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VISIONARY ART OF ASHRAF MURAD

Abstract. The paper is dedicated to 100th anniversary of the famous artist of Azerbaijan Ashraf Murad who immensely contributed to artistic culture of the country in XX century. First part of the paper describes youth period of artist, his education and initial period of creativity as painter-artist. Middle part of the article analyses formation of painter's personal creative artistic language. A number of creativity stages are being reviewed. Genres in which searches of his idiolect are described. The last part of the paper reviews the main theme of Murad's creativity – portraits. However, with their formal thinking, art of painting technique and compositional talent, power of impact, hypnotic properties, attraction and absorption of light, they stand apart and could decorate the halls of the world's best collections of modern art.

Key words: Ashraf Murad, paintings, Baku Museum of Modern Art, Nar gallery, exhibitions of Yarat Contemporary Art.

Introduction. Real artist is a man free of all and all bonds – mental, ethnic and even moral. In general, the issue of choice is probably the most difficult in life, especially in arts. Although, it would seem, man is doomed from the very beginning to residing in a dual world and in constant opposition of paired givens «inhale – exhale», «life – death», «day – night», «yes – no», «plus – minus», «woman – man», «black – white» – and therefore, it seems to be easy to choose, in fact the whole life of a person is placed in a swinging pendulum, where he freely chooses or accepts with resignation. And the life of an artist is in the swinging pendulum of art: between an easy and hard, comfortable and interesting roads full of losses and gains.

The pendulum of the life of Ashraf Murad, this wonderful Azerbaijani painter unknown to the general public, led him beyond the usual reality and put him into the space of parallel realities, where talents and creators free of any conventions live.

The first personal exhibition of Ashraf Murad had opened only after his death – in 1984, in his native Baku. Then everyone was amazed at the enormous size of the canvas of this unique master of the brush – at that time it was a real fantasy... The creativity of Ashraf Murad and the perfection of his coloring was matched only by the colors of our ancient carpets and tirme. The national character of Ashraf's art was formed on basis of Azerbaijani folklore.

The interpretation of the main material. Ashraf Murad is one of the most significant, most mysterious and almost surreal figures of Azerbaijani art in the second half of the 20th century. They spoke and wrote little about this painter and his works have never been exhibited with the exception of two short-term exhibitions (only now some of his works hang in the Baku Museum of Modern Art which opened in 2009). They contain a high concentration of information that distinguishes a masterpiece – bearing deep, aesthetic knowledge – no matter if it is expressed in a realist, cubist, decorative or any other language.

Ashraf Murad was born on October 26, 1925 in Baku, in a family of intellectuals, in 1946 he graduated from the Azerbaijan Art School named after A. Azimzade, and in 1954 – the Leningrad Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture named. Repin with honors (Y. Neprintsev and R. Frentz, thesis «M. Lermontov and M. Akhundov»), participated in Baku exhibitions, always dreamed of going to Paris. He died on March 11, 1979 in Baku, before he was 54 years old. That's the whole short biography. Before the illness, everything was going well, like everyone else. They say that a terrible misfortune happened to him while studying in Leningrad – food intoxication, which had a strong effect on the body and consciousness. He survived her hard, but straightened out. However, after an illness, another artist was born, as if the real Ashraf had come out of captivity, once and for all released the Artist from prison. Previously beloved historical subjects, executed within the framework of the Russian school of painting, were replaced by new ones; now they were compositional portraits, but already painted in a completely different artistic style, worldview, hand. Everything has changed here – the palette,

drawing, plastic, chiaroscuro, modeling, linear perspective has been reversed, the classic solution has become flat – his name is Turkic roots and love for the French avant-garde!

In that first reality, Ashraf was very handsome, successful, drove a car and boxed well, was an idol of girls and made good money. In the second reality, he was only an Artist.

In the deeply intimate, simple, self-reflexive art of Ashraf Murad, we see the world of a person who is ignorant of the world and is outside the world and reality despite its imaginary existence. It is the world of the only person, or someone else's universe, where there is something that others do not know and where reality – the dream and paradise – is not only lost, but also not the only one. Paintings of Ashraf Murad are transcendental like the last works of the genius Georges Braque, and they seem to be ringing, but the frequency of these sounds is hardly perceptible to the human ear. It is uncomfortable to write about them using ordinary scientific vocabulary and it is unethical to see them as ordinary art objects. They are «aliens» like the «Birds» of Braque and graphics of Boyce, like the Sphinx and Shedu, like Sumerian cuneiform writings in the British Museum.

Surprisingly, some seascapes of Ashraf resemble seascapes of the final years of Braque, although it is clear that Ashraf had never seen them – either in the original or in print. They are separated from each other by 20 years, but they are in tune with their penetration into the element of water, general mood, color vibrations, palette, composition, horizon and even stains of whitewash. They are deeply archetypal. If you get true knowledge from these pictures – they are a gift to someone who is ready to accept them.

They seemed to have no time, or rather, future and past. They are a document or an energy generator, or simply a parallel reality.

This mysterious and extremely expressive painting is a high level of artistry. This is the level that Ashraf Murad reached and none of his contemporaries was able to reach – it was only his level and nobody else's. Maybe, the price of a great thing is marginal perception and loss of the ordinary perception of everyday life?

His avant-garde came from the depths of the soul, from the reality itself refracted through psychic energy. His «avant-garde» was «realism» – genuine realism, not photographic naturalism.

In general, with a closer look at the great examples of 20th century art, you'll find a certain conventionality of the avant-garde – realism opposition,

their relativity and typological blur. Often realist painters used modernist techniques (for example, Guttuso or Siqueiros), and inside the avant-garde there was some «realism». Besides that, the realism of some avant-garde works exceeds the «realism» of realism, if such tautology is acceptable. It is known that Cezanne had an invaluable influence on the development of modern art because in the early 20th century, the focus was mostly on his artistic method. So Cezanne's method allowed this brilliant painter to enter the heart of the material world around us and to write objectively, say, realistically, because he wanted to write the reality of the essence of things, not their apparent «reality». «Cezanne wanted to get away from the unstable surface of things and get to the reality that does not change, but always lurks beneath the bright deceptive picture born by the kaleidoscope of feelings,» the eminent art historian Sir Herbert Read wrote.

The same desire to reveal the true reality, know it, admire it, reflecting it on the canvas, prompted Ashraf Murad to be in a sincere and permanent state as a researcher – find between perception and expression.

Creativity, as Fazil Isgandar said, is an instinct of information transfer. Ashraf could not but paint pictures. The individuality of the artist is unique, and his personal style has no analogues in the world or in domestic arts. He could not found a school, a national school of painting, or hand over his unique artistic experience to anyone – he was a lonely star. He introduced «psychism» and unique freedom of expression, hypersensitiveness and chaste eroticism, the truth of the body, the truth of the flesh, states of consciousness altered to the extreme and the taste of today to Azerbaijani arts. Freedom that sweeps away all the «taboos», but retains the voice of conscience, the inner voice of ethics – moral intuition, in which the ethical, aesthetic, sincere, honest, and, therefore, positive, bright and kind things (despite the black color or maybe because of it since it is the most solid) are inseparable.

Why was he unable to save himself? Why didn't he live a long and happy life? Maybe because he was not interested in the future and lived in the present – in this moment and at full capacity, forgetting about food and other natural needs? Sometimes he just did not have money to eat. Living in the present, he was still almost unknown to anyone of his contemporaries. Injured repeatedly, injured, but not broken, as an artist, as a sincere and honest man, Ashraf could not adjust. And he probably did not want to, or rather, he did not know that he needed to adjust to something. He just lived passionately, and

joyfully wrote canvases. He was only interested in art – he was a painter – like rebellious Qizilbash Sadiq Bey Afshar, who was not able to keep the post of kitabdar, or Huseyn Javid, or Sufi humanist Nasimi.

Of course, his creative work will definitely be studied, the time will come when there will be a serious study of the legacy of the most mysterious, magical Azerbaijani painter unknown to the audience.

Artist and polity. This topic could not but interest Ashraf Murad, it was closely connected with the reality of those days, with Soviet reality. She intertwined with the theme of a strong personality, with the theme of a powerful woman, her archetype, strong, strong-willed, sometimes overwhelming. He is interested in Lenin, since the entire Soviet space lived under this symbol of power. Stalin is also in this row. And the characters of the «Tehran Conference», and Krupskaya's portrait, and Tereshkova's portrait, and Napoleon's portrait – they are all static, they are the Makers of Destinies. Napoleon's image is written in a monumental manner, this is a tragic image, even romantic, he is like an actor in the light of the footlights, but the radiance of the white color of his sword belt stands out against the maroon background of the whole decision, giving solemnity and high meaning, as if speaking about the duality of life, about the two sides of being one. Quite different – Demon, another archetype, frighteningly real in its abstractness, written in the same style with «Horse». His small head, twisted, but titanic body is the formula of the demonic principle.

In the picture «Horse» the painting space is monochrome and dense. This is essential realism, here the transfer is not of external signs and features, but of real inner life, the essence of reality.

«The girl in black glasses» is amazingly positive, full of the energy of the sea, joy and humor. Although the canvas depicts nothing but a figure on a black background, we are sure that there is a sultry beach, people, a summer day and the atmosphere of a happy life all around. The same non-verbalized artistic task is posed by the master in still lifes – these energetic, filled with life juice as if unpicked melons, watermelons, apples, roses, tulips completely transform our idea of still life – “dead nature”.

The secret of joy lives in the black color of Ashraf's canvases; in this black color, which is life itself, all his unexpected characters bathe: both bathers, and sportswomen, and Simone Signoret, and Lenin, and a watermelon, and the Demon. Black is the perfect color, absorbing and exuding life. This is the color of Ashraf.

He was a very handsome, happy, cheerful, kind and decent man. Before the disease, everything went well. They say that trouble happened to him in Leningrad – intoxication, and then consciousness changed. The disease began to attack, in spurts, advancing and then retreating. He struggled with it desperately. It took away his friends, communication, freedom of the body, but not the freedom of creativity. He did not give it to anyone: either to the disease, or to the government or to people surrounding him.

Personal problems, tragedies, mental hypersensitivity and dark forces stalked Ashraf like almost every great painter. Like Leonardo, Botticelli, Van Gogh, Kirchner ... fate was more favorable to some of them and less favorable to others (depending on the life and spiritual problems they were faced with.) But there is, perhaps, the freedom of choice. Ashraf Murad chose creative enthusiasm and burning. A Dionysian ecstasy of creation. And, as Nietzsche says, that's what Zoroaster had called for. «The present is perfect,» wrote George Braque. Ashraf Murad wrote the same thing – in colors.

On March 15, 2019 in the Museum of Painting of Azerbaijan of the XX-XXI centuries, the exhibition of the artist-nonconformist Ashraf Murad “Love and Protest” had opened. It was organized with the assistance of YARAT Contemporary Art Center.

The exhibition features a little more than forty works of the artist (painter); almost half of them belongs to the Nar gallery, owned by Farkhad Akhmedov – famous Russian businessperson of Azerbaijani origin, philanthropist and art collector. Notably, Farkhad Akhmedov with the great art collection of more than twenty Azerbaijani artists of different directions and generations treats warmly the works of Ashraf Murad. About 130 his works are kept carefully in his gallery. Moreover, literally he saved a lot of them from destruction in Baku workshops. His invaluable contribution to the development of art became a real source of inspiration for the next generations of artists.

The collection of paintings by Ashraf Murad, owned by the «Nar» Gallery of art Farhad Akhmedov, is an amazing gift to the inhabitants of Baku, the fruit of meticulous collecting work, because the destinies of paintings, like human destinies, are different and complex. The fate of Ashraf Murad's paintings turned out to be happier than his personal fate: the artist who spent his life in obscurity and illness, 40 years after his death, appeared on the walls of Nar Gallery in all the splendor of his

magical colors! An amateur and passionate art collector, Farhad Akhmedov managed to collect the largest collection of paintings by Ashraf Murad – and this is the brightest event for art lovers! More than 30 canvases and 50 drawings are in the possession of «Nar Gallery» – these are monumental compositions, portraits, still lifes, landscapes, graphics, pencil studies. And each exhibit is a masterpiece!

Conclusion.

1. Ashraf Murad is one of the most significant, most mysterious and almost surreal figures of Azerbaijani art in the second half of the 20th century. His pictures contain a high concentration of information that distinguishes a masterpiece – bearing deep, aesthetic knowledge – no matter if it is expressed in a realist, cubist, decorative or any other language.
2. Ashraf Murad's creativity is deeply archetypal.
3. This mysterious and extremely expressive painting is a high level of artistry. This is the level that Ashraf Murad reached and none of his contemporaries was able to reach – it was only his level and nobody else's.
4. The individuality of the artist is unique, and his personal style has no analogues in the world or in domestic arts. He introduced «psychism» and unique freedom of expression, hypersensitiveness and chaste eroticism, the truth of the body, the truth of the flesh, states of consciousness altered to the extreme and the taste of today to Azerbaijani arts.
5. With a closer look at the great examples of 20th century art, you'll find a certain conventionality of the avant-garde – realism opposition, their relativity and typological blur. Often realist painters used modernist techniques and inside the avant-garde there was some «realism». Besides that, the realism of some avant-garde works exceeds the «realism» of realism, if such tautology is acceptable.

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Gülrəna Mirzə (Azərbaycan)

ƏŞRƏF MURADIN VİZİONER İNCƏSƏNƏTİ

Məqalə XX əsr Azərbaycan bədii mədəniyyətinə görkəmli töhfələr vermiş böyük avanqard rəssam Əşrəf Muradın 100-illiyinə həsr olunub. Birinci hissədə rəssamın gəncliyindən, təhsil illərindən və rəngkar kimi ilk yaradıcılıq dövründən bəhs edilir. Sonra rəssamın bənzərsiz fərdi üslubunun formalaşması və təşəkkülü, yaradıcılıq mərhələləri, çətin və əzablı taleyi, fərqli janrlarda bədii idiolektin axtarışları təhlil edilir. Məqalənin sonuncu hissəsində rəssamın şah əsərləri olan portretlər təhlil olunur. Azərbaycan incəsənətində Əşrəf Murad yaradıcılığı ayrıca, müstəqil və fərqli məkan tutur, çünki formal təfəkkürünə, rəngkarlıq texnikasına, kompozisiya istedadına, işığın mənimsəməsinə və cazibəsinə görə ustadın əsərləri unikalıdır.

Açar sözlər: Əşrəf Murad, rəngkarlıq, Bakı Müasir İncəsənət Muzeyi, Nar qalereyası, YARAT Müasir İncəsənət Məkanının sərəqiləri.

Гюльрена Мирза (Азербайджан)

ВИЗИОНЕРСКОЕ ИСКУССТВО АШРАФ МУРАДА

Статья посвящена 100-летию выдающегося художника-авангардиста Азербайджана Ашрафа Мурада, внесшего огромный вклад в художественную культуру Азербайджана XX века. Первая часть статьи посвящена молодым годам художника, образованию и начальному периоду его творчества как живописца. В средней части статьи анализируется формирование и становление собственного творческого языка мастера, рассматривается два этапа его творчества, описываются жанры, в которых проходили поиски его идиолекта. В концовке статьи рассматривается магнумopus творчества художника – портреты, а также персональная выставка, прошедшая после его смерти. Его творчество стоит особняком в пространстве искусства: по формальному мышлению, технике живописного мастерства и композиционного таланта, по мощности энергетического воздействия, по уровню притяжения и поглощения света.

Ключевые слова: Ашраф Мурад, живопись, Бакинский Музей Современного Искусства, Галерея Нар, Центр Современного Искусства YARAT.

FIGURES:

