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## “NON-NATIONAL ARTISTS” AND “NATIONAL ART”: ABOUT THE EXCLUSIVITY OF THE “INCLUSIVE” TERMS OF SOVIET AESTHETICS

*Since the 1930s, reinterpreting the Stalinist formula “national culture in form and proletarian in content,” historians have described the birth of art in the Soviet republics as a process for the emergence and formation of the so-called “national schools”: painting, music, architecture, etc. Moreover, the characterization of “national” and “non-national” artists, i.e. artists, belonging or not belonging to the titular nations that comprised the Soviet Union, was vested with different semantic functions; and these artists themselves played different social roles. The purpose of the “national artist” was considered to be a direct expression of “national art,” whose voice was regarded as authentic and synthetic. The role of “non-national artists” remained ambivalent and uncertain, although their contribution to the building of a number of “national cultures” was not only significant, but sometimes decisive. This article reflects on the different perceptions of “national” and “non-national” artists, as well as the terms which were used to differentiate one from the other. The history of art of the Central Asian republics and especially Uzbekistan served as the material for this analysis. According to the main hypothesis of the article, the differences between “national” and “non-national” artists were rooted in the binary presumptions of Orientalism. However, in reality, the situation was not strictly binary due to several factors. First, there were groups of artists who could appear in critics’ descriptions as both “national” and “non-national.” Second, the concept of “national art” coexisted in parallel with the concept of “folk art,” which was often more inclusive. Third, the art of “national” and “non-national” artists appeared in a different scope, when comparing the descriptions of Muscovite and Central Asian critics. These and other discursive features deprived the situation of their apparent dichotomies.*

**Key words:** fine arts, Soviet art, Uzbekistan, ethnic community, minorities.

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THE EVOLUTION of the concept of “nation” spanned for more than two millennia, but this article focuses on the fact that by the 20th century such interpretations were based on two different paradigmatic platforms. The first was associated with the idea of civic consciousness. Within its framework, a nation was understood as a *social community*, or people made up of representatives of different ethnic groups, confessions, etc., carrying out as subject political activities in their own state. The second was based on the ideas of cultural anthropology. The nation, in this instance, meant an ethnic community with a specific set of characteristics. It was the second principle whereon the Soviet program of “nation-building” was based, in which the eschatological goal of “the merging and disappearance of nations” under communism

was “dialectically” supplemented by the opposite goal of “comprehensive development of national cultures” during the period of socialist construction. From the beginning to the end of the USSR’s existence, nations were understood primarily as ethnic communities developing on “their historical territory.” The form of social development of the largest “Soviet nations” was the union republics, within which various forms of cultural autonomies were created (republican, district, etc.). It was supposed that each such republic would have its own “national culture” and “national art,” reflecting the spiritual and domestic uniqueness of each nation.

Meanwhile, not a single Soviet republic was monoethnic. Therefore, the artists living in a particular territory belonged either to the “titular nationality” or



Pavel Kuznetsov, Sheep shearing, 1912



Martiros Saryan, "Egyptian Night", 1912

to another ethnic stratum, and this made their position different. The ethnic origin of artists was marked twice: First, institutionally, in the passport with their personal data; and, second, culturally, as perceived by society as well as in the self-perception of the artists themselves. This distinction, which reflected the political and social characteristics of each Soviet decade, was neither ostentatious nor insignificant. On the contrary, it assigned different roles to artists in society and sometimes predetermined the theme and focus of their works. Without pretending to be an exhaustive description and full analysis of this major problem, this article will instead focus on its definition and review of some of the consequences that it had for artistic practice. Its main postulate is that the evolving distinction between “native” and “non-native,” “titular” and “non-titular,” “national” and “non-national” has always been based on the presumptions of orientalism – first the explicit ones and then the repressed and latent ones.

As contemporaries testified, the Governor-General of Turkestan, Konstantin von Kaufmann, prior to his death (1882) said: “I ask you to bury me here (i.e., in Tashkent) so that everyone knows that this is a genuinely Russian land, in which a Russian is not ashamed to lie” (*Fedorov* 1913: 55). These words demonstrate that from the first decades of the colonization of Central Asia by the Russian Empire, the feeling of being “at home” was already a characteristic of Russian Turkestan society. The desire to legitimize this feeling is augmented by the mythologized “Aryan theory” (see: *Laruelle* 2005; *Laruelle* 2009), the Russian supporters of which wanted to prove that the colonization of Turkestan was just a return of Russians to the legendary homeland of their Aryan ancestors.

Without questioning the identity of the conquered peoples, this myth, however, implied that the colonialists in this territory were “more indigenous” than the colonized. Therefore, the existing uncertainty of identity characterized the self-awareness of Russian artists in Central Asia. On the one hand, they felt “at home” here, like, for example, Pavel Kuznetsov, whose passion for the steppe world was, in the words of his contemporary Anatoliy Bakushinsky, “a return to their homeland after a short and merely external stay in the Babylon of European civilization” (*Romm* 1960: 24). On the other hand, it is easy to see the ontological distinction between such a “return--to-yourself” and the perception of “native land” in the eyes of a “truly Eastern person.” Such is Martiros Saryan in the description of Maximilian Voloshin: “Although Saryan’s art reflects the East, however, he is not an Orientalist. [...] He himself is a son of the East, estranged from his country” (*Voloshin* 1988: 305). An echo of this distinction can be heard a century later. For a typical example I would refer to the art critic Vera Razdolskaya, who claims that “Kuznetsov was a Russian who came to the East, and this largely determines the special poetic aloofness of his vision of the East. Saryan was a man of the East by blood, and for him referring to it was a return to the origins, to a specific national creative consciousness that preserved persistent and vivid archetypes” (*Razdolskaya* 1998: 29).

The above-mentioned allows one to ascertain that the colonial situation of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, for all their seeming dichotomies, was not ideally binary. This general idea of perceiving the Turkestan population as divided into two parts – new settlers and natives – does not quite correspond to reality, since in the conventional ideas of this period



Hovhannes Tatevosyan, "At the Uraza holiday", 1919

there were "people of eastern blood" among the settlers, who, even after receiving a Russian-European education, maintained an organic relationship with the world of "Asian" or "Eastern" culture.

According to my first hypothesis, the ethnic roots of the artists, conditionally associated with the East or Russia, and thus, Europe, were taken into account until the end of Soviet Central Asia. Thus, the assignment of the status of "national artists" to persons whose roots in the collective imagination were connected with the East (for example, dancer of Armenian origin Tamara Khanum, painter of Tatar origin Chingiz Akhmarov, architect of Dagestani origin Abdulla Akhmedov, etc.) was accepted with much greater readiness than the so-called "Europeans."<sup>1</sup> However, "Eastern" or "European" associations related to the ethnic origin of the artists were not consistent. For example, it would be wrong to think that all artists of Armenian origin were unequivocally classified as "oriental." This perception rather remained a kind of potentiality, realized in some cases and blocked in

<sup>1</sup> The term "Europeans" in relation to the inhabitants of the newly formed parts of historical cities that emerged after the Russian colonization of the 19th century assimilated in Central Asia and was widely used in Soviet times. Its use remained paradoxical in many ways: for example, artists who arrived in Uzbekistan from Siberia and Altai located to the east of Central Asia (Viktor Ufimtsev, Mikhail Kurzin, Valentina Markova, Nikolai Mamontov, etc.) immediately joined the ranks of "European society" and were identified as its representatives, while Uighurs arriving from "East Turkestan" or Koreans displaced to Central Asia, as a rule, were identified as "Asians." Considering that the variegated "European" society included representatives of diverse nationalities, it can be concluded that this generally accepted and non-contemplated terminology confirms our hypothesis, according to which the mental boundaries that separated some parts of the region's population from others were based on orientalist presumptions.



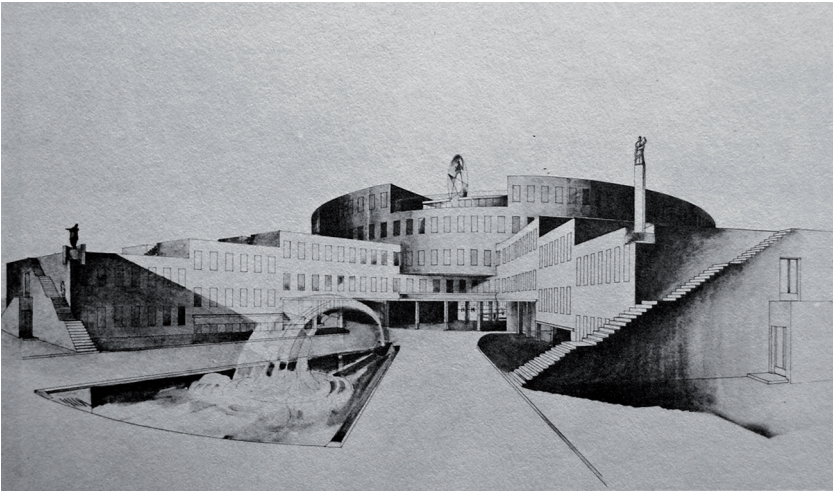
Nikolai Karakhan, "Women with ketmen", 1934

others. Therefore, the first hypothesis must be supplemented by another one.

The second hypothesis is that the binary rigidity of the division of artists into "oriental" and "non-oriental" has been significantly weakened at several discursive levels. It is necessary to carefully analyze the terms used to make this differentiation, as well as the historical circumstances in which these terms appeared, and the philosophical, socio-political and aesthetic thinking in which they were embedded. This second hypothesis, studied in all its complexity, will certainly lead to the third one. According to it, the use of terms shaping the apparent difference between the native and non-native population was not the same in the periphery as it was in the center of the Soviet state. It can be stated that in defining "national" and "non-national" artists, the Soviet center and the Asian republics resorted to different perspectives, and therefore the Central Asian artists, who were considered "national" in Moscow, were not definitely perceived as such in the region itself.

The framework of this article does not imply a comprehensive consideration of these three hypotheses. I will limit them to a summary explanation.

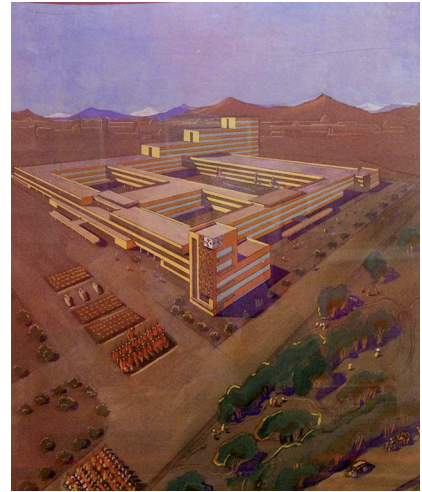
From its earliest years, the USSR proclaimed a new national policy opposed to the colonial practices of the tsarist regime. It was aimed at a radical change in the hierarchical relationship between the center of the country and its periphery. To equalize the "level of development" of cultures, it was first necessary to accelerate the development of the cultural life of the peoples considered "undeveloped." Starting from Marxist ideas about social formations, Stalin, in his speeches and texts on the "national question," repeatedly described the hierarchical nature of the devel-



**Konstantin Melnikov, Palace of Labor  
in Tashkent, 1933**

opent of the peoples and the nationalities that entered the USSR, from “semi-patriarchal-tribal” and “feudal” to “capitalist” (*Stalin* 1952: 25). As a result, in contrast to the former imperial chauvinism, local nationalisms and the accelerated construction of the “national cultures” of the Soviet peoples began to be encouraged (*Martin* 2011).

The 1920s were also the time of the dominance of the sociological approach, later called “vulgar sociology.” It implied the perception of the artist’s identity as inextricably linked with the collective psychology of their social class. And according to the communist manifesto, since the proletariat did not have a fatherland, the ethnic shades of the identity of the “proletarian artist” which came to the foreground during this period, were not important. Even after Stalin proclaimed the slogan of culture “proletarian in content and national in form” in 1925, and two years later Anatoliy Lunacharsky suggested that folk peasant art would brighten up the severity of international proletarian art with picturesque nuances (*Lunacharsky* 1927, p. 20); the character of national art remained on the periphery of aesthetic problems discussed by critics and artists for several years. At this time, such general obscure expressions as “national art of the East” (*Ginzburg* 1926: 113) or “national architecture of Central Asia” (*Rempel, Chepelev* 1930) were often used in relation to Central Asia. It is not surprising that in the 1920s, notions of the roles and functions of “native” and “non-native” artists were not yet formulated. The lack of distinction influenced artistic practice. For example, Moisei Ginzburg, Alexey Shchusev, Konstantin Melnikov were confident in their ability to construct the national architecture of the Central



**Alexey Shchusev, Government House  
in Samarkand, 1929**

Asian peoples in their Moscow bureaus. In the 1920s more significant antinomy concerned another difference; that between the “worker-peasant” youth, on the one hand, and artists of “bourgeois,” “intellectuals,” “petty bourgeois,” or “aristocratic origin” on the other. Educational institutions welcomed women and representatives of ethnic minorities within their walls, but priority was given to applicants from families of workers and peasants (*Rivkin* 1930: 23). According to the widespread opinion at that time, as demonstrated by Plekhanov, Friche, Pereverzev and other art critics of the Marxist orientation, “class psycho-ideology” was immanently rooted in the subconsciousness of the artist, thus reflected in all their work. It was believed that the artist of “bourgeois origin” was not capable of creating truly Soviet art. At best, one was assigned the role of a “fellow-traveler” providing support to young “fellow proletarians” until they reached professional maturity.

