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RASIM BABAYEV – 95

Abstract. The paper is dedicated to 95th anniversary of the national artist of Azerbaijan Rasim Babayev who immensely contributed to artistic culture of the country in XX century. Babayev tried all forms and genres of painting and graphics, and later moved on to decorate ceramics, manufacture tiles, carve figures from stone and make installations – his favourite funny ogres and maidens – characters from Azerbaijani tales. First part of the paper describes youth period of artist, his education and initial period of creativity as freedom-loving 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 Babayev's creativity – series of works "Ogres", "Angels". Landscape, portrait here are reimagined into new, synthetic genre of modern Azeri painting. Artist finds his personal language, decorative, vanguard, emotional, and emanating from national form. Rasim Babayev was a national painter, whose painting bears the imprint of the Turkic ethnos; but that was not a matter of the painter's choice, not his rational decision, it was the natural outcome of his talent. The canvases of Rasim Babayev feature the colours of our southern land, mixed in the ethnic codes living on in carpets, mugham, miniatures, Sufi philosophy and poetry, in the refined and powerful form of calligraphy. Also the paper reviews creativity of Rasim Babayev in the context of Islamic culture and Islamic values. Mental searchers of the painter in the field of Sufi psychology revealing in his creativity are studied as well.

Key words: Rasim Babayev, periods of creativity, Azerbaijani painting, mythmaking, sufi psychology.

Introduction. There are artists in whom a mental ethnic code is more clearly apparent in their creations. The ethnic component of their art is expressed more comprehensively and freely in their work. In them the traditions of mythological art, reignited more intensively in the last decades of the 20th century, are felt more strongly with the reemergence of a national art and social-cultural consciousness. These processes are reflected clearly in the career of People's Artist of Azerbaijan Rasim Babayev. I would say his birthplace was Absheron and his patronymic 'Painting'. Rasim Babayev was a painter from God, in his essence and with his talent he was destined to create. I first saw his paintings at his solo exhibition in 1976, I was shocked by the painting, poetry, romance, reverie, the plot of shape and colour. Since then the paintings of Babayev have settled in my world and influenced my life. And since then I have loved works that have been viewed in numerous exhibitions and in his overflowing studio. There were also seen at the villa where he was to be found from early spring until late autumn absorbing energy from the earth, sand, sun, trees, pure well water, from proximity to the sea – all absent from city life. Baku's Absheron was the power that fed his mind and feelings with colour, giving them life; it was the initial impact, primordial, primitive. It was a point of reference. Other places are known only in reference to Absheron. This is why the painting, originating in nature, is so strong and sensual, real and fabulously alive. His true Turkish character emerged in his deeply democratic nature, in a bright, vigorously pulsing palette, in strict adherence to principles. In his work he always delved into open questions of existence, an understanding of life expressed in the picturesque and plastic art of a wholly national artist.

The interpretation of the main material. Rasim Babayev said that all that had happened to him had come from Absheron. On this blessed, sun-warmed and sea-caressed land, little Rasim heard the call of nature and later decided to devote his life to art. He derived his strength and his images from the land of ancient Baku. For him this land is the essence of Azerbaijan and Turkism, the two main keys to an understanding of his works. Rasim Babayev's career was in total connection with a philosophical cosmogonic quest; it was primal in its presence, and as strong as any fundamental principle. In my view, his is one of the leading names representing twentieth century Azerbaijani art.

His art is at first sight far from reality, mythological, life emerges from it. His paintings are evocative and attractive in the mysticism of colour, their picturesque plots and the thick, juicy texture of the paint, full of metaphysical

import, expresses the only real life, mysterious and invisible to man, but a life in which angels and devils, monsters and the Apostles coexist.

The great painter explored the inner essence of the phenomena of life with his all-seeing eyes, identifying and painting archetypes – the essence, the images and symbolic, psychological structures of people's fantasies and dreams, but also and especially of art.

Rasim Babayev was born on 31 December 1927 into a Bakuvian family renowned for its longstanding military traditions; however a poetic, artistic atmosphere reigned in the house was.

After Baku college Rasim Babayev entered the painting department of the V. I. Surikov Moscow State Art Institute.

After six years' study at the Institute, Rasim stayed in Moscow for another year – his real universities were the beautiful Moscow and Leningrad museums. He joined a studio producing children's films, a fascinating time.

