

IRSTI 18.11: 21.31

N.Zh. Baitenova¹, E.F. Yessekeyeva^{1*}, N.K. Aljanova¹, D.Zh. Dosmagambetova²¹Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan, Almaty,

*e-mail: aminayesekeyeva@gmail.com

²Museum of Peace and Accord, Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan

RELIGION AND CONTEMPORARY ART OF KAZAKHSTAN

The Contemporary art of Kazakhstan was formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In their work, artists started to turn to the customs and traditions of the Kazakh people, which became a characteristic feature of modern creativity in Kazakhstan. This trend began to manifest itself not only in the works of artists of the old generation but also of the young generation. "Identity search" is one of the main topics that focused on the ancient Kazakhs' culture, Tengriism, shamanism, etc., expressed in the search for a new national ideology.

With the development of globalization and information technology, the role of religion in modern society has not diminished. The later 20th century saw the fortuitous return of religion not only to political and public life but also the renaissance of religious topics in contemporary art. There is a criticism of religion, specifically of Islam, in the contemporary art of Kazakhstani artists.

In this article, the author presents a brief introduction to the creativity of modern Kazakhstani artist Anvar Musrepov. He is using digital technology in the study of issues related to spirituality, religious extremism, radicalization, traditionalism and the influence of globalization processes on socio-cultural processes.

Key words: religion, contemporary art, Anvar Musrepov, islam, globalization.

Н.Ж. Байтенова¹, Э.Ф. Есекеева^{1*}, Н.К. Әлджанова¹, Д.Ж. Досмагамбетова²¹Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті, Қазақстан, Алматы қ.,

*e-mail: aminayesekeyeva@gmail.com

²Бейбітшілік және келісім музейі, Қазақстан, Нұр-Сұлтан қ.

Дін және Қазақстанның заманауи мәдениеті

Қазақстанның заманауи өнері КСРО тарағаннан кейін қалыптасты. Суретшілер өз шығармаларында қазақ халқының сал-дәстүрлеріне, әдет-ғұрыптарына бет бұрып, Қазақстанның заманауи көркем өнерінің өзіндік ерекшелігін жан-жақты қарастырып, талдау жасайды. Мұндай үрдіс бүгінгі күні тек бұрынғы суретшілерде ғана емес, жас суретшілер арасында да жиі кездесіп орын алғандығы туралы қорытынды жасауға толық негіз бар. «Бірегейлікті іздеу» мәселесінің басты тақырыбы тәңіршілдікке, шаманизмге бағытталып, жаңа ұлттық идеологияны іздеуде көрініс тапты.

Жаһандану және ақпараттық технологиялардың даму кезеңі қазіргі қоғамдағы діннің рөлін кеміткен жоқ. XX ғасырдың аяғы діннің тек қана саяси және қоғамдық өмірге оралуымен ғана ерекшеленбей, сонымен қатар бұл кезең заманауи өнердегі діни тақырыптың қайта жаңғыруы үрдісінен көрініс тапты. Қазақстанның заманауи өнерінде дінді, оның ішінде исламды сынға алу орын алды.

Мақалада Қазақстандағы заманауи өнердің визуализация және рефлексия арқылы дінді, фундаментализмді, радикализацияны, дәстүршілдікті қабылдауы қарастырылады. Авторлар руханилық, фундаментализм және жаһанданудың әлеуметтік-мәдени үдерістерге ықпалымен байланысты сұрақтарды зерттеуде сандық технологияларды қолдануды өзара үйлестірген қазақстандық суретші Әнуар Мүсіреповтің шығармашылық қызметіне қысқаша шолу жасалынды.

Түйін сөздер: дін, заманауи өнер, Әнуар Мүсірепов, ислам, жаһандану.