The 1930s signified a change in the evolution of this differentiation. The principles of vulgar sociology were rejected, the importance of social origin diminished, while the importance of ethnicity increased significantly. The new aesthetic approach, defended in particular by György Lukach and Mikhail Lifshitz, assumed that every genuine work of art reflected the reality and essential conflicts of its period. Through this prism, called “Lenin’s theory of reflection,” the most famous authors, regardless of social background, came to be regarded as “national artists” whose creative work was generally representative for the nation, and not just for the social class they came from.

Starting from the 1930s, reinterpreting the Stalinist formula of “culture, which is national in form,”

the development of art in the republics of Central Asia was described as the process of the emergence and formation of the so-called “national schools.” In the texts, the characterization of the “national” and “non-national” artist was endowed with different semantic functions. The role of the “national artist” was described as authentic and synthetic, and the role of the “non-national” as ambivalent and indefinite. It was assumed that the native artist, by virtue of origin, should naturally and spontaneously express the “essence” and “soul” of the “national culture,” while the non-native, not being able to authentically reflect the “national spirit,” could contribute to the development of “national art” by performing auxiliary pedagogical, participatory, and research functions. As an example, let me refer to the text of Hovhannes Tatevosyan, an artist and organizer of institutions important for the artistic life of Uzbekistan, including the *Samarkand Art-factory*. In a performance report in one of the Muscovite magazines, he prioritized the following: “Cadres of proletarian artists are trained on the basis of collective labor. Special attention is paid to the training of nationals who can use the domestic uniqueness of the masses, thus conducive to the development of art, national in form and socialist in content” (*Tatevosyan* 1931: 24). This meant that “non-national artists,” even after spending many years in Central Asia or even born in the region (that is, in fact being a native inhabitant), remained alien to the area’s main population and, therefore, could not express “national art” as such. However, they were able to train “national artists” and, by transferring knowledge and skills, bring along the “national art.” Mikhail Kurzin intrinsically spoke about it in a concise way: “Uzbeks should have their own national fine arts. And we, Russian artists, must help them in this matter” (*Kuryazov* 2015: 54-55).

While classifying the republic’s artists in his book *The Art of Soviet Uzbekistan* (1935), Moscow critic Vladimir Chepelev also emphasized ethnic distinction. For him, the “national artists” were precisely the Uzbeks, while the non-Uzbeks belonged to the vague category of “other artists.” It is paradoxical, but the above-mentioned book was mainly devoted to these “others.” Due to historical circumstances, in the first two Soviet decades, the art of Uzbekistan developed in small and ethnically diverse intellectual communities of the two capitals, Tashkent and Samarkand. At that time, Uzbek artists did not yet play an important role. Among protagonists of the Chepelev’s book were Usto Mumin, Mikhail Kurzin, Alexander Volkov, Pavel Benkov, Nikolai Karakhan, Nadezhda

Kashina and others. The critic sought to show their contribution to the creation of “national art,” while not considering either themselves or their works as “national.” On the other hand, despite the obvious semantic aberration, Chepelev tried to convince the reader that the leading role in the formation of the art of Uzbekistan was played by “national artists.” In particular, he declared, “In the Samarkand technical school, only 15% are nationals. But in this area, there is also an overcoming of the old feudal vestiges during the years of reconstruction which took a big step forward, and now there is the first group of young national painters in Uzbekistan. It must be said that these young masters are at the forefront of national artistic development” (*Chepelev* 1935b: 57). The critic argued for the superiority of these “young nationals” over “non-native artists” by listing the “shortcomings” of such “non-national artists” as Nadezhda Kashina, Zinaida Kovalevskaya and Valentina Markova, who either “got lost in formalistic delights” or had “not yet mastered the tasks and ways of establishing the new art of the republic to such an extent” (*Chepelev* 1935b: 57).

Other Muscovite critics – without questioning the very differentiation between “non-national” and “national” artists – spoke more pessimistically about the latter. Thus in the report on Moscow’s second exhibition of the artists of Uzbekistan, held in the Gorky Park of Culture and Leisure, the *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* newspaper wrote: “Like at the exhibition organized by the Museum of Oriental Cultures in 1934, a small group of young Uzbek artists is still lost among other artists who linked their life with Uzbekistan, and their work with Uzbek themes. The group of Uzbek artists mainly consists of the same names that appeared in the 1934 exhibition (Abdullayev, Sidyiki and Bahram Hamdami). Only Rashid Temurov’s works are exhibited for the first time. Like three years ago, this group includes a very modest still-life painting, small sketches, and mediocre portraits. The exhibition signifies a problem in the training of national cadres of the Uzbek fine arts and insistently demands for the control of the work of both art schools in Uzbekistan.”<sup>2</sup> In this review, it is also important to note that not only “non-national artists” in the Central Asian republics themselves, but also Muscovite institutions perceived the upbringing of “national staff” as a systemic problem, without which it was impossible to

<sup>2</sup> *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* (*Soviet Art*) Newspaper, No. 37 (383), August 11, 1937, p. 1.



Victor Ufimtsev, Untitled, 1922

properly develop the art of the region. Moreover, the activities of “non-national artists” as mentors could be assessed both positively (in most cases it was so) or negatively. For example, in one of the articles, Vladimir Chepelev noted that “Kazakhstan is characterized by the well-known leveling of national painters among the team of Russian artists. Only the increase of national staff can change the situation. The main task of the entire art front of Kazakhstan is to make the Kazakh artists predominate” (Chepelev 1935a: 172).

In the second half of the 1930s, these ethnic distinctions became explicitly significant. Ethnicity was indicated next to the surname and year of birth<sup>3</sup> in many publications, such as the catalog of the exhibition that took place in 1937 dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Revolution at the Museum of Art of Uzbekistan. Of course, this designation was problematic, forcing artists from multi-ethnic families to choose only one “nationality.” Meanwhile, the narratives prevailing in society were sensitive even to impurities of “foreign blood,” and sometimes such were even presented as more significant than a person’s declared ethnicity on his or her passport. Exaggerated attention to “inoculation” existed in the previous Soviet decades. For example, considering the work of Paul Gauguin, Jacob Tugendhold believed that “his passionate temperament, his love of adventure, his contempt for bourgeois well-being, and longing for the promised land ...” these were characteristics Gauguin inherited this from his grandmother, a Spanish woman born in Peru (Tugendhold 1918: 11).

<sup>3</sup> *Catalog of the Exhibition of Paintings by Uzbek Artists for the Twentieth Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution*. Tashkent: Museum of Arts Publ., 1937 (in Russian).



Ural Tansykbayev, "Mountain kishlak", 1934

In 1934, the editorial board of the *Tvorchestvo* (*The Creation*) magazine, presenting portraits of Uzbek artists, accompanied some of the images with indications of nationality, and in the case of Nikolai Karakhan, without mentioning his Armenian origin, they called the artist a “half-Persian,” which, in the eyes of Muscovites, was apparently more significant in connection with the display of art in Uzbekistan. In the same way and in the same year in the art magazine *Iskusstvo* (*The Art*) one reads, “N. Karakhan is a young artist, half-Persian by origin.”<sup>4</sup> There is significant evidence that such characteristics were used in personal communication between artists. For example, the famous composer of Uzbekistan Alexey Kozlovsky, according to his memoirs, in conversations with the artist Alexander Nikolaev (among his ancestors were Poles) mentioned that in Russian music any worthy composer had an admixture of Polish blood and that the art of such half-breeds, as a rule, “marked in its skill with height, nobility and the secret of special grace” (Kozlovskaya 1977: 2). The famous critic Sophia Krukovskaya based her unpublished reflections on Alexander Volkov from the painter’s Gypsy origins.<sup>5</sup> In particular, she wrote:

<sup>4</sup> In the listing of other artists in the same material, only ethnic groups close to the Uzbeks were expressed from the editorial point of view (“Chingiz Akhmarov is a young Tatar artist,” “Ural Tansykbayev is a young talented Cossack artist”), while A. Podkovyrov’s nationality was not mentioned, but it was emphasized that he was “a native of Turkestan, all the while working in Central Asia” (*Arhitekturnye rospisi hudozhnikov Uzbekistana* [Architectural paintings of artists of Uzbekistan], in: *Iskusstvo*, 1934, No 4, pp. 70-72).

