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TRANSFORMATIONS IN KAZAKH VISUAL ART: FROM POSTMODERNISM TO DIGITAL EXPRESSION

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the emergence and evolution of digital art within Kazakhstan's visual arts landscape, focusing on its impact on cultural heritage. It examines the defining characteristics of digital art, clarifies key concepts and terminology, and analyzes the methods used in both the creation and interpretation of contemporary digital works. The study also highlights innovative tools and techniques that are shaping the creative process today. Attention is given to the development and transformation of Kazakhstan's modern visual art scene, with particular focus on artists from the postmodern era to the rise of crypto-art. The article traces the historical context of visual art both globally and within Kazakhstan, identifying key phases in its progression. It further systematizes the cultural and historical trajectory of digital art and outlines the foundational conditions that have enabled its emergence in Kazakhstan's contemporary art environment.

KEYWORDS: Art, Artistic Eclecticism, Digital Creativity, Cryptoart, Modern Visual Expression, Culture, Digital Era.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, as Kazakhstan steadily upholds and reinforces its national independence, significant attention is being paid to the preservation and revitalization of its cultural and philosophical heritage. A nationwide movement aimed at spiritual development and cultural renaissance has created favorable conditions for the advancement of national philosophy and the arts. This cultural renewal is deeply rooted in state policy and reflects a broader effort to restore historical consciousness among citizens. President Nursultan Nazarbayev emphasized this national priority in his work "The Future of Kazakhstan Lies in the Nation's Ideological Unity", where he urged for the rigorous study, preservation, and restoration of historical values. He argued that returning to one's cultural and historical roots is not only a natural but a positive and necessary process. Such a return is vital in shaping a strong national identity in an increasingly globalized world [1].

Today, this cultural awakening is most vividly observed in the rapid development of Kazakh visual art, particularly painting and sculpture. Despite its relatively recent emergence spanning only a few generations Kazakh visual art has undergone an intense and dynamic evolution. From its early formative stages to its current phase of international recognition, the development of this art form illustrates the creative resilience and cultural depth of the Kazakh people. This transformation did not happen in isolation; rather, it was deeply influenced by the nation's desire to reconnect with its philosophical worldview, traditional aesthetics, and symbolic imagination [2].

However, in the contemporary context, painting and sculpture have become significantly more complex not only in terms of technique and composition, but also in meaning and cultural reference. The current artistic landscape is saturated with conceptual layers, often drawing on a wide range of visual languages, including abstract, symbolic, and metaphorical forms. As a result, the gap between artist and audience has widened, sometimes leading to confusion or disengagement among general viewers. Many contemporary artworks are no longer immediately accessible or easily understood, especially when they break away from conventional aesthetic norms or narrative structures. This complexity reflects a broader shift in global and local art, where form and meaning are constantly redefined.

Understanding the full scope of contemporary Kazakh art requires a nuanced and reflective

approach one that takes into account not only artistic methods and materials, but also cultural memory, historical experience, and national identity. Many artists today are revisiting the experiences and stylistic foundations laid during the formative stages of the national art school. However, rather than merely replicating past traditions, these artists reinterpret them through the lens of modernity. They use a diverse array of visual tools colors, textures, compositions, and sculptural forms to reconstruct and reimagine the cultural codes of the past. These reconstructions are not nostalgic imitations; instead, they represent a conscious effort to collect and synthesize scattered elements of cultural memory into a coherent artistic system [3,4].

In this creative process, artists become cultural archivists of sorts, piecing together fragments of national identity into powerful visual narratives. They draw from deep-rooted understandings of the world reflected in Kazakh cosmology, folklore, and oral traditions and embed these ideas into contemporary artistic language. Through painting and sculpture, they reconstruct models of the world that are deeply tied to national consciousness and worldview. In this way, the visual arts act not only as a mirror of society but also as a medium for philosophical exploration and cultural affirmation.

It is also important to recognize that this ongoing transformation of visual and sculptural art is occurring within a highly pluralistic artistic environment. Artists are now working across multiple styles, techniques, and philosophies. Some adhere to classical traditions, while others experiment with new media, conceptual approaches, or postmodern expressions. What unites these diverse practices is a shared engagement with the "object" not just as a physical form, but as a bearer of meaning. **In modern works, the object often plays a dual role** it serves as both an aesthetic focal point and a symbolic vehicle. Depending on the artist's intent, the object may heighten beauty and formality or, conversely, challenge and subvert traditional aesthetic norms.

