

# COMPREHENSION OF NEW FORMS IN ART OF UZBEKISTAN. THE UZBEK CONTEMPORARY ART

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**Abstract:** *In the given article theoretical aspects of development of the Uzbek contemporary art are considered. Following specialists’ thesis who are artists, curators, art critics, the author reveals current state and problems, which take place in development of contemporary art in the country. The ways of ability of contemporary art in co-existing with national artistic traditions where the history, spiritual and religious mentality of artists are weaved. What is the place of the contemporary art in Uzbekistan, which shows some powerful dynamics in social economic development?*

**Key words:** *contemporary art, modernism, post modernism, actual art, conceptual art, Dadaism, minimalism, socialist realism, socialist romantism, harsh style, constructivism, avant-garde, new experimental forms of art, scenography.*

## INTRODUCTION

The term “Contemporary art” which, since 50-ies of last century hugely conquered the art space throughout the world, is settled in new spaces, strengthening its positions in the counties where due to circumstances, its development wasn’t on high level.

Uzbekistan, having rich but complicated history of fine art development, couldn’t stay in shadow of modern artistic processes.

In the period which was called by the president Sh.Mirziyaev as “Third Renaissance” the country survives big changes in all social spheres. The republic became more open to the world with friendly foreign affairs and beneficially developing of economy. These changes influenced to comprehension of current artistic tendencies. Reforms in all spheres, implemented by the government gave a push to development of interesting processes taking place in the Uzbek contemporary art.

However, with this, it would sound not correct to say that contemporary art didn’t exist. It existed earlier certainly, in a form of underground which was going opposite to officially declared cultural politics, taking its beginning from Soviet period.

## THE MAIN RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The term itself, as “Contemporary art” or “Actual art” was appropriated by the artistic elite when such names as A.Akhunov, A.Nikolaev, J.Usmanov and others, came to the arena of artistic life of the country. Further, thanks to efforts of art critic and specialist on contemporary art N.Akhmedova, in 2001 the first international biennale of contemporary art was initiated where artists of actual art got an opportunity to express themselves on official platforms. It became good news for some recognition of new forms of art in official cultural policy of Uzbekistan since its independence.

However, contemporary art and its forms is still a kind of alternative form of the artistic culture with a number of problems existing on its way of development.

In the context of the world art, contemporary art had appeared since 50-ies of twentieth century, when representatives of Dada trend, with their strange aggressive manner to reflect of the surroundings came to the art scene of post war period. They tent to ruin established aesthetic stereotypes of visual culture of the past. Exactly with their raged filing, the concepts as “readymade” (using items of environment and everyday life as art objects), collages where the artists strove to destroy two dimensional space of canvas restricted by a frame, weird installations from garbage, food and metal and etc. Manifest of denying – this term substituted usual narrative in description and in comprehension of art object, where events taking place in the world, social and political changes coerced artists to searching of new solutions and forms of expression.

Returning to reality of Uzbekistan, the process of searching and representation of contemporary artistic methods endured a number of ethical problems.

Due to historical facts development of the Uzbek fine art went in paradigm of tendencies of the Russian academic and realistic art. The realism itself was taken as a basis of the pictorial methods.

Beginning from 80-ies of twentieth century the tendencies of the world art influenced to the art process in Uzbekistan in sense of artists’ escaping to abstractive symbolism and stylisation. This form of pictorial representation became an alternative to the line of socialist realism proclaimed by the government.

In the epoch of independence, a massive challenge of national self-definition and national identity impacted to the artistic language in general. The principals of socialist realism were transformed to narratives of the new epoch representing mostly an official art. As for secular art, possessing more freedom in choosing themes, found its development in many representative forms. According to opinion of Akbar Khakimov, which he gives in his book “Art history of Uzbekistan” exactly bigger freedom of expression which became available in the independence period, called appearing of variety of styles and trends in the fine art. [1.2.]

Contemporary art which was developing in the period, Khakimov tends to relate to forms of non-figurative painting and installations. Appearing of the given forms of visual embodiment in creation, the author sees in widening of creative outlook of artists, their desire to come out of well-known norms. [1.2.] [2.1.]

Actually, in the first years of independence, contemporary forms of art began to attract attention of

artists, straightening to come out of the frames of traditional decisions. In this sense, an establishing of Biennale of contemporary art by the Art academy of Uzbekistan, appeared to be a big step in a kind of legalisation of these forms from side of official cultural policy. The positive dynamics was expressed in a fact the term of “contemporary art” desists to be something alienated, doubtful, improper to local artistic traditions. The artists had an opportunity to visit cultural events abroad, which brought more international contacts. In this plan the biennale plays its role, as according to tradition, lots of foreign visitors are invited to the event.

A process of “adaptation” of contemporary art to the soil of local mentality – this is a question by which, specialists studying the given sphere are interesting in. For many art lovers as well as for some artists themselves, contemporary art with its “non-traditional” form of expression, still remains in field of misunderstanding and denying.

