe* is bending over and melting *samauryrn*. At the first glance, a small patchwork quilt – *quraq korpe*, which an elderly woman is holding in her hands, catches the eye. Such a *korpe* in the traditional culture of the Kazakhs represents the Universe, the macrocosm in miniature. By sewing bright fabric scraps into a single canvas for the *korpe*, Kazakh women seemed to revive the archaic myths of creation, each time repeating the ritual where the Creator-Tengri creates the sun, the moon, rainbow, rain, clouds, flowers and everything around. So everyone starts their day with the act of creation. She performs ordinary magic every morning, connecting scraps of momentary events into a life canvas. Moreover, it preserves the life and way of life of the native *Kokshe*, and with it the universe of Kazakh culture as a whole.

Elements of *quraq* are also present in the paintings of the famous Tajik artist Zuhur Khabibulayev. For example, his *Bazaar* (1972), which depicts sellers of traditional textiles and a little boy looking at what is happening with curiosity. The central figure is a woman in a bright

turquoise dress, holding a small *korpe* in her hands, and the whole background of the painting is covered with blurred, but perceptible *kurok*, combining the composition into a single whole – a motley picture of life. In general, all the artist's works are distinguished by their energy, color preferences, and dynamic drawing (*Hotel Nurek*, 1962; *Pamir Still Life*, 1964; *Bahor*, 1967; *Thirst*, 1972), etc.

The theme of Khabibulayev's art is life in all its diversity, where the particularity of the trigger as a colouristic device occupies a special place for expressing his creative ideas and intentions. Thus, an indirect influence of the traditional *quraq* is also expressed in the artistic techniques of artists. An example of this is the work of another Tajik artist Maksudzhon Mirmukhamedov, whose works are built on the principle of a patchwork canvas – a combination of bright and contrasting colors, as well as various geometric shapes. These are *Family Hearth* (2022), *Pomegranate Love* (2022), etc.

The work of Kyrgyz artists also stands out in the line under study. For example, Juristanbek Shigayev expresses an idea of connecting the parts into a whole in a slightly different form: a synthesis of traditional folk ornaments, predominantly geometric in form. His creative method is clearly traced in such works as *Manas* (2002), *Manas's Tamga* (2002) and others.

The Uzbek *kurok* comes to life in a modern way in the work of the famous artist, graphic artist, and master of patchwork sewing Toir Sharipov. The source of his inspiration is traditional Uzbek textiles, through which he reflects the images, signs and stylistics of traditional culture in the best possible way. "Through the interpretation of the language of textiles in his works, he creates his own special world in which people can turn into an ornament and, conversely, cities gather from scraps, and we begin to feel their rhythms,

sounds...”, said art critic K. Akilova (Akilova 2022) at the artist’s exhibition.

The creations of an outstanding artist of modern Uzbekistan – Vyacheslav (Yura) Usseinov, who fruitfully experiments in a variety of techniques: tapestry, knitting, patchwork, etc., are no less interesting. He is rightfully called the discoverer of a new direction – fractal verismo, the essence of which lies in a simple idea – copying and scaling simple shapes and their various combinations. This idea, in our opinion, is quite correlated with the rules of shaping in the traditional patchwork of the peoples of Central Asia.

Such projects of the artist as: *Ossuary for Texts and Dust* (2020), *Coastline: Dry Dung Fuel* (2021), etc. are attractive. If in the first project, the artist, taking the meaning of an ancient burial vessel as a conceptual basis, projects it onto the modern construction boom and pandemic, then in the second, the author refers to the dung exclusively in a positive way, as a traditional energy carrier. But, nevertheless, the artist in this project seeks to emphasize the problem of the “indefinite”, connecting the “dung age” and the “era of global energies” with an artistic line.

In the context of this study, the following works of Usseinov are significant: *The Spring* (2001), *Based on Samarkand Architecture* (2008), *Based on Bukhara Architecture* (2009), *Geometry of Time* (2011), *Abduction of the Swastika* (2013) and many others. Some of the listed works of the author are made in a real patchwork technique, while other techniques of patchwork sewing are used as a formative element of the artistic space.

The Usseinov’s work of *The Spring* (2001), made in a mixed technique, is an almost square textile fabric, where a diamond-shaped figure enclosed in a square is placed in the center (see fig. 2). The predominant blue and light-blue color of the central figure resembles the “eye” of a spring – a source

of the purest water, metaphysically – a source of fertile energy.



Fig. 2. Vyacheslav (Yura) Usseinov. “The Spring”. 2001. Mixed media.

Source: http://useinov.uz/images/pages/fractal_objects/pohishenie_svastiki/32-po-motivam-samarkandskoj-arkhitektury.jpg

Conceptually, such works of the artist as *Based on Samarkand Architecture* (2008) and *Based on Bukhara Architecture* (2009) are solved identically. The mysterious image of these ancient cities could not be better conveyed with the help of patchwork technique. Peering into the geometric patterns of these textile canvases, it’s like “walking” through the ancient streets of Samarkand and Bukhara, absorbing their especial aura.

Exploring the phenomenon of *quraq* in work of contemporary artists of Central Asia, it is impossible not to mention a work of another Kazakh artist – Sultan Ilyayev. Describing his multifaceted work, art critic K. Mukazhanova writes: “A diverse set of visual elements, given in various variations, refers to Kazakh ornaments, with its invariable rapports. And the color elegance – to the *quraq-korpe*, patchwork quilt, to the *bau* and *bascur*, and to the entire interior of the yurt, abundant with ornamented

things” (15). It would be legitimate to add here that not only the color, but also the principle of dividing space itself, and in some paintings there are direct analogs with the Kazakh *quraq korpe*. We would include such works of the author as *At the Mirror* (2012), *Bride* (2013), *Aul* (2007), *Kobyz-dombra* (2010), etc.

Patchwork mosaic as a formative technique can be traced in other genres of visual art – murals. For example, Kazakhstani artists Yerzhan Tanayev and Akkali Zakir (Tigrohaud crew creative group) create murals that decorate the buildings of Astana, Almaty, Karaganda, and other cities of Kazakhstan. For example, the image of the great Kazakh *kuishi* Kurmangazy was built by artists precisely on the principle of patchwork mosaic, where warm yellow-brown colors dominate: the color of *kobyz*, wood and sun. As the artists themselves admit, such a technique requires the viewer to be attentive, it is necessary to “peer” into the geometry of shape and color in order to catch all the nuances of composition and image.

In the studied aspect, the works of Gulnur Mukazhanova also require attention. In her project with the symbolic name of *False Hope, or the Moment of the Present* (2019), 28 canvases made of brocade, lurex and velour were presented. In choosing bright and shiny materials, the artist refers to the Kazakh custom of presenting pieces of fabrics as gifts for weddings and other celebrations. However, Mukazhanova clarifies, these fabrics are so impractical that most often they are simply overdone. This is how the ancient rite in the modern world turns into a formal exchange of information, E. Minkina notes. Perhaps that is why in the artist’s work *The Moment of the Present* (see fig. 3) we no longer see a clearly structured space, but a kind of chaotic color composition. But, nevertheless, pieces of these tissues, in the words of M. A. Blumin, “generate

vibrations and fluctuations of spatial zones” (646).

Of course, the patch and the technique of its execution inspire not only artists of Central Asia. In Art History, we know many examples of creative experiments that have led to various discoveries. One of such productive examples is the work of Sonia and Robert Delaunay. Describing their work, M. A. Blyumin notes that their experiments with patchwork technique led to the creation of the first simultaneous works. ...the patchwork quilt played a special role in the development of avant-garde art, becoming an artifact with a powerful creative potential, the scientist writes (649).



Fig. 3. Gulnur Mukazhanova.
“The Moment of the Present”, 2020.
Brocade, lurex, velour, pins, collage, mixed media.
Fragment. Source: gulnumukazhanova.com

Conclusion

In this article, an attempt was made to comprehend the phenomenon of *quraq* from the point of view of the semiotic approach, where all the “information” transmitted through it is interpreted by us in the most general way as a relationship between a sign carrier (patch) and the whole community, where the patch is allocated the role and functions of a certain “harmonizer” of relations designed to protect and protect people and also contribute to the social affirmation, “legitimization” of the changes that it fixes (wedding, birth, funeral, initiation, etc.).

Therefore, in our opinion, until today in the minds of the peoples of Central Asia, the conviction remained that with the help of a cloth patch – the most important ceremonial element, it is possible to achieve the desired goals and have a beneficial effect on the course of certain events in a person’s life, which is reflected in modern art. It is sometimes directly, and sometimes indirectly in the form of an artistic device.

Used in the creation of images of contemporary art in Central Asia,

the *quraq* is a visual metaphor can be considered as an artistic means by which people treat each other, with Higher Powers, asking for the same thing as many centuries ago: to grant light and harmony, to drive away darkness, to provide protection... And here the technologies of the realization of the artwork do not matter. The idea of a visual message is essential, and it is known that it does not depend on technology.

Авторлардың үлесі

Ж. Н. Шайгозова – идеяны, негізгі мақсаттар мен міндеттерді тұжырымдау, мақала үшін алынған мәліметтерді жинау және түсіндіру, зерттеу жүргізу.

А. І. Ибрагимов – қолжазбаны безендіру, графикалық материалмен жұмыс, мәтінді өңдеу және редакциялау.

Вклад авторов

Ж. Н. Шайгозова – формулировка идеи, ключевых целей и задач, сбор и интерпретация полученных данных для статьи, проведение исследования.

А. И. Ибрагимов – оформление рукописи, работа с графическим материалом, переработка и редактирование текста.

Contribution of authors

Sh. Z. Shaigozova – formulation of the idea, key goals and objectives, collection and interpretation of the data, obtained for the article, conducting research.

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**ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯНЫҢ ЗАМАНАУИ ӨНЕРІНДЕГІ «ҚҰРАҚ»:
СИМВОЛДЫҚ ТІЛ ЖӘНЕ КӨРКЕМ МӘТІН**

Аңдатпа. Қазақтарда «құрақ» деп аталатын маталар қиығы және олардан жасалған бұйымдар Орталық Азия халықтарының мәдени тәжірибесінде бұрын және қазір ерекше орын алады, ал бүгін заманауи өнерде бейне ретінде де, көркемдік тәсіл ретінде де қайта өркендеп жатыр. Бұл оның кең экспрессивті техникалық және көркемдік, семантикалық және коммуникативті мүмкіндіктерімен түсіндіріледі.

