

TRANSFORMATION OF THE IMAGE OF FAMILY IN THE VISUAL CULTURE OF KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract. This study examines the portrayal of family in Kazakhstan's visual culture, tracing its evolution from traditional to contemporary depictions against a backdrop of socio-political changes. The study establishes why the image of family was marginalized in the Soviet period and has had such an explosive development in contemporary art. The focus of the research is placed on the nuclear family and the interpretation of the theme of family in photography, painting and contemporary art in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The purpose of the study is to investigate the transformation of the portrayal of family in the transitional period of socio-political changes. To achieve this goal, the comparative-historical method is employed to analyze artworks from the funds of the A. Kasteyev State Museum of Arts and the works of contemporary Kazakh artists over the past 5 years. Findings indicate a re-engagement with pre-Soviet cultural roots juxtaposed against the backdrop of modernity and globalization. The conclusion posits that these changing representations not only reflect the ongoing connection between past and present in Kazakh society but also contribute to a broader understanding of cultural identity and familial concepts, suggesting a dynamic interplay between adherence to tradition and adaptation to contemporary realities.

Keywords: *Clan, photography, painting, contemporary art, transitional period, socialist realism, strategy, tactic, performativity, identity.*

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1. Introduction

The concept of family, a fundamental societal unit, manifests distinctively across cultures and epochs, embodying the prevailing ideologies, economic conditions and social transformations. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, a country with a rich tapestry of history influenced by both Soviet governance and its subsequent independence, the visual representation of family offers insightful reflections into the shifts in societal norms, values and identity.

Kazakhstan's visual culture, especially in the context of family portrayal, provides a unique lens to study the intersection of art, society and politics. During the Soviet era, art was heavily influenced by socialist realism, a style mandated by the state to promote the ideals of communism. This period saw family depicted in ways that aligned with state ideologies, focusing on the collective rather than individual or familial narratives.

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However, these representations were not merely passive reflections of state ideology but also subtle means of negotiating and sometimes contesting the imposed narratives, embedding within them a complex layer of meanings and resistances.

The Kazakh school of painting first took root in the 1930s. The analysis of motifs in Kazakh painting shows that throughout its development in the 20th century, the theme of family as a married couple with or without children was the least demanded one. This fact is peculiar since the role of family has always been tremendously important in Kazakh society. Knowledge of one's lineage - shezhire - was obligatory for each Kazakh. Through their genealogy, the person determined their place in society and history, identifying with a specific clan (Argynbaev, 1973).

In the nomadic way of life, loners simply could not survive and the entire system of nomadic society was based on the supremacy of the clan. Some archaic familial practices, such as levirate marriage, which existed before Soviet rule, stemmed from the need to decide the fates of young widows with underage children for whom kolym had been paid, while the majority of the property was inherited by the husband's relatives (Burova *et al.*, 2023; Zhunussova, 2022). Aside from economic reasons, keeping women within a single clan was justified by the striving to eliminate the institution of orphans, since children who had lost their parent(s) were in the care of relatives (Argynbaev, 1978). Thus, the integrity of the clan and the continuity of generations were preserved (Hos *et al.*, 2021; Osadchaya *et al.*, 2023; Rybakov, 1896).

The transition towards independence in 1991 marked a pivotal moment for Kazakhstan, initiating a process of national identity reconstruction and cultural revival. This period saw a reevaluation of traditional values, including those related to family and a quest for a post-Soviet Kazakh identity in the arts. Artists began to explore the themes of kinship, heritage and personal narratives, moving away from the collective focus of socialist realism to a more diversified and individualized portrayal of family. This shift not only reflected the changing social fabric but also contributed to broader discourse on national identity, modernity and globalization. Over the past 5 years, Almaty alone had four exhibitions with family as the chief theme: “Birtutas” (“A Single Whole”) (2018) and “Shezhire” (2023) by O. Kaboke, “Oshak” (“Hearth”) by A. Nurbolat (1921) and the collective exhibition “Shezhire” (2022).

Today, visual culture is quick to respond to large-scale political and sociocultural changes, becoming a sort of impression of ongoing societal processes. The transformation of social relationships, symbolic values and ideals was directly reflected in the private sphere as well, which, in turn, influenced the actualization of the motifs of kinship, marriage and parenthood in art, especially in the works of young masters of painting and graphics, contemporary art and cinema (Bekbenbetova *et al.*, 2022; Zhatkanbayeva *et al.*, 2017).