By Nigora Akhmedova, according to western art methodology contemporary art or actual art are related to non-traditional kinds of art, while traditional kinds are paintings, graphics, sculpture and etc. In Uzbekistan folk and decorative applied arts are traditional art, which determines as authentic form of art for the given region, while (European) paintings, graphics and sculpture are “introduced” but taken toots in consciousness of the society, which almost became “traditional” forms [1.1.].

Contemporary art, oppositely, in the light of the given conclusions, stays in a row with no traditional forms of art. However, due to circumstances, it linked with not sufficient understanding of conceptual basics of contemporary art by local art elite, - art critics and artists themselves from the one hand and small support of the artists who works in the field by managing institutions from the other hand. [2.3.]

For most of traditional artists, who decided to try themselves in contemporary art, the question of its perception and comprehension lies on surface, i.e. this is to address to external forms of its representation. As a result, most of their works, positioning as contemporary art items, change just their external form, leaving content unchangeable. This could be traced on examples of installations of the artists, using often symbols, inherent from postmodern art of Uzbekistan, like birds, pomegranates, leaves, and etc., i.e. the narrative of abstracting as a form of life contemplating, is leaving unchangeable, differing just presentation, transferring sense from two-dimensional surface of canvas to three-dimensional installation.

A well-known Canadian art critic B.Chukhovich, who has the uzbek roots, marked a tendency of abstractiveness and indifference of main trends of the Uzbek painting, referring to common political situation and the artists’ unwillingness to reflect social themes. [2.8] But the political background – is not the only factor of the “non-acceptance” phenomenon of the new (which is not new in the West) experimental language of artistic expression. In opinion of the article’s author, the reason is evolution of so called secular art in Uzbekistan, which begins from “invasion” of Russian orientalist in early XX century with their academic art,

as well as Russian realists, who set the path for academic realism traditions in the soviet period, where main streams were social realism and social romanticism.

An ideological background also influences on the whole picture of perceiving of contemporary art, which comes far from soviet times, when western art, associated with contemporary art, embodies a decline of best traditions of the world art, making it be equal with shocking and hackwork.

At the same time, on the West, Clement Greenberg, a famous American art theorist, inspired by Marksist’ ideas, in his work “Avant guard and Kitch” brings an intriguing thesis that contemporary art (beginning its way from Avant guard streams of XX century) tends to continue traditions of academic arts but in new conditions, and is a product of revolution of critical thinking. While the Kitch as an “academized” simulacra of a real culture, is a product of industrialization and urbanization of labour class, who doesn’t possess intellectual resources for realization of progressive culture, invented for the mass consumption. [2.7.]

Moreover, Greenberg sounded artists’ position, who is dependent on market and state and is bound to “golden umbilical cord”. [2.7.]

Interpreting his thesis and taking into account local conditions, one can say that the given statements find a feedback in current situation, when objects of contemporary art commercially disadvantageous while traditional art has always chance to be monetized. But at the same time, the artists strive to be in the world trends and hence we have some forms of appropriation of methods of contemporary art to the ground of acknowledged principals of expression. As it was mentioned above, the artists just adopt external representative features from contemporary art works, like video arts, installations and etc., but not actually changing contents and conceptions they use in traditional arts, thus, we have the same symbolic and contemplating conceptions.

Should contemporary art be social? This question finds its reflection on the ground of artistic processes taking place in Uzbekistan and in other states where the artistic culture is a subject of a control from side of government. If to observe pre-history of forming of contemporary art beginning from 20ies-30ies years from appearing of the Avant guard arts which reflected in a whole, strong social and political shifting in countries, and further, to evaluate forms of contemporary art in 40ies-50ies in the West, where a reflection of artists to surrounding social environment was a foundation of the contemporary art forming, then the question eliminates by itself.

However, in the process of changing of paradigm of contemporary art in the world, where in 60ies-80-is the artists interpreted social changes through a prism of their own existential experience, on the example of abstract expressionism, minimalism and conceptual art, where, according to the words of art critic Michael Fried “conception substituted object” (Julie Baumgardner, “How 1960’s most iconic artists made art

Contemporary”)), it became more tranquil in visual methods but less social. [2.6.]

In general, there shouldn't be any thematic frames for contemporary art, as well as for any other kind of art. However, it should be marked that contemporary art as a cultural layer based exactly on social basement. Is contemporary art in Uzbekistan social? There is the only answer – it's different. On the one hand it is narrative –contemplating, on the other hand, there are some examples which have social background.

One of the well-known curators and contemporary art experts Normurod Negmatov claims that contemporary art in the country began its development from soviet times, being represented by social canvases of Samarkand artist Abdullo Vakhobov and his adherents, where the given artists, going against official art, strived to find other forms of artistic expression, including verbal forms, texts, collages and etc. [3.1.]

Creativity of Vyacheslav Akhunov, who is considered to be a Maitre of the Uzbek contemporary art, who also has a title of “informal rebel”, cannot be separated from social theme. But he was one of the “pioneers” who confronted to the cultural policy and ideology.

One of his last sensational projects is the “Pakhta” (Cotton) exhibition, which got together conceptual artists, photographers and filmmakers. It touched a theme of cotton or “cotton slavery” as a phenomenon of colonial heritage, which left from the USSR times. The project was fulfilled in a deep social context, and every spectator had an opportunity to discuss and reveal his position on the theme, which touched on problems of ecology, ethics, compulsory labour and etc. [2.4.]

