

## BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: RECEPTION OF ARTISTIC TRADITIONS IN UZBEK PAINTING, 1970S–1980S



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**Annotatsiya:** Maqolada 1970–1980-yillar o‘zbek rangtasvirida Sharq va G‘arb badiiy an‘analarining qabul qilinishi Javlon Umarbekov ijodi misolida ko‘rib chiqiladi. Yangi badiiy tilning shakllanishi kuzatilmoqda, unda Sharq miniatyurasi va Markaziy Osiyo madaniyatlari merosi G‘arb modernistik oqimlari bilan kesishadi. Retsepsiya madaniy muloqotning tuzilmaviy tamoyili bo‘lib xizmat qilgani dalillanadi, bu asosiy asarlarni sinchkovlik bilan o‘rganish orqali tasdiqlanadi.

**Kalit so‘zlar:** O‘zbekiston rassomligi; Javlon Umarbekov; retsepsiya; Sharq miniatyurasi; modernizm; madaniy muloqot.

**Аннотация:** В статье рассматривается рецепция восточных и западных художественных традиций в узбекской живописи 1970–1980-х годов на примере творчества Джавлона Умарбекова. Прослеживается формирование нового художественного языка, в котором восточная миниатюра и наследие центральноазиатских культур пересекаются с западными модернистскими течениями. Аргументируется, что рецепция служила структурирующим принципом культурного диалога, что подтверждается внимательным изучением ключевых произведений.

**Ключевые слова:** живопись Узбекистана; Жавлон Умарбеков; рецепция; восточная миниатюра; модернизм; культурный диалог.

**Abstract:** This article examines how Eastern and Western artistic traditions were received in Uzbek painting of the 1970s–1980s through the case of Javlon Umarbekov. It traces the formation of a new artistic idiom in which Eastern miniature and the heritage of Central Asian cultures intersect with Western modernist currents. The argument is that reception functioned as a structuring principle of cultural dialogue, as demonstrated through close readings of key works.

**Keywords:** Uzbek painting; Javlon Umarbekov; reception; Eastern miniature; modernism; cultural dialogue.

The study of Uzbek painting of the 1970s–1980s should move beyond a purely historical-descriptive account of styles and movements. To comprehend the artistic processes of this period, one must consider the mechanisms of cultural reception that shaped a specific model of East–West interaction. In this context, philosophical and aesthetic factors, socio-cultural changes, and the search for new forms of expression in the late Soviet period played a decisive role.

The relevance of the research lies in the need to view the painting of Uzbekistan as a phenomenon that encompassed several layers: the Soviet artistic tradition, national imagery rooted in Eastern miniature and the heritage of ancient cultures of Central Asia, as well as impulses of Western modernism. During the 1970s, a distinct artistic discourse emerged, addressing questions of national identity, cultural dialogue between East and West, and the permissible boundaries of departure from the canons of Socialist Realism. These issues were actively discussed in art journals such as *Tvorchestvo* (Creativity), *Soviet Art Studies*, *Decorative Art*, and *Art*. As noted by A.I. Morozov [1, p. 9], A.A. Kamensky [2, p. 202], and A.T. Yagodovskaya [3, p. 184], Western art had

a significant influence on the artistic practices of the Central Asian republics, contributing to the emergence of new forms and themes. The weakening of censorship in the 1970s allowed artists to turn to subjects of the inner world of the individual, philosophical reflection, and national history. Through the reception of modernist tendencies (Expressionism, Post-Impressionism, Abstraction), they reinterpreted Eastern traditions, enhancing emotional expressiveness, intensifying the use of color, and experimenting with symbolic forms.

The new generation of artists — J. Umarbekov, B. Jalalov, M. Tokhtaev, A. Mirzaev, and Sh. Abdurashidov — sought to create an artistic language that was open to global art while nourished by local cultural sources [4, p. 108]. Their turn to the artistic heritage of the Kushan period, the wall paintings of Varakhsha and Afrasiab, and the traditions of Eastern miniature was combined with explorations in Western modernism. As a result, painting of the 1970s–1980s acquired intimacy, psychological depth, and a multilayered pictorial language. As A. Yakimovich observed [4, p. 108], for this generation, world art was perceived as a single “root system” that united national and universal values. In this sense, the reception of East and West can be seen as a crucial mechanism in shaping the artistic discourse of Uzbek painting of the period.