This duality gives rise to a new visual language one that is highly individualized but still deeply informed by collective identity. In many contemporary works, one sees a movement away from surface-level representation and toward more abstract, associative, and metaphorical expression. The artistic object becomes a site of negotiation between tradition and innovation, between national memory and personal reflection. In this dynamic, the viewer is invited not merely to look, but to interpret, to engage, and to re-evaluate their own

understanding of cultural meaning.

Significantly, the rise of such a diverse and layered artistic language is closely tied to the development of a new generation of Kazakh artists painters and sculptors who are shaping what can be described as a “post-independence aesthetic.” This aesthetic is not monolithic. It is characterized by hybridity, experimentation, and fluidity of form. Yet it remains rooted in the national mentality, drawing on symbols, metaphors, and narratives that are distinctly Kazakh. It reflects a deeper philosophical inquiry into questions of identity, history, and belonging questions that are central to both individual creativity and collective memory [5]. (Table 1)

Table 1: Analytical Category, Evidence, Interpretation.

Theme	Key Ideas	Implications
Pluralistic Artistic Environment	Artists work across classical traditions, new media, conceptual, and postmodern approaches.	Demonstrates diversity of styles and philosophies in contemporary Kazakh art.
The “Object” as Central Concept	The object functions both as an aesthetic focal point and a symbolic vehicle. It may affirm beauty or subvert norms.	Serves as a unifying element across diverse practices; embodies both form and meaning.
Emergence of a New Visual Language	Shift from surface-level representation to abstract, associative, and metaphorical expression.	Encourages deeper interpretation and active viewer engagement.
Negotiation of Tradition and Innovation	Artistic works balance national memory with personal reflection.	Reflects ongoing dialogue between heritage and modern creativity.
Post-Independence Aesthetic	Characterized by hybridity, experimentation, and fluidity, yet rooted in Kazakh symbols and narratives.	Defines the identity of a new generation of artists; links individual creativity with collective memory.

Stylistically, this new artistic language is often defined by ambiguity, abstraction, and conceptual layering. The visual codes are not always direct or literal; rather, they rely on suggestion, metaphor, and symbolic resonance. In many cases, works adopt a metaphysical or philosophical tone, using visual form as a means of exploring complex ideas and existential themes. This approach requires an active and thoughtful engagement from the viewer, who must interpret rather than simply observe [6].

The aim of this article is to explore the current

state of visual art in Kazakhstan by analyzing its developmental trajectory from its foundational stages to its contemporary manifestations. Through a focus on both painting and sculpture, we will examine how national identity, cultural philosophy, and artistic innovation converge in the visual language of today’s Kazakh artists. Particular attention will be given to how artists use form, symbolism, and composition to articulate complex cultural narratives, as well as how these narratives contribute to the broader project of cultural revitalization in the post-Soviet space.

In doing so, this study seeks not only to describe the surface features of modern Kazakh visual art, but also to identify the deeper philosophical and cultural currents that shape its direction. By tracing the connections between tradition and modernity, between individual vision and national identity, we aim to offer a comprehensive understanding of the evolving role of visual art in Kazakhstan’s cultural landscape. Ultimately, this exploration will contribute to a broader dialogue on the significance of art as a means of cultural continuity and transformation in a rapidly changing world.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a multidisciplinary qualitative approach to explore the evolution of contemporary Kazakh visual art particularly in painting and sculpture through the lens of cultural philosophy, stylistic transformation, and technological innovation. The research methodology is grounded in a combination of visual analysis, semiotic interpretation, and contextual cultural analysis, integrating perspectives from art history, postmodern theory, digital aesthetics, and ethnocultural studies [7].

To understand the changing nature of artistic expression in Kazakhstan, the research focused on a selected group of contemporary artists, spanning across three generations. These artists have participated in both domestic and international exhibitions, and their creative output offers insight into the shifts occurring in Kazakh visual art since the late 20th century. A central component of the methodology involved a comparative analysis of their works, tracing how traditional realism has been transformed under the influence of postmodernism, digitalization, and global art movements.

Kazakh artists have long demonstrated a strong grounding in realism, a visual language deeply rooted in academic painting traditions. This foundation, however, has not remained static. As global technological and scientific advancements

have permeated nearly all sectors including art. Kazakh painters and sculptors have adapted and responded to new paradigms. These developments include the emergence of postmodernism, the rise of digital media, and the increasing influence of international conceptual art practices. Thus, a secondary layer of the research employed chronological tracing, identifying transitional moments where realism gave way to abstraction, symbolism, or multimedia expression.