In the present paper, we attempted to discern why the image of family was marginalized in Soviet art and then developed so extensively in contemporary culture.

Our study relies on the definitions of family developed by sociologists, who interpret family as the unity of the clan (ties of kinship), marriage and family, distinguishing the nuclear family (a married couple with children) and the traditional extended family (three generations and more) (Giddens, 2009; Karimova *et al.*, 2022; Kharchev, 2003). We will deliberately not touch upon such important branches of this topic as the image of childhood and the portrayal of various family rites. The focus of our attention lies specifically on the nuclear family and the interpretation of the theme of family in painting and contemporary art in three historical periods: the 1930s, the

time of formation of a monolithic totalitarian state and the creation of the Kazakh aul; the Khrushchev Thaw, the liberal changes of which manifested themselves in Kazakh culture in the late 1950s and 1960s and contemporary Kazakh art of the 2010-2020s in the context of the fundamental renewal of society and the problem of sovereignty. The study aims to explore the dynamics of family representation during these transitional periods associated with large-scale changes in social life.

We seek to explore these representations within Kazakhstan's visual culture, examining how art has documented, responded to and influenced perceptions of family through a period of significant political and social change.

2. Methods

The study was conducted in 2023 and utilized the comparative historical method. The comparative historical method provided for the analysis of the development of family representation in the art and culture of Kazakhstan throughout different historical periods.

The sources of material for the research included Kazakh artworks from the funds of the A. Kasteyev State Museum of Arts (Almaty, Kazakhstan) that were examples of national identity in the school of painting; photos from the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) (Saint Petersburg, Russia) and the D. Bagaev Memorial House-Museum (Pavlodar, Kazakhstan); as well as paintings and projects by contemporary Kazakh artists over the last 5 years that received considerable attention in criticism and the press.

Our critical research principle was the study of selected works of Kazakhstan's school of painting, which consisted in formal-stylistic and iconological analysis, revealing the visual structure and hidden symbolism behind the artworks. The comparative historical method allowed us to discover peculiarities in the understanding of the image of family at different stages in the development of painting.

To explain the extra-aesthetic factors in the actualization of the family theme in transitional periods, we elected the perspective of social art history and examined the correlation of Soviet artworks with the socio-political interest of the client represented by state institutions that monitored the ideological discourse of that age. The image of family was analyzed proceeding from understanding changes in the “period eye”. The author of this concept, Baxandall (1972), insisted that a productive analysis of the fine arts cannot be done without the study of the spiritual life and sociocultural practices surrounding the creation and perception of the artwork. In our study, we seek to demonstrate how prominent artworks and artists' methods of reflecting the image of family offer new opportunities for the comprehension and analysis of historical reality. At the same time, there is a reverse process, in which the changes marking transitional periods, when captured in artistic images, shape new models of behavior in society, which we will examine based on the examples of contemporary art.

Fundamental writings on the establishment and dynamics of the Kazakh family, on which our study heavily relies, are the works of the historian and ethnographer Argynbaev (1973, 1978).

In the interpretation of visual materials, we utilized Barthes' (1997) semiotic models of the image. The task of unveiling the foundations of patriarchal family, Soviet day-to-day life and various representations of Masculinity and Femininity necessitated

a reference to research on sociocultural anthropology (Adoneva, 2018; Clark, 2000; McCallum, 2018; Yurchak, 2006).

Important for the study of the family theme in Soviet art is the concept of tactics opposing the ruling order in society by M. De Certeau. This concept sheds light on important aspects in the search for national identity and the striving of artists to oppose ideological pressure through the images of private life and the individual space of family (Certeau, 2013).

3. Results and Discussion

Patriarchal Family as an Aposiopesis in Paintings in Kazakhstan of the Totalitarian Period

The first visual representation of the Kazakh family is photos taken as part of ethnographic studies of the extensive eastern territories annexed to Tsarist Russia. The objective of the photographers was to make a detailed description of the daily life and appearance of natives. In the Soviet period, these photos were only available to specialists, but now they are open to the general public. The images have gained great popularity in the context of the active search for sustainable foundations of identification, now considered not a reflection of colonial discourse with its compulsory exoticization of colonial peoples but works of art serving an aesthetic function.

