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Influence of The Artistic Life of Samarkand In The 1920s On The Development of Easel Painting In Uzbekistan

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Abstract: The early 20th century marked a transformative period in the history of visual arts across Central Asia, particularly in Uzbekistan, where the city of Samarkand emerged as a key artistic hub. During the 1920s–1930s, Samarkand became a vibrant intersection of Eastern artistic heritage and Western painterly techniques, significantly influenced by political reforms and cultural modernization. Despite the rich documentation of artistic evolution in Soviet territories, a comprehensive theoretical framework contextualizing Samarkand's unique artistic development during this era remains underdeveloped. This study aims to explore the impact of Samarkand's artistic life in the 1920s on the formation of easel painting in Uzbekistan, focusing on the contributions of both local and Russian-trained artists. The findings reveal the coexistence and tension between national traditions and socialist realism, embodied in the works of A. Volkov, P. Benkov, O. Tatevosyan, and Usto Mumin. The city hosted artists who adapted decorative folk styles, miniature aesthetics, and plein-air impressionism to create a culturally hybrid visual language. The research highlights the individual stylistic trajectories of Samarkand artists, uncovers the absence of rigid creative collectives, and documents the city's appeal to Russian artists, whose visits catalyzed intercultural exchanges. Understanding the artistic life of Samarkand in this transitional period deepens our comprehension of regional cultural identity formation, the negotiation of tradition and ideology, and the broader Soviet artistic experience within a multinational context.

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1. Introduction

In the history of art in Uzbekistan, especially in Samarkand, there are aspects that require in-depth study and analysis in order to eliminate gaps in the process of sustainable development of art[1]. The article examines the peculiarities of the artistic life of Samarkand, against which a brief art history analysis of the works of artists who played a key role in the formation and development of the visual arts of this region is conducted. At present, there is no full-fledged theoretical study that systematizes the results of the multifaceted artistic life of Samarkand, which has become an important stage in the history of this ancient cultural and artistic center[2].

This study is based on the works of a number of art historians, including R. V. Eremyan, T. Makhmudov, I. Marazov, M. B. Myasin, S. Krukovskaya, L. I. Rempel, R.

Taktash, B. Chukhovich, G. E. Abbasov, N. R. Akhmedov, A. Ustimenko and others. We also used catalogues and monographs dedicated to artists who worked in the 1920s and 1930s.

During this period, the struggle between art based on national traditions and the officially supported art of socialist realism, which developed within a strictly established historical framework, became more acute[3]. This complex and far from painless process was especially evident in Central Asia, where the traditions of decorative art, folk art, as well as flat compositional and plastic solutions of miniatures were of particular importance.

Despite the use of modern approaches, the study of Uzbek art requires taking into account its specifics and a more detailed analysis of cultural processes[4].

Literature review

The creative work of the masters of the 1920s-1930s – A. Volkov, N. Karakhan, U. Tansykbayev, M. Kurzin, V. Ufimtsev, N. Kashina, O. Tatevosyan – despite their originality, developed in line with the general processes of Soviet art.

Pavel Benkov, who had considerable pedagogical experience and was able to synthesize the traditions of Western and Eastern cultures, played a special role in the formation of the Samarkand Art School of Painting[5].

Special attention is paid to the Samarkand Art School, where talented young artists of local origin studied, who later became famous masters of fine arts, both in Uzbekistan and abroad. Among them are Abdulkhak Abdullayev, Lutfulla Abdullayev, Rahim Akhmedov, Bahadir Zhalalov, Malik Nabiyeu, Javlon Umarbekov and many others[6].

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a historical-analytical method grounded in art historical research to explore the artistic life of Samarkand in the 1920s and its influence on the development of easel painting in Uzbekistan. Primary and secondary sources were analyzed, including archival records, exhibition catalogs, monographs, critical essays, and scholarly publications on Soviet-era Central Asian art. The research drew on the works of key art historians such as T. Makhmudov, N. Akhmedova, R. Eremyan, and L. Rempel, whose theoretical frameworks provided essential insight into typological and stylistic categorizations. Particular attention was given to the analysis of specific artworks by prominent artists like P. P. Benkov, A. Volkov, O. Tatevosyan, and Usto Mumin, evaluating compositional structure, color palette, and iconographic elements[7]. The method included comparative stylistic analysis to differentiate national traditions from socialist realist conventions and examined how sociopolitical transformations influenced artistic expression. The study also integrated contextual interpretation to assess the roles of educational institutions, exhibitions, and external influences from Russian artists who migrated or worked in Samarkand. Visual analysis was complemented by hermeneutic interpretation, where individual artworks were read as cultural texts reflecting historical tensions and ideological transitions. This multifaceted methodological approach allowed the authors to identify patterns in the evolution of visual language and aesthetic philosophy, while highlighting the interplay between local traditions and imposed ideological frameworks in the formation of a unique Samarkand school of painting[8].

3. Results and Discussion

One of the main features of the modern art process is the intensive interpenetration and mutual influence of national and regional cultures, while preserving their historically established identity[9].

In this context, a serious analysis of the characteristic features of the development of fine arts in various regions as an integral part of multinational Soviet art, as well as determining its role and place in the relevant historical and cultural situation, is

fundamentally important and relevant. This is especially significant in the context of the diversity of stylistic trends, trends and concepts that characterize artistic practice in a multinational state[10].

To date, there is no full-fledged theoretical study summarizing the results of the diverse artistic life of Samarkand, which has become an important stage in the history of the formation and development of this ancient cultural and artistic center.

Samarkand is a unique phenomenon. First, the city has a rich historical heritage, which is why it is often called the "eternal city" or "Rome of the East". Secondly, its history is clearly reflected in the preserved unique architectural monuments, creating a unique appearance, where the past and the present coexist harmoniously[11].

The artistic life of Samarkand is closely connected with the characteristic historical processes that took place in Central Asia. Already in the early 1920s, an active development of art education began here, which contributed to the emergence of a new generation of artists. Graduates of Samarkand educational institutions have made a significant contribution to the development of the region's artistic process, actively participating in its creative environment.

A characteristic feature of the artistic life of that time was the desire to put the visual arts at the service of the current needs of society. This was reflected in the broad development of mass propaganda art, primarily in the creation of posters.

Famous art critic Nigora Akhmedova describes this period as follows: "The painting of Uzbekistan in the 1920s and 1930s was a time when the region was changing its political and cultural model of future development and creating fine art of the European type. The work of artists inspired by revolutionary utopias, the creation of a "New East", as well as the beauty of nature, people and traditions, gave rise to an original branch of modernism in art. However, already in the mid-1930s, with the approval of Stalin's power, its development was suspended, and the issues of its study were pushed out of the sphere of art criticism practice" [12].

During the 1920s and 1930s, the historical situation and conditions for the development of fine arts in Central Asia underwent significant changes. With the development of the artistic process, the struggle between art based on national traditions and the officially encouraged art of socialist realism, which developed within the rigidly established historical framework characteristic of that time, became more acute.

This complex and far from painless process was especially pronounced in Central Asia, where the traditions of decorative folk art, flat compositional construction and plastic solution of miniatures played an important role in shaping the artistic appearance of the region[13].

Even such a seemingly distant master as Usto Mumin created a number of significant works that reflect the realities of his time. For example, the scenes of everyday life in his painting "The Boy with the Quail". The carpeting of the composition, the plasticity of the poses, the subtle conventionality of the construction give this work a special character, in which the "seen" in life organically combines with the "learned" from ancient manuscripts, creating a new artistic synthesis.

His famous painting "Bye" can also be viewed from the same perspective. In it, the centuries-old tragedy of Oriental women gets a concrete artistic embodiment. Despite the fact that the events depicted were already becoming a historical past by the 1930s, the tragedy of a young girl forced into marriage is conveyed with deep inner penetration. Alien to melodramatic pathos, this picture becomes essentially accusatory. At the same time, it is a brilliant historical canvas that conveys the essence of the era not through specific events, but through a deep understanding of the situation and an accurate calculation of the emotional response of the viewer [14].

