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BALKARIAN PROFESSIONAL FINE ARTS

Until the 1920s, the artistic culture of the Balkars had developed naturally and endogenously. The absence of the fine arts was understood in terms of Islam. Actually, the reasons for this phenomenon are much more deeply rooted and are connected with the specifics of the artistic philosophy of the Balkars. Brought up on other traditions and artistic values, this particular ethnic group were neither psychologically nor aesthetically prepared for any new perceptions or unusual forms of creativity. Fine arts were not connected with their cultural requirements but had been spread by the Soviets in days of the Cultural Revolution¹⁾ (1920–1930s) and later. New forms of art clashed with the centuries-old way of life of the mountaineers and therefore the abrupt withdrawal pains of centuries of traditions could not be overcome in just a short space of time. Meanwhile, this task was considered by the Bolsheviks²⁾ to be extremely important as, in their opinion, art should serve the political and ideological goals of the state leaders. However, despite all efforts made by the authorities to familiarize the locals with the fine arts, they reacted conservatively and for several decades remained alien to it. So, the realization of this plan extended over four long decades.

It is quite natural that the creation of works of art is impossible without a professional staff of artists. So, at the same time there was the problem of their education. The government of Kabardino-Balkaria tried to solve it during the 20s; however, the indigenous people remained indifferent to this undertak-

¹⁾ Appayeva (1996:105–106).

²⁾ Appayeva (2007:14).

ing for a long time. Certainly, despite a ban on Islam in our area the fine arts would have arisen quite naturally as, for example, happened with other Muslim countries. Nor would we have avoided the influence of other cultures as we entered a curve of universal progress. However, this process was forced upon us, so that the republic, so to speak, did not lag behind Soviet trends and nor stand on the roadside of cultural life in the country. Despite lacking objective preconditions for the development of the fine arts, the process went slowly and with great difficulties.

A major role in the formation of the professional fine arts in the republic was played by visiting artists who had been educated in Russia. Their creativity developed in the tideway of the traditions of Russian art. In 1897, a graduate of the Petersburg academy of Arts was sent here for anti-governmental activity – M.V. Alekhin lodged in Nalchik. During the 1910–20s, professional artists such as Krause, Segal, and others moved here.

The artistic media of the republic managed to establish itself during the pre-war period, but it consisted entirely of guest artists. There were no national artists. Before World War II, the government of the republic did not manage to train its own artists. Then on March 8, 1944 on false charges of high treason, the Balkarian people were deported to Central Asia and Kazakhstan “forever” as the decree concerning the eviction of the Balkarian people stated.

In the history of mankind there were many cases when ethnic groups were either exterminated or expelled from their traditional lands by stronger enemies. But even once having eradicated the people, invaders would generally not pursue the aim of destroying everything connected with their memory. However, such a monstrous campaign took place during the days of Stalinshchina.³⁾ People were not only deported. Everything was destroyed that could serve as a reminder of their stay on their native land. Even the simple mention of the name of a nationality fell under a ban. Generally, deported ethnic groups were simply deleted from history.

Such a destiny also befell the Balkarian people in 1944. Their expulsion from their native land immediately affected the fate of local documentation and art monuments. Balkarian cultural artifacts stored in the museum of local lore in Nalchik were withdrawn by members of the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs straight after the human eviction. The destiny of these materials remains unknown to this day but, most likely, they were destroyed. Fortunately,

³⁾ Appayeva (2007:58–59).

the destiny of the people was not so tragic: in 1957, according to the will of the authorities, they went back home.

There was no more joyful event in the lives of the Balkarian people than the news of their homecoming after a thirteen-year exile. On March 28, 1957 the Kabardino-Balkarian ASSR was restored and the Balkars were allowed to return to their historical homeland.

Certainly, it is impossible to forget about the tragic pages of history concerning this ethnic group, but time goes forward and, thankfully, the years of Balkarian cultural standstill are behind us. The people found the strength to push forward into the future, to overcome pressing problems.

Immediately upon return to their native land, again there arose the question of how to educate local artists. During the 1960–70s, talented Balkarian youth took up places at art schools and state higher education institutions. In 1965 Jakub Akkizov received his art education in Makhachkala. Afterwards, Ibrahim Dzhankishiyev (Rostov-on-Don), Valery Kurdanov (Alma-Ata), Mukhtar Uzenov (Tashkent), Yousaf Shavayev (Karachayevsk) became professional artists. Before the war, the remarkable sculptor Hamzat Krymshamkhalov was studying in Tbilisi, but did not finish the Tbilisi academy of Arts and went to work in Nalchik.

The first generation of Balkarian masters of art had to face some quite serious problems. After all it was necessary to redress the enormous backlog in cultural development from thirteen years of exile. The fine arts of Kabardino-Balkaria became a representative of Soviet peripheral, provincial art. It began under the influence of Russian democratic art, academism, creativity of *peredvizhniki*,⁴⁾ social-realism.⁵⁾ Later, since the 1980s, our artists have absorbed artistic methods and expressiveness from the cultural heritage of different people of the world, while also embracing ethnic art. Not all the tendencies and the directions of Soviet art were reflected in local art, and a chronological framework of Balkarian art coincides neither with the entire USSR, nor with those from other republics of our country. However, both during the post-Perestroika⁶⁾ period and now, our art lags behind Russia as a whole. It is necessary to consider and that during previous decades, Balkarian fine arts were split between differ-

⁴⁾ Appayeva (2007:14).

⁵⁾ Appayeva (2007:14).

⁶⁾ Appayeva (2001: 95–96).

ent directions and currents. Its development was difficult and multilayered in character.

There were few native artists for a long time and the question of the creation of a national model of art was irrelevant until the 1980s. There were, of course, certain artists who were excited earlier by this issue. But it was impossible to be involved in its decision as there was no corresponding base.

In 1970–80s there was, so to speak, a quantitative accumulation; solutions to artistic problems lay in the background. But it is necessary to note the fact that the activity of certain men during the seventies had prepared a basis for the further development of fine arts in Kabardino-Balkaria.

Today Balkarian artists perfectly understand that people's art cannot be created by one person, however talented. Only an association of masters of the arts, a preservation and collective expansion, an organization of a creative atmosphere will enable the enrichment not only of Balkarian culture, but will also strengthen its position in the republic, in Russian and world art. Some artists have managed to gain recognition in the republic. Others personify our art at the Russian and international level. In the general art process are also some artists who have not received any vocational training but thanks to their talent and diligence have managed to enter into the culture of the region.

Comprehension of the deep essence of life, the creation of images which the people could apprehend as national and reflecting their own outlook: such is the task which the Balkarian masters of arts have set themselves and, it is necessary to say, so far they have coped well with this difficult task. Artists skillfully combine the requirement to serve the people with a freedom of expression.

During the previous decades, the accents in Balkarian art have changed considerably in that "national" is invariable an attribute of creativity for many artists. Authors identify their art with the most diverse directions in art into which they aspire to inject some Balkarian color. Some of them lean more towards Russian or West European schools of art; others gravitate towards a regional, Caucasian flavor. Among Balkarian artists, there are those who follow realistic traditions. Some go down the path of nationless, pointless art. But even in these works, although not implicitly, the national spirit is shown.

The sculptor Hamzat Krymshamkhalov is one of those artists who lay the way for the creation of a national art school in Kabardino-Balkaria and who one might possibly call one of pillars of the Kabardino-Balkarian fine arts. First of all, he is a sculptor of monuments, whose creations decorate the cities and villages of the republic. The greatest popularity was enjoyed by his monu-

ment *The grieving mountaineer*, created by himself together with the architect Mukharbi Karkayev and is considered one of the best memorial monuments in Russia. H. Krymshamkhalov is a master of all types and genres of plastic arts. The portrait gallery of well-known people created by him testifies to his deep understanding of the inner world of heroes and their psychology. In Rakhayev's portrait, convincingly as is the sculptor's wont, the unique personal lines of the subject are transferred. The sculpture is outwardly static, but all the attention of the author is concentrated on the inner spiritual world of the hero. The portrait is devoid of any external effects, but is psychologically expressive. The eagerly arrested originality shown here is an integral advantage of the portrait image of the great dancer Mahmoud Esambayev represented at a moment of creative inspiration. The laconicism of artistic language, clarity of form, the finesse of the model's movement transforms the sculpture into a dance emblem. The rhythmic structure of the work, constructive logic and strict confidence of volume ratio serve to emphasize the importance of the personality.