Similar to early European family portraits of the mid-17th century and the images of new class bourgeoisie families popular in the 19th century, these photos are created to glorify the status and wealth of the depicted heroes. The same schemes in the formation of the group, lack of emotion and close attention to detail in costumes and entourage eliminate any manifestations of individual qualities.

Photos of Kazakh families show the same examples and the same elimination of the personal, the unification of heroes in a single class, a single social group.



Figure 1. Kyrgyz family of the Semipalatinsk region in traditional costumes, Kazakhstan, 1879

Source: Poliakov (1879)

By virtue of these images, the archetype of the traditional Kazakh family is reinterpreted as not a mere family unit but as an extensive network of kinship covering not only older relatives, the spouses and their children but also other people who were an inseparable part of common everyday life. These images highlight a complex social structure, in which family ties extend beyond the nuclear family, reflecting a collective lifestyle deeply embedded into Kazakh cultural heritage. The picture provides a vivid illustration of sociocultural dynamics in traditional Kazakh society, highlighting the importance of collective family support systems and interdependence among members of the extended family.

Notably, one of the founders of Kazakhstan's school of painting N. Khludov and his student, the first Kazakh painter A. Kasteev rely on the poetics of these photos. Like his mentor, being a primitivist, Kasteev relied on the already existing images found in the paintings of renowned masters, photos, street signs and lubki prints. His depictions of young girls in a yurt are painted with strict adherence to the canons of images from ethnographic reports, which were compiled from an inventory of the traditional culture of the peoples described.

Kasteev's early works, notably from the late 1920s, function as visual catalogs capturing the essence of a nomad's household, where humans and objects are indistinct and young girls blend into the array of inanimate possessions. This depiction aligns with observations of Russian family structures, emphasizing patriarchal, patrilocal and property transmission practices. Post-revolution, the dissolution of private ownership eroded these family foundations. Kasteev's later pieces, such as "Collective Dairy Farm" and "Milking Mares" (1936), shift focus towards celebrating new societal norms against the backdrop of collectivization and demographic shifts, subtly incorporating familial themes despite the catastrophic impacts of forced policies and famine on traditional Kazakh families.

Kasteev created his paintings in the age of the advent of the Kazakh village, "a settled village with collective house-keeping, i.e., a collective farm, which specialized in cattle breeding and mostly consisted of Kazakhs" (Ohayon, 2014). The artworks "Collective Dairy Farm" and "Milking Mares" represent a new form of family, the unifying core of which was the functional parameter. We see a labor artel made up by relatives.

There is now deep value content or tradition behind the concept of family here. Family is defined by function: it is a collective of people doing a common job and working for the good of the people. This is not a separate family household, as before, but a part of a big collective farm aul, painted by the artist in great detail in the landscape stretching behind the family group.

In contrast to photos from the archives and artworks of Khludov, Kasteev's paintings have a personal, almost autobiographical hue and are constructed from the first-person perspective. This is what allowed the painter, while remaining strictly within the theme assigned by the state, which was devoted to depicting the new socialist daily life of the Kazakh people, to "let it slip", creating images that did not fit into the scheme prescribed by social realism.

To describe the specificity of Kasteev's portrayal of family, we can resort to Barthes' idea of two concepts existing in the structure of a single photograph - *Studium* and *Punctum*. The first refers to the meaning of the photo, which the viewer uncovers through their cultural experience. The second term most commonly refers to a detail whose presence transforms the photo, wounding and fascinating the viewer. As pointed

out by Barthes (1997) himself, “Many photos show no signs of life as I look at them” (p. 46). However, if the photo has certain triggers that disrupt the usual polite interest, the pre-programmed reading of the elementary “text” of the painting fails.

The concept of Punctum can characterize important details in the studied works by Kasteev. They evoke concern and spontaneous interest due to the optionality of their appearance and their absurdity. This is an ugly little boy looking directly at the spectators and lined up like an army, strictly horizontally a series of snow-white yurts, against which people do their daily work.

In Kasteev's genre devoted to the working days, the plot beginning is almost always absent. This frees Kasteev's painting from the cementing condition of totalitarian ideology - the primacy of language and verbal formulation. The painting “Collective Dairy Farm” (Figure 2) depicts a high mountain pasture and members of a family, who, on a warm summer day, are making qurut (salted curd cheese balls) and laying it dry on the canopy. While the adults are fully immersed in their chores, the child standing by the entrance to a small hiking yurt is looking straight at us.

The ideal space of the valley running down into endless depths, the tranquility, beauty and smoothness of women's movements, the neat rows of snow-white qurut echoing with the white spots of the flock in the distance - the world of the aul presented as idyllic, the promised land reached by the people, is sharply crossed out by this central character who represents the future. The painting does not boil down to the simple formula “Kazakhstan as an example of happy collective labor, a new socialist paradise”, which the masters of art were demanded to visualize. Unexpectedly, it emphasizes a kind of disturbance in the system of traditional ties: happy parents - happy children, to whom adults will later pass on their work skills. More than that, this image casts doubt on the truthfulness of this paradise. Just like Punctum in photography, “this is the case that aims at me but also hurts me, hits me” (Barthes, 1997), forcing one to rethink the entire understanding of the painting.



Figure 2. A. Kasteev. Collective Dairy Farm. 1936

The second work, “Milking Mares” (Figure 3), also raises several questions upon closer inspection. The artist here edits together two views: reproduces a specific scene of milking mares and in the background paints a magnificent panorama centered around the nomad's house - the yurt. As previously discovered by one of the authors of this paper, S.Zh. Kobzhanova, this work has a specific visual source - a photo from the private fund “Troitsk City. No.37. From the Kyrgyz steppe. Milking Mares”, which Kosteev replicates almost completely. The only differences are minor compositional alterations made to highlight the long row of yurts, the reinforcement of this image by transfer to a different medium.



Figure 3. A. Kasteev. Milking Mares. 1936

Using the methodology of de Certeau, we can hypothesize that Kasteev employed the tactic of “poaching”, arrogating to himself the metanarrative in the form of an official photograph to fit in the propaganda strategy and yet allowed himself to create a new field, putting in the artwork his own meaningful ideas and individual experiences. Kasteev's actions repeat the tactics utilized by the “weak” to create a free space of personality in a hostile environment formed completely by the dominant strategy of power institutions. As a result, there is an unpredictable malfunction in the perception of his work through the Punctum described above, leading to a shift in the semantic foundation.

Yurchak (2006), a researcher of Soviet everyday life, presents a similar description of the idea of the performative shift: each Soviet citizen joined in the process of “reproduction of ritualized acts and statements”, for example, experienced joyful excitement and enlightenment on collective farm holidays and demonstrations, but did not intend to assimilate the discourse they contained. This led to the emergence of new meanings and forms of existence, which the state “did not foresee and never managed to fully see or comprehend” (p. 77).

Kasteev built the image of his Homeland and his landscapes became “sites of memory” of a lost past that can disappear from collective memory (Nora, 1999), while the future, as an unexpectedly ugly child, only scares. The paintings illuminate the main

mythopoetic constant of the nomadic type of thinking: the image of the “Own”, protected space extracted from chaos by the artist's will. Through painting, Kasteev spoke truths entirely unrelated to the current rhetoric of the destruction of the old world. He painted the immutability of nature and the home, the solidarity and brotherhood of the people, bringing order and meaning to the world of cataclysms of Soviet reality.

During this period, photographs often depicted families within yurts, minus the elder generation, hinting at a continued semi-nomadic lifestyle. Artists seeking commissions for thematic works from the Union of Artists faced stringent reviews by artistic councils. These checks ensured compliance with Soviet visions of modernizing rural areas, transitioning Kazakhs to a settled way of life and integrating them into the broader Soviet society. Consequently, art portraying families, especially those of lower social status in traditional nomadic settings, was scrutinized as potentially glorifying a past inconsistent with state policies.

The image of home and family as a clan living in it is eroded and becomes unclear. The action in paintings on the theme of auls is often depicted near a yurt, the emphasis is placed on the external rather than internal space and the scene takes on a mass character. Ritual actions, such as a wedding, are also transformed into collective celebrations (Kasteev, “Kolkhoz Toyi”, 1937), in which the inhabitants of the aul become one collective body, as is typical for Soviet holidays with mandatory pathos and happy smiles on the faces of the gathered.