Н.Ж. Байтенова¹, Э.Ф. Есекеева^{1*}, Н.К. Альджанова¹, Д.Ж. Досмагамбетова²¹Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, Казахстан,

г. Алматы, *e-mail: aminayesekeyeva@gmail.com

²Музей мира и согласия, Казахстан, г. Нур Сұлтан

Религия и современное искусство Казахстана

Современное искусство Казахстана сформировалось после распада СССР. В своем творчестве художники начинают обращаться к обычаям, традициям казахского народа, что

становится характерной особенностью современной живописи Казахстана. Данная тенденция стала проявляться в работах художников не только старого поколения, но и молодого. Одна из основных тем «поиска идентичности» ориентировалась на культуру древних казахов, тенгриизм, шаманизм и т.д., выражаясь в поиске новой национальной идеологии.

Развитие глобализации и информационных технологий не уменьшили роли религии в современном обществе. Конец XX века отмечен не только возвращением религии в политическую и общественную жизнь, но и возрождением религиозной тематики в современном искусстве. Прослеживается критика религии, в частности ислама, в современном искусстве казахстанских художников.

В статье рассматривается восприятие религии, фундаментализма, радикализации, традиционализма современным искусством Казахстана через визуализацию и рефлексию. Авторы статьи представили краткое введение в творческую деятельность современного казахстанского художника Анвара Мусрепова, сочетающую в себе использование цифровых технологий в исследовании вопросов, связанных с духовностью, фундаментализмом и влиянием глобализации на социокультурные процессы.

Ключевые слова: религия, современное искусство, Анвар Мусрепов, ислам, глобализация.

Introduction

Anvar Musrepov is one of the most prominent representatives of the young generation of Kazakhstani contemporary artists. Anvar Musrepov graduated from the Rodchenko Moscow School of Photography and Multimedia and currently is studying at the Vienna Academy of Arts. In addition to his artistic practice, he is an independent curator and publisher of the online magazine *Horse Milk*, that focused on contemporary art in Central Asia.

Musrepov is known not only in Kazakhstan, but also abroad. His works focus on topics relevant not only to modern Kazakhstani society but for everyone. He is familiar with the use of modern digital technologies: photography, video, installation and performance in his works. Born in the 90s of the 20th century and raised in the era of globalization and the development of modern information technologies, he is interested in search of links between local identity and the global context.

In his works, Anvar Musrepov has undertaken courageous measures to raise questions related to religion, the influence of religious radicalism and its spread among the population.

The relevance of the article is because contemporary Kazakhstani art, formed already in the post-Soviet period, is of increasing interest at the international level. At the same time, there is a rapid spread of non-traditional religious organizations on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan, especially of Islamist religious associations. In connection with the current situation, modern Kazakhstan artists react to current events through their work.

The main purpose of the paper – is to analyze the works of the contemporary artist – Anvar Musrepov on religious subjects. By the purpose, the following tasks are carried out:

- analysis of contemporary art's role in the era of globalization;
- identification of art's capacity as a platform for discourse;
- study of the role and place of religion in the works of Anvar Musrepov.

The methodological and theoretical basis of the paper – is general theoretical research methods using systemic, descriptive, deductive, approaches, as well as synthesis and analysis methods.

Main part

In the video “Haram” (Sin) (2016), Musrepov filmed a man clogging the dome of a yurt - the “shanyrak” with blackboards (see Figure 1), after which the screen appears complete darkness on the screen, but you can still hear the sounds of the hammer, which clogs the boards. Shanyrak in a yurt is one of the most respected details in the national home of the Kazakhs - a yurt. Kazakhs associated with this element have many cultural and historical motives, customs, rituals that carry a sacral character. The shanyrak was considered sacred and inherited. Therefore, the shanyrak was also considered a symbol of family well-being and peace. Being the top-most element of the yurt, crowned with a dome, it was comparable to Heaven, which had a conceptual connection with the Tengri cult. (Mikhailov, 1980: 143-152).

This video dedicated to the growth of Islamophobia in modern Kazakhstan and the consequences manifested in social tension, unrest, the growth and spread of radicalization, etc. These potential threats may concern the state, and especially national security. Musrepov openly expresses his concern about the increased propaganda of religious extremism and the joining of young Kazakhstanis to the ranks of ISIS.



Figure 1 – Still from Anvar Musrepov’s video “Haram” Sin (2016)
SOURCE: Express-K website

The project bears the symbolic name Haram. The Arabic word “haram” (can be translated as “forbidden”, “sacred”) (Baranov, 2001).

In the interview to Express-K journal, Anavar Musrepov said:

“My work Haram, shows our future if we do not resist religious extremism. Our centuries-old customs and traditions are going pounded in a coffin, and we will plunge into the darkness...” (https://express-k.kz/news/sotsium/saukele_protiv_khidzhaba-83299).

Through his work, Musrepov expresses his opinion about the new Islamist movements promoting fundamentalist ideology.

Many scholars and politicians see fundamentalism as an irrational and atavistic phenomenon in nature, which creates the basis for strong opposition to modernization and democratization of society, as well as an initial step in the transition to Islamic radicalism and further to Islamic extremism. Western political scientists associate fundamentalism exclu-

sively with Islamic radicalism and qualify as a clear security threat. (Baitenova; Nurshanov, 2018: 147).

The main idea of the video “Haram” - is that we should not forget about the origins of the Kazakh culture, which is composed of traditions and customs. If we look at the roots of the identity of Kazakh culture in its historical and religious aspects, then among the ancient Kazakhs, Tengrism (the cult of Tengri, Jer-Su, Umai), as well as shamanism, was widespread among ancient Kazakhs the basis of the worldview, ethics and culture of the Kazakhs. Tengrism and shamanism extent to our days and manifesting in everyday life in various aspects. (Orynbekov, 2013: 7-8).

Musrepov returned to the topic of Islamophobia, radicalization and terrorism in his triptych “Kazakh Woman in a Burka” (2016). In the first image, a young woman with a proudly raised head poses in a national Kazakh dress. In the second image, she is holding the black burka. In the third image of the triptych, an outfit of a girl completely hidden by a burka. (see Figure 2).

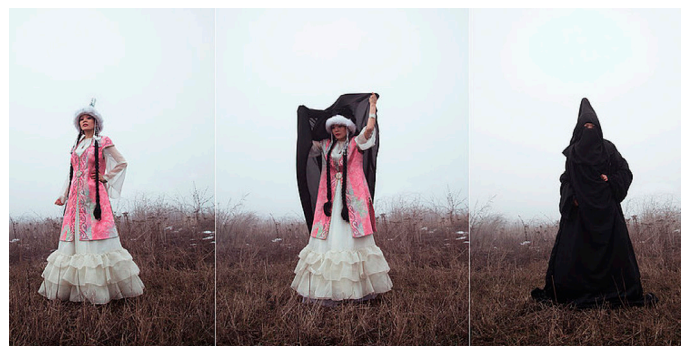


Figure 2 – Anvar Musrepov, “Kazakh Woman in a Burka” (2016)
SOURCE: Express-K website

This work has a direct reference to events related to a global problem - radical Islam, resulted in the radical organization Islamic State (IS) or ISIS (the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant) (banned in Kazakhstan), as well as its role women in participating in terrorist organizations.

The ideas of radical Islamists gained immense popularity among young Kazakhs. Young men from Kazakhstan, who were involved in the ranks of ISIS, going to fight in Syria and Iraq, and young women with children were also involved. Many of the Kazakhstani men who left for Syria and Iraq marry a young woman there.

According to the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan, since the start of the war in the Middle East, about 800 of Kazakhstan citizens have left for Syria and Iraq (about 500 are minors) (<https://sptnkne.ws/ymfm>).

And in Musrepov's triptych, we see how a young Kazakh woman replaces Kazakh national clothes with a black burka. Through his work, Musrepov addresses the issue of not only replenishing the ranks of ISIS by Kazakhstanis but also reflects on the impact of new religious radical movements on

human consciousness and the transformation of cultural values and social order.

In his multimedia project *Namaz Maker* (2016) (see Figure 3), Musrepov designed a virtual environment with a Muslim rug for prayer.

Musrepov himself says the following about his project:

"Interactive projection *Namaz Maker*, imitating Muslim carpet, creates a virtual environment for a ritual. There are five modes in this projection with color indicators for each pray (morning, noon, day time, evening and night). The special function allows setting the praying text individually. For customer's convenience modes are changing by a clap, to maximum concentrate on the praying session without direct contact with the remote control system. For automatic navigation to the correct direction of the pray Interface has a compass, which updates every second and always identifies exactly the location of Mecca. For advertisers interested in the target audience there is a special place for advertising. An option to switch off the advertising exists for the payment. Don't forget to clean the floor before use." (Musrepov).

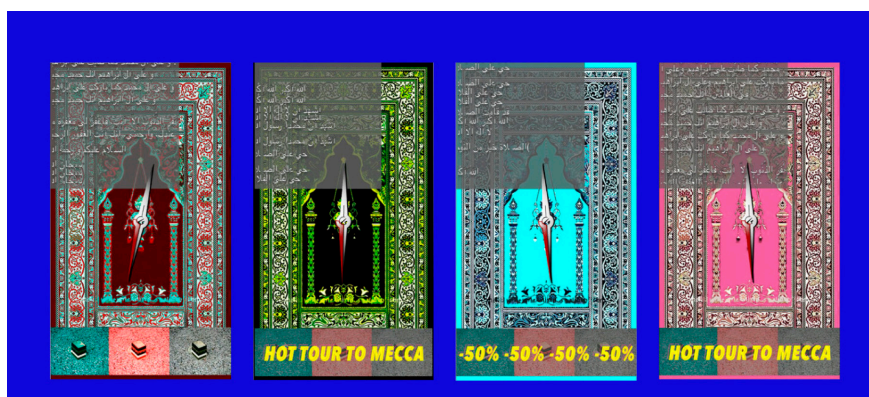


Figure 3 – Anvar Musrepov, *Namaz Maker* (2016)
SOURCE: Anvar Musrepov's personal website

This project reflects on the changes taking place in Kazakhstani society, caused by issues of globalization, place and role of religion in the era of technological progress.

On the one hand, globalization dictates the guidelines of the new world order and has positive consequences. On the other hand, it can have negative consequences as well, which can lead to culture's destruction and to bury *into oblivion religious and* moral values of society. The victorious procession of globalization reduces the role of religion in the world, and it is being

squeezed to the periphery of a social being. One of the religion characteristics – is flexibility. Religion can be adjusted as an ideological form to the views and ideas of people of a particular era. Simply put, religion keeps up with the times. And with the globalization also came the development of information technology.

Today, even the most conservative religions use modern technology in their practice, for example, you can visit the temple online, make a prayer.

Smartphones and social networks are actively influencing the way religion is consumed. Today,

religious practices have become more accessible to people that are busy or people with disabilities. For example, man can download a free Bible app to phone. Muslims use the iPray program, and instead of the muezzin, they are called to prayer by

a phone that focuses on the user’s location and time of year (see Figure 4). Thanks to a 140-letter lesson from @JewishTweets Jews can easily learn the Torah and send emails to the Wailing Wall (<https://theoryandpractice.ru/posts/13046-it-church>).

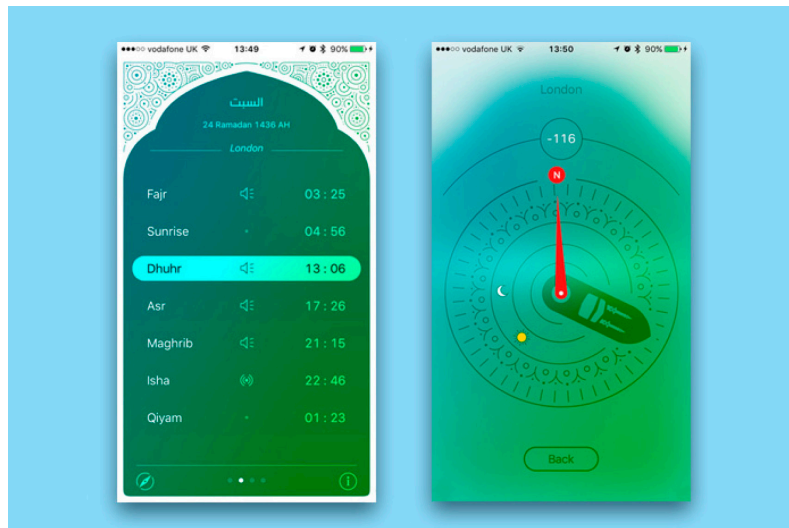


Figure 4 – IPray App: Prayer times & Qibla Compass
SOURCE: Screenshot from IPray App

