



THE PUNITIVE POLITICS OF SOVIET POWER IN THE VISUAL ART OF UZBEKISTAN IN 1930S OF XX CENTURY

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Received: 1 st May 2021	The article is devoted to the fates and trials of artists of Uzbekistan in period of Stalinism. The article shows how the ideological pressure of the authorities influenced the work of artists who were forced to change their views and behavior when the situation in the country changed. The problems of ideological and features of moral and political aspects of fine art in the 1920s-1930s in Uzbekistan are considered. In addition, previously unexplored archival materials allow us to open unknown pages of biographies of artists of Uzbekistan in 1930s.
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The conditions of cultural construction, the significance of the creative activity of artists of Uzbekistan in 1930s is multifaceted and interesting. Much of what is related to the activities of artists is still not sufficiently disclosed. This circumstance prompted us to turn to the problem of ideological and moral - political aspects of fine art in the 1920s - 1930s in Uzbekistan and try to identify their features in the region. At the beginning of the twentieth century, progressive changes affected all aspects of public life and led to fundamental changes in almost all types of culture and art. The new era brought new content and new directions to art. Artists sought not to copy events, but to create them with their creative imagination. This was the main content of the work of modernist artists. They called themselves expressionists, abstractionists, Cubists, Surrealists. But they were united by one goal – to break away from external attributes and penetrate into the essence of phenomena. Soviet art of the early twentieth century developed in the conditions of a decisive struggle with the manifestations of bourgeois ideology-with formalism and naturalism, which allegedly led artists away from reality. All these areas were subjected to persecution and criticism, exhibitions were banned, paintings were incomprehensible and difficult to perceive.

The art of socialist realism, as a world-outlook method of artistic creativity, was considered by the Bolshevik authorities like a basic element in their ideological and cultural policy, "being in conformity with handling the problems of building the socialism" and was embedded into artistic creativity by aggressive tools of state policy, including censorship. During the Soviet regime, art historians and the artists quite often played a very important role in the cultural policy. A certain group of artists made efforts to co-operate with the authorities, another one, on the contrary, strived to release from their pressure. At that, some artists sincerely or due to other motivations served the authorities, the others, sometimes making a sacrifice of their personal well-being, freedom, and even life, braved the regime and public opinion. The political ruling establishment on the one hand saw in art workers the group of people oppositional to the regime, and on the other hand, considered the art workers as an extremely indispensable ally in social, political, ideological spheres. The attitude of the authorities to the artists was dual: from severe reprisals to rendering any possible support. By means of arts the authorities tried to change the basic fragments of the national picture of the world, distorting it and mythologizing, which was established through administrative means and measures, violence together with encouragements and rewards.

In the period of the 1920s-1930s, the formation of the Soviet culture and arts, including visual arts, based on the policy of cultural development of the Soviet system began in Uzbekistan. In the 1920s, the first art studios and schools were created, where mostly Russian teacher-artists worked. During these years, work on forming national staff of artists was initiated, but raising of the local artists still required a certain period, and therefore the supplement of the collective of artists of Uzbekistan in the first years of the Soviet system was mainly due to arrival of artists from the cities of Russia and other republics.

In the 1930s, the party officials began strictest control over the Soviet artists. Party officials kept a sharp lookout in order that "ideologically harmful" and "alien to people" works of art despite their high artistic merits would never see the light.

State censorship subjected to persecution and criticized those artists who sought to break away from the trappings of manifestations of life and penetrate deeply into its essence through creating it by their own creative imagination. Many artists, especially those of the older generation, were unwilling to compromise and kept their personal credo. In their pictures, A.Volkov, A.Nikolayev, M.Kurzin, O. Tatevosyan and others, despite the demands of

the Soviet ideology, provided a real interpretation of the traditional way of life of the people of Uzbekistan of their time. The 1933-1937 accounting records of the Organizing Committee of the SSKh of Uzbekistan stated that "the paintings produced by the artists, were not indicative of their struggle for realism. The Republican exhibition of artists of Uzbekistan (1932) showed the works, which distorted the Soviet reality beyond recognition (works by M.Kurzin, N.Kashina, A.Volkov, E.Koravay). They didn't make a compromise and kept an individual creative originality. Artists tried to oppose (in an open or latent form) to the instrumentalization of art, and owing to this and other reasons those individuals found themselves forced out of public art life.

