

Reflection Of Family Themes In Curatorial And Exhibition Projects Uzbekistan (2000-2025)

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Abstract

Since the 21st century, the institution of family in Uzbekistan has undergone significant changes, which inevitably reflected in art. While in the early 1990s, family images in art served as a visual manifesto of national unity, then with the advent of the 21st century, the emphasis has shifted toward personal story, cultural compatibility, comprehension of losses and new identity. These processes found vivid embodiment in the works of contemporary plastic art, which utilize a variety of materials, forms, and concepts.

Keywords: Family, curator, exhibitions, national identity, fine arts, artist

In contemporary artistic culture in Uzbekistan, the theme of family remains one of the most significant, reflecting both the resilience of traditional values and the challenges of the times. Since the 2000s, during a period of active societal transformation, interest in interpreting family themes has grown in the visual arts, particularly in exhibition and curatorial work. Family has become not only an object of depiction but also a means of artistic reflection on social memory, gender roles, and cultural identity.

Over the past twenty-five years, key exhibition projects have been held in Uzbekistan's exhibition and curatorial practice, addressing the transformation of traditional ways of life in the context of modernization, family values, and continuity. These projects have focused on changing visual language, engaging a younger generation of artists, and the socio-cultural contexts that influence artistic expressions of family. Curatorial practice in Uzbekistan has developed more rapidly since the 2000s, largely under the influence of international programs, collaborations with cultural institutions in Europe and Asia, and the emergence of an independent artistic community. Projects exploring family themes are often built at the intersection of local traditions and global challenges:

migration, urbanization, the transformation of women's roles, and expanding notions of gender and family.

Cultural development in the context of new sociocultural trends in the country is one of the most important challenges for contemporary art today. Curatorial and exhibition projects play a significant role in this, fulfilling their cultural-creating function. The exhibition space becomes a center of communication and an aesthetic environment for artists. Within the exhibition space, the viewer's interaction with art fosters their development. Curatorial projects help artists define their path and progress in the art world. Through this interaction with art, artists acquire new experiences.

In recent years, the status of curatorial and exhibition activities in Uzbekistan has grown as a major phenomenon in the country's cultural life. Over the past 25 years, we have discovered the world, and the world has discovered us. In this regard, I would like to highlight the exhibition activities of Tashkent's major exhibition halls and galleries [1]. The curatorial and exhibition activities of the Academy of Arts of Uzbekistan are a priority. The Tashkent International Biennale of Contemporary Art [2] has become a key event in the country's cultural life, exerting a significant influence

on the development of contemporary art in Uzbekistan [3]. Between 2000 and 2025, extensive positive experience has also been accumulated in the field of international exhibitions.

The dynamics of modern life have brought new nuances to our understanding of the infinitely profound nature of the institution of family. We sense these changes in our compatriots, as well; old stereotypes are also changing – the image of the family is becoming more diverse, both socially and psychologically. In 21st-century Uzbek painting, the era of portraits of field workers and shock workers is fading into the background, but unfortunately, there is little new, creative, or philosophical perspective on the topic. This further complicates the task of art, which, for various reasons, de-emphasized this issue in the early 2000s. A new understanding of this topic seemed highly relevant.

Today, artists convey their vision of the family through various forms of contemporary art. The diversity of forms and techniques in contemporary fine art plays a vital role in its development and evolution. This allows artists to experiment, innovate, and explore new facets of art, while reflecting the diverse worldviews and cultural characteristics of our time.

Another important aspect of popularizing the theme of family in contemporary art in Uzbekistan is the active support of the state and society for the development of the artistic sphere. State programs, exhibitions, and competitions for artists help stimulate their creative potential and professional growth. A striking example of this was the 2002 International Photo Exhibition "Women: New Century, New Image, New Role," organized by the regional office of the United Nations Development Fund for Women in the CIS countries jointly with the United Nations Development Program in Uzbekistan. It featured 180 works by winners and runners-up of a simultaneous

international competition from 14 countries [4]. The diversity of genres and techniques in the exhibition halls played a key role in reflecting the particularities of creating the image of the family in the modern era.

In 2008, Academician A. Khakimov's "Moon-Faced" project was exhibited at the National Bank of Ukraine's Fine Arts Gallery. This project explores the role of women in the family, society, and the social order. In the "Moon-Faced" project, artists presented their works across five themes. The first theme is women in the modern world—social portraits. The second theme is the Eastern woman: from deification to desacralization. The third theme is the philosophical context of female loneliness. The fourth theme is He and She: a lyrical and romantic perspective on the theme. The fifth theme is the interpretation of love in Eastern philosophy, contextualizing it through sensual, earthly perception [5].

Essentially, the exhibition was international in scope, as it featured Ronald Kleier (Netherlands) and Michael Barry Lane and his wife, Fawzia Lane (UK), as well as artists from Uzbekistan. A. Khakimov's selection of project participants was determined by his observations of the work of a group of leading Uzbek and international artists working in various forms and techniques of contemporary art, from painting and video art to installations and photography.

The video works by artist Yuri Useinov, "Woman Walking Backward" (2006) and "Knife and Fan" (2007), are polysemantic: a single character is presented in various guises. A precise musical accompaniment enhances the philosophical perspective of the work, dedicated to the uniqueness and originality of women's perceptions of the world. A. Chaplenko's pictorial triptych "Women" (2008), depicting monumental female workers in a style combining Rembrandt and Gudiashvili, is perceived as odious and leaves a feeling of

incompleteness [6]. The artist's interpretation of the Eastern family theme evokes the mysticism of Sufi meditation, conveyed through an original sculptural language. His installation featuring a safe wrapped in burlap was less convincing, leaving the impression of an idea that hadn't been fully thought out. The most striking piece in the room was N. Sharafkhodzhaeva's sculptural installation "LUN@LIK.YA" (2008), assembled from numerous computer disks—an attempt to understand the psychological states caused by the perception of technocratic reality [7]. Through irony and elements of sculptural parody, the artist asserts that even in the information age, women retain innate moral qualities and grace. N. Sharafkhodzhaeva dispels the myth of the technocratic woman. The theme of family and the hearth is close to each of us and remains relevant at all times. This is precisely why many artists dedicate their best works, and sometimes even entire series of works, to it.

In Uzbekistan, exhibitions and projects are held in various formats. In 2014, for example, the NeUyat exhibition, "Every Woman Who Survived Violence Is Someone's Mother, Sister, or Daughter," was organized [8]. This exhibition addressed pressing issues that are often not addressed openly, as they are considered disrespectful to the weaker sex. Such exhibitions address issues that society, in keeping with Eastern traditions, often prefers not to "bring problems from home." While this upbringing may be very good and noble, evil sometimes begets evil. The NeUyat exhibition, "Every Woman Who Survived Violence Is Someone's Mother, Sister, or Daughter," became the central event of the festival of the same name, which is now in its third year being held by the anti-violence project Nemolchi.uz and a gallery founded by photographer and activist Timur Karpov. The project's goal is to use art, education, and frank

conversations to eradicate the culture of silence and shame around violence in society. A unique exhibition of soft adras dolls, a map of Tashkent, colorful paintings with traditional patterns, