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REPRESENTATION OF THE MEMORIAL CULTURE IN CHECHEN PAINTING (2000-2012)

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The object of the research is the memorial culture in Chechen painting, the subject being its representation in the works of Chechen artists. The purpose of the study is to consider the representation of the phenomenon of memorial memory in the work of Chechen artists. The paintings of national artists of Chechnya served as empirical material in the work. The methodology is based on comparative studies, art history and the system-constructive analysis.

The authors construct the concepts of memorial heritage in the paintings of Chechen artists, revealing the universal characteristics of their work. For the authors, memorial culture comes down to a variety of ways to materialize the socio-cultural ethnic context, including the visualization of mythological and religious meanings, as well as the translation of mental characteristics and ethnic archetypes. The deep memory of the people includes historical and cultural areas, which include artistic images born in a creative way. In turn, ethnic art serves as a kind of reflection of ethnophilosophy, the mentality of the people, national traditions and a means of conveying the deep memory of the people.

Keywords: *memorial culture; concept; painting; national art; Chechen artists; ethnophilosophy; representation*

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РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ МЕМОРИАЛЬНОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ В ЧЕЧЕНСКОЙ ЖИВОПИСИ (2000-2012 ГГ.)

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Объектом исследования является мемориальная культура в чеченской живописи, предметом – ее репрезентация в произведениях чеченских художников. Цель – рассмотреть репрезентацию феномена мемориальной памяти в творчестве чеченских художников. Эмпирическим материалом в работе послужили картины национальных художников Чечни.

Методология основана на компаративистике, искусствоведческом и системно-конструктивном анализе. Авторы конструируют концепты мемориального наследия в живописи чеченских художников, выявляя универсальные характеристики их творчества. Мемориальная культура для авторов сводится к разнообразию способов материализации социокультурного этнического контекста, включающего в себя визуализацию мифолого-религиозных смыслов, трансляции ментальных характеристик и этнических архетипов. Глубинная память народа включает в себя историческую и культурную области, к которым относятся рожденные творческим путем художественные образы. В свою очередь, этническое искусство служит своеобразным отражением этнофилософии, ментальности народа, национальных традиций и средством передачи глубинной памяти народа.

Ключевые слова: мемориальная культура; концепт; живопись; национальное искусство; чеченские художники; этнофилософия; репрезентация

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The theme of memorial memory in art is quite sought after. Today we often witness the re-creation of mental images and meanings of national culture in literature, poetry, music, sculpture, painting, etc. The *relevance* of the topic is connected with the manifestation of the structures of the past in the cultural fields of modernity. So far, researchers have not been paying enough attention to the problem of historical memory in the work of Chechen artists. The question of comparing traditional models of national culture and objects of painting in order to identify the interpretation of the processes of meaning generation in the work of Chechen artists also actualizes the study.

The *novelty* of the study lies in understanding the development trends of Chechen painting, as well as enriching the base of research of a historical and artistic nature. The study of memorialization, an applied form of translation and reproduction of the socio-cultural experience of the Chechen people through visual forms of art determines the novelty and relevance of the study.

The *research methodology* is based on comparative art history and system-constructive analysis. The authors construct the concepts of memorial heritage in the paintings of Chechen artists, revealing the universal characteristics of their work. The comparative-historical, problem-chronological and descriptive methods were used in the work as auxiliary ones.

Memorial memory as an immanent property of culture determines the content and mechanisms of a person's identity, defining a system of connections between the present and the past.

The *purpose* of the study is to try to consider the representation of the phenomenon of memorial memory in the work of Chechen artists.

The *degree of development* of the problem under consideration is believed to be quite insufficient. We can name works in which the object of research is memorial culture in the context of commemorative practices of cultural institutions (museum), cinema, media structures of the Chechen Republic [see 9]. Most of the works are devoted to the study of the cultural Chechen heritage in the context of oral folk art, literature, architecture and other arts [see 4].

Art is able to replenish cultural knowledge, drawing from images of nature, traditional ideas about the world order, the role of man, various combinations of the earthly and the transcendent, thus allowing each and every national artist to fulfill their artistic potential, as well as to present an original interpretation ethno-mythological content through the embodiment of the “collective unconscious” (according to C. Jung) [7, p. 11].