<sup>5</sup> The idea of the artist’s mother’s Gypsy origin was based on unreliable family legends, according which the girl was found in the Astrakhan steppes during a certain military campaign (Volkov *Al.*, *Volkov An.*, *Volkov V.* 2007: 32).

“From the gypsies, Volkov’s passion for music, song, dance. Most of the heroes of his works are singers, musicians, dancers is how this national trait of the gypsy nature manifests itself in his work. He not only paints pictures, he composes poems about them, performs them with a tambourine and dances” (*Krukovskaya* 1975-1984: 2). In Volkov’s works, according to Krukovskaya, “there is no Uzbekistan as such, it is Uzbekistan through the eyes of a gypsy” (*Krukovskaya* 1975-1984: 3). As demonstrated in all the above statements, ethnicity figured primarily as a biological trait inherited in the “genes” or “blood.” This means that the racial theories of the 19th century, without being officially proclaimed in the USSR, remained in place when describing many situations in the artistic life of the Central Asian republics.

It is extremely curious, however, that sometimes critics still listed “non-national artists” among “national” ones. For example, the catalog of the exhibition of Uzbek artists in Moscow in 1934, in the “national group of artists” which included Akram Tashkenbayev and Siddiki, listed not only Ural Tansykbayev, a native of Tashkent with Kazakh roots, but also Nikolai Karakhan, a native of Nagorno-Karabakh (while Alexander Volkov, Usto Mumin, Mikhail Kurzin and others were outside this category).<sup>6</sup> Vladimir Chepelev also made an exception for Ural Tansykbayev, including him among the “national artists” of Uzbekistan due to the “deep national tradition of the culture of color, torn from the patterns of ornamentation and old decorative features” (Chepelev 1935b, p. 81). Forty years later, the authors of the book *Iskusstvo Sovetskogo Uzbekistana (The Art of Soviet Uzbekistan)* again singled out Tansykbayev, stating that “in the 1920s the first major national artists of Uzbekistan appear: Ural Tansykbayev and Iskander Ikramov” (*Dolinskaya* 1976: 70). In addition to Ural Tansykbayev, Chingiz Akhmarov, a native of Troitsk, who spent the first half of his life in Russia (*Krukovskaya* 1947: 5-6), gradually began to be included in the circle of “national artists.” Since other older Uzbek artists who came from Russia did not receive such qualifications from official Uzbek and Muscovite critics during the Soviet years, then it should be noted that the concept of “national” was more easily used in relation to those whose ethnic roots in the collective imagination were conditionally linked with the so-called “East.” In particular, they referred to natives of Armenia, neighboring Central Asian republics, or regions of Russia with a predom-

inately Muslim populations. This is exactly how the presumptions of Orientalism worked, according to which the “Eastern people” seemed to have natural internal features (“mentality,” “temperament,” “soul,” “natural perception of color,” etc.), allowing them to spontaneously and organically join in the creation of national art of the republics of Central Asia. And, vice versa, “non-Eastern people” did not have such internal resources, even if they lived in Central Asia from birth, like Alexander Volkov, Leon Bure or Sergei Kalmykov. Despite the fact that, from a traditional point of view, the works of “native” and “non-native” artists have undergone similar formal and subjective metamorphoses since the 1920s, moving from more decorative and conventional compositions towards a figurative thematic social canvas; their mission, role, and the functions were nevertheless described in different ways.

Thus, the complex and contradictory role that Uzbek and Muscovite critics entrusted to “non-native artists” should be better understood. The following are some typical expressions that implicitly reveal the subsidiary and secondary feature of this role, despite the recognition of the importance of the artists and the pioneering nature of their work. Rafail Taktash wrote in 1965 concerning Zinaida Kovalevskaya: “Together with P. Benkov, Z. Kovalevskaya, as an artist and teacher, played a major role in the education of the first national artists of the sunny republic at the Samarkand Art School and, by her personal example as a talented genre painter, significantly influenced the formation and development of this kind of painting in Uzbekistan” (*Taktash* 1992: 177). And further in the same article: “Z.M. Kovalevskaya comprehended the most characteristic features of life, national character, colorful expressions and nature of Uzbeks and Tajiks and – like the old Venetians who created the “Venetian flavor” – captured in her numerous canvases the unique atmosphere and airy environment saturated with the thinnest dusting of majestic city’s special flavor of its ancient architectural sites and modern science” (*Taktash* 1992: 182-183). The same author wrote about Nadezhda Kashina: “An artist who lived for many years in a sunny land who could create a work so deeply convincing with its national character and typical images, having deeply comprehended all the uniqueness of the the national way of life and lifestyle” (*Taktash* 1982: 73). Analyzing the paintings of Grigory Ulko, Telyab Makhmudov admitted that “in these canvases G. Ulko appears as a master who had a profound knowledge and feeling of the national character” (*Makhmudov* 1993: 267). And, of course,

<sup>6</sup> About the artists of Uzbekistan // Catalog of the Exhibition of Paintings by Artists of Uzbekistan. Moscow: 1934, pp. 6-8.



Paul Gauguin, "Faces of Tahitians", 1899



Usto Mumin, Untitled, 1920s-1930s. (?)

the work was not limited only to the brush and palette knife, the same problem arose when describing, for example, music. In one of the first substantially important works dedicated to the distinction between “national” and “non-national artists” following perestroika, Natalia Yanov-Yanovskaya stated: “For the time being, the efforts of all Russian musicians who came here and forever linked their fate with Uzbekistan (and even those who, while living in Russia, came to Uzbekistan occasionally), concentrated around the problems of *Uzbek* music which involved the search for a nationally characteristic, polyphonic style, and ways to create a new one. “European” genres, mastering the composer’s writing and technique on the basis of traditional monophonic music. They seemed to have abandoned their “Russian” way beforehand, sincerely believing that their mission in the Uzbek republic is gratuitous and noble, fully understanding that they are dealing with a great, yet different art” (Yanov-Yanovskaya 2002: 113). It is easy to see that the semantic structure of these statements has a double meaning. On the one hand, critics in the most positive way testify to the ability of artists to “comprehend national life,” to contribute to the creation of “national schools” and to educate colleagues who came from the “native environment.” However, no matter how deep the knowledge and relationship that linked these artists to the local context, descriptions of their artistic contribution invariably contained connotations that indicated the artists’ outsider status towards “national life” itself.

On the discursive level, Soviet aesthetics found a way to provide vague descriptions of this emerging binary, which threatened potential conflicts. In particular, along with the concept of “national,” scholars and critics have often resorted to a related, yet still different, concept of “*narodnost*.”<sup>7</sup> This is one of the most mysterious Soviet terms, which has no adequate equivalent in English or French. However, it is exactly the distinction between “national character” and “*narodnost*” that reveals the relationship between

<sup>7</sup> According to *Britannica*, “*Narodnost*, doctrine or national principle, the meaning of which has changed over the course of Russian literary criticism. Originally denoting simply literary fidelity to Russia’s distinct cultural heritage, *narodnost*, in the hands of radical critics such as Nikolay Dobrolyubov, came to be the measure of an author’s social responsibility, both in portraying the aspirations of the common people (however these were perceived) and in making literature accessible to the masses. These complementary values of *narodnost* became prescribed elements of Socialist Realism, the officially approved style of writing in the Soviet Union from the early 1930s to the mid-1980s”. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/narodnost>



“national” and “non-national” artists in many texts. Here is another fragment of Telyab Makhmudov’s text about Grigoriy Ulko: “Unlike many artists of the republic, who are more interested in the external national attributes of everyday life and type, G. Ulko goes deep into the creative nature of the national spirit, which is reflected in the *narodnost*’ of his paintings” (Makhmudov 1993: 266).

This description is archetypal. Usto Mumin, Alexander Volkov, Pavel Benkov and other masters of Uzbekistani art of the twentieth century, as a rule, appear in the texts of art critics who deeply felt the “popular character”; understood and fell in love with the local culture; and knew the local life well. It follows from this almost elusive terminological derivation that the “non-national artist” who was conventionally denied the possibility of expressing the “national spirit” directly, was nevertheless able to perceive and love what was related to the *people*.