Rasim Babayev's pictorial work of the 1960s-70s singled out him from the milieu of Azerbaijani painters, clearly identifying him as the philosophical, visionary and poetic painter, sensitively, with nerves exposed, sounding out nature and the world of man.

The painter worked in both graphics and painting. While in his early linocuts the technogenic world is biomorphic life in dynamic transformation, in the pictorial works nature, the earth and the heavens are somehow alien, unrecognizable, but with the appearance of reality. It seems the painter's spirit soared high and wide in a clear and precise dream, as real as a child's, and as desirable as a lunar landscape seen through a telescope.

The painting "Earth" (1963), which Babayev referred to as "Balls of Butane", depicted an ordinary standard landscape but, seen through the master's eyes, it has become something like a Martian, cosmic canvas.

From the same year, "Heaven", shows us a familiar view from the window of an airplane, but again it is a unique view, a view given by the painter and which we have to master and love, but is that possible in the silent stillness of those beautiful cloudy icebergs? They are just as incorporeal and frail as all of our ideas about the world. The same beautiful ethereal world of water and rocks, earth and plants appears in "The Coast" (1966), "Memories of Spring" (1975), "Pistachio Tree" (1970) and "The Herd" (1973). As in the real world of fairy tales, we are immersed in the ochre-blue space of the canvases, gently infused with the warm, thin sound of a pipe: "War Veteran" (1974), "Spring" (1975) and "Dream" (1976).

The artist seems to explain to us the wise ancient maxim: “Be one, but be with all”. He wrote in the magazine “Creation” (1978, № 6): “A poetic relationship to reality, appearing variously in the work of painters, forms over many centuries. We are the heirs of this long evolutionary process. Acuteness of observation helps to connect the world of fiction and the world of reality. The eye of the painter selects a pictorial series in the objective world, in nature, in people that needs to be arranged compositionally; a rhythm, form and system of metaphors must be found... My artistic experience is also based on this understanding”.

Later came the picture “Door Destroyed,” we see an image of the beast - an ogre - confronting images of the painter, his mother with a cockerel in her hands and, standing between them, the defeated Pegasus: this is the world of reality, a monstrous world, but an existing one. The painter also created a social grotesque in “Hall of Fame” (1985) and “Ceremony of Congratulations” – a parody of the socialist awards system.

His psychology was such that he painted ogres to understand what it was like to be an ogre, to feel the infernal; it was the most complicated mental work: the way an actor gets the feeling of the character being played.

The dark side of the subconscious, the archetype of the shadow according to Jung, is part of the personality. And Babayev drew ogres to understand himself, his dark side, and when understood – to triumph over it. This is a war with oneself or, rather, the highest manifestation of self-expression in art.

It was no wonder that all Rasim’s worlds are inhabited by ogres – they are also different, like people with different characters and natures: smiling, funny, with a sense of humour, scary, creepy, surprised, ironic, drinking tea, smoking a hookah or looking proprietorially at women’s charms – all are vulnerable. In the Azerbaijani tale “Jirtan”, in which the little man outwits the ogre, saves his brothers, and goodness triumphs. So the painter-researcher Rasim Babayev painted ogres not as an enemy, but as a part of our consciousness, he was like a doctor seeking the formula for a vaccine and testing it on himself; he tried to understand himself and life through painting, to understand what it means to be ogre, angel and human.

Mythological characters have long exercised the minds of painters, poets, musicians and many others seeking answers to existential questions. Archetypal motifs of the labyrinth, Ariadne’s thread and images of Theseus and the Minotaur have inspired great people; Picasso poured his excitement from the image into the many beautiful drawings of the series “Minotauromachie”

and “Tauromachie”. Babayev, too, was inspired and transformed the image of the minotaur into the more ancient image of the ogre of Iranian, Turkish and Indian mythology, whose prototypes were the shining Lucifer and the archetype of Evil Intent, Ahriman.

Babayev went further than Picasso in identifying the dark side: if Picasso’s bull or minotaur next to a girl is the personification of the terrible beast of power, war, and aggressive sexual energy, then Babayev’s ogre is the dark side of the ego, one of our sub personalities, the personification of nafs (Arabic = ego), i.e. he took his research closer to man, within the psyche, seeking the ogre within – to recognise and then to tame it.

To be in the painter’s studio was an astounding experience. His was quite a different studio: it had so much (and still does!) energy, lots and lots of pictures, which he brought and fanned them out one by one. You found yourself at an epicentre of creation, a real fairy tale that amazed and penetrated, deep into the heart, to the soul; you yourself became a horse, an ogre, then Adam and Eve, all at once you became a resident of the country of Rasim Babayev.

