TRENDS IN THE FINE ARTS OF TATARSTAN IN THE 1970–1990S ON THE EXAMPLE OF NARKIS PONOMAREV’S CREATIVITY

Summary: The article is devoted to the late Soviet period of fine arts in Tatarstan — a republic with rich avant-garde traditions, which was characterised by extraordinary intensity of artists’ creative life during the 1970–1990s. Today, this period of art, as a regional version of the second wave of the avant-garde, still remains insufficiently studied and requires more detailed and scrupulous study and understanding.

The topic is considered on the example of one of the most original painters of Kazan of the second half of the 20th century — Narkis Ponomarev (1946–1996), who is considered by the author to be among the unofficial circle of artists.

The study introduces the personality of Ponomarev as a self-taught artist and autodidact into the scientific context for the first time. It is argued that, despite the lack of the master’s professional art education and the resulting difficulties (lack of recognition in the artistic community, criticism from official art critics and officials, inability to exhibit, and so on), he managed to form and develop a self-sufficient and original art. Avant-garde tendencies in the artist’s work are identified and substantiated based on an analysis of more than 60 Ponomarev’s works mainly from private collections. Turning to the heritage of Matisse, Picasso, Chagall, German expressionists, etc., without copying, only focusing on them, Ponomarev developed his own artistic concept. Using a variety of bright colours, free volumetric strokes, turning to marginal subjects or lyrical landscapes and fantastic images, he imbued his works with simplicity and primitiveness, in the good sense of the word, of the image itself.

It is noted that creativity, which gained its fame and recognition only in the post-Soviet period, was necessary for Ponomarev as a way of understanding the world around and oneself, as a therapeutic impulse for one’s own alienation. The purpose of this article is to trace the evolution of the artist, to reveal the role and significance of Ponomarev’s creative activity in the artistic life of Tatarstan in the 1970–1990s. The presentation of new trends and the introduction of new names into scientific circulation will help to identify paradoxes and facets of the institution and its remoteness from the era of the USSR.

Keywords: late Soviet art, expressionism, unofficial art, autodidact artist, fine arts of Tatarstan, postmodernism, Narkis Ponomarev.

In July 1993, the State Museum of Fine Arts of the Republic of Tatarstan hosted a large-scale exhibition, New Art. Yesterday. Today. Tomorrow. The organisers of the exhibition were Kazan designers, artist-designers E. Goulustov, V. Nesterenkova and others, led by the ideological inspirer of the project, art critic V. Tsoi. They intended to present a retrospective of the Kazan avant-garde with an emphasis on modernity, starting from the 1910s and moving from era to era through unusual spatial solutions reminiscent of scaffolding. The works of Narkis Ponomarev were also exhibited at this exhibition and were noted in the press [1, 5]. It is noteworthy that Ponomarev’s artworks were almost always used to illustrate notes and articles in periodicals dedicated to this exhibition.

Finally, in February 1996, Narkis Ponomarev’s long-awaited first personal exhibition took place on the occasion of the artist’s 50th anniversary; it lasted about a week (the exact number of days varies among sources). It was not possible to exhibit the works of an “inconvenient” artist in the local Exhibition Hall of the Union of Artists; the management found excuses. However, the management of the Exhibition Hall of the Union of Artists; the management found excuses. However, the management of the Exhibition Hall of the Union of Artists; the management found excuses. However, the management of the Exhibition Hall of the Union of Artists; the management found excuses. However, the management of the Exhibition Hall of the Union of Artists; the management found excuses. However, the management of the Exhibition Hall of the Union of Artists; the management found excuses. However, the management of the Exhibition Hall of the Union of Artists; the management found excuses. However, the management of the Exhibition Hall of the Union of Artists; the management found excuses. However, the management of the Exhibition Hall of the Union of Artists; the management found excuses. However, it was probably due to the absence of representatives of the official authorities and professional artists. Nevertheless, such a dialogue with the viewer was necessary for the artist. Experiencing severe physical pain from a serious illness during this period, he urgently needed a personal exhibition as a last breath of fresh air before death. After 3 weeks the artist passed away. Narkis Ponomarev was admitted to the Union of Artists of the Republic of Tatarstan posthumously in 1996. His membership card was placed in his coffin — his loved ones understood how important and valuable it was for him.

In 1998, two more chamber personal exhibitions of Ponomarev’s art were posthumously held. They were arranged by the artist’s family with the support of art critic R. Sultanova in the Exhibition Hall of the Union of Artists and the Gorky Museum in Kazan, evidence of which has not yet been discovered.

In 2022, at the Hazine National Art Gallery of the State Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan the author of this article organised another, larger-scale personal exhibition of Narkis Ponomarev — ‘Oth-
er Art”, which presented a retrospective of the artist’s work, uniting several large private collections. The exhibition featured 55 works, of which only 5 were from the collection of the State Museum of Fine Arts of the Republic of Tatarstan.

Despite Narkis Ponomarev’s seemingly active creative and exhibition biography, the entire conscious part of it was deprived of recognition. And timid attempts to exhibit officially and join the Union of Artists were unsuccessful. This was due to the fact that, as art critic V. Tsoi wrote about the artistic situation of this period, “everything that remained outside the figurative (objective) image was contemptuously called ‘abstractionism’ and ‘formalism’ and, accordingly, ‘was not allowed’ into respectable exhibition halls” [4]. The lack of artistic education only reinforced the beliefs of my colleagues in unprofessionalism. Some treated Narkis Ponomarev’s work with distrust and even ridicule; others just shrugged their shoulders — the unprepared Kazan public did not take the artist seriously.

For Narkis Ponomarev, painting was a deeply personal, emotional, and sometimes dramatic state of mind. When asked what was depicted in his paintings, he always answered the same: “Look, and you will see everything”. His work is an expressive symbiosis of figurativeness and abstraction. The author’s style appeared based on the heritage of the world avant-garde of the early 20th century — colouristic dominants and expressive side of Matisse’s colour, the conscious destruction of Picasso’s nature, allegorical em-

bodiments in Chagall’s primitive (with which the artist was also connected by ethnicity), the grotesque of German expressionists. By building a private dialogue with the great history of art, mixing artistic languages, eras and styles, Narkis Ponomarev developed his own self-sufficient artistic strategy, which fits well into the framework of autodidactics.

The most fruitful stage of Narkis Ponomarev’s work certainly occurred in the 1980s. It is the phase of maturity in the artist’s biography — a period of confrontations and difficult quests, the creation of the “pink” and “blue” cycles (almost according to Picasso), where the latter reflects worldly suffering, which the artist felt acutely and painfully, expressed in a numerous series of images of the blind, the crippled, alcoholics and other marginalised people. At the same time, Narkis Ponomarev’s transition to the “pink” series also marked a change from sadness and poverty, resolved in gloomy colours, to a more joyful representation of the world: romantic landscapes and portraits (including self-portraits), bathed in warm light.

Regardless of the period of creation of works or their style and theme, compositional structures are always unexpected: they often use distortion of space and defragmentation. The “characters” of the paintings, entering into complex interaction with each other, maintain cold indifference — dynamic unity and detachment at the same time. The artist’s works of this period can be considered as intellectual and creative philosophising in images or “reflections” (the term of art critic S. Kolina).

Freely experimenting with form and colour, Narkis Ponomarev invariably remained faithful to easel paintings in small formats, most often on cardboard — it was more accessible. His vivid associative paintings often amounted to puzzles, perhaps containing coded messages. During this period, still lifes appeared; they were mainly with jugs and fruit — a kind of Cezanneism in an effort to experiment with the ponderability of the subject, the materiality of colour (Evening, 1970s; Still Life. Yellow Vase, 1980). In this so-called “synthetic” series, the artist worked on the pictorial and plastic tasks that he set for himself:

Ill. 3. Ponomarev N.I. Still life with a blue vessel. 1980s, hardboard, oil, private collection

Ill. 2. Ponomarev N.I. Female profile against the background of a landscape. 1980s, oil on canvas, private collection
the inhabitants of old Kazan, cripples and vagrants, war veterans resemble a caricature, however, not an evil one but a condescending one. Sometimes the author’s characters hypertrophy; their "plasticine" bodies and/or limbs stretch out, creating internal tension bordering on numbness in the viewer. The artist’s “grotesque theatre of the absurd” creates a special expressionistic intonation.

In some of Narkis Ponomarev’s works, a sophisticated viewer will certainly find a symbolic motif — the image of a short man in a hat; it is a self-portrait of the artist, his unique signature, changing depending on life situations: first, lonely, and then, with the birth of his daughter, walking around the city with a stroller.