In this process, Uzbek painting drew upon the rich heritage of the peoples of Central Asia: the ancient art of the Kushan kingdom, the wall paintings of Varakhsha and Afrasiab, and the refinement of Eastern miniature. These sources inspired artists, helping them to discover new images, subjects, and chromatic solutions that were reinterpreted in the spirit of modernity. The most significant explorations in this direction are associated with the works of J. Umarbekov, B. Jalalov, M. Tokhtaev, A. Mirzaev, and Sh. Abdurashidov, who expanded the expressive possibilities of painting by focusing on the psychological depth of the image, the inner world of the individual, and subtle emotional states.

In the 1970s–1980s, the traditions of Uzbek Soviet painting were also revived, particularly the decorative tendency rooted in the 1920s–1930s. The works of Sh. Abdurashidov, A. Mirzaev, and R. Shodiev demonstrate the aspiration of young artists to convey national identity through decorative forms, ornamental rhythms, and vibrant color, creating works filled with love for humanity, for people’s labor and daily life, and for their connection to the native land.

Uzbek painting of the 1970s–1980s thus represents a multilayered artistic phenomenon, characterized by the search for new forms of expression that combined the legacy of Eastern traditions, the achievements of world culture, and the experiments of modernism. Artists of this period turned to ancient cultural strata, national folklore, and global art, creating works that could embody both personal experiences and universal values.

The most illustrative example of these processes is the work of Javlon Umarbekov, whose artistic evolution can be traced from the stylization of Eastern miniature to the philosophical interpretation of tradition and a complex engagement with Western modernist trends. His painting reflects not only the individual trajectory of the artist but also the broader mechanisms through which a new pictorial culture in Uzbekistan was formed in the late twentieth century.

Methodologically, the study combines reception theory, hermeneutics, and intertextuality to trace the evolution of Umarbekov’s pictorial language and its dialogue with multiple cultural strata across creative stages.

The early years of Javlon Umarbekov’s career (early 1970s) were marked by a turn to the traditions of Eastern miniature, Old Russian icon painting, and the early monuments of Indian painting from Ajanta. These sources provided a formal foundation that enabled the artist to construct his own visual language. In *My Friend* (1972), one observes a conventional treatment of figures, a flat compositional plane, and a decorative rhythm of line reminiscent of miniature techniques.

The folkloric series of the early 1970s — *Two Angels* (1973), *Fetching Water* (1974), *Ritual* (1974), *Cockfights* (1975), *Mother and Child* (1975), *Dance with Laghans* (1976) — is built upon laconic graphic sketches that, despite their apparent simplicity, retain the refinement and decorativeness of the Eastern tradition. Here, tradition functions as a recognizable visual sign — a decorative citation not yet subjected to deep reinterpretation. In the context of Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas on the dialogicity of cultural texts [5, p. 76], these works may be regarded as the initial stage

of the artist's "conversation" with tradition: it still functions as a citation — a recognizable symbol rather than a deeply reworked element.

In the second half of the 1970s, Umarbekov gradually moved away from external stylization and began to seek ways of more profound interpretation of the national artistic heritage. The series of "poetic novellas" — *Faces* (1976), *Girl with a Tambourine* (1976), *Lovers* (1977), *Peach Garden* (1977), *Dream* (1978), *Musicians* (1978) — demonstrates a freer handling of forms and space. The line acquires a melodic quality; the color palette is enriched with shades of blue and gold, while the pictorial space attains a conditional yet expressive structure.

Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality [6, p. 12] makes it possible to interpret these paintings as multilayered texts saturated with cultural quotations, entering into dialogue between Eastern miniature, European painting, and the artist's personal memories. Here, tradition ceases to function as a mere ornamental element and begins to define the emotional and philosophical rhythm of the composition.

At the turn of the late 1970s and early 1980s, Umarbekov sought to bring together different layers of world culture, creating new images in which past and present entered into productive interaction. Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic approach [7, p. 45] allows us to view his works of this period as a space of "fusion of horizons." A vivid example of this is the painting *Homo Sapiens* (1979–1980), where the artist unites cultural symbols of different epochs, expressing the idea of interaction and mutual understanding between civilizations. In *I Am Human* (1983), one can recognize the figure of Avicenna, the image of Mona Lisa, Botticelli's *Spring*, and busts of ancient scholars — all merging into a single artistic context, symbolizing the unity of human culture. The composition is constructed according to the principle of symbolic montage, where each element refers to the idea of historical continuity and the universality of cultural codes.