He painted his own image on the wall around the door at the entrance to his studio – this is not an ordinary self-portrait, it was rather a manifestation of the soul, “I – like the other”. He portrayed himself as slightly aloof, he was just one inhabitant of Rasim Babayev’s country, and next to him on the same basis were poems by his favourite Sufi poets, birds, ogres, maidens and a very excited, vital space of beauty, energy, feeling and colour. This really was painting.

However, more general and philosophical problems were resolved in a series of paintings dedicated to the eternal stories of the Bible and Qur’an – “Adam and Eve”. A favourite topic over the centuries, it was taken to its primitive, original height by the Azerbaijani painter. The experimentation in form development found here a new aesthetic embodiment; the work of the avant-garde painter in his search for new means of expression, was the point of his trials in form and colour. A great painter, exploring the phenomenon that interests him, always looks to the root, sees all the interrelations, enhances the phenomenon, raises questions and explores its philosophical meaning. This is what we see in the paintings “Refugees” and “Refugees at Home”. These are not just refugees from their native lands of Karabakh, the paintings are metaphors for a humanitarian catastrophe. The fantastic shapes embodied here by the painter, some many-eyed, many-legged cocoons symbolize running,

movement. This is an allegory of a running man, without root, home or native land, it is a metaphor for society's inhuman response to a man from nowhere. And that is why it is wonderful that with his canvases devoted to refugees, no matter what, Rasim Babayev gave us perfectly harmonious and beautiful images. The gentlest palette and refined, protective, loving forms are here; it is the quintessence of faith in the final good, despite all the pitfalls. And it will be so.

Rasim Babayev was a national painter, whose painting bears the imprint of the Turkic ethnos; but that was not a matter of the painter's choice, not his rational decision, it was the natural outcome of his talent because, and you may remember we talked about this at the beginning – he was a painter of Earth, a painter of this land of propitious location, at the junction of geographical and sacred threads., all the elements have interacted here for eternity; fire blazing to the sky, from the sea as well as the earth. People came from distant countries to worship Holy Fire. Our culture developed from worship of the Creator, understanding Providence and respect for Knowledge. In the art of miniature portraiture Azerbaijani masters attained unprecedented heights in the East because the traditions of fine art developed under the wing of great classical poetry and music. Because nowhere in the Islamic world was script accorded such an interconnected aesthetic or greater sacred value, the book has always been a true and beloved jewel for us.

All researchers include the eastern miniature among the most remarkable artistic creations of the Middle Ages. It is distinguished by an amazing harmony of fairy-tale joy, tranquillity and a sense of paradise within a painted reality. The painter's approach to the world was enthusiastic, warm and deep; he was confident of the correctness of world order and therefore happy. Even in images of war and struggle there is a sense of acceptance of this entity, thus the energy of the world's beauty really does emanate from miniatures. We discussed this more than once with Rasim bey: miniatures, Gobustan and the murals by Usta (Master) Gambar Garabagi in the Sheki Khan's Palace. He even said that the murals that he copied in Sheki for six months shortly after graduating from the Moscow Institute, revived his genetic memory, gave him the opportunity to recall his ethnicity, to identify his artistic "I". The primitivism and expressionism that art critics perceived in his paintings were born out of the Sheki frescoes and medieval Tabriz miniatures. It may be said that the language of modern Azerbaijani avant-garde was formed from the traditions that Rasim Babayev studied alongside his cousins Javad

Mirjavadov and Tofiq Javadov. This was done during their joint search for an individual pictorial language and their common love of poetry and music and the nature of Azerbaijan, which they discovered as they tracked its mountains and villages, debating and discussing everything in the world but, of course, mainly painting.

It is interesting that, having sought freedom in France after perestroika and finding himself working alone, Rasim Babayev decided that never again would he leave his homeland.

The canvases of Rasim Babayev feature the colours of our southern land, mixed in the ethnic codes living on in carpets, mugham, miniatures, Sufi philosophy and poetry, in the refined and powerful form of calligraphy.

Nietzsche wrote that there are two ways to enter the final room: freely and not freely. There are people who never even think about this: they do not know of freedom. Rasim Babayev's view was vital, he knew that he should be free; but living in society means that this freedom is achieved the hard way: easy to be free in a hermit's cell, but immensely hard in hierarchical human society, where there is just one way to freedom – the way of conscience, honour and truth-seeking.