Narkis Ponomarev is an iconic figure in the late Soviet fine arts of Tatarstan. Despite the drama inherent in his work and personal fate, his brush had the incredible ability to saturate people’s hearts with colour and civic passion.

The art of Narkis Ponomarev was not of an official nature; nevertheless, it cannot be considered an underground movement. Rare participation in permitted exhibitions was a necessary form of artistic existence and the only opportunity to publicly present his controversial works, which were characterised by irony, grotesque and symbolism. The artist’s humble nature and reclusive lifestyle were in no way identified with the new style that he proclaimed with his work.

Today, the controversy surrounding the name of this artist, the struggle of critical opinions and assessments does not cool down. Meanwhile, the art of Narkis Ponomarev had its own rebellious path, the movement of which was impossible to predict. Recording the information about such original and controversial artists will allow us to have a complete picture of the country’s late Soviet art.

We see prospects for further research of the problem in the publication of a catalogue of the artist’s works, as well as in the study of other personalities of this period, which are still underrepresented and have not received worthy publications.

REFERENCES:

in addition to crimson red and azure, his canvases were saturated with emerald and amber yellow (Still Life with a Pear; Still Life with a Blue Vessel, 1980s), turning into a chaotic centre of brushstrokes. They conflict, pulsate, creating a tense play of colour dominants, building up the luminosity and shape of objects.

Narkis Ponomarev’s repeated theme, which permeated his entire creative path, was the lyrical and at the same time painful image of old Kazan (Press House on K. Nadzhmi Street, 1980s; Old Yards, 1980s; Kazan. Bulak, 1983; Kekin’s House, 1990, etc.). The artist showed attentiveness to details: capturing crooked streets, unsightly court-yards, dilapidated buildings, slanting arches, humpbacked bridges of Bulak; he conveyed his own philosophical perception of mortal existence.

The city, “painted with pain but also with love” [1], is deformed — different scales, incongruous approximations establish new aesthetic principles in the pictorial picture. In these works, Tsoi saw “objects of close study, the Socialist Art artist’s analytical research” [4, P. 12]. Rather, the artist did not manipulate visual stereotypes of Soviet propaganda in his landscapes; he strived to convey the image of the city, its character, by conveying social orientation and the response of contemporar-y events. In the city landscapes depicting Kazan, there is Narkis Ponomarev’s exception-al love, opening an endless series of images before us. They reflect the artist’s deeply personal perception and understanding of the events that happened here. Here, the symbolically and allegorically executed city views are not only picturesque plans and rhythmic colour spots but also a new formative task in the range of the modernist and avant-garde paradigm.

