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**Maria Lizogub's painting and tendencies in  
Women Art in Kazakhstan**

**Abstract.** This article examines the phenomenon of Women Art in Kazakhstan of the XX century. The analysis of the works of Maria Lizogub allows researcher to describe the specific nature of Kazakh women's painting. Analyzing the personality of artist, her creative path, author reveals the style of the works and their importance for the development of national tendencies in art. The artist was able to overcome the barriers of gender inequality declaring herself as the leading representative in the art of Kazakhstan. At the same time, making an accent on the woman's huge spiritual potential, she comprehended her as a keeper of hearth and home and the patriarchal way of life. This duality consists in the issue of identification processes when the representation of female interacted with ethnic and cultural self-determination.

**Key words:** women art, national traditions, gender aspects, socio-cultural situation, socialist realism.

**Introduction.** In comparison with the other regions of Central Asia, the active and numerous presence of women artists at different stages of development of the fine arts in Kazakhstan urgently requires scientific research and comprehension. The present article reviews the women's pictorial art in Kazakhstan in the aspect of gender studies.

Joan Scott writes about four aspects of gender relationships in the society through which one can conduct a full historical analysis: First, culturally-available symbols that define the mental background of human activity; second, normative concepts based on symbolic meanings that are expressed in religious, educational and political doctrines; third, social institutions (from family-related to the state ones), and fourth, gender subjective identity [1, pp. 67-68].

Subjective gender identity, in our view, defines the female painting. The same processes take place in literature. Irina Savkina writes: "The most interesting thing in women's literature is that only there and nowhere else the image of a woman, a feminine beginning, has been seen, thought out and created by a woman herself." [2, p. 359].

Maria Lizogub (1909-1998) was the member of the Board of the Union of Artists of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The emphasis on women's creativity makes it possible to reveal the general socio-cultural situation in the reviewed period of Kazakh art development. "The basis for the methodology of gender research," writes Olga Voronina, "is not just a description of differences in the statuses, roles and other aspects in the life of men and women, but the analysis of power and domination asserted in the society through gender roles and relationships." [3, pp. 105-106].

Of particular importance will be representations of gender within socialist realism and changing attitudes among female artists toward this dominant artistic style of the Soviet period. Female artists lost their position within the hierarchy of the Union of Artists, in part compelling them to find new guidelines for their practices. Thus, art made by women artists in Kazakhstan entailed a certain way of resolving the issue of gender in a concrete socio-cultural situation.

Maria Lizogub (1909-1998) was born in the Ukraine. Her arrival in Kazakhstan can be referred to the significant evidence of a woman's absolutely new self-sentiment in the Soviet state.

She was amazed by the poetry of the Kazakh poet-akyn Zhambyl and decided to meet him by all means. In 1938, the young woman alone arrived in Kazakhstan, the unknown and remote area thousand kilometers away from her home. Gauguin's departure for Tahiti was a less risky venture. The materials collected in this trip became the basis for her excellent diploma thesis. In 1940, Lizogub moved to Kazakhstan permanently.

As a person of her time, Maria Lizogub organically absorbed and then reflected in her art all social doctrines and mythologemes.

Julia Penelope has developed a theory of *patriarchal universe of discourse* [4]. The conceptual meaning of this theory is that a woman is compelled to define and express herself with a language that embodies a male view on the world.

The external side of the totalitarian regime, the splendors and romance of this era gave birth to her bright works glorifying Stalin, socialist transformations and the war against illiteracy. The latter point was the subject matter of her first work, "Pioneer-Agitator in the Village" (1940), painted by her immediately upon arrival in Kazakhstan and portraying a little girl teaching elderly women. The usual social hierarchy was turned on its head. In the society of nomads, the elders, *aksakals*, had great experience which was transferred to the younger ones. At the same time, despite the socialist realistic pictures of the new life overthrowing the old Kazakh way of life they proved to be a necessary element for Lizogub to convey her own understanding of the new homeland.

**Discussion.** The real nature of Lizogub was revealed in paintings of the themes that really excited her. First, she had a great interest in Kazakh arts and handicrafts. Besides, she was always interested in the mysteries of creative process and produced many portraits of actors and writers. However, the most famous psychological portraits were those of female artists and women who themselves were devoted to art.

As far back as the early 1940s, at the discussions of the exhibitions it was stressed that Maria Lizogub was the only artist to appeal to the Kazakh theme. One of the excellent examples of her deep understanding of pictorial folklore was the "Folk Master" of 1960, depicting a woman close to her in terms of profession and spirit: Latifa Khodzhikova, the first Kazakh artist of theatrical costumes and a talented craftswoman. This work, as well as the "Portrait of the Painter Kovalevskaya" (1953), became the culminations of this genre in the art of Lizogub. As models, she chose successful women, who reached the high points in their career, and tried to solve the mystery and a special turn of their talent. Both heroines are depicted at the peak of their creative inspiration. It seems that only one step separates them from understanding the truth of creativity: one moment and the idea cherished in their mind will appear before them as a bright comprehensive picture down to the every detail. However, the artists approached to this state differently. Zoya Kovalevskaya, the People's Artist of Uzbekistan, internally is prepared for a decisive attack to win a longstanding dispute with nature and to reflect the real life to a high degree of accuracy and pressure. Firmly grasping the instruments, she directs her cold and sharp look into a distance ready at the right time to make a decisive brushstroke. The warriors can envy the artist's discipline and the power of spirit. Meanwhile, Latifa Khodzhikova meets inspiration as good news, as calm happiness finding her suddenly and taken as a long-awaited gift. She as if basking in the rays of this divine gift.

These portraits have less than a decade gap but surprising is the difference in style preferences and understanding of the nature of creativity! From tense volitional effort in the portrait of Kovalevskaya to unsophisticated Mozartean genius of Khodzhikova. From hard lines, fine details and mirror reflections developing the Serov line of Russian portrait to the impressionistic vision, the insistent display of overall beauty of folk art and the mystery of the gift of the ordinary Kazakh craftswoman. In contrast to Kovalevskaya, for Lizogub the Kazakh woman-creator is not a participant in the dramatic struggle with a sluggish form, as felt by many famous male artists, but a harmonious successor of age-old traditions, the keeper of hearth and home.

The success of these paintings is that Lizogub has revealed ingenious women having an unshakable feeling of endless power over the form and the ability to exercise their inexhaustible creative ideas. This heartfelt message in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was a real breakthrough in

comprehending the creative freedom of women. The question stated by Linda Nochlin – why there were no great female artist – has revealed the role of institutions in shaping artistic practice [5]. In the Soviet Union, especially in the mid-twentieth century, it was asserted that a woman is and must become a Creator. However, the reality of life, working conditions, and the patriarchal world view preserved in Kazakhstan pushed women artists into the background. The well-paid orders of the Union of Artists to produce large-scale paintings on the theme of socialist realism were never commissioned to women. So, the gap between slogans and life forced women artists to find their own niche.

“Fairy Tale” (1958) was another incarnation of a favorite motif in works by Lizogub. The picture was included in the list of iconic paintings of the soviet painting. Her story is easy to read, the atmosphere of love and affinity that arise when the communication between grandmother and granddaughter, already absolutely on-to another makes the sound of a child theme. The youths, who personified the new Soviet system, are replaced during this period by ordinary playful children. In these years, many paintings were written on this topic. What was decisive for the resounding success of the picture Lizogub? In our opinion, again the main role was played here by the sublime, almost sacred space of the Yurt. The peace and grandeur of this space makes us perceive the figures in it as significant and beautiful. The artist was able to convey the aura of protection from adversity, peace and harmony that reign in this home. Sincere happiness, which felt Lizogub in contact with folk art, with the Kazakh way of life, she was able to convey to the audience. The attention paid by the artist to the Kazakh folk art, to the ornament, became a worthy example for the masters of the next generations.

**Results.** Lizogub defined the range of plots related to home and Kazakh folk art as an inseparable part of hearth and home which later was developed by other artists. Under the great willingness to record all new that was happened in socialist Kazakhstan, of importance for Lizogub was the motif of steadfastness of the traditional mode of life. In the 1960s she often placed her characters in the interior of the Kazakh yurt, showing the house as a temple, as a sacred place. So, the motif of home united in itself the whole old way of life as a certain ideal and basis for continuity and tradition.

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, it should be stressed that at the stage of formation of Kazakh fine arts (1930s-1950s), women’s painting was developed with the artists’ self-awareness being the main theme. With the example of Maria Lizogub, it was demonstrated that female artists overcame the barriers of social inequality declaring themselves as the leading representative in the art and culture of Kazakhstan. At the same time, making an accent on the woman’s huge spiritual potential, they comprehended her as a keeper of hearth and home and the patriarchal way of life. This duality consists in the issue of identification processes when the representation of female interacted with ethnic and cultural self-determination.

The creative evolution of Maria Lizogub highlights the trends that are typical for the Kazakh art on the way from submission to socialist realist dogmas to the search for the perfect beauty of form. Lizogub has varied and evolved throughout her long and rich artistic career achievements. Free search, the ability to grow and accept the new were largely predetermined by the strong basis of knowledge that she received within the walls of the Kiev Art Institute. She never took her palette pure color, while all around suddenly became principled decorativity. Huge picturesque culture allowed her to remain a true master of fine arts. In her creative work, she used the experience of folk art – a sense of color, vivid figurative expressiveness, decorative structure of compositions, finding a major color sound, an acute lyrical vision of nature and an attentive attitude to every part of life.

The subjective identity of a creative person includes ethno-cultural identity expressed and represented in a creative work. “Women's writing is not any text written by a woman, but a gender phenomenon involving depersonalization as a specific women’s ability to open themselves to other” [6,p.87].

M. Lizogub's appeal to the space of the Yurt, to its harmony, colorfulness and integrity pushed national masters to look for ways to strengthen their own roots. Inexhaustible throughout the

creative path, the attention paid by the artist to the Kazakh folk art, to the ornament, became a worthy example for the masters of the next generations.

The harmonious unity of modernity and tradition, expressive emotional experience of everyday things, nature and life are the main characteristics of Lizogub's art.

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### **Мария Лизогуб кескіндемесі және Қазақстандағы нәзік жандылар өнерінің үрдістері.**

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада ХХ ғасырдағы Қазақстан бейнелеу өнеріндегі ерекше құбылыс болған, әйел суретшілерінің шығармашылығы қарастырылады. Мария Лизогуб туындыларын талдау зерттеушіге қазақтың нәзік жанды суретшілері кескіндемесінің ерекшелігін сипаттауға мүмкіндік береді. Автор суретшінің тұлғалық ерекшелігін, шығармашылық жолын талдай келе, өнердегі ұлттық үрдістерді дамытуға өзіндік үлес қосқан туындыларының негізгі бағыты мен мәнін кеңінен аша түседі. Суретші өзін Қазақстан өнерінің жетекші өкілі ретінде жариялай отырып, гендерлік теңсіздіктің тосқауылдарын еңсереді. Сонымен қатар, қылқалам шебері әйелдің үлкен рухани әлеуетіне баса назар аудара отырып, нәзік жандыларды үй ошағы мен патриархалдық өмір салтының сақтаушысы ретінде көрсетеді. Бұл екі жақтылық, әйел заты өкілдігінің этникалық және мәдени тұрғыда өзін-өзі анықтаумен өзара байланыста болатын, сәйкестендіру процестері туралы мәселе болып табылады.

**Түйінді сөздер:** әйелдер өнері, ұлттық дәстүрлер, гендерлік аспектілер, әлеуметтік-мәдени жағдай, социалистік реализм.

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### **Живопись Марии Лизогуб и тенденции женского искусства в Казахстане**

**Резюме.** В данной статье рассматривается феномен женского изобразительного искусства в Казахстане ХХ века. Анализ работ Марии Лизогуб позволяет исследователю описать специфику казахской женской живописи. Анализируя личность художницы, ее творческий путь, автор раскрывает стиль произведений и их значение для развития национальных тенденций в искусстве. Художница смогла преодолеть барьеры гендерного неравенства, объявив себя ведущим представителем в искусстве Казахстана. В то же время, делая акцент на огромном духовном потенциале женщины, она понимала ее как хранительницу домашнего очага и патриархального образа жизни. Эта двойственность заключается в вопросе о процессах идентификации, когда репрезентация женского взаимодействия с этническим и культурным самоопределением.

**Ключевые слова:** женское искусство, национальные традиции, гендерные аспекты, социокультурная ситуация, социалистический реализм.

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