From the standpoint of modern science, the program of studying the space of memorial memory allows one to penetrate into the traditional layers of ethnic culture, which are “a reflection of the mythopoetic, sociocultural, religious traditions of the existence of an ethnos”, since “the very existence of the spirit, expressed in national culture, is much deeper and more multifaceted than empirical national history” [4, p. 5].

Memorial culture expresses the meanings and values of entire generations, it is a set of stable, reproducible ways of knowing, interpreting, describing, preserving, broadcasting the past, represented in various forms of public and private commemorative activity.

For an objective perception and understanding of the meanings brought into the public space of painting, let us turn directly to the works of Chechen artists.

The objectification of memory in the space of culture is most clearly represented by the work of Said-Khusein Sultanovich Bitsiraev *Prayer* (2000) (Fig. 1). The picture is painted in oil on canvas, 80x67 cm, oriented vertically; at present the work is stored in the Memorial Complex of Glory named after A.A. Kadyrov.

The picture is dedicated to one of the foundations of Islamic rituals, i.e., the worship of Allah, which is a significant part of the traditional historical and cultural memory of the Chechen people. In his work, the artist shows a special funeral prayer performed for the deceased, in which the living call for mercy and acceptance of their soul. Painted in harsh colors, the work depicts a large group of worshipers with elders and imams in front of them. Men in cloaks and chokhas are grouped near the grave, forming an open circle.



Fig. 1. *Prayer* by S.-K. Bitsaraev, 2000

S.-K. Bitsaraev uses the stern style painting technique, being uncharacteristic for Chechen painting. With the help of impasto painting with fiery flashes Bitsaraev pumps up the texture of the painting, as well as intensifies the tension with sharp lines that cross the entire canvas. The presence of bright lines, sharp contrasts of plans, intense harmony of colors creates a feeling of significance of what is happening.

The artist fills the dense background, characteristic of the stern style, with the outlines of the towers on the left side of the painting and with the lines of the mountains in the center and on the right. The complex geometry of the painting includes the lines of the horizon, contour of the grave, mountain peaks, sharp-angled cloaks of the highlanders, men's beards, etc., which visually cut the canvas into pieces.

The prayers can be distinguished due to the light falling from the side, as if "snatching" individual faces from the darkness of the general background. It can be assumed that the artist sought to create a collective image of the people, which is united by a common memory, a tradition of honoring ancestors. A person is mortal and lives in the memory of other generations only thanks to loyalty and service to their homeland.

Traditional for the mentality of the Chechen people was an appeal to the memories of the deceased. It was believed that the world of earthly life is closely connected with the world beyond, and this interaction can be traced in all the rituals and ceremonies of the cult of the deceased. Formulating ideas about the completeness of fate in the visible world, folk wisdom thus created the possibility of the existence of the soul, i.e., *sa* in Chechen, in the world beyond. In the national mentality, “the past is up to date a more understandable notion than the future or the present” [2, p. 15-20]. The sacralization of the past is an important part of the memorial culture of the Chechen ethnoses and included a whole complex of archaic ideas about the soul, the feeding of ancestors, the direct dependence of the world of the living on the heavenly land of the dead, all boiling down to the fundamental dichotomy of death and immortality. This property of the ethnic group is fundamental in the memorial culture of Chechen artists.

Memorial culture is reflected in the personal reminiscences of S.-K. Bitsaraev, who lived in St. Petersburg and worked there for a significant amount of time, as well as in assimilated traditional values, conveying the properties of the mentality of the ethnic group, which include asceticism, dichotomous mentality, mysticism, ritualized behavior in society, a strict hierarchy of age strata [1, p. 7].

The Ablution (2012) by Aslan Lemaevich Bugaev allows one to take a look at the ritual and everyday culture of the Chechen people (Fig. 2). It belongs to genre painting and was created in a realistic manner.

Here is a scene of a baby bathing. In the center of the composition there is an elderly Chechen woman wearing a burgundy dress and a white shawl wrapped around her head in a special manner. The folds of the white shawl tightly wrapped around the head and neck are contrasted with the broken lines of the white fabric with which the woman carefully wraps the child. Sitting on a wooden bench lined with traditional water-carrying jugs, she gently holds the child with her overworked hand. The artist depicts the child from the back, placing him compositionally in the foreground of the picture in a massive wooden trough.