To date, under the influence of globalization processes, the cultural, ideological, as well as socio-economic ties of the Islamic civilization space societies are being strengthened. An intensive comprehension of urgent global problems takes place. (<https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/09/30/ru-pub-53152>).

With the advent of the globalization era, not only the development of information technologies but also the socio-cultural practices of the “consumer society” were developed. In his project Place of strength (2016) (see Figure 5), Anvar Musrepov visualizes issues related to spirituality, the search for identity in the era of globalization and the culture of consumerism.



Figure 5 – Anvar Musrepov, Place of strength (2016)
SOURCE: Anavr Musrepov’s personal website

This project was presented as part of the seventh ARTBAT FEST in the Botanical Garden in 2016 in Almaty. This festival is held annually and I try not to miss this opportunity to attend the festival and that year was no exception. The festival was dedicated to the topic “Symbiosis”. The main message of the festival was: “The immobilized anthropomorphic structure of the city: roads, intersections, architecture comes to life, filled with the energy of modern art. The lively direct action of the artist here and now, his interaction with the surrounding reality, with the townspeople makes the entire urban landscape move.” (ARTBAT Fest 7).

Musrepov’s project Place of strength – is a huge logo of the famous McDonald’s fast-food chain, tied with colourful pieces of fabric.

The rite of tying tree branches with colourful or white pieces of fabric was common among nomads and had a sacred meaning reached till our time. Since ancient times, tying and untying knots on ribbons has been used for various purposes, including magical and healing ones.

Orynbekov describes the world of nomads as follows: “The world of nomads was filled with a good and evil spirit. During the nomad migration, they did not put the summer pasture in the place where the previous camp used to be. It was believed that spirits from the previous camp might actually get twinge trouble to people.

A cavalier approach of entering the places where the spirits lived was the cause of rheumatic pains among old people. In the steppe, many places were considered sacred. The place of worship could be mountains and forests, a lonely tree or unusually arranged shrubs. Pieces of cloth (zhyrtys) were hanged on the tree to honour the spirits”. (Orynbekov, 2013: 21).

In Kazakh culture, there are a lot of traditions and rituals using ribbons.

To untie or cut the knot means to solve any issues. For example, in the rite “tusau keser” (Kazakh “rite of cutting the bond”) starts by cutting the ribbons. With baby-steps of the child, the legs must be tied with a ribbon and respected man should cut the ribbons. This rite meant that old man transferring his energy to the baby, freeing from visible and invisible bonds.

With his project, Anvar Musrepov makes an explicit reference to the March events of 2016 when people stand in *line for kilometres to try McDonald’s food*. Musrepov criticizes mass culture, focusing on the issue of rethinking modern consumer culture. Another message laid down by Musrepov is a search for a person’s identity. In other words, for some,

consumerism is now becoming a kind of addiction, adversely affecting a person, manifesting in the desire to own things, for example, from well-known brands (brand religion), during which oniomania develops. For a person suffering from such an addiction, goods lose their significance and become a kind of symbol of worship.

About the project, Anvar Musrepov says the following:

“Modernity comes along with the feeling of bewilderment when facing self-identification. Should we raise the ambition of enhancing national identity or just give up and support globalization, where the role of developing identity is delegated to marketing companies.

The McDonalds logo as accidentally ancient pagan monument is found in the woods and covered by thousands of cloth strips. Ritual places for praying to consumerism and globalization which reaches our steppes with its long queues for hamburgers. The single McDonalds restaurants as outer spaceships having come from far space for the purpose of capturing a new planet. In different pagan cultures tying of cloth strips on trees symbolizes sacrifice to spirits in the sacred places.” (Musrepov).