The artist Ibrahim Dzhankishiyev almost immediately carved his own niche in the fine arts of Kabardino-Balkaria, communicating in the instantly accessible language of the figurative and the artistic, which with good reason can be called national. Having begun work on this task even during his days of training at the art school in Rostov-on-Don., Ibrahim Dzhankishiyev's painting is an example of a mature, wise technique which comes in the course of time, along with life and creative experience. In his creativity, the artist addresses issues concerning the restoration of the Balkarian national character. The painter skillfully reproduces the idiosyncratic nature of mountaineers and the unique beauty of the Caucasian landscape.

The monumentally sublime image of a mother with her child in the picture *Over the world* (Fig. 1) symbolizes the Motherland. It is no accident that the figure of a woman is identical to the mountains of the Caucasus. Both local heroes and also the environment of their dwelling are presented in a generalized form, without specification. The emotional impact of a canvas is felt via the rhythmic creation of composition, the impressive variety found on the surface of a canvas. Dzhankishiyev never relies on visual supervision alone, always generalizing the seen.

Jakub Akkizov is, undoubtedly, one of the key figures in Balkarian art. He participated most actively in the integration of Balkarian art into the pan-Russian and soviet context. The content of the works of Jakub Akkizov is so deep and multi-layered that each viewer is able to take the most divergent information from them. The graphic cycles are matched by perfection in art.

Using fragmentation, a multi-faceted approach and variety in depth of field, he managed to create many astonishing works.

Many artists from Kabardino-Balkaria defer to the illustration of the Narts'epos⁷⁾ (Fig. 2). But without exaggeration, it is possible to state that the cycles of graphic sheets created by Y. Akkizov are beyond comparison and with a clearly expressed tendency towards a lack of figurativeness or to an uncertain figurativeness. The role of the myth, legend, and parable is prominent within them, and an inclination towards symbolic reflection is felt. These pictures bend to philosophical reflection and assume an ambiguity in their reading. In an abstract canvas *Big hunting*, the images of a wolf and his victim start to emerge after close examination. The abstraction turns into a drama, a scene of great conflict.

Vladimir Bakkuyev is keen on ethnic culture and, in particular, its ancient forms. Plots from ancient Balkarian mythology and folklore bring him closer to the mentality of the people. Nevertheless, in the center of attention there lies the present. These are portraits of representatives of the intellectuals, landscapes and local clothing. He tries to maintain an ethnic identity first of all through images of Balkarian artifacts – kiyizes⁸⁾ in a variety of different contexts.

The creativity of the lyrical artist Valery Kurdanov is first and foremost attached spiritually to the people of the village. He has always poeticized the everyday life of tribal groups. The emotionality of painting is achieved by the rhythmic creation of composition, and thinly nuanced color. Its canvases are full of light and air, reflecting the very color of Balkarian life. What is evident at once, when one admires the works of the painter, is the absence of critical conflict. His heroes always enjoy the wholeness of their existence. From here there is serenity, tranquility and total harmony with the world and nature. The artist sings of the everyday life of the heroes as he has the gift to turn the most ordinary subject into the height of beauty. His simplest motif is fanned by poetry. While building composition, Kurdanov carefully selects the forms and paints appropriate for his ideas. Here, for example, his picture called *Expectation* (Fig. 3) bursts with the beauty of color combinations and their thin orchestration precisely matched to the composition.

The beauty of the local landscapes has always been a great source of inspiration for the painter and sculptor Liuan Akhmatov, along with collective wisdom and the legends of old which have passed through the centuries (Fig. 4).

⁷⁾ The nartsky epos – the epos of the people of the North Caucasus. See: Appayeva (1996: 105–106).

⁸⁾ Kiyiz – a felt carpet. See: Appayeva (2001: 115).

His flexible talent and his own, peculiar system of artistic coordinates allow him to represent himself not only as the observer, but also as a deep analyst of reality. He is one of the most stylistically mobile artists who “drift” over numerous styles and directions and perfectly adapt them not only to the requirement of the task in hand but also to a purely Balkarian attitude.

Hyzyr Teppeev is multi-faceted in his creativity. The creations of this artist always testify to his professional armament and delicate taste in art. All genres of painting are open to him and he achieves success in each one of them. A balance is found in historical canvases between an imperceptible image of the past and its understanding today. His works devoted to the present are so convincing too moving on from the truly conventional and into original realms. That’s why his works are can be differentiated in terms of the mysterious, hypnotic force of influence.