Fig. 2. *The Ablution* by A.L. Bugaev, 2012

The A.L. Bugaev's work is close to Dadan Idrisov's program painting *A Story to the Grandson*, which was presented to the audience in Stavropol in 1970. Paintings by D. Idrisov and A.L. Bugaev broadcast the main idea of life continuation. The theme associated with the need to comprehend such categories as life and death has been generally quite popular in painting. Seasonal symbolism, showing the alternation of the flourishing and fading of life, the whose derivatives have passed through historical epochs, has received a multivariate personification in both spiritual and material culture, including the fine arts of the Chechens.

Elderly people are especially revered in traditional Chechen culture, which provides the image of an elderly Chechen woman in the painting by A. Bugaev with a certain sacred meaning since in the memorial culture, her image corresponds to the mythological progenitor, i.e., Mekhka-Nana, being the goddess of the mountainous area. The painting emphasizes the

connection of every Chechen mother with the image of the Foremother, i.e., the first woman of mankind, who was considered by the people as an unshakable symbol of holiness. In the view of the young Chechen artist A. Bugaev, a woman bathing a young boy and thus preparing him for the life journey has become a collective image of the homeland.

The saturated, clear ornament of the carpet with the central element, i.e., the tree of life personifying the life cycle of birth and procreation, adds to the symbolism of the painting, which is also enhanced by such details as a dove and an olive branch in the hands of the boy. The tree of life in the memorial culture is interpreted as a symbol of earthly fertility, its roots being irrigated with the water of the underworld and the branches reaching the heavenly world of the ancestors. The carpet ornaments contain the history of the people, the archaic ideas about the world, its philosophy and spiritual culture. Thus, through the reflection of traditional memory, the artist marks the continuity of different generations in terms of ethnic culture.

These spiritual threads feed the talent of creative people since they are included in the emotional and cognitive process of awareness of belonging to a particular ethnic group.

One of the well-known paintings by A. Bugaev is *The Dream of the Sworn Enemy* (Fig. 3), which is a picturesque allegory, the meaning of which is still being debated by critics and viewers. The painting is dedicated to the ancient Caucasian custom, which prescribes vengeance on the offender and marks the traditional idea of absolute justice. The unwritten laws of blood vengeance represent an ethno-value orientation in the legal field: this custom used to save society from anarchy, arbitrariness and chaos, to a certain extent preserving public order, social justice and equality. In the view of the Chechen people, this custom corresponded to *adat*, i.e., a system of traditions and customs, which was opposed to the official religious law, i.e., Sharia. Discussions on the deviant behavior of people, being dictated by traditions, appeal to the legal field, ethnic philosophy, as well as zealous observance of traditional beliefs (e.g., the existence of a legend about the anger of the ancestors for an unavenged insult).



Fig. 3. *The Dream of the Sworn Enemy* by A. Bugaev, 2012

The modern Chechen artist has demonstrated the multi-layered process of understanding the world, based on ethnic tradition.

So, in the painting by A. Bugaev, a man in national Chechen attire is depicted in the foreground sitting. The figure of the sworn enemy is leaning against a large boulder; a naked saber lies on the man's knees; a burning lantern is at his feet. These details symbolize the coming revenge since the law of blood vengeance has no time limitation. In the background of the picture, behind the boulder, there are few men in traditional highlander attire approaching the dozing enemy. Their faces are obscured or covered with white cloth, each of them is armed and ready to attack. The features of the persecutors are not depicted in detail: the head of one of the men is covered with a pointed hood; the faces of the other two are more like silhouettes against the reddening background. The symbolism of the painting *The Dream of the Sworn Enemy* is associated with the idea of blood vengeance, eternal torment of the conscience of a person, pursued by the fear of vengeance. The scarlet blood spilled in the background of the painting is stopped by the white boulder, symbol-

ically hindering what is coming. The painting is stored in the Memorial Complex of Glory named after A.A. Kadyrov.

The memorial culture of the Chechen people is expressed by the painter in his plot work being addressed to the epistemological connections with the past as an endless chain of conditions that determine the spiritual life, material customs, moral and religious values of the people, which is “associated with the transmission of knowledge and communication of subjects of knowledge, a set of dependencies between the people’s activity and its cultural and historical context” [6, p. 74].

The Dance, a painting by Rustam Khozhaevich Yakhikhanov (2011, canvas, tempera, 250x345) is the central part of the polyptych *The Land of My Ancestors* (Fig. 4). It draws the attention of the modern viewer to the bright side of the space-time model of the Chechen cosmology. The work takes the viewer into the atmosphere of love and harmony, embodied in the dance. The artist gives the center of the work to a young couple wearing traditional attire, standing out against the white background of an open burka, which is also part of the traditional attire. In the background, accentuating the bright images of the couple in love, there are guests of the wedding celebration, i.e., people of different generations taking part in the dance and watching others dance.



Fig. 4. *The Land of My Ancestors* by R. Yakhikhanov, 2011

The crowdedness of the ceremony is conveyed in a special way, i.e., the top of the canvas looks as if it was cut off, providing the impression that the entire procession failed to fit on the canvas.

The character of the people in *the Dance*, which is stored in the Museum of the Chechen Republic, is conveyed by drawing the details of the attire, portraits, facial expressions. All the members of the ceremony are passionate about what is happening, filled with joy for the young, but remain restrained and strict in accordance with the traditions and customs that dictate appropriate behavior. They surround the central field of the carpet composition like a protective chain. Chechen felt carpet, i.e., *istang*, presented by the artist, organizes the space. In the ornamentation of a felt carpet, the main pattern placed in its center, i.e., *Bustam* (Chechen “pattern”, “measurement”) is of great importance [10, p. 88]. The colors and composition immerse the viewer in the world of beauty and mystery. The motifs are made in a symmetrical form consisting of smooth and flexible lines.

According to a few studies, until the 1900s, felt carpet ornamentation was found exclusively on wall carpets.

The Keepers of the Secrets (Fig. 5), created in 2010 by Ch. Khasaev, stored in the Memorial Complex of Glory named after A.A. Kadyrov, emphasizes the greatness of familiarizing with the life of nature as well as the deep memory of the people. The keepers of the secrets here are, first of all, mountain peaks, silent witnesses of the events of the thousand-year history of the Chechen people, as well as towers, stone guardians of the original culture. Their dark silhouettes against the light snowy background of mountain peaks illustrate the inviolability of the foundations of ethnic culture, turning them into heralds of memoriality. The artist complements the allegory of *the Keepers of the Secrets* with a road winding into the distance as a symbol of future development.

Spring in Chechnya, a surrealist painting of the artist Zamir Tagirovich Yushaev (Fig. 6) tells the story of first love. The spring on the painting gives rise to hope from the meeting of a young man and a girl at the *shovda*, i.e., a water spring. The artist has a unique style that combines realism, fantasy and romantic tendencies. Delicate colors of

spring, pastel colors of the painting, figures of heroes floating in the air in dance “pas”, framed by a stylized mountain landscape in the form of a cave grotto, create a unique atmosphere filled with air, music and poetry of love. The divine image of Spring itself, turning into the road, water, trees, towers, seems to protect the young. Z. Yushaev’s painting is full of exquisite lines, light, it is saturated with air and wind, it rings with spring water.



Fig. 5. *The Keepers of the Secrets* by C. Khasaev, 2010

Z. Yushaev was born in Dagestan into a Chechen family, but he lives and works in Leipzig. The homeland and its people are still one of the artist’s favorite themes. His paintings arouse curiosity. They are mystical, meditative, inspiring and complex.

The comprehension of the works of national artists, thus, allows one to take a deeper look at the traditional layers of ethnic culture, which are “a reflection of the mythopoetic, sociocultural, religious traditions of the existence of an ethnos”, since “the very existence of the spirit, expressed in national culture, is much deeper than the empirical national history” [5, p. 5].



Fig. 6. *Spring in Chechnya* by Z. Yushaev, around 2010-2013

The memorial culture of the Chechen people is embodied in the works of contemporary Chechen artists in completely different ways, i.e., in their individual painting style.

While being different in spirit, plots, writing technique, their works are united by national history, ancient traditions and customs, stored in the memory of every Chechen, being passed on to their descendants.

Various strategies of reflection of the past as well as their embodiment in creativity emphasize the individual perception of the ethnoconcepts of culture by both the creator and the viewer, reflecting the ethical nature of the memorial culture. National art is a reflection of ethnophilosophy, mentality of the people, national traditions as well as a means of convey-

ing the deep memory of the people. Its phenomenon is of a humanistic nature, since it embodies “efforts aimed at ensuring the functioning of collective memory in a specific place and at a specific time” [8, p. 16].

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