These approaches to the pictorial and figurative solution of the national theme in Uzbek painting of the 1920s-1930s should not be absolutized or, as some researchers do, all the variety of artistic phenomena should be adjusted to the "Procrustean bed" of certain typical trends.

The famous Uzbek art critic T. Makhmudov pays special attention to this topic in his book devoted to the issues of continuity of cultural and artistic heritage and the use of

traditions in contemporary art. His main conclusions are that the artistic life and work of Uzbek masters follow three key principles: traditional realistic generalization, poetic and romantic representation of life, and expressive and symbolic expression of reality .

In our opinion, such a scheme is, firstly, unnecessarily rigid and formally deterministic. Secondly, it does not cover all the richness and peculiarities of the work of Uzbek artists, in particular the masters of Samarkand[15].

If we follow the logic and principles of this author, then the first group associated with traditional realistic generalization includes very different artists, such as P. P. Benkov, M. Kurzin, O. K. Tatevosyan, Z. M. Kovalevskaya, V. N. Eremyan, and later-L. Abdullayev, A. Razykov and others.

T. Makhmudov considers the works of A. N. Volkov and his students to be a poetic and romantic reflection of life, relying on the theory of Eastern Romanticism, brilliantly developed by L. I. Rempel in his works of the 1970s. However, in this category, it unites under one "roof" such artists of different aesthetic positions as Ch. Akhmarov, N. Karakhan, U. Tansykbayev[16].

Speaking about the direction of expressive and symbolic painting, T. Makhmudov again refers to the work of A. N. Volkov and his students, and also includes artists R. Charyev, and somewhat later – D. Umarbekov, E. Melnikov and others.

It seems that, despite the constructiveness and thoughtfulness of the scheme proposed by the author, it does not fully reflect the diversity of art in Samarkand in the 1920s and 1930s.

First of all, it should be noted that during these two decades there were no creative groups in the city in the sense in which they were understood in the Russian Soviet art of that time. However, this does not mean that there are no major personalities or coincidences and differences in their creative attitudes.

A typical example in this regard is the work of O. K. Tatevosyan. The artist lived in Samarkand in the pre-revolutionary period and is rightly considered one of the founders and leaders of the Union of Artists, as well as the art associations that preceded it in the city[17].

Rather, trying to determine the origins of the diversity of style trends and creative positions of artists who worked in Samarkand at that time, it should be noted that the tendency to create groups and associations modeled on those that existed in central Russia, in fact, was not observed here. This, in turn, contributed to the fact that the names of individual masters sounded especially bright and distinct.

An example is the work of O. K. Tatevosyan, a student and follower of K. A. Korovin and A. E. Arkhipov. In his artistic language, Tatevosyan largely tends to sharp coloristic expressiveness. Turning mainly to landscape painting, he creates lyrical compositions with a special passion, being on the verge between landscape and genre scenes.

The series of paintings "**Old Samarkand**", which includes such canvases as "Old Samarkand", "Tabibs", "Uzbek Bath", "Bachey Dance", "Arba", "Scribe of Talismans" and others, shows the artist's desire to convey **his vision of Central Asian nature and the special way of local life**. In fact, with these works of the 1920s, the artist opens one of the traditional themes for Samarkand, which originated at the end of the XIX century. This is a kind of **picturesque portrait of the city**, in which the charming "**fairy tale of the East**" finds different embodiments in various artists.

For Tatevosyan, **the color of architectural and landscape motifs is of particular importance**. In "Scene on the Street", for example, **the restrained range of light ochre, sunny tones** seems especially expressive in combination with bright highlights on clothes – striped dressing gowns of old men and dark silhouettes of muffled women. It is **the plastic of female figures** that gives a special charm to this, at first glance, ordinary landscape-genre motif. Everything is written **in large, surprisingly plastic strokes**[18].