Among the enduring imagery of Narkis Ponomarev, there are often images of marginalised people (On the Street, at the Kiosk, 1987; In the Old Yard, 1987; Scream, late 1980s, etc.). This is a distorted and ugly world; Narkis Ponomarev’s people are “a single cast of our communal existence” [4, P. 12]. Painted in a few accurate strokes,
Анонс: Статья посвящена позднесоветскому периоду изобразительного искусства Татарстана — республики с богатыми традициями авангарда, которая характеризовалась в 1970–1990-е гг. необычайной интенсивностью творческой жизни художников. Данный период искусства, как региональный вариант второй полосы авангарда в эпоху СССР, оказал большое влияние на выявление непарадоксальных и полифункциональных тенденций в изобразительном искусстве. Тема раскрывается на примере одного из самых ярких представителей изобразительного искусства Татарстана, постмодернизма, Наркиса Пономарёва. Татарстанская искусная публика не воспринимала художника как автора, но Наркис Пономарёв выглядел исключительно (по разным данным, на выставке входили 50–70 человек), но Наркис Пономарёв выглядел исключительно (по разным данным, на выставке входили 50–70 человек), но Наркис Пономарёв выглядел исключительно (по разным данным, на выставке входили 50–70 человек). Тем не менее подобный диалог со свободным проявлением и развивался как терапевтический импульс на собственной личности, что подтверждается исследованием творчества Наркиса Пономарёва по случаю 50-летнего юбилея художника, который длился около недели (точное количество дней в источниках разнится). Е. Г. Го...
направления, преимущественно с кувшинами
всего на картонах — они были доступнее. Его
как интеллектуально-творческое философство
художника этого периода можно рассматривать
в образах и отрешённость одновременно. Работы
холодную безучастность — динамичное еди
ное взаимодействие друг с другом, сохраняют
тёплым светом.
вой» серии обозначил и смену печали и нищеты,
же время переход Наркиса Пономарёва к «розо
а также алкоголиков и прочих маргиналов. В то
численной серии изображений слепых, калек,
остро и болезненно, что выразилось в много
мировые страдания, которые художник ощущал
годы. Это фаза зрелости в биографии художни
вписывается в рамки автодидактики.
точную художественную стратегию, что вполне
— Наркис Пономарёв выработал свою самодоста
шись в хаотичную гущу мазков. Они конфликтуют,
пульсируют, создавая напряжённую игру цвето
тевых доминант, выстраивают светосилу и фор
му объектов.
Своеобразной темой Наркиса Пономарёва, про
изывающей весь его творческий путь, стал лир
ический и при этом бедняцкий образ старой
(«Дом печати с ул. К. Наджми», 1980-е; «Старые
Наркис Пономарёв проявляет внимательность к деталям: запечатлевая скривлён
ные улицы, неприглядные дворы, ветхие здания,
косые арки, горбатые мостики Булака, транслиру
ют своё собственное философское восприятие
примитивного бытия. «Гротескный театр абсурда» ху
дожника создаёт особую экспрессионистическую
интонацию [5].
В некоторых произведениях Наркиса Поно
марёва искусственный зритель непременно ощущает
символический мотив — образ невысокого муж
чины в шляпе — это авторпортрет художника, его
своеобразная подпись, меняющаяся в зависо
ости от жизненных ситуаций: сначала одинокого,
а с рождением дочери — прогуляющегося по
городу уже с коляской.
Наркис Пономарёв — знаковая фигура в подз
несоветском изобразительном искусстве Татар
стана. Несмотря на драматизм, свойственный его
творчеству и личной судьбе, его кисть обладала
невероятным свойством насыщать цветом и граж
данской страстью сердца людей.
Искусство Наркиса Пономарёва не носило офи
циального характера, в то же время его нельзя при
числить к андергрунду. Детское участие в разрешённых выставках было необходим
ной формой артистического существования и един
ственной возможностью публично представить
военные неоднозначные работы, для которых были
характерны ирония, гротеск и символизм. Покор
ный характер художника и затворнический образ
был не отложился с новой стилисти
кой, которую он провозгласил своим творчеством.
Сегодня споры вокруг имени этого худож
ника, борьба критических мнений и оценок не
останавливаются. Между тем его искусства Пономарёва был своё мятежный путь, движение
которого предугадать было невозможно. А фик
сирование столь оригинальных и неоднозначных
художников позволит выстроить целостную кар
тину позднесоветского искусства страны.
Перспективы дальнейшего исследования про
блемы мы видим в издании каталога произве
дений художника, а также в изучении других
персоналий этого периода, до сих пор недоста
точно представленных и не получивших достой
ных изданий.

БИБЛИОГРАФИЯ
1. Бурнашевская Е. Фантастическая реальность //
2. Колина С. З. Гризматка любви // Казань. —
3. Колина С. З. Волшебное зеркало жизни // Заречье. —
№ 7. — С. 4.
5. Жданова И. Оглушающий авангард // Казанские ве
6. Уварова И. Собственный характер // Казань. —
Казанские ведомости. — 21 июля. — С. 5.
7. Уварова И. Собственный характер // Казань. —
Казанские ведомости. — 21 июля. — С. 5.

Свободно экспериментируя с формой и цве
том, Наркис Пономарёв неизменими сохранял вер
ность станковой картине малых форматов, чаще
всего на картонах — они были доступнее. Его
яркая ассоциативная живопись зачастую свод
илась к ребусам, в которых, возможно, зако
дированы послания. В этот период появился натюрморт, преимущественно с кувшинами
и фруктами — этажи сезонах в стремлении
покоряли поэтические черты образов. Они отражают глубо
ко личное восприятие и осмысление событий,
произошедших здесь, самым художником. Сим
волические и иносказательно исполненные городс
кие виды здесь не только живописные планы
и ритмичные цветовые пятна, но и новая фор
маторческая задача в диапазоне модернист
ской и авангардной парадигмы.
Наркис Пономарёв вписывается в рамки автодидактики.
Перспективы дальнейшего исследования про
блемы мы видим в издании каталога произве
дений художника, а также в изучении других персоналий этого периода, до сих пор недоста
точно представленных и не получивших достой
ных изданий.