

## MYTHOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS THEMES IN MODERN FINE ARTS OF TATARSTAN

*Liliya Mukhametzyanova<sup>1</sup>, Lyajsan Kadyjrova<sup>1</sup>, Gaukhar Halmurzaeva<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>*Kazan Federal University*

<sup>2</sup>*Kyrgyz State University of Construction, Transport and Architecture them. N. Isanova  
aklilya@bk.ru*

**Abstract.** Various relations between the forms of social consciousness such as art and religion are formed in the process of the historical development of the spiritual culture of mankind. In this historical phenomenon, certain religions “choose” this or that system of arts, which in the most optimal way is capable of reproducing the spiritual atmosphere and religious practice of this religion. Fine arts as the emotional-figurative affirmation of religious ideas occupies a certain place in the system of religious values. In a bright and clear form, this process is manifested in the functioning of the developed world religions, whose structure is the most stable and defined, although historically it has, of course, evolved. The present article discusses the mythological and religious themes in the works by artists of Tatarstan of the years 1990s-2000s, which reflect, above all, the two main religions represented in Tatarstan – Islam and Christianity, and often regardless of the ethnic affiliation of certain artists. And the religious tolerance inherent in the Republic of Tatarstan, the dialogue of two cultures, are reflected in this interaction, the mutual influence of various religious denominations on the worldview, on the spiritual world of people, on the creativity of artists.

**Keywords:** fine arts; painting; graphic arts; mythology; religion; Islam; Christianity

**Introduction.** The process of mutual influence of religion and art has led to the fact that world religions have incorporated almost all the genres of art, both traditional and modern, into their structure. The relationship between religion and art in certain eras is analyzed in a number of works on the history of art, for example, in the works by N.A. Berdyaev, B. A. Rybakov, E. B. Taylor, J. D. Frezer and others. Various aspects of the problem of art and religion were considered by such historians and philosophers as A.V. Gorsky, A. V. Kartashev, P. A. Florensky, E. G. Yakovlev. In modern Russian literature, many different publications cover these aspects. The interest of practitioners and theorists in the field of art in this topic is currently not accidental: many people associate the revival of Russia with the revival of religion and religious consciousness of society, and the art, in one of its forms, is an integral part of a religious cult, in another, it keenly reflects spiritual quest, formation of religious consciousness, comprehension of spiritual experience in society, since the periods of transformations, growth of national self-awareness and spiritual revival of the people are always associated with a return to the national cultural and historical traditions [1, p.752]. At the same time, art in all its manifestations is an integral part of the spiritual development and improvement of society. The works by Russian and republican art critics cover certain aspects and problems of this complex phenomenon. So, well-known art historians S.M. Chervonnaya [2], G.F. Valeyeva-Suleymanova write about the development of Islamic art in Tatarstan in their works. [3]. R. G. Shageeva (in the articles dealing with A. Abzgildin's works [4]), R. R. Sultanov (in the book on the art of new cities of Tatarstan [5]), L. Polyakova (in studies about R. Salyakhutdinov's shamas [6]) and others write about the specifics of rendering religious themes and quests in the works by some artists. It should be noted that the studies of art historians do not give much attention to the problems of the development of Orthodox art and its understanding in the works by contemporary artists of Tatarstan. The aspects related to other confessions and religious movements represented in Tatarstan are also studied insufficiently.

**Methods.** Contemporary art of Tatarstan has been developing in the spiritual space where for several centuries the traditions of Tatar and Russian culture has been connected and intertwined, where two great civilizations intersect – Muslim and Christian, where the East and the West do not merge. It should also be noted that the art of the region develops in the context of ethnic globalization, as a result of the interaction of various religious cultures [7]. In the 20th century, the fine arts of Tatarstan went down a considerable and complex development path. It absorbed the traditions of Russian and Soviet art. In the 1990s – 2000s a galaxy of talented artists appeared in the art of Tatarstan, free from the stamps of previous decades of the Soviet era, when art was heavily dependent on ideological order. The artists of the new post-Soviet formation were given the opportunity express their creative position without restraint, to turn to themes that used to be practically excluded from artistic practice, including religious themes. The parallel development of the main religious denominations – Orthodoxy and Islam – in the territory of Tatarstan, is reflected in the works of artists who are engaged in certain religions and ethnic groups. Religious themes, which focus on the issues of spiritual values, are especially clearly manifested in the works of such artists as B.I. Urmanche, A.A. Abzgildin, R.M. Bakhitov, E. G. Golubtsov, K. A. Nafikov, M. M. Mingazova, R. A. Gabbasova, A. A. Artamonova, I.M. Khanov, etc. The uniqueness of this process in Tatarstan lies in the unlimited interest of the artists in a certain religious theme on ethnicity and the historically existing division, for example, the Tatars – Islam, the Russians – Orthodoxy. Tatar artists turn to Christian plots (for example, A.A. Abzgildin), they are professionally engaged in icon painting (artist I.M. Khanov), Russian artists create shamails and tugras (artist V.A. Popov).