Rasim Babayev was alone warrior who denied banal conventional wisdom and, unfortunately, knew that the true monsters against whom he was fighting seemed to everyone else to be ordinary windmills. And yet, “not heeding the voice of Sancho, who warned him that he was not going to fight a monster but merely a windmill, Don Quixote gave Rocinante the spur”.

In 1988 a first grandchild, Shirin, was born, his palette brightened, a purification of the dark forces occurred and, a year and a half later, during surgery under anaesthesia, messengers of light come to his subconscious and a series of paintings, “Angels”, appeared.

He would live and be happy, seeing his grandchildren and painting pictures full of wonders even 17 years after this vision.

In 2001 he visited China with an exhibition, and it made a joyful impression on his soul, he felt a connection with the common, ancient culture of Eurasia, and resumed his course – he turned again to black-and-white graphics, drawing, but this time on superb Japanese rice paper. Thus he went through every phase of life and creativity. This was the highest integrity of an artistic, creative life. And while in the early black-and-white linocuts (the material was ideal) there is a hidden struggle and the weight of the Earth, near the end of his life in the black-and-white Japanese paper graphics, there is ease,

humour and acceptance of life. The self-portraits are cheerful, the pictures are elegant, strong and lustrous, the rice paper itself breathes with purity and freshness of feeling. By the end of his life his palette had become young, dealing not with mind, but with spirit. The murals on the walls of his country house, the tiles that he was fond of in his later years, the stones carved with faces and camels, which he had adored since childhood and which portrayed his mother's pilgrimage to Mecca when she was 12, and which he continued to paint always as a metaphor for the Way – all this is the unique Azerbaijani painter Rasim Babayev.

He was erudite, well-informed, reflective and also spiritual in seeking and exploring his way, asking himself existential questions and looking for answers in the most difficult and painful layers of the psyche. But the main tool in his quest was always his conscience, and space – freedom. No wonder all of this spiritual work on his inner self added lustre to his appearance, a spark to his eyes and colour to his palette. He was beautiful and harmonious, especially towards the end of life: he looked like a Sufi dervish or Tibetan monk, well-informed and conducting his days in work and prayer. This was the rare case when age does not weaken or worsen, as usual, but it revealed the beauty of the soul, purified and illuminated his image with spiritual radiance.

Babayev saw painting as his vocation. With his monsters, his protest against the monstrous, his affirmation of human will, his hopes, struggles and victories Babayev expressed a mythic vision of our age – lyric and epic at the same time.

He had paintings that were declarations of war, indictments, challenges, promises, confidence – everything that constituted the painful struggle and passionate life of the people of our time.

Artistic creation has set itself the task not of reproducing the world, but of expressing human desire. This desire can simply be the desire to escape from reality, run from it or, on the contrary, the desire to transform it. Alongside the existing world, Rasim Babayev erected a fictional world, designed by the personal law of Rasim Babayev. He wanted to escape the labyrinth, open a new path, translating emotions and will into a language not borrowed directly from nature.

Apollinaire wrote: “When a man needed to simulate walking, he created the wheel, dissimilar to the foot”. The idea is that art is not a copy of reality, but is pure human creativity, an essentially human act of denial of the existence of

the way of things and strengthening through art – as once with the discovery of fire and invention of tools – merely a human way of being.

The painter reviews the conception of reality and the concept of beauty. He seeks for his own, new, metaphorical means of expression for defining reality in paint.

CONCLUSION.

