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REPRESSIVE PROCESSES AGAINST ARTISTS OF UZBEKISTAN IN 1930S

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to overview the works and existing trends in the arts of senior generation of artists in the period 1920s – 1950s when the party officials exercised the strictest control over the Soviet artists.

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INTRODUCTION

In the early 20th century, due to ongoing political transformations the society of Central Asia had to constantly adjust its social and cultural development. Indeed, at this period, the territory of modern Uzbekistan, has undergone complex contradictory processes in the sphere of social life. It was caused by political events which took place in the region after the 1917 revolution and which accelerated the process of shaping a new social context. The people found themselves 'torn off' from the uniform Eastern Muslim civilization and had been attached to the fundamentally different Russian-European type of culture. National culture was developing, but throughout the entire Soviet period was adjusted to the views of communistic ideology and was confined in the rigid frameworks. During the period of transformation and reforms, social sciences, including the historical studies, evolved in accordance with the Soviet frameworks and guidelines. The history was highly ideologized, deviated from the real life. As is known, the art of socialist realism, as a world-outlook method of artistic creativity, was considered by the Bolshevik authorities like a basic element in their ideological and cultural policy, "being in conformity with handling the problems of building the socialism" and was embedded into artistic creativity by aggressive tools of state policy, including censorship.

During the Soviet regime, art historians and the artists quite often played a very important role in the cultural policy. As is known, a certain group of artists made efforts to co-operate with the authorities, another one, on the contrary, strived to release from their pressure. At that, some artists sincerely or due to other motivations served the authorities, the others, sometimes making a sacrifice of their personal well-being, freedom, and even life, braved the regime and public opinion. Serious artists, especially of the senior generation, with the developed ideological and esthetic positions, such as A. Volkov, Ufimzey, M. Kurzin, Z.Kovalevskaya, V. Eremyan, didn't make a compromise and kept an individual creative originality. The political ruling establishment on the one hand saw in art workers the group of people oppositional to the regime, and on the other hand, considered the art workers as an extremely indispensable ally in social, political, ideological spheres. The attitude of the authorities to the artists was dual: from severe reprisals to rendering any possible support. By means of arts the authorities tried to change the basic fragments of the national picture of the world, distorting it and mythologizing, which was established through administrative means and measures, violence together with encouragements and rewards. It is remarkable that among them, there were both representatives of art *beau monde* of the republic serving to the official authorities, and promoting and sharing the ideological views and values of the regime, their activities included shaping new "socialist" forms of art. Along with them it is possible to observe the individuals, who were trying to oppose (in an open or latent form) to the instrumentalization

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

In the 1920s – 1950s, the party officials exercised the strictest control over the Soviet artists. Party officials kept a sharp lookout in order that “ideologically harmful” and “alien to people” works of art despite their high artistic merits would never see the light. In the period between the 1940s and 1950s the artistic groups (collectives) were divided into conflicting groups. Contradictions between the representatives of creative professions arose as a result of the collision of personal ambitions and different understandings by the artists of their professional functions. The main motive of the behavior of artists was competition for customers. In the years of Stalinism, this struggle took the most unexpected forms and was conducted in a hidden way: through denunciation, the signal “to the top” about the political, ideological, aesthetic or household unreliability of competitors. In the 1930s, the party officials began strictest control over the Soviet artists. Party officials kept a sharp lookout in order that “ideologically harmful” and “alien to people” works of art despite their high artistic merits would never see the light. State censorship subjected to persecution and criticized those artists who sought to break away from the trappings of manifestations of life and penetrate deeply into its essence through creating it by their own creative imagination. Many artists, especially those of the older generation, were unwilling to compromise and kept their personal credo. In their pictures, A. Volkov, A. Nikolayev, M. Kurzin, O. Tatevosyan and others, despite the demands of the Soviet ideology, provided a real interpretation of the traditional way of life of the people of Uzbekistan of their time.

The 1933-1937 accounting records of the Organizing Committee of the SSKh of Uzbekistan stated that “the paintings produced by the artists, were not indicative of their struggle for realism. The Republican exhibition of artists of Uzbekistan (1932) showed the works, which distorted the Soviet reality beyond recognition (works by M. Kurzin, N. Kashina, A. Volkov, E. Koravay). They didn't make a compromise and kept an individual creative originality. Artists tried to oppose (in an open or latent form) to the instrumentalization of art, and owing to this and other reasons those individuals found themselves forced out of public art life. Bright individualism of these artists began to interfere with the state ideology. The state authorities pursued a policy of repression against those, who were in opposition to the existing regime. The principal motivations of blaming many talented artists were standard: political shortsightedness, ideological vagueness, petty-bourgeois deviation in creative work, organization of groups and contacts with the counter-revolutionary nationalists. Also the political leadership of the country showed a negative attitude to art associations, as they were regarded as institutions of “bourgeois art”. Avant-

gardism, the artistic trend of the 1920s-30s, and its representatives as “manifestation of formalism and the influence of Western art” were banned in the late 1930s. In compliance with the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks – the Central Committee of the CPSU (B) – dated April 23, 1932, “On Restructuring of Literary and Artistic Organizations”, the artistic communities in Uzbekistan were reorganized. In this period there were developed institutional frameworks, methods, and forms of management of creative associations' activity.

Thus, the republican newspaper “Pravda Vostoka” (“The Truth of the East”) on 17 January 1930 published a feuilleton of Michael Donetsky (under a pen-name A. Ksandr) “mAKHrovayareaktsiya pod krasnoietiketkoi” (“Arrant reaction under the red label”). The feuilleton was directed against the artists E. G. Burtsev and I. S. Kazakov, in which they were accused of that at lessons in the studio the students draw the head of Christ and the Apostle Paul. Then, based on the same author's article “Iskopaemoye” (“Antediluvians”), the GPU (General Political Office) initiated case № 3950 on accusation of E. G. Burtsev and I. S. Kazakov according to Clause 10-66 and Clause 142 of the UzSSR Criminal Code. E. G. Burtsev and I. S. Kazakov were a leaders of first creative association of artists in Uzbekistan “Association of revolutionist artists (AKhR)”. A striking example of the censorship policy is the fate of V. Rozhdestvensky. “The reason for the dismissal and accusation of committing an anti-Soviet act by the artist V. Rozhdestvensky, who headed the art department of the satirical magazine “Mushtum”, was finding in a drawing the “resemblance of the German Schutzman's cap badge with the Soviet star”. V. Rozhdestvensky explained in his statement that “resemblance” happened only because of the fact that he worked with his left hand, having lost his right hand a few years ago due to illness, that is why the characteristic feature of his drawing style were acute angles and sharp lines.

V. Rozhdestvensky “with all the harshness and severity” was charged with “negligence in the performance of political cartoons”, because “a graphic artist has to work extremely well and accurately, in order that none of hidden class enemies could take advantage of his mistakes”. On 5 September 1937, V. Rozhdestvensky was evict out of his post of the editor of the magazine “Mushtum” after 15 years of honest and excellent work, with the following wording in the administrative order: “For publishing an anti-Soviet cartoon, for nonchalant attitude to work”. Repressive processes touched M. I. Kurzin, the talented artist, who came to Uzbekistan from Barnaul even in the 1920s. In Uzbekistan he was a founder of such associations of artists as “Masters of New East” and the “Association of fine arts' workers”. Together with E.L. Korovai, his first wife, being a wonderful artist, too, he made a long journey from Barnaul to the Crimea and the Caucasus, to Central Asia. But they soon divorced, Kurzin remained to live and work in Tashkent, and Korovay moved to Samarkand. In 1930 he married again to an artist from Barnaul, his student V. Markova. Markova was not satisfied with her personal life: Kurzin used to intake a lot of alcohol, made a row, and she offered to break the relationship with him. After her husband's arrest Markova practically lived alone – the friends avoided communicating with her due to her being ‘the wife of the enemy of the state’. Besides that, she was blamed in organization of groups and discharged from her work in art

school. In consequences, she was having problems with work and V. Markova moved to Leningrad, where she earned by taking orders in the printing house, and dealt with the design work for theatrical performances. In 1941, at the age of 36, Valentina Markova died in the siege of Leningrad. Kurzin was bold in his pronouncements and in deeds. Once in a fit of drunkenness, barely standing on his feet, he fell out of his apartment and trying to keep his balance, began shouting in the street: "Artists and poets! In this country, you cannot create freely as your conscience tells you to do. Go to the Kremlin! Kill Stalin!" He was wearing his wife's panties on his head...¹ Anyone who worked closely with Kurzin, often became the object of his harsh public statements, the proficient artist did not recognize compromises, and therefore acquired enemies in the face of his own fellow artists.

Denunciations to the appropriate authorities, anonymous letters in the artistic environment were not the exception to the rule, but a reality. Kurzin was arrested, accused of having a hostile attitude toward the Soviet regime, saying terrorist intentions against Stalin, anti-Soviet propaganda and sentenced to five years imprisonment and three years of exile in Kolyma. After his deinstitutionalization in 1946 he was sent to exile in Bukhara, without the right to visit Tashkent. But in the same year he was included in the list of members of the Union of Artists of Uzbekistan. In 1948, Kurzin was again arrested for infringement of written undertaking not to leave the place – he illegally arrived in Tashkent – he was sentenced to 8 more years of imprisonment in the Krasnoyarsk Territory already. Mikhail Kurzin returned to Uzbekistan in 1956, lived in Nukus, where he died in 1957 from cancer. R.Eremyan, the art historian, daughter of a famous artist V.Eremyan writes about the artist A.Nikolaev, who is better known under the pseudonym Usto-Mumin, "... this man is a dual-personality man. In Uzbek surroundings, he was loved as a person who respects their language, who converted to Islam and committing five-time prayer. He wore an eastern robe and turban, went to the mosque and was called Us to Mumin, a "modest master". In the Russian environment he was Nikolayev, he worked late in smoky little rooms of the Children's publishers, drew on paperboard socialist pioneers and capitalist policemen, aircrafts over red and green holiday crowds at the First of May.² Us to Mumin was a talented artist, his art is based on freely quoting of miniatures, icons, he was a singer of platonic union of adolescent sexuality, and he was repressed for immoral behavior. His paintings were not accepted because they were over-formalistic, distorted rather than reflected the reality and did not meet the principles of socialist realism. Nikolayev was arrested in 1938 during his business trip, when he was appointed the artist of the Uzbek pavilion at the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow.

"The creative trip" of an artist lasted for four years, but only first in the "Matrosskaya Tishina" (the prison) in Moscow, then in Tashkent prison. Nikolaev later found out that he was accused of "conspiracy and preparing terrorist acts against the leaders of the Soviet government". In 1942, the State authorities released Nikolaev for lack of evidence, and even apologized in writing for the misunderstanding. The state in 1943 awarded him the honorary diploma of the Central

Executive Committee of Uzbekistan for participation in the creation of the Uygur Theater, and in connection with the 25th anniversary of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic A.V.Nikolaev (UstoMumin) was given the honorary title of the Honored Artist of Uzbekistan.³ Difficulties in prison left a terrible open wound in the soul of Nikolayev. His health was undermined, frequent headaches, nightmares of the camp life brought him suffering. He could not forget the tragic death of his youngest son (he fell from a tree), and his eldest son did not return from the war field – died defending Ukraine. He held himself courageously, trying to stifle suffering with work. Alexander Nikolayev died in the summer of 1957.

The artists, who criticized organizational work at meetings and came into conflict with the administration, paid with a significant deterioration in their financial situation due to the exclusion from the Union of Artists (A. Volkov, V. Rozhdestvensky, A. Nikolayev (Usto-Mumin), M.Kurzin, O.Tatevosyan, V. Markova, P. Ben'kov, Ch. Akhmarov, etc.). Owing to disagreement with the high officials of the SSKhUz, Ch. G. Akhmarov left for Moscow. Despite all his merits, he had neither a house nor an apartment of his own, but lived in a hostel in a very small and narrow room with a single window, he lived like a Spartan, he used a hostel-owned furniture: iron bed, a home-made bedside table and two stools. His drawings he kept on the first floor in another lumber-room. The fate of those talented artists is one more evidence of how soviet power etch and struggled alternative thoughts and alternative behavior that was out of soviet communistic regime. Monopoly and mandatory requirement of socialist realism inevitably led to the degradation of fine arts. The trend of naturalism, which was embarked by many artists led to the degeneration of art. In the period under review all aspects of social life, including the organizational and creative ones, were strictly controlled and regulated by the state. Under the guise of party slogans, the administrative-command system interfered in creative activities of the artistic intelligentsia. State censorship subjected to persecution and criticized those artists who sought to break away from the trappings of manifestations of life and penetrate deeply into its essence through creating it by their own creative imagination.

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²CSA RUz F.2588 op.1 d.67. R.V.Eremyan.

³CSA RUzF.2305 op.1 d.55-58. A.V.Nikolaev (UstoMumin).

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