Мақала авторлары «құрақ» термині ретінде дәстүрлі құрақ құрау техникасы және осы техникада орындалған барлық бұйымдар деп түсінеді. Семиотика тұрғысынан заманауи өнер туындыларын талдау құрақ (белгі және символ ретінде) этномәдени ақпаратты кодтаудың әртүрлі тәсілдерін көрсетуге қабілетті екенін айқындады.

Бұл зерттеудің негізгі әдістемелік құралы семиотикалық тәсіл болып табылады. Мұнда құрақ семантика деңгейінде символдық тілдің белгісі ретінде қарастырылады, ал прагматика тұрғысынан белгі (құрақ) мен оны қолданатындар (суретші, көрермендер) арасындағы қатынасты бейнелейтін мәтін ретінде қарастырылады. Зерттеуде, сонымен қатар, бақылау, салыстыру, талдау және синтездеудің жалпы ғылыми әдістері қолданылды. Бұл тәсіл заманауи визуалды өнерді зерттеуде өзекті деп ойлаймыз.

Орталық Азияның заманауи суретшілерінің семиотикалық көзқарасы мен көркемдік тәжірибесіне сүйене отырып, бұл зерттеу отандық мәдениеттану мен өнертанудың жаңа векторларын көрсетуге бағытталған.

Дәстүрлі құрақ бұйымдары саласындағы зерттеу материалдары Ресей этнографиялық мұражайының (2019–2021 жж.) қорларында, Қазақстанның бірқатар өлкетану мұражайларында, сондай-ақ халықаралық құрақ көрпе мұражайында (Небраска, АҚШ) ұсынылған Орталық Азия аймағының онлайн коллекцияларын зерттеу бойынша далалық зерттеулерінен алынды.

Мақала Қазақстан Республикасы Жоғары білім және ғылым министрлігінің AP09259280 «Қазақ мәдениетінің тілдері этникалық бірегейліктің негізі ретінде: семиотика және семантикасы» жобасы аясында дайындалған.

Тірек сөздер: өнер, Орталық Азия, маталар құрағы, құрақ, салт-дәстүрлік тәжірибе, мәдениет тілі, көркем мәтін.

Дәйексөз үшін: Шайгозова, Жанерке, және Ибрагимов, Аман. «Орталық Азияның заманауи өнеріндегі “құрақ”: символдық тіл және көркем мәтін». *Central Asian Journal of Art Studies*, т. 8, № 1, 2023, 49–65 б. DOI: 10.47940/cajas.v8i1.653.

Авторлар қолжазбаның соңғы нұсқасын оқып құптады және мүдделер қақтығысы жоқ екендігін мәлімдейді.

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**«ҚҰРАҚ» В СОВРЕМЕННОМ ИСКУССТВЕ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ:
СИМВОЛИЧЕСКИЙ ЯЗЫК И ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫЙ ТЕКСТ**

Аннотация. Лоскут ткани и изделия из него, называемые у казахов «құрақ», в прошлом и сейчас занимают особое место в культурной практике народов Центральной Азии, а сегодня происходит его ренессанс в современном искусстве как в качестве самого образа, так и в качестве художественного приема. Это объясняется его широкими выразительными технико-художественными, семантическими и коммуникативными возможностями.

Под общим термином «құрақ» авторы статьи понимают традиционную лоскутную технику как таковую и все многообразие изделий, выполненных в этой технике. Анализ современных произведений искусства с точки зрения семиотики показал, что лоскут (как знак и как символ) способен продемонстрировать различные способы кодировки этнокультурной информации.

Основным методологическим инструментом настоящего исследования выступает семиотический подход, где лоскут на уровне семантики рассматривается как знак символического языка, а с позиции прагматики как текст, репрезентирующий отношения между знаком (лоскутом) и теми, кто его использует (художником, зрителем). В исследовании также использованы и общенаучные методы наблюдения, сравнения, анализа и синтеза. Думается, что этот подход актуален в исследовании современного визуального искусства.

Опираясь на семиотический подход и художественный опыт современных художников Центральной Азии, данное исследование стремится продемонстрировать новые векторы отечественной культурологии и искусствоведения.

Материалом изучения в области традиционных лоскутных изделий выступили полевые исследования по изучению фондов Российского этнографического музея (2019–2021), ряда краеведческих музеев Казахстана, а также онлайн-коллекции Центрально-Азиатского региона, представленные в Международном музее лоскутного одеяла (Небраска, США).

Статья подготовлена в рамках проекта Министерства высшего образования и науки Республики Казахстан АР09259280 «Языки казахской культуры как основа этнической идентичности: семиотика и семантика».

Ключевые слова: искусство, Центральная Азия, лоскут ткани, құрақ, ритуально-обрядовая практика, язык культуры, художественный текст.

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