As noted by M. Agranovskaya [9, p. 3], Uzbek painters of the 1970s–1980s, such as J. Umarbekov and M. Tokhtaev, sought to affirm national art as an equal participant in world culture. N. Akhmedova also emphasizes this process [8, p. 142], pointing out that artists of the period strove to overcome the boundaries of locality and narrow national frameworks, perceiving world art as a valuable resource for their own creativity.

The reception of global artistic experience encouraged stylistic and technical diversity in late-1970s painting; artists grew increasingly open to experimentation, combining approaches and producing original works imbued with new philosophical and cultural meanings. According to N. Akhmedova, while in the 1960s the structural ties of the artistic process were determined by the formula 'national school – folk traditions'; in the 1970s this shifted toward 'artist – aesthetic systems of East and West.' [8, p. 101]

Thus, Umarbekov's oeuvre of the late 1970s – early 1980s marks a new stage in the philosophical interpretation of tradition and an important link in forming a new model of artistic thinking in Uzbekistan, one open to international cultural dialogue and the perception of world art as a single aesthetic system.

Parallel to his engagement with Eastern tradition (1978–1988), Umarbekov explored Western modernist directions, most notably Cubism, which he reinterpreted as a philosophical tool. In *Eclipse* (1978), one can see the transition to sharp deformations of form and a dramatic palette. *Earthquake* (1979) is built on the contrasts of yellow and black, conveying tragic tension and emotional fracture, reminiscent in its plasticity of Picasso's *Guernica*.

In *Family of Tuaregs* (1987), cubist techniques are combined with Eastern ornamentality, forming a unique compositional rhythm. The triptych *Flying Carts* (1984) creates the effect of simultaneous spatial and figural shifts, conveying a sense of inner chaos and temporal dynamics. Later works — *Seller of Old Copper Utensils* (1986) and *Skullcaps for Sale* (1988) — intensify the theme of spiritual apocalypse, the disintegration of world wholeness expressed through fragmented forms and tense lines.

Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory [10, p. 340] helps explain how these paintings were perceived in the artistic milieu of the 1980s: they were understood not only as stylistic experiments but also as emotional chronicles of an era, reflecting the anxious expectations of social

transformations and global catastrophes.

Applying these theoretical frameworks makes it possible to view Umarbekov's stylistic evolution as a gradual evolution — from decorative stylization to philosophical interpretation of traditions, and from local sources toward a more universal artistic idiom. His painting becomes a space of encounter between East and West, tradition and modernism, personal and collective experience, shaping a distinct pictorial world within Uzbek art of the second half of the twentieth century.

An analysis of Uzbek painting in the 1970s–1980s reveals that this period was a crucial stage in the development of the national school, marked by the search for new forms of expression, the transcendence of Socialist Realist canons, and openness to global artistic experience. The work of Javlon Umarbekov stands out as one of the most illustrative examples of these processes. His trajectory — from the stylization of Eastern miniature in the early 1970s to complex philosophical interpretations of tradition and the active reception of Western modernism — reflects the dynamic artistic thinking of the generation of the 1970s.

The use of the concepts of Gadamer, Jauss, Kristeva, and Bakhtin allows us to interpret Umarbekov's painting as a space of dialogue between past and present, between local and global cultural codes. At the same time, Homi Bhabha's ideas on the hybridity of cultural forms help us better understand the processes of synthesis and transformation in the artist's visual language. Umarbekov did not merely copy Western models but reinterpreted them, integrating them into the fabric of national art and creating new images and visual meanings.

His canvases of the late 1970s–1980s (*Eclipse* (1978), *Earthquake* (1979), *Flying Carts* (1984), *Skullcaps for Sale* (1988)) exemplify artistic hybridity, where Eastern traditions and Western avant-garde explorations engage in a tense yet fruitful dialogue. This experience demonstrates that Uzbek painting of the second half of the twentieth century was not confined within local traditions, but became part of global cultural exchange, developing its own mechanisms of stylization and reception of world art.

Thus, the study of Javlon Umarbekov's oeuvre in the light of philosophical and theoretical approaches reveals the depth of these intercultural processes and underscores their significance in shaping the modern artistic language of the region and situating it within global art history.

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