Musrepov also reflects on the topic of identity search in video loop Jigitovka (2016). We see a digital figure of Anvar riding on a virtual horse.

This work was also presented in the framework of his exhibition Wonderstan (2017) at the Art Future gallery (Smart Point) in Almaty. The exhibition was dedicated to the Internet, the network culture that defines today’s reality and how the place of birth affects our identity. He compared the nomadic culture of ancient Kazakhs with the modern culture of Internet surfing.

Today, the Internet is an integral part of human life, and for the younger generation this has become a new reality. In the digital artificial space, you can be anyone, look as you like, be immortal, have various talents, abilities and even supernatural powers. To some extent, you can even feel like God.

Anvar Musrepov creates his digitalized reality of Wonderstan, where he can feel like a “real Kazakh” riding a horse. Anvar Musrepov said:

“My research is more about identity after the Internet. I grew up with the development of the Internet and for me, it is a very important aspect of everyday life. Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” was written in the 90s, which said that now we are free, we can move from country to country. He was a little utopian but reflected the main thing. Here I reflect on what will happen if our consciousness is digitized and transferred to a computer? Can we

preserve our cultural background? Can we consider ourselves Kazakhs, Russians? For me, it's rather a limitation.” (<https://www.buro247.kz/culture/art/personalnaya-vystavka-anvara-musrepova-wonderstan.html>).

Conclusion

Anvar Musrepov's works are one of the clearest examples of how contemporary art can be an independent platform for discussion not just on the subject of spirituality, but religion as well.

The place of religion and art as well occupies an important place in society. Anvar Musrepov's works are relevant because of provocative topics related to radicalism, religious extremism and terrorism, and

politics. It can be concluded that society and art are interconnected. Artists reaction to external vents and upheavals - is inner experiences. That is how the piece of art appears. We can say that contemporary artists act on behalf of society, while art functions as an instrument.

Contemporary art is attractive because it is not limited by censorship and is free in its expression. This allows artists to express their point of view and position, sometimes in a provocative form, creating a specific communication environment for inclusion of the viewer in the discourse.

Contemporary art allows us to witness not only everyday, understandable view of the world but shows the complexity and inconsistency of this world.

References

- “Giki-buddisty, mobilnye cerkvi I treby online: kak religiya ontositsya k tehnologiyam”. Last modified March 17, 2016, <https://theoryandpractice.ru/posts/13046-it-church>
- “Uehavshie c Siriyu kazakhstanki prosyatsya domoi – MID reshaet vopros”. Last modified September 12, 2019, <https://sptnkne.ws/ymfm>
- Baranov, Kharlampiy, trans. from rus. *Arabsko-russkiy slovar'*. M., 2001.
- Mikhailov, Timofey, trans. from rus. *Iz istorii buryatskogo shamanizma (s drevneishih vremen do XVIII v.)*. Novosibirsk, 1980.
- Nagima Baitenova Azamat Nurshanov, “New islamic movements in contemporray world: ideological projects and political activity”, *KazNU Bulletin. Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Political Science* 64, no. 2 (May 2018): 147.
- Orynbekov, Mukhanmadiyar, trans, from rus. *Genezis religioznosti v Kazakhstane*. Almaty: IPPR KN ME RK, 2013.
- Yerkin Baidarov, “Religiya v global'nyh processah”. Last modified September 30, 2013, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/09/30/ru-pub-53152>
- ARTBAT Fest 7. trans. from rus. “Ezhegodnyi festival sovremennogo iskusstva. City in motion / Gorod v dvizhenii.” Facebook, September 2, 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/events/277891282596756/>
- Musrepov, Anvar, <https://anvarmusrepov.com/>
- Popova, Matiya, “Ocifrovannye kazahi: Vystavka Anvara Musrepova Wonderstan”. Last modified December 12, 2017, <https://www.buro247.kz/culture/art/personalnaya-vystavka-anvara-musrepova-wonderstan.html>
- “Saukele protiv hijaba.” Last modified September 16, 2016, https://express-k.kz/news/sotsium/saukele_protiv_khidzhaba-83299