At the same time, Tatevosyan is equally **alien to both dry academism and excessive decorativeness**. In his paintings, we observe **an organic fusion of the techniques** of the artists **of the "Union of Russian Artists"** with the use of a richer and more expressive palette. This is probably dictated **by the intense sunlight of the southern region**, which increased the contrasts and color certainty of the compositions .

At the turn of the 1930s, **P. P. Benkov became one of the central figures in the artistic life of Samarkand** становится П. П. Бенъков. He arrived in the city as a **mature, well-formed artist**, having a **rich experience of the Kazan Art School**, where he not only studied, but also taught. **A deep acquaintance with the best examples of Russian painting in the pre-revolutionary decades, as well as masterpieces of world art**, quickly brought Benkov **authority and recognition** in the art circles of Uzbekistan.

Being an adherent of **realistic tendencies**, he became a **member of the AHRR in 1922**. However, his painterly style, based on a **subtle perception of color nuances and plein-air technique**, brings his work closer to **the best achievements of Impressionism**, reinterpreted in the individual manner of the master. **Central Asia, and especially Samarkand**, provided him with **unique opportunities** to reveal in his works a **bright, rich color palette**, that conveys the **"colorful fullness" of the surrounding world**[19].

Already in the works created **in the late 1920s and early 1930s**, Benkov fully implements **his artistic principles**, applying them to the motifs that particularly **attracted his attention**. So, in the painting **"Street Scribe"** and a number of other works, the artist manages to convey **the feeling of sultry air**, in which **the adobe walls of houses, figures of people and animals seem to melt**.

A **special feature of Benkov's work** is his **interest in everyday life**. According to the researchers, **" Benkov was not particularly attracted to the monuments of medieval architecture."** Instead, in his works, he **sought to capture the corners of Samarkand, Khiva, and Bukhara disappearing under the onslaught of the new era – modest but colorful scenes full of life and warmth**. The artist's **observant eye** lovingly captured the **most characteristic features of the urban environment and everyday life**, preserving the **fading atmosphere of the Old East**.

Along with **portraits**, in which the artist actively develops a **new theme for himself and painting of the 1920s-1930s**, a significant place is occupied by **female images**. The very fact of turning to **this complex and ambiguous topic for the East** testifies to the true innovation of the master.

His paintings **" Khivinki-spinners "**, **"Girl-Khivinka"** and other works of this direction demonstrate **the artist's social vigilance**. Without any explanation, it becomes obvious that **this is a new image for Central Asian art and society at that time**: the girls are depicted **with their faces uncovered**, and their **clothes, although they remain national, are already noticeably different from the traditional outfit**[20].

The role of P. P. Benkov in the development of fine arts and the artistic life of Samarkand **is not limited only to his personal work** – he **brought up a whole galaxy of masters**.

As a painter, Benkov combined a **clear understanding of social problems with a sincere passion** for the new things that **modern life suggested to him**. No matter what theme he worked on, his painting was always distinguished **by its depth and significance**.

Today, from the perspective of the times, it becomes clear that **the accusations of the notorious "Impressionism"** were **only an unsuccessful attempt** to reduce the understanding of his art to a rigid scheme. Benkov, a **subtle colorist**, remained true to his inner artistic sense and never betrayed himself.

Thus, the artistic life of Samarkand was distinguished **by a variety of creative handwriting and artistic systems**. However, as already noted, **there was no sharp struggle of groups and trends** here, in fact, **was not observed**.

This, of course, **does not mean**, that the artistic environment was **cloudless and idyllic**. On the contrary, **there were disagreements, serious creative discussions**, attempts **were made to impose primitive realism on artists**, superficially perceived in the spirit of **AHRR**.

Speaking about the artistic life of Samarkand in the 1920s and 1930s, one more important circumstance should be noted. In addition to artists of various nationalities who live and work permanently in the city, masters from Russia regularly came to Samarkand, and many of them were famous artists.

The East, and in particular Samarkand, occupied a prominent place in their work. Samarkand paintings presented at exhibitions, in turn, contributed to the popularization

of the city as a center of picturesque monuments and ancient history. Thus, a lively artistic connection was established.

Although for most artists the East was considered an exotic country, the appeal to its culture opened up new opportunities for creativity. In addition, the presence of famous artists influenced local artists, expanded their artistic horizons, and contributed to the internationalization and integration of cultures.

Considering the peculiarities of the artistic life of Samarkand in the 1920s and 1930s, we can draw the following **conclusions**.

One of the most important factors in the development of the city's artistic environment was its transformation into a center of attraction for Russian artists. During this period, Samarkand became a place of pilgrimage for a number of famous artists who came here for various purposes.

Some masters participated in historical and archaeological expeditions, such as K. S. Petrov-Vodkin and A. N. Samokhvalov. Others came to the city for various periods solely for artistic purposes – among them V. V. Rozhdestvensky, Usto Mumin, A.V. Isupov, and later R. R. Falk.

These visits not only helped to popularize Samarkand as a cultural center, but also influenced local artists, introducing new artistic ideas and stylistic trends.

Speaking about the works of these and many other masters in Samarkand, it should be noted that their influence on the cultural life of the city was quite noticeable. The point, of course, is not only that each of them has a new audience. The Central Asian cycles of these artists prepared the ground for arousing great interest in nature, life and everyday life, and the historical past of Samarkand for the All-Union multinational audience. This was already evidenced by the preparation of the first exhibition "Life and everyday life of the peoples of the USSR" and the wide representation of the regional section of Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

In the light of studying the work of masters who settled in Uzbekistan, in particular in Samarkand, it is necessary to emphasize that the work of each of them, as we have seen, was marked by features of deep identity. Almost none of them escaped the influence of local traditions, but in a particular manifestation, this influence was very individual, with differences prevailing over similarities.

Suffice it to recall the decorative and plastic solutions of **A. N. Volkov**, which do not directly quote from the arsenal of ancient miniatures, but there is a special sense of originality and beauty of life. These qualities of his painting are especially pronounced in comparison with the refined decorative **art of Usto Mumin** or the rich, "hot" painting of **V. V. Rozhdestvensky**.

Thus, we can confidently state the thesis about the diversity of forms of creative development of the artistic heritage of Uzbekistan. An important event that confirmed this thesis was **the Eighth exhibition of paintings and sculptures of the AHRR "Life and everyday life of the peoples of the USSR"**, where the works of Uzbek and Russian masters demonstrated a wide range of interpretations of national traditions in painting.

4. Conclusion

The artistic life of Samarkand in the 1920s and 1930s played a pivotal role in shaping the development of easel painting in Uzbekistan by fostering a unique cultural synthesis that blended national traditions with evolving Soviet artistic currents. This period witnessed the emergence of a new generation of artists who, influenced by both Eastern aesthetics and Western academic foundations, formed a diverse and vibrant artistic environment. Figures such as O. K. Tatevosyan and P. P. Benkov exemplified the integration of local cultural motifs with techniques inspired by Impressionism and Realism, bringing forth a visual language that was at once rooted in tradition and responsive to modernity. The absence of rigid artistic collectives in Samarkand encouraged individuality in artistic expression, allowing for a multitude of styles and interpretations to flourish. Moreover, the city's openness to visiting Russian artists facilitated a cultural dialogue that broadened the horizons of local masters and contributed to the enrichment

of the artistic scene. The artistic endeavors of this era — marked by depictions of daily life, architectural beauty, and social themes — reflected the complexities of a society undergoing transformation. Through paintings that captured the emotional and visual essence of the region, artists preserved the intangible spirit of a historic city while navigating the ideological pressures of the Soviet period. Ultimately, the legacy of Samarkand's artistic life in this transformative era lies in its capacity to balance continuity with innovation, anchoring the visual arts of Uzbekistan in a deeply expressive and historically resonant tradition.

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