1. Babayev was a poetic, myth-creating and national painter, in modernistic search of new means of expression
2. In his pictures is the complete union of man and the world, peace and happiness, inherent in Islamic art and poetry.
3. The painter lives an integrated life in unity with his land. The world of his fiction is dry and poor if he thinks it up as an ideal in his studio. In contrast, his imagination will develop if he works indefatigably, renewing the ground of the motherland beneath his feet.
4. From the 1960s to 1970s, Rasim Babayev experienced his world of the picturesque in a palette of earth and sky, ochre-blue, and his fictional world was like Hermann Hesse's 'blue flower', unattainable and clean, a lost paradise. "Wanderer" from the series "Good People" may perhaps be considered one of the master's most significant works. There is a happy man, the colour of the blue bird of happiness, but he is surrounded by a red space and a black crow is falling on him. The symbolism of this picture may be interpreted as you wish, but it is precisely a transition, it is a metaphor of incognisant humanity, craving happiness and beauty.
5. From the 1970s to 1980s the palette and dreamlike images created from the "collective unconscious" (in Carl Jung's terminology), became darker, screaming expressively, blood-red and black, but no less optimistic. The painter's great talent never altered his humanist essence, he struggled continually with the vices, sins and violence that he saw in the evil of totalitarianism and embodied them in red and black tones of the distraught and aggressive human subconscious. As if anticipating the grief that would fall upon the native land of Karabakh, Babayev painted his most horrific canvases in the mid 1980s: "Army" (1980), "The Killer" (1981), "War" (1983), "Bloody General" (1985), "Wicked Ogre" (1985) and "Tragedy" (1987). There appeared in the 1980s a series "The Doors", tightly closed doors as a metaphor of total imprisonment and lawlessness.

6. Rasim bey's paintings mark an evolution of the image of the ogre – from the early, illustrative, 'Jirtdan style' to the images in his paintings of the 1980s – 90s.
7. It was no wonder that all Rasim's worlds are inhabited by ogres – they are also different, like people with different characters and natures. So the painter-researcher Rasim Babayev painted ogres not as an enemy, but as a part of our consciousness.
8. More general and philosophical problems were resolved in a series of paintings dedicated to the eternal stories of the Bible and Qur'an – "Adam and Eve".
9. In 1988 a first grandchild, Shirin, was born, his palette brightened, a purification of the dark forces occurred and, a year and a half later, during surgery under anaesthesia, messengers of light come to his subconscious and a series of paintings, "Angels", appeared. By the end of his life his palette had become young, dealing not with mind, but with spirit.
10. The 20th century finished with realism in the academic sense, realism became essential, form-building, mythical, expressing the idea of things. The subject here is not what the person sees, but what it is in essence.

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Gülrəna Mirzə (Azərbaycan)

RASİM BABAYEV – 95

Məqalə XX əsr Azərbaycan bədii mədəniyyətinə böyük töhfələr vermiş Xalq rəssamı Rasim Babayevin 95-illiyinə həsr olunub. Babayev rəngkarlığın və grafikanın bütün forma və janrlarında çalışırdı, hətta keramika, daş figur və instalyasiyalarda. Birinci hissədə rəssamın gəncliyindən, təhsil illərindən və

azad rəssam kimi ilk yaradıcılıq dövründən bəxs edilir. Sonra rəssamın fərdi üslubunun formalaşması və təşəkkülü, yaradıcılıq mərhələləri, fərqli janrlarda bədii idiolektin axtarırları təhlil edilir. Məqalənin sonuncu hissəsində rəssamın şah əsərləri olan “Divlər” və “Mələklər” silsilələri təhlil olunur. Rəssam dekorativ, avanqard, emosional formadan əmələ gələn öz fərdi təsviri dilini tapır. Rasim Babayev milli rəssam idi, onun şəkillərində türk etnosunun kodları və islam dəyərləri özünü büruzə verirdi. Onun yaradıcılığında təzahürünü tapan sufilik psixologiyası sahəsində rəssamın mənəvi axtarırları təhlil edilir.

Açar sözlər: Rasim Babayev, yaradıcılığın mərhələləri, Azərbaycan rəngkarlığı, mifyaranma, sufi psixologiyası.

Гюльрена Мирза (Азербайджан)

РАСИМ БАБАЕВ – 95

Статья посвящена 95-летию народного художника Азербайджана Расима Бабаева, внесшего огромный вклад в художественную культуру Азербайджана XX века. Первая часть статьи посвящена молодым годам художника, его образованию и начальному периоду его творчества как фрилансера. В средней части статьи анализируется формирование и становление собственного творческого языка художника, рассматривается несколько этапов творчества, описываются жанры, в которых проходили поиски его идиолекта. В концовке статьи рассматривается магnum opus творчества Бабаева - серия работ «Дивы» и «Ангелы». Художник находит свой собственный изобразительный язык, декоративный, авангардный, эмоциональный. Расим Бабаев – глубоко национальный художник, в творчестве которого прослеживаются тюркские этнические коды и исламские ценности. В его творчестве анализируются духовные искания в области суфийской психологии.

Ключевые слова: Расим Бабаев, этапы творчества, азербайджанская живопись, мифотворчество, суфийская психология.