Petersburg philologist and historian Konstantin Bogdanov devoted a chapter of his book *On Crocodiles in Russia* to the history of the concept of “*narodnost*” in Russian language and culture. According to the researcher, this “vague concept remains in tune with the ideology, verified not by social experience, but by rhetorical abstractions” (Bogdanov 2006: 145). It was because of this that it was suitable for situations where a discursive gap had to be left between the work and the description, which facilitated the entry of the work into social life. Throughout its long evolution, the concept of “*narodnost*” has acquired various connotations, but always implicitly contained a romantic distance between the people and the artist. Within the framework of this distinction, the artist was not part of the people and was outside the masses. Their calling was to capture and understand the “spirit of the people” and then reflect it in their work. The concept of *narodnost*’ has been essential for Russian culture since the 19th century. According to Nikolai Dobrolyubov, whose ideology influenced Soviet aesthetics, “we understand *narodnost*’ [not only] as the ability to depict the beauty of local nature, use apt expression overheard among the people, accurately represent rituals, customs, etc. (...) [but] in order to be a truly popular poet, one needs more. One should be imbued with the spirit of the people, live their life, be on a par with them, discard all the prejudices of social estates, book learning, etc., feel everything with that simple feeling that the people have” (Dobrolyubov 1962: 260). Dobrolyubov’s desire to get closer to the “people” is similar to Gauguin’s Polynesian temptation to live the genuine, full-blooded life of “ordinary people” not

spoiled by civilization, as well as Usto Mumin, who wanted to repeat the Gauguin’s experience in Turkestan. However, the language which was used to describe this idyll indicated the presence of a distance between the subject approaching the “people” and the “people” themselves as an object of interest, cult, love, study and artistic experience. In their fruitless striving to get closer to the “people,” the artists thus resembled Zeno’s Achilles, unable to catch up with the turtle.

However, the scholastic nature of the concepts of “national” and “*narodnyi*” (which was an adjective produced from “*narodnost*” and could be translated as “popular”, i.e. related to “people”) in the conditions of the Asian republics of the USSR allowed for playing with the nuance of meaning. If “national” became a concept almost exclusively tied to ethnicity (with rare exceptions explained by Orientalist stereotypes), then “*narodnyi*” had a more open and inclusive character. For example, although some artists, such as Viktor Ufimtsev, Alexander Volkov or Hovhannes Tatevosyan, were not considered and did not consider themselves “national artists,” they were awarded the title of “People’s Artist of the Uzbek SSR” (“*narodnyi khudozhnik*”) in the mid-1940s. Composers Sergei Vasilenko, Aleksey Kozlovsky, Reingold Glier, Victor Uspensky and others, who played a significant role in the development of musical composition in Uzbekistan, as well as many “non-national” actors and directors of Uzbek theaters and cinematography, became “People’s Artist of the Uzbek SSR.” Generally, this corresponded to the internal logic of the terms since “national” correlated with a narrowly understood ethnicity, and “people’s” in certain circumstances, implied the entire population of the republic.

However, the speculative nature of both concepts allowed critics to implement paradoxical discursive “somersaults” in their usage when changing the focus. From one perspective, when viewed from Moscow, works of the “non-national artists” of Uzbekistan were regarded as “national.” For example, the influential Muscovite art critic Yuriy Kolpinsky, who was in Tashkent during the war years, wrote about Alexander Volkov’s still life paintings that “they are brightly national and show a special decorative originality and that dramatic rendering of color that distinguishes the art of Uzbeks from the art of other peoples of the world” (Taktash 1992: 188). In a similar way, in the last Soviet decades, some magazines from Moscow began to characterize the work of “non-national” authors in other types of art – for example, architects Sergo Sutyagin, Vladimir Spivak, Yuriy Khaldeev or composers Sergei Varelas, Rumil Vildanov, etc.

This same change of emphasis also affected the concept of “narodny”. If within the Central Asian republics the title of “people’s painters” (artists, etc.) was awarded to representatives of all the ethnic groups, the same titles at the federal Soviet level were awarded – with rare exceptions – to the “national cadres.” Of course, this kind of distinction and celebration was primarily a parade of official representations and reflected a consolidated direction of political rather than artistic vectors. Institutional recognition, however, had the inverse effect on artistic practice, providing holders of titles and awards not only with moral authority, but also access to key positions in cultural institutions, which in turn influenced artistic policy and set new aesthetic guidelines for the artist community. It is beyond the scope of this article to consider this story not only on the material of the evolution of

perceptions and terminological derivations, but also on examples of artistic creation itself. It seems that in each type of art the interaction of “non-national” and “national” artists was never been conflict-free, but remained problematic, even if the latent conflict was camouflaged behind specific “internationalist” Soviet social and verbal practices. In different arts, such as music and architecture, visual arts and theater, this happened in its own way, due to the peculiarities of art education and the institutional organization which characterized the functioning of these arts. The analysis of such interaction is particularly effective at the level of microhistories (Chukhovich 2016), but it does not exclude broader generalizations.

The author hopes to return to the consideration of this issue on the basis of the architecture of Uzbekistan in the 1920s-1980s in the near future.

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