Bright individualism of these artists began to interfere with the state ideology. The state authorities pursued a policy of repression against those, who were in opposition to the existing regime. The principal motivations of blaming many talented artists were standard: political shortsightedness, ideological vagueness, petty-bourgeois deviation in creative work, organization of groups and contacts with the counter-revolutionary nationalists.

The political leadership of the country showed a negative attitude to art associations, as they were regarded as institutions of "bourgeois art". Avant-gardism, the artistic trend of the 1920s-30s, and its representatives as "manifestation of formalism and the influence of Western art" were banned in the late 1930s.

In compliance with the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks – the Central Committee of the CPSU (B) – dated April 23, 1932, "On Restructuring of Literary and Artistic Organizations", the artistic communities in Uzbekistan were reorganized. In this period there were developed institutional frameworks, methods, and forms of management of creative associations' activity. Thus, the republican newspaper "Pravda Vostoka" ("The Truth of the East") on 17 January 1930 published a feuilleton of Michael Donetsky (under a pen-name A.Ksandr) "mAKHrovaya reaktsiya pod krasnoi etiketkoi" ("Arrant reaction under the red label"). The feuilleton was directed against the artists E.G.Burtsev and I.S.Kazakov, in which they were accused of that at lessons in the studio the students draw the head of Christ and the Apostle Paul. Then, based on the same author's article "Iskopaemoye" ("Antediluvians"), the GPU (General Political Office) initiated case № 3950 on accusation of E.G.Burtsev and I.S.Kazakov according to Clause 10-66 and Clause 142 of the UzSSR Criminal Code. E.G. Burtsev and I.S. Kazakov were a leaders of first creative association of artists in Uzbekistan "Association of revolutionist artists (AKhR)".

A striking example of the censorship policy is the fate of V.Rozhdestvensky. "The reason for the dismissal and accusation of committing an anti-Soviet act by the artist V.Rozhdestvensky, who headed the art department of the satirical magazine "Mushtum", was finding in a drawing the "resemblance of the German Schutzman's cap badge with the Soviet star". V.Rozhdestvensky explained in his statement that "resemblance" happened only because of the fact that he worked with his left hand, having lost his right hand a few years ago due to illness, that is why the characteristic feature of his drawing style were acute angles and sharp lines.

V.Rozhdestvensky "with all the harshness and severity" was charged with "negligence in the performance of political cartoons", because "a graphic artist has to work extremely well and accurately, in order that none of hidden class enemies could take advantage of his mistakes".

On 5 September 1937, V.Rozhdestvensky was evict out of his post of the editor of the magazine "Mushtum" after 15 years of honest and excellent work, with the following wording in the administrative order: "For publishing an anti-Soviet cartoon, for nonchalant attitude to work".

Repressive processes touched M.I.Kurzin, the talented artist, who came to Uzbekistan from Barnaul even in the 1920s. In Uzbekistan he was a founder of such associations of artists as "Masters of New East" and the "Association of fine arts' workers". Together with E.L.Korovai, his first wife, being a wonderful artist, too, he made a long journey from Barnaul to the Crimea and the Caucasus, to Central Asia. But they soon divorced, Kurzin remained to live and work in Tashkent, and Korovay moved to Samarkand. In 1930 he married again, also to an artist from Barnaul, his student V.Markova. Markova's personal life was not happy: Kurzin drank much and often, made a row, and she offered to break the relationship with him. After her husband's arrest Markova practically lived alone – the friends avoided communicating with her due to her being 'the wife of the enemy to the people'. Besides that, she was blamed in organization of groups and discharged from her work in art school. In consequences, she was having problems with work and V.Markova moved to Leningrad, where she earned by taking orders in the printing house, and dealt with the design work for theatrical performances. In 1941, at the age of 36, Valentina Markova died in the siege of Leningrad.

Kurzin was bold in his pronouncements and in deeds. Once in a fit of drunkenness, barely standing on his feet, he fell out of his apartment and trying to keep his balance, began shouting in the street: "Artists and poets! In this country, you cannot create freely as your conscience tells you to do. Go to the Kremlin! Kill Stalin!" He was wearing his wife's panties on his head...¹

Anyone who worked closely with Kurzin, often became the object of his harsh public statements, the proficient artist did not recognize compromises, and therefore acquired enemies in the face of his own fellow artists.

Denunciations to the appropriate authorities, anonymous letters in the artistic environment were not the exception to the rule, but a reality. Kurzin was arrested, accused of having a hostile attitude toward the Soviet regime, saying terrorist intentions against Stalin, anti-Soviet propaganda and sentenced to five years imprisonment

¹ Central State archive Republik of Uzbekistan (CSA RUz) F. P-2320, оп.1, д.37, л.63

and three years of exile in Kolyma. After his deinstitutionalization in 1946 he was sent to exile in Bukhara, without the right to visit Tashkent. But in the same year he was included in the list of members of the Union of Artists of Uzbekistan. In 1948, Kurzin was again arrested for infringement of written undertaking not to leave the place – he illegally arrived in Tashkent – he was sentenced to 8 more years of imprisonment in the Krasnoyarsk Territory already. Mikhail Kurzin returned to Uzbekistan in 1956, lived in Nukus, where he died in 1957 from cancer.

R.Eremyan, the art historian, daughter of a famous artist V.Eremyan writes about the artist A.Nikolaev, who is better known under the pseudonym Usto-Mumin, "... this man is a dual-personality man. In Uzbek surroundings, he was loved as a person who respects their language, who converted to Islam and committing five-time prayer. He wore an eastern robe and turban, went to the mosque and was called Usto Mumin, a "modest master". In the Russian environment he was Nikolayev, he worked late in smoky little rooms of the Children's publishers, drew on paperboard socialist pioneers and capitalist policemen, aircrafts over red and green holiday crowds at the First of May². Usto Mumin was a talented artist, his art is based on freely quoting of miniatures, icons, he was a singer of platonic union of adolescent sexuality, and he was repressed for immoral behavior. His paintings were not accepted because they were over-formalistic, distorted rather than reflected the reality and did not meet the principles of socialist realism. The party officials exercised the strictest control over the Soviet artists. Party officials kept a sharp lookout in order that "ideologically harmful" and "alien to people" works of art despite their high artistic merits would never see the light.

Nikolayev was arrested in 1938 during his business trip, when he was appointed the artist of the Uzbek pavilion at the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow. "The creative trip" of an artist lasted for four years, but only first in the "Matrosskaya Tishina" (the prison) in Moscow, then in Tashkent prison. Nikolaev later found out that he was accused of "conspiracy and preparing terrorist acts against the leaders of the Soviet government". In 1942, the State authorities released Nikolaev for lack of evidence, and even apologized in writing for the misunderstanding. The state in 1943 awarded him the honorary diploma of the Central Executive Committee of Uzbekistan for participation in the creation of the Uygur theater, and in connection with the 25th anniversary of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic A.V.Nikolaev (Usto Mumin) was given the honorary title of the Honored Artist of Uzbekistan.³

Difficulties in prison left a terrible open wound in the soul of Nikolayev. His health was undermined, frequent headaches, nightmares of the camp life brought him suffering. He could not forget the tragic death of his youngest son (he fell from a tree), and his eldest son did not return from the war field – died defending Ukraine. He held himself courageously, trying to stifle suffering with work. Alexander Nikolayev died in the summer of 1957.

Many artists, who had come into conflict with the government, paid for it with a significant deterioration in their financial situation. But at the same time, many artists were willing to sacrifice their material well-being for the sake of social and professional ideals.

The artists, who criticized organizational work at meetings and came into conflict with the administration, paid with a significant deterioration in their financial situation due to the exclusion from the Union of Artists (A.Volkov, V.Rozhdestvensky, A.Nikolayev (Usto-Mumin), M.Kurzin, O.Tatevosyan, V.Markova, P. Ben'kov, Ch.Akhmarov, etc.). Owing to disagreement with the high officials of the SSKh Uz, Ch.G.Akhmarov left for Moscow. Despite all his merits, he had neither a house nor an apartment of his own, but lived in a hostel in a very small and narrow room with a single window, he lived like a Spartan, he used a hostel-owned furniture: iron bed, a home-made bedside table and two stools. His drawings he kept on the first floor in another lumber-room.

Thus, these materials show how the direct ideological pressure of the authorities influenced the work of artists, who were forced to change their views and behavior when the situation in the country and in the world changed. The manifestation of creative initiative was perceived as an alien phenomenon, and all other theories and views were declared formalistic, ideologically harmful, and the figures behind them were apologists of Western culture.

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² RGALI F.2588 op.1 d.67. R.V.Eremyan.

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