The events often unfold not in a private space but in the red yurt - a club where literacy was taught, women learned the skills of various professions, lectures were read and propagandists delivered speeches. In the 1930s-1940s, a regular yurt was used as a setting only in the depictions of the renowned folksinger Zhambyl. His appearance in the home interior with Soviet pioneer children, actors, or the military precisely repeated the images of Stalin with the people in the prominent works of Soviet masters.

Image of Family in the Art of Kazakhstan during the Thaw

In the 1940s, along with the blurring of the concept of family space, there was another major change in the representation of the private life of Soviet people. This change is connected with the demographic imbalance that resulted from mass repressions and the Great Patriotic War. The image of the father, husband and head of the family disappeared. A brilliant scientific analysis of this phenomenon was carried out by McCallum (2018) using the example of prominent Soviet artworks, predominantly by artists from Moscow and Leningrad. The researcher points out that already by the end of the 1940s, the state of affairs had changed and the image of family and the representation of the relationship between children and adults had finally found their place in the arts (McCallum, 2018).

In Kazakh painting, this process began later, at the end of the Thaw. Even the theme of returning from the front did not get its embodiment. After Stalin's death, the paintings were given to women, often grandmothers and granddaughters. The most popular in Kazakh painting were women in snow-white kimeshek - hats worn after marriage. Associated with the archetype Mother Earth (Ana Zher Ana), they became a symbol of mothers who lost husbands and sons in the war.

The liberalization of power and culture under the rule of N. Khrushchev (1953-1964) or the Khrushchev Thaw, became a turning point in the development of Kazakh art.

S. Aitbaev and T. Togysbaev drew inspiration from the formal decisions of H. Matisse and P. Picasso. Mexican masters D. Siqueiros and D. Rivera, famous for their monumental frescoes, had a great influence on them as well.

The modernist artistic language used by Kazakh masters explains not only the poetics of their works, meaning their generalized planes of color, simple rhythm, angular lines and close-ups, but also the decision not to tell stories and narrative, instead filling the canvas with powerful image symbols. The image of what happens before the eyes is replaced by a metaphorical translation of concepts. Therefore, the image of family and home is shown by the artists of this time not directly but through a metaphor linked with home and happiness.

In his work “Happiness” (Figure 4), for Aitbaev, the home that brings happiness is the steppe with its endless gently rolling hills and snowy peaks, where a young couple of shepherds sit as if inside a yurt.

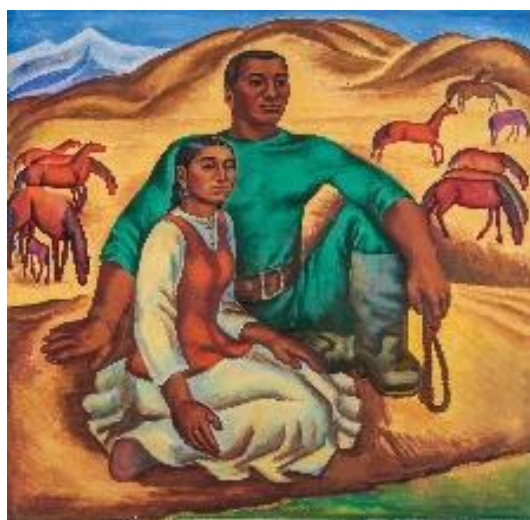


Figure 4. S. Aitbaev. Happiness. 1966

The theme of “couple”, as argued by art critic Svetliakov (2023), curator of the largest exhibition “The Thaw” in the Tretyakov Gallery (Moscow, Russia, 2017) is a key theme for the age. In “Happiness”, the union of two people, the union of the feminine and masculine, is for the first time in Kazakh painting shown lyrically, intimately and at the same time through the prism of myth, archetypal foundations of the world. The artist depicts two shepherds as young gods, the masters of this space. The divide between Khludov's exotic look and Aitbayev's images is vast. As in the Soviet art of this time, in cinema, theater and painting, the main element is the representation of young and happy people who have a long life ahead of them.

The home, as one of the foundations of national identity, is an important motif in the generation of the 1960s, which engaged in an active search for its own identity. Kazakh everyday life is made public, becomes an object of high art, equal to the European artistic heritage and evokes an intense experience of its aesthetic and artistic qualities.



Figure 5. T. Togysbaev. Kitchen. 1972

Matisse said he always wanted “a tired, torn up, exhausted person to taste peace and rest before my art”. Togysbaev, like Matisse, who became his inspiration, sought to tirelessly demonstrate the oases of happiness of a family with children in the flow of mundane, insignificant life (Figure 5). Whereas Matisse showed his workshop, Toghysbaev made the kitchen into his main topos, a sacred place, thus breaking the hierarchy of significant spaces. However, in the Kazakh context, the kitchen is the focal point and symbol of national life. Togysbaev reinforced this symbolism by putting entire “batteries” of national utensils in his still lifes. A chest, ayak kap (nomad felt bag for storing dishes) a mortar, kurak korpe (patchwork quilt), like living beings, pose to the viewer, trying to take the most advantageous position.

Togysbaev was one of the first to perceive and show family as a private space. Through Matisse's techniques of combining pure colors, their unrestrained interplay, a shift of space and choosing a naive and child-like perspective, Togysbaev engages in performativity. Working on a painting on a topic ordered by the state, he paints the personal story of a free man who has an individual worldview and keeps his memory of the past alive. By abstracting reality and simplifying artistic forms, the artist highlights the space of the family, declaratively speaks of its autonomy from the socialist society and its foundations and orders, linking the kitchen, in which he places many symbolically significant things, with the values and ethical norms of the past. As suggested by French historian Nora (1999), the less memory is experienced on the inside, the more it needs external support and tangible points of support, “memory sites”, which allow it to exist. For Togysbaev, everyday things of Kazakh life and family troubles are not an ethnographic concept, like for his predecessors, but national and moral ones. He demonstrates them as historical objects, visualizing what would be memorialized and deemed truly important.

Key Trends in the Representation of Family by Contemporary Kazakh Artists (2010-2020s)

We consider the current stage in the development of Kazakh art to be a transitional period because the art scene has welcomed a generation of young masters born in independent Kazakhstan, who are already guided by different social norms and values.

All the displaced images of the traditional family are coming back to paintings. First and foremost, these are motifs of national rites - marriage, childbirth and

commemoration - which were banned in the USSR and practiced in secret. Also extremely popular is the image of the house, the Kazakh yurt and detailed descriptions of household items. Just as prevalent are paintings dedicated to the ideal male hero, which embodies the ancient principle of *Jeti Kazyna* (seven treasures of the nomad), the first two of which are a brave man and a beautiful wife.

Female images are shaped as exemplary perfect gentle beauties and brides. They are dressed in rich national costumes, try on elegant national silver decorations or simply sit in the yurt in sadness.

Of note is also the evident simplification of still-life paintings. Young masters no longer choose items for a still life as thoroughly as their predecessors. Each item in Kazakh daily life, even the most unprepossessing, is believed by them to be worthy to be presented on the canvas. The items depicted by them are not ceremonial, far from the immaculate works of decorative art shown by Togsybaev. A still life becomes more intimate, as artists exhibit personal things that are passed down from generation to generation without care for the sublime or aesthetic qualities.

LaCapra (2001), relying on S. Freud's psychoanalysis, described various approaches to working with collective trauma. One of these is non-critical "acting out", constantly talking through the trauma, which corresponds with melancholy. This insistence on demonstrating ethnographic details, traditional cultural objects and national rituals and rites we interpret as the process of talking through traumatic memories and striving to overcome the Soviet experience of all things national being erased from society and remove the bar of the Soviet person, returning to one's own identity, tastes and understanding of the world.

Paintings by modern artists also reflect current demographic processes. The vast number of images of children and the embodiment of the happiness of having many children visualize the views of a large social group. Cities are now being filled by a rural population distinguished by high fertility and large families.

At the same time, there are visual models of family as a sexual union that seek to reflect the innermost side of marriage. Such works are usually created by female artists (U. Zhubynysheva, Figure 6).



Figure 6. U. Zhubynysheva. Midday. 2023

Analysis of the works of both young and mature masters shows how much importance they assign to using all of the world's cultural heritage. A focus on intertextuality, abundant citation and the use of techniques and achievements of different layers of culture can also be found in paintings of family characters.

Photographs of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries from ethnographic collections, which we examined earlier, are actively cited by artists belonging to opposed artistic movements. These photos become part of an intertextual game played by both masters of salon figurative painting, designed for commercial success in the general public and by representatives of contemporary art. Both of them use new media different from the sources (Figure 7). For instance, painter K. Moon uses oil and canvas, whereas the author of modern objects S. Suleimenova utilizes plastic bags (“Cellophane Painting”, Figure 8).



Figure 7. Unidentified author. Three brides. Photo. 1875



Figure 8. S. Suleimenova. From the series “Cellophane Painting”. 2021

Equally influential for the young is the formative experience of the Thaw painting, masters of the “severe style” and active use of the technique of montage in their works. Contemporary artists resort to montage to highlight the family space from the public and emphasize its special, unique, individual character. N. Nurachmet's cut compositions, as if captured by a camera lens (Figure 9) point to his desire for precision in conveying a moment, similar to cinematography. The montage poeticizes everyday stories - sleeping, eating, watching a craftswoman - thus, the characters acquire more complex connections than simple participation in a normal event.



Figure 9. N. Nurakhmet. Kurak korpe. 2012

The special nature of a family space is disclosed from the standpoint of the national worldview, considering the specifics of perception among nomads, who are used to sitting at the low table *dastarhan* and resting and sleeping on felt carpets *tekemets*. To encompass the everyday world of a family, artists take a high view and create a kind of “tekemetic” scene, showing the family from above lying flat on the floor. From this point of view, everyday life with all its characters and troubles is visible all at once: tired young parents fast asleep by their child's side, a student glued to a computer screen, little children scattered across the carpet (Figure 10). Artists reach the ability to show the world in its entirety, in a panoramic view. In this world, physicality, a saturated physical presence acquires a spiritual dimension, translating the values of the traditional family - the closeness of all its members, interaction, fertility, etc.



Figure 10. O. Kaboke. Attractions. 2017

The special structure of the composition for the heightened perception of family is demonstrated by O. Kaboke. This young painter is one of the leaders of his generation, actively looking for new formal-image ways to embody the eternal themes, including

the theme of family. The artist has been doing a lot of productive work to comprehend the theme of family and childhood as concepts of the native home, unveiling the spiritual power of socialization in society and demonstrating the ordinary yet strong bonds that unite people and the memory of the ancestors. Kaboke sees a natural and clear need to appeal to the divine pantheon of various origins, be it the white elder surrounded by babies on all sides as a reminiscence of sculptural images of Buddha with children all around him, which give welfare and prosperity (“Tartylys”, 2017) or to a Turkic deity. All this allows him to disclose the chosen motifs in full glory.

The leading motifs of Kaboke are the themes of the regular, ordinary existence of the Kazakh family. His works can be grouped into a saga, a cycle about relationships within a family, particularly between parents and children. Childhood and family become part of the memory of the past, which encompasses both early memories and general ideas of the clan and the native land.

In line with the active position of the artist, who thinks not only in aesthetic categories but also sets social orientations for his work, his manner is also geared towards a quick response. Kaboke seeks to achieve a psychological effect with minimal artistic means. His work is marked by flatness, graphicity, selection and consolidation of the semantic center, work with the spot, rhythmic repetitions and the hero's looking directly at the viewer. His paintings are close in impact to posters: family stereotypes are reflected in equally formulaic poster compositions. Under the onslaught of simple and effective techniques, we fall under the charm of his everyday world, a deeply emotional, often sentimental description, in which together with a pinching gentle note a strong and domineering image of family is formed.

Kaboke often shows literal demonstrations of unity, where the family group is depicted as a complex nesting doll, in which the painter arranges the characters by height from the smallest to the largest. As an example, we can consider a portrait of a grandmother standing upright, hugging a small granddaughter, who holds a teddy bear. This trinity makes up one frontal plane, a single body (Figure 11).



Figure 11. O. Kaboke. Reiteration. 2018

The ideal of family is shown by Kaboke from the standpoint of a patriarchal order, where the man dominates and takes responsibility for the welfare of the family, clearly establishing a vertical with the male parent at the top. As has been noted above, the grandfather surrounded by grandchildren is the artist's favorite motif. This theme is

constantly included in scenes that visualize one of the definitions of family for Kazakhs - urpak - generations, posterity.

Another important evidence of the significance of folklore and archetypes and the foundations of the national mentality is the naive and fairytale-like presentation of material and the active use of hyperbole.

In the painting “Blessed Clothes” (Figure 12), the phrase *уй-іші*, i.e., those inside the house, also used to refer to the family, receives a detailed artistic interpretation. The painting is a group portrait of a young family. The entire group appears to be a single organism because they are all placed inside a single “shell” - the characters are securely covered by a tanned red jacket with a fur collar. The jacket is like a magical house, the interior of which can expand to infinity, accommodating all children and adults.



Figure 12. O. Kaboke. Blessed Clothes. 2016

The hyperbolization of the capacity of this space is magical and correlates with Renaissance painting, with *Madonna della Misericordia* by Piero della Francesca, who hides and protects with her huge cloak the donors at her feet (they are portrayed much shorter in stature) and all those who pray to the world. She is the Madonna of Mercy, who can stop all the calamities that have befallen humanity by giving it safety and faith in miraculous salvation. The Kazakh artist, in turn, sacralizes family, clan and collective unity.

Kaboke demonstrates the opposition of the large world and the small, private, individual world, which lies at the core of the national image of the world. This archaic binary confrontation is joined with a sense of anxiety understandable to the viewer, caused by the instability of today's world exposed to epidemics and wars. The outside world, aggressive and dangerous, from which the “magic” jacket is protecting, embodies all the hardships that face the young family in modern society.

The artist articulates extremely simple things with such convincing power that they regain significant meaning and do not look like worn-out truths. He is not afraid to appear immature, simple-minded and archaic: family values imbued with his mother's milk are his inner memory, which serves as a protection against the inconsistency of his ideas of a prosperous world with modernity.

Reviving the lost continuity of generations, Kaboke, like many young people, again brings to the front stage images of the elders in the family, the grandparents, making kinship connections a shield from all troubles. Standing frontally, motionless senior members of the family become a kind of fence, blocking access inside the home

to foreign forces. Grandparents as representatives of the older generation or stylized stone sculptures balbalas symbolize the predecessors and serve as a protective bastion for the happy childhood of grandchildren in the future. Their opinion, their experience and their public blessing or, on the contrary, the condemnation of transgressions, shield the present generation from wrong steps, laying down the foundations, the basic rules of life and the laws of honor and decency.

Employing the poetic folklore, the entire arsenal of world painting, montage structuring and Kaboke's bird's-eye view, attention is drawn to the beauty of the simply mundane and the family as a link, the continuity of spiritual connection of the current generation with the moral lessons of the past. The family is not merely a subject of the author's admiration but is exhibited as one of the value poles of human existence.

4. Conclusions

Representation of the family is one of the leading characteristics of the image system of Kazakhstan's visual culture, which allows us to consider this phenomenon at various stages of its embodiment in art.

In the totalitarian period, viewed as a marginal remnant of the past, the image of family as a clan turned out to be the tactic necessary to visualize the archetypes of national thinking and restoration of the role of family as the core of values and ethics in the genre of daily life in social realism.

In the Thaw era, the aposiopeses associated with the depiction of the clan, home, nuclear family and the couple return to national painting, becoming a marker of an individual space free from the dictatorship of socialist norms.

In contemporary art, the image of family is developed in detail and shifts away from a metaphorical interpretation characteristic of paintings of the Thaw towards a rejection of the grand style of Soviet paintings and a tale deeply personal to the painter and marked by a lyrical and frank tone.

Contemporary visual culture reflects the preservation of cultural memory and the comprehension of the traumatic experience of the Soviet period, including the factual ban on national customs and the elimination of traditional family values and rites. The constant, sometimes intrusive, repetition of certain ethnocultural motives in painting, constant talking and acting out of traumatic memories serve as a basis to overcome them and strengthen identification strategies.

An important feature of the representation of family is the revival of the image of the older generation, the demonstration of family as a large clan and the display of continuity between generations.

The representation of a modern family depicts the reinforcement of traditionalist ideas in Kazakh society, strengthening of the role of customs and rights, adherence to gender stereotypes and a focus on a high birth rate and large families.

The balance between traditionalist vectors and modernization strivings is achieved with the emergence of portrayals of new family models, for instance, as a sexual partnership and by interest in the interpretation of family space as a field for individual action shown through formal innovations of young artists' painting.

The portrayal of family, so popular in the contemporary art of Kazakhstan, becomes a way of finding spiritual balance in the complex labyrinth of problems of modern life. Artists show family images in search of ideological and ethical support points to understand today's turbulent, head-spinning modernity through the values, stereotypes and moral foundations laid down at an early age.

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