**Results and discussion.** The process of the formation of a new national paradigm and the revival of the interrupted traditions of Muslim culture in Tatarstan led to the revival of the traditional forms of Muslim art and genres such as calligraphy, shamail, which was most clearly manifested in the work by such artists as: B. I. Urmanche, R. G. Shamsutdinov, F. G. Girfanov, S. M. Gilyazetdinov, R. N. Salyakhutdinov, N. F. Nakkash, V. A. Popov, V. S. Khannanov,

R. I. Shamsutov, L. F. Faskhutdinov and others. In the modern world view, calligraphic works have become a symbol associated with the cultural traditions and historical heritage of the Tatar people. The relatively restricted textual content of "classic" shamails, which have the meaning of a talisman in a religious view, significantly expands its boundaries, incorporating popular lines from folk songs and sayings. Calligraphic works become not only a means of performing formal abstract compositions but also serve as a means of self-expression of the artists. It is no accident that the Arabic graphics are present in the form of inscriptions in many paintings by B. I. Urmanche, R. M. Vakhitov, M. M. Mingazov, A. A. Abzgildin. In their spiritual quest, artists turn to national, historical themes, and at the same time to the subjects related to the history of religion (B.I. Urmanche "Ibn Fadlan's Arrival to the Volga", 1970; K. A. Nafikov "Christening", 1976 ; R.M. Vakhitov "Madrasa", 1998; R. S. Mukhametzyanov, "The Capture of Kazan", 1995, etc.).

One of the first themes of the adoption of Islam by the ancient Bulgars is the prominent figure of the Tatar culture B. I. Urmanche, who is considered in Tatarstan to be one of the founders of the national visual arts, in his painting "Ibn Fadlan's Arrival" (1970). Here we can focus on another feature: if in past centuries, orthodox Islam was adopted in Tatar society, strictly prohibiting the depiction of people and living beings, then in modern Tatar society (influenced by Eastern traditions), artists refuse this ban, turning to visual forms not only in free art, in easel secular works but also in the works related to a religious cult (for example, to illustrations by R.G. Shamsutdinov to A.Hayri's book "Muslim Holidays", 1991-1993), and portraying figures of people in generalized plastic in restrained forms, giving their images symbolic, allegorical content.

The Muslim tradition influences the content and form of the works by the artists of the new wave. This is manifested in the symbolic imagery, conditional decorativeness, abstractness, ornamental rhythms, and a deviation from naturalistic visualization. Religious, Koranic plots are often used. These works include paintings by A. Ilyasova "Maryam, Picking a Fruit" (1992), "Seven Angels" (1992), R. S. Mukhamedzyanova "Tell the Virgins to Drop Their Eyes ..." (2000), Kh. M. Sharipova "Black Kaaba Stone" (1994). We can also observe the influence of Eastern Muslim traditions in graphic illustrations by T. G. Khaziakhmetov "Yusuf and Zuleikha" (1971), R. G. Shamsutdinov "Muslim Holidays" (1991-1992), "Angels: Jabrail, Israphil, Mikhail, Azrail" (1991), Prophet Mohammed (1992) "Kul Gali. The Book by Yusuf" (1993-1994). An outstanding artist of Tatarstan, A. Abzgildin also addresses Muslim themes in his work. He was one of the first to touch upon the theme of the eastern miniatures, traditions and philosophy of Islamic art in a broad sense, portraying the personality of Prophet Muhammed in the painting "The Birth of Muhammed" (1997).

In the 1990s, construction and restoration of mosques and temples began in Russia, and in Tatarstan in particular, where the artists from the region were involved, which naturally could be not but reflected in their future work. So, many Tatar artists turned to the Image of shamails, and Russian artists turned to icon painting and temple painting. In this article we do not consider in detail the art of icon painting, but it should be mentioned few words about the monumental painting of Orthodox churches. Notable in this respect are the murals in the Church of Cosmas and Damian in the city of Naberezhnye Chelny ("Creation of the World", "The Trinity", "The Ascension", "Dedication to Mary", "Last Judgment"), performed in 1991-1992 by creative group ANSVAKI, which comprehended artists V. Y. Akimov, V. V. Anyutin, Yu. G. Svinin. Popular religious scenes are represented by the artists from a philosophical point of view as unity and confrontation. The artists freely interpret the canonical plot, moving the scenes of heaven and hell, but in general, they, of course, follow the existing iconographic traditions. In the center of the composition is Christ, the judge of the world. But the artists interpret him to be not a formidable, punishing judge, as to be customary portrayed according to religious canons, but a fair, kind, sympathetic, surviving savior of human souls. Here, the concept of the fresco clearly expresses humanistic moods – a life-affirming, optimistic beginning, faith in the future. And the whole painting, based on the consonance of warm bright colors, is perceived as a natural chants to the human spirit [4, p.114]. The special significance of this work lies in the fact that the painting of the church of Kosma and Damian pushed the artists to master a new theme for themselves and contributed to the inclusion of religious themes in their easel art. According to one of the artists of the creative group ANSVAKI V. Y. Akimov, the work on wall-painting of the church and the desire to express their personal attitude to universal spiritual values were later embodied in a series of his works with eternal biblical images: "The Ascension" (1991), "Judas" (1995), "Willow Sunday" (1995), "The Annunciation" (2002). Biblical plots are especially vividly expressed in easel painting by prominent artist A. Abzgildin ("The Birth of a Poet", 1997; "Christ", 2006; "Dedication to Paradzhanov and Tarkovsky", 1985; "Let Us Pray to the World", 2006-2007; "From he Time of Adam Until Today, 1987). The artist compares in the painting "The Birth of a Poet" the birth of G. Tukai to the birth of Jesus Christ, thereby portraying the image of the Mother of God with a baby in her arms. Especially noteworthy is the work "Dedication to Paradzhanov and Tarkovsky" (1985). The composition of this work consists of three parts, where the central is the portrait of Tarkovsky. The artist painted an angel next to him, a portrait of Paradzhanov in the image of one of the saints – on the left, a scene of Jesus being taken down from the cross – on the right. In these allegorical scenes the artist illustrates his vision of the fate of these outstanding personalities. Another line in the fine arts of Tatarstan of the 1980-2000s is the interest in the subject of ancient mythology, paganism, and folklore. In search for the ideals of the beautiful, artists often turn to Greek mythology. Aesthetic feeling, embodied by the beauty and harmony of nature and female images, becomes an integral part of the creative worldview of artist V. Y. Akimov. The image of a beautiful woman as the giver of all living things and the embodiment of the artist's sublime ideal infinitely varies both in his works with a plot and in numerous free compositions ("Nymph", 1996; "Dana", 1999; "Flora", 1999; "Tersey and Ariadne", 1997) [5]. Artist A. F. Abzgildin also often refers to mythological themes in his work ("Dancing Centaurs", 1985; "Touching", 1973). The myth stands, as it were, between

religion and art, gravitating, for the most part, towards art rather than towards religion. The myth is largely devoid of the mystification of the developed illusory consciousness; the religious aspects of the myth are largely ousted by the faith in the natural transformation of life into death, of man into an animal or plant, of the microcosm into a macrocosm. This line is in touch with the tendency to think via antinomies – the macrocosm-microcosm, at the same time, transforming all objective phenomena into subjective, fictional, fantastic types, the desire to escape from the outside world into another being, that is, creating a different reality. This tendency in painting characterizes the predominance of emotive and intuitive elements, a heightened role of imagination, various mystifications (dreams, flights, dreams; as an example, one can refer to the works by V. M. Synkov, Kh. N. Latypov, B. B. Grabenko) interest in the original sources, in folklore, the genre of the new myth-making (works by A. S. Fatkhutdinov, Kh. M. Sharipov, Z.S. Nizamutdinov, I. K. Murtazin, E. F. Grabenko, K. A. Latyf). The characters of Tatar folklore (“Sak-Sok”, 1977; “Shurale” 1989) and forgotten pagan beliefs of the Tatars (“The Spirit of the Sky”, 1990; “The Spirit of the Earth”, 1990; “The Spirit of the Field”, 1990, and other works from the cycle “Amulets”, 1989-1994) have become central in A.S. Fatkhutdinov’s painting and sculptural compositions. In the cycle “Shurale” (1974-1998), the image of the forest spirit appears before us as flesh of the flesh of Hellenism, Tengrianism, or the embodiment of the links of Tatar culture with the Turkic, ancient world, ancient civilizations. Shurale is interesting to the artist as a phenomenon of indissoluble unity and diversity of living and inanimate matters.

**Summary.** Religion and mythology, when interacting with art, as a rule, turn to the spiritual life of a person and interpret the meaning and goals of human existence in their own way. However, E. Madden, who was looking for unique Islamic art in Islamic art, wrote that one should not try to look for symbolic everywhere, giving each phenomenon a philosophical interpretation [8, p. 427-429]. As is known, art and religion represent the world in the form of artistic images, intuitively grasping the truth, through inner illumination. They are unconceivable without the emotional relationship of man to the world around him, without a developed imagination, imagery, fantasy [9]. However, art, as a rule, has more considerable room for figurative, artistic reflection of the world, which usually go beyond the boundaries of religious consciousness. The experience of artistic creativity in the art of the 19th century is associated with the most important discoveries in science, economic progress, which explain the renewal of artistic tradition [10].

**Conclusions.** Certainly, religious themes occupy an important place in the works by Tatarstan artists of the 1990s – 2000s, where, above all, two main confessions Islam and Christianity represented in Tatarstan are reflected, often irrespective of the ethnicity of particular artists. And in this interaction, the mutual influence of various religious denominations on the worldview, on the spiritual world, on the creative work of artists reflects the religious tolerance and the dialogue of two cultures inherent in Tatarstan [11].

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