Teppeev has no standard schemes of thinking. In his works he does not use subjects from old times in their everyday purpose, but as archetypes, as a graphic symbol of the people, for example: kiyises. He restores the historical and cultural function of the koshma and its religious value. Maybe it is for this reason that his *Skilled workers* (Fig. 5) spread some traditional Balkarian patterns on the kiyize with such awe. In his pictures *Sirat’s Bridge* and *Leaving* he deals with intricate plots. Here the realities of time find their embodiment in cryptic imagery.

Boris Gudanayev has his own specific language when approaching the multiple layers of cultural associations. In *Gadalshchitsa* he exaggerates an image, rendering it almost grotesque. The deformation of the figure and the person make an image more expressive and convincing. The artistic language of *Self-portrait* unifies features of various styles which the author skillfully blends together under a uniform system. In general, Boris Gudanayev’s creativity is connected with a historical vanguard, the achievements of modern masters of painting. The artist experiments a great deal, creating space on the canvas plane by fusing various directions in art (Fig. 6).

In the cycle *Dreams in a moonlight night* (Fig. 7) by Halimat Atabiyeva everything is constructed on changeable feelings and fragile memoirs. These are the images which recur in the memory and then the next instant disappear in its depths. They are as though born by a stream of consciousness. Bodiless angels, easy and light, soar to the heavens. Some unsteadiness, an uncertainty in the expression of feelings gives the impression of an innuendo. Canvases of this cycle are marked by light, gentle touches of the brush. On the contrary, the picture *Baikal in the winter* is written temperamentally, expressively. The

white veil of snow covering the winter lake blows up ringing impregnations of red, dark blue, yellow, green. Dense dabs of paint convey the vital energy and force of the sleeping Baikal.

An explosive character is also inherent in Abdurrahman Zanibekov's picture *Wind*. It has successfully coped with the task of depicting a curling motion with uneasy, inconsistent and varied vector movements, having given the compositions an effective, complete character and having managed to chain the dynamics of a whirlwind, the whole mad whirlpool on a canvas framework.

Yousaf Shavayev's graphic sheets are executed with great precision. As always they are full of symbols, metaphors, with a wealth of dynamic images. The range and depth of the author's imagination are harmoniously combined with a down-to-earth approach when the drawings contain elements of real details.

The sculptor Takhir Cherkesov has enriched national Balkarian culture and has strengthened its position in the realm of Russian art. He is distinguished by his ability to think in artistic categories. In an attempt to give the people an insight into the author's own vision of the world, he tries to keep focus on the mentality of the Balkars. His works, first of all, excel in their courage of self-expression and their dynamic energy. Both the open expression of artistic language as well as the forced rhythm of lines and gestures are inherent within his oeuvre. In Cherkesov's works a number of the cultural directions are fused, and at their join he has developed his own system of values. Some works, such as *Satanay-biyche*, are monumental, even majestic. The epic character also distinguishes his *Host*. In such sculptures as *Chaban*, *Haymaking* (Fig. 8), *Shepherd*, the lines and the planes recoil and turn to face each other at acute angles, creating a richness of form and pattern.

While working on sculpture, Takhir Cherkesov does not aspire at all to create authentic shapes with precisely fixed lines. Merely, he chooses only the most expressive qualities of the model which he proceeds to emphasize and poeticize.

Speaking today about Balkarian artists, it must be pointed out that they are quick to adopt anything new that comes from the West. And it is quite natural, as also our region has managed to be entered in a world cultural space. At the same time it is possible to state that the masters of art try to preserve and develop the art traditions handed down to them by their ancestors.

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Fig. 1. Ibrahim Dzhankishiyev, *Over the world*, oil, 100×120, 1997, property of the author



Fig. 2. Yakub Akkizov, *Nart Eryuzmek* paper, autolithograph, 41×44, 1985 (Kabardino-Balkaria Fine Arts Museum)



Fig. 3. Valery Kurdanov, *Expectation*, oil 80×40, 1980
(Kabardino-Balkaria Fine Arts Museum)



Fig. 4. Liuan Akhmatov, *Shelter*, oil, 45×48, 2009



Fig. 5. Hyzyr Teppeev, *Skilled workers*, oil 90×120, 1995 (Kabardino-Balkaria Fine Arts Museum)



Fig. 6. Boris Gudanyev, *Fortune teller*, oil, 109×68, 1992, private collection



Fig. 7. Halimat Atabiyeva, *Spring motive*, oil, 100×73, 1996



Fig. 8. Talchir Cherkesov, *Haymaking*, plaster tone, 63×56×37, 1998, property of the author