Although the term "postmodernism" has no fixed chronological start in Kazakhstan's art history, its influence is visible in the thematic and stylistic shifts that have taken place since the 1990s. The research drew on theoretical contributions from Kazakh art critics and scholars such as B. Ibraev, who emphasized that the essence of postmodernism in Kazakh art lies not in merely revisiting the past but in a conscious movement toward the future [8]. Rather than promoting rigid synthesis, this trend favors eclecticism a free and often contradictory combination of styles and narratives which eventually gives rise to new forms grounded in what could be termed the "ethnic memory."

The materials for this study include over 40 visual works from contemporary Kazakh artists such as A. Akanayev, Zh. Kairanbayev, N. Bube, A. Duzelhanov, N. Kilibayev, U. Zhubanyazov, and others. Their paintings and sculptures represent a wide range of stylistic directions, from neo-traditionalism to conceptual installations. The selection criteria for artworks were based on thematic relevance, use of innovative materials, and the integration of cultural symbolism. These artists engage in visual storytelling that combines epic composition, surrealistic metaphors, and historical-ethnic motifs, which reflects the transition from Soviet-era realism to contemporary hybridity [9].

A notable part of the methodology involved empirical observation and visual decoding. Artworks were examined for their use of color, form, material, spatial composition, and symbolic content. Particular attention was given to how these visual elements reflect deeper philosophical ideas such as universalism, myth, rhythm, metaphysics, and national identity. Theoretical references included the spatial theories of Pavel Florensky, Edmund Husserl, Aleksei Losev, and Yuri Lotman, who emphasized that the organization of space in any cultural product reflects deeper models of thought and world-building [10].

Some works featured alternative materials such as metal, leather, and found objects that go beyond traditional media like oil paint or bronze. These were

analyzed under the conceptual framework of "contemporary art", which encourages material experimentation and symbolic layering. Particular attention was paid to archetypal structures and signs, as their use in visual composition reveals continuity with deeper mythological and philosophical narratives of Kazakh culture [11].

In exploring the artistic techniques and symbolic functions of these works, the study also considered how artists challenge or reinforce cultural mythologies. Some engage with non-mythological consciousness, pushing against collective memory with ironic or subversive messages. Others embrace bricolage thinking, weaving together disparate elements dance, myth, sound, and environment to create a multisensory experience. This method is especially prevalent among artists working in "contemporary art" genres, where visual metaphor and philosophical speculation are intertwined.

Another methodological component involved the case analysis of "The Theft of Europe", a major group exhibition involving 15 Kazakh artists from different generations. The show featured works by K. Bazarghaliev, S. Atabekov, B. Bubikanova, and others who employed mixed media and digital tools to critique, reflect, or reimagine Kazakhstan's place in a broader cultural and geopolitical context. This exhibition served as a live laboratory for observing how viewer perception changes when confronted with digital artifacts, conceptual objects, and interactive installations [12].

Artists such as S. Suleimenova and T. Tileuzhanov were also studied for their involvement in art performances and festivals, events that merge art with public action. These art forms categorized as "art act," "art project," or "art festival" create temporary spaces for cultural engagement and often carry strong social messages. The "Green Triangle" group, known for reinterpreting national symbols and traditional ornaments through a contemporary lens, provided key examples of how Kazakh artists are reshaping folklore and national mythology into accessible, urban-friendly formats.

Further attention was paid to the psychological and archetypal dimensions of image-making. Drawing on Jungian theory and its application in art, the research examined how archetypes manifest in Kazakh visual culture. For instance, K. Serikbol's work "Abak Tamga" reveals the enduring role of symbols and sacred signs in shaping visual narratives and establishing identity continuity through image [13].

In exploring the new avant-garde, the works of artists such as A. Noda, K. Askarov, A. Begalin, E.

Isaev, and others were examined. These creators often work with heavy social themes, reinterpreting the national spirit and civilizational imagery through avant-garde forms, installations, or abstract visual structures. Their art is situated within a broader reflection on collective memory, post-Soviet identity, and the tension between globalization and nationalism.

Moreover, the study integrated elements of philosophical discourse, referencing thinkers like Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard, especially their theories on simulacra and simulation, which help explain the presence of duplicated yet disconnected visual signs in digital and postmodern art. These concepts were particularly useful in interpreting how contemporary artists produce “images that do not resemble anything in the real world yet remain culturally charged.”