Speaking about variety of contemporary art in Uzbekistan, Nigora Akhmedova underlines that art not always expresses the whole national mentality but reflects some of its facets. Analysing creativity of well-known actual art artist Jamol Usmanov, she refers his conception, which directed to Sufi contemplation, to deep spiritual traditions of Islam. Not denying specialties of the national mentality, the author claims not to unify the art in the frames of “special mentality” and the art will always reflect some or another national features. Nigora Akhmedova is convinced that exactly a genial coupling of national and universal is the best result. [2.3.]

What are perspectives and challenges for development of contemporary art in Uzbekistan?

According to Normurod Negmatov, for this moment the state is not a bad. He characterized it as “moving in a normal outline”. Being experienced curator and researcher of contemporary art, Normurod traces tendencies of its development from soviet period, when the art was called no contemporary but “dissident”, “informal” and etc. [3.1.] Normurod is inclined to substitute the term itself to “new experimental forms of art”. However, this kind of art becomes new and experimental exactly on local artistic plants. [3.1.]

Under perspectives of development, Negmatov implies common tendencies, which are not uniform. In other words, development of contemporary art in regions goes more intensively then in the capital. These regional centres are Samarkand, Bukhara, Karakalpakstan. Normurod explains this phenomenon with less influence of central institutions to the local artistic elite as well as ability of artists to cooperate their straights with officials. [3.1.]

With this, rising interest from side of young artists to forms of contemporary art is marked. This fact is confirmed by various art events, being held in Nukus (Karakalpakstan) under the patronage of the local branch of art academy of Uzbekistan, and also in experimental art galleries of Samarkand (Aysel gallery) and the museums union of Bukhara. (From private discussions with Normurod Negmanov, 2023) [3.1.]

Among most important challenges linked with development of contemporary art in Uzbekistan, almost all authors claim two main problems.

First one is – this is implanting in education institutions of traditional kinds of arts, as academic painting and drawing, traditional graphics, sculpture and etc., by this, ignoring other forms of representativeness. [2.3.] [3.1.]

The other problem, certainly, an absence of financial basement, sponsorship and philanthropy in general. Contemporary art artists more of others need in additional means of support, as in most part, their art works cannot be monetized, comparing to traditional art works.

According to opinion of two biggest curators and experts – Nigora Akhmedova and Normurod Negmanov, possible solving of problems of development and promotion of contemporary art is in involving of specialists and audience to the process of promoting, researching and representing of the given kind of art. Special platforms or clusters should be created in order to give an opportunity to discuss, to analyse and learn the art. The function of governmental institutions of culture should not be restricted only by information support, but providing with resources they possess for wide usage. [2.3.] [3.1.]

But at the same time, it's necessary to reconsider the methodology of education in artistic institutions, schematizing theoretical knowledge among art specialists – art critics and art managers, as well among students. Normurod Negmatov has more tough position on this question, claiming that the present methodology of straightening of traditional approach to art education and to learning the art theory, is a kind of a colonial approach, which propagandizes outdated European academic education. [3.1.]

Nigora Akhmedova pays an attention to the rising of generation of curators – proactive people, who is able to fulfil tendencies in the world art, not just some theorists “who quietly attends exhibitions”. [2.3.]

Briefly, as a summary, a number of statements can be brought.

- Contemporary art in Uzbekistan develops and there are not huge obstacles for its development. Interest to new experimental forms of art increases both from side of artists and from side of art theorists.

- Contemporary art develops more in regions than in the capital, where culture institutions don't prohibit it but don't support it properly.

- In the whole, the trend of contemporary art in Uzbekistan doesn't have a direct social context, if only it is a conception of an artist himself.

- There is one of the main problems related to contemporary art development, is lack of awareness about the them both among artists and among art critics. Hence, a stereotype is forming that contemporary art is a western product, which runs counter to the national mentality.

- In order to understand and comprehend more deeply new forms in art, it's necessary to raise the level of education in the art institutions and to change a methodological approach in art studying.

- It's necessary to create some platforms and clusters for opportunity to discuss widely contemporary art exhibitions and projects not only by art specialists but also by an audience who is interested in art.

- By the initiating and creating of contemporary art projects, the role of curators must be straightened.

- Also, in the opinion of the article's author, it's necessary to develop international spaces on specialists' exchange. Governmental or private foundations grants should be initiated in order artists and curators to visit art events and institutions abroad. In its turn, foreign art specialists should be invited to Uzbekistan.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it may be said that the state of contemporary art in Uzbekistan is estimated as a stage of its dynamic development. However, with interesting samples, regular projects, which are represented by local specialists and curators, raising interest of young artists to contemporary art, there are a number of objective problems. In particular, there is lack of fundamental knowledge about the history of contemporary art, not developed institute of curatorship, and some rejection by artists of the new forms of art, as well as due to established stereotypes there are problems of funding/sponsorship. But these problems can be solved, that means there is a prospective to see on art exhibitions more projects of artists who use experimental and actual for our times visual language.

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