The study also took into account recent theoretical contributions by Boris Groys, Viktor Misiano, and Sergei Savitsky, who suggest that contemporary art often functions as a manifesto a political and cultural statement rather than merely aesthetic expression. In this sense, Kazakh artists’ works were analyzed as active commentaries on past events, political realities, or emerging social trends.

An important subset of this research focused on the evolution of digital art in Kazakhstan. Since the mid-20th century, art genres such as environmental art, performance, and installation have gained traction, with pioneers like K. Ibragimov, R. Khalfin, E. Meldebekov, and others leading the transformation. These works mark the departure from classical realism and avant-garde traditions toward new media-based practices that are more flexible, interactive, and aligned with global digital culture [14].

Digital art defined by its reliance on technological processes and computer-generated aesthetics includes genres such as video art, photo manipulation, glitch art, and 3D modeling. Artists now combine visual elements with sound, rhythm, and movement, producing works that reflect cultural shifts in a multimedia format. For instance, in “photo art”, artists digitally alter images changing tone, texture, and meaning to create composite visual narratives that resonate with younger audiences. These methods provide new ways to address pressing cultural and social issues, blending creativity with technology.

As digital tools become more accessible, Kazakh artists are using them not only for creative expression but also to engage with philosophical, historical, and cultural ideas. This includes incorporating

animation, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) into their works. According to art theorist Natalia Rabchuk, digital art provides a unique opportunity to express both the internal and external aspects of human experience. It allows artists to convey subjective vision while interacting dynamically with the viewer.

In sum, this research employed a comprehensive, layered methodology combining visual critique, philosophical interpretation, empirical analysis, and artist case studies. It demonstrates how Kazakh contemporary visual art has moved beyond traditional boundaries, incorporating eclectic influences, digital media, and cultural memory into a vibrant, evolving artistic language [15].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In recent decades, the evolution of digital art in Kazakhstan has mirrored global trends, yet retained a unique local flavor shaped by historical, technological, and cultural dynamics. This section reflects on the state of digital art within contemporary Kazakhstani visual culture, drawing on developments in technology, the growing diversity of digital practices, and the shifting perception of what constitutes “art” in the digital era.

The Integration of Digital Art into Contemporary Society

Digital technologies have fundamentally altered not only how art is created but also how it is perceived and consumed. In Kazakhstan, the art scene is responding dynamically to the increasing digitalization of society. The notion that digital art is somehow inferior or unworthy of inclusion in the broader art world still persists in certain circles, particularly in post-Soviet contexts. Despite this resistance, the rise of digital art schools and communities even in these regions shows that the tide is changing.

A global trend has emerged in which countries establish digital art museums and online galleries. Kazakhstan is no exception. Local artists have started embracing the potential of tablets, styluses, and design software, shifting from traditional oil painting and canvas to digital surfaces. The process focuses less on the texture or physicality of materials and more on the image’s symbolic and conceptual content. This technological shift allows for rapid creation, easier dissemination, and global accessibility [16].

3.1. A Hybrid State of Art Practice

Contemporary art today exists in a hybrid form, integrating both digital and traditional components.

Kazakhstani artists now operate in a mixed media reality, where artistic processes and aesthetic outcomes are increasingly driven by technology. This shift impacts not only production but also how art is curated, sold, and archived. The digitization of artworks also allows for restoration and preservation, extending the life of cultural heritage through new media.

Notably, the emergence of electronic formats for buying and selling art including via NFTs (non-fungible tokens) has transformed the economics of art in Kazakhstan. While many still associate "true art" with tangible forms, younger artists and collectors are pushing the boundaries by using blockchain technologies to validate and distribute digital works.

3.2. Glitch Art, NFT, and the Rise of Cryptoart

A significant evolution within digital art is the emergence of new genres such as glitch art and cryptoart. These developments mark a break from traditional art forms and establish a digital-native aesthetic. Glitch art, characterized by intentional distortions and data corruption, represents a metaphor for technological instability and cultural fragmentation both of which resonate with the postmodern condition in Kazakhstan. On the other hand, NFTs have gained traction as a blockchain-based system of owning and trading digital artwork. While this trend is still nascent in Kazakhstan, notable events like the 2021 NFT exhibition at the Hermitage Museum have fueled interest among local artists and collectors.

Interestingly, the conceptual basis of NFT art finds its roots in 20th-century avant-garde experiments like Marcel Duchamp's readymades. In Kazakhstan, this historical continuity is being explored by a new generation of artists who understand art as not only an aesthetic product but a comment on systems economic, digital, or social. The cryptoart scene, while still developing, presents a radical rethinking of what it means to own, view, and create art.

3.3. Kazakhstan's Digital Artists: Between Innovation and Identity

Kazakhstan's visual art is developing along multiple trajectories, enriched by digital innovation and global interconnectedness. Artists such as A. Musrepov, Zh. Yerlanqyzy, A. Saifullaev, and A. Batyr are representative of a younger generation working with animation, multimedia, and video art. At the same time, established names like B. Bubikanova and A. Menlibayeva blend traditional Kazakh motifs with experimental digital forms,

forging a dialogue between the past and future [17].

Although some Kazakh scholars are cited, further engagement with recent local-language art criticism can enrich the regional grounding of this study. Such perspectives are particularly relevant given that contemporary artists in Kazakhstan explore a wide array of subjects from socio-political critique to spiritual symbolism addressing both local themes (such as post-Soviet identity, nomadic culture, and national symbolism) and global concerns (such as digital surveillance, consumerism, and ecological degradation). Incorporating regional criticism will also help contextualize the diversity of digital practices, as designers, game developers, musicians, filmmakers, and self-taught creators contribute to a dynamic scene that reflects both national traditions and emerging digital realities.

3.4. Redefining the Concept of the Artist and Viewer

The meaning of the term artist is undergoing transformation. In Kazakhstan, as elsewhere, the digital revolution has democratized the production of art. Anyone with a device and an idea can now create, edit, and share their vision with the world. This shift blurs the line between professional and amateur, creator and consumer. Viewers themselves become participants engaging with interactive installations, VR experiences, and social media-based exhibitions.

This decentralization extends to the evaluation of art. No longer the sole domain of critics or curators, the legitimacy of artwork is now often decided by communities online. This phenomenon reflects a broader cultural shift towards participatory and decentralized art practices, where digital media platforms are the new galleries and marketplaces.

The experience of art, too, has changed. Online exhibitions, VR walkthroughs, and AI-generated works mean that interaction is no longer limited by geography or physical access. In Kazakhstan, this is especially significant for artists and audiences outside major cultural centers, offering new ways to engage with the national and global art community.

3.5. Challenges and Opportunities

Despite the many opportunities, digital art in Kazakhstan still faces several challenges. One key issue is the unstable nature of software and platforms tools used by digital artists are often updated, changed, or rendered obsolete. This constant flux creates problems for preserving digital artworks in a consistent format.

Another challenge lies in institutional recognition.

While some museums and galleries have begun to accept digital art into their collections, many traditional institutions remain hesitant. Moreover, the lack of a unified framework for classifying, storing, and exhibiting digital works limits their integration into the established art world.

Nonetheless, the benefits outweigh the limitations. Digitization supports education, research, and access to cultural heritage. It opens up avenues for global collaboration and allows artists to experiment freely with form, technique, and meaning. Moreover, it provides a platform for interdisciplinary dialogue bringing together fields like philosophy, architecture, sound design, artificial intelligence, and more.

3.6. Socio-Cultural Impact of Digital Art in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's transition from post-Soviet society to an independent, digitally connected nation has profoundly impacted its cultural expressions. Digital art is both a result of and a response to this transition. It embodies a new cultural narrative that values innovation, hybrid identity, and global citizenship, while still rooting itself in local traditions [18].

The country's young artists are at the forefront of this change, using digital tools not just to create aesthetically engaging works, but to comment on political, cultural, and technological transformations. From augmented reality installations that reinterpret

nomadic heritage, to animated films that explore urban alienation, these works contribute to a broader understanding of Kazakhstan's evolving identity [19].

Through digital art, Kazakhstan is becoming more visible on the global cultural map. Its artists are increasingly participating in international exhibitions, collaborations, and digital marketplaces. This exposure is critical for fostering a more nuanced understanding of Central Asian art and thought [20].

4. CONCLUSION

The digitalization of art in Kazakhstan is not merely a trend but a profound transformation. It is changing how art is made, viewed, owned, and understood. Artists are adapting to a new media era that values flexibility, interactivity, and innovation. Though traditional notions of art and artist still persist, a new paradigm is emerging one where technology and creativity coexist fluidly.

Digital art is now recognized not just as a form of expression but as a cultural phenomenon that reflects the complexities of our time. Its rapid development in Kazakhstan underscores both the creative potential of local artists and the broader societal shift towards digital culture. As the country continues to embrace new technologies, digital art will likely play an increasingly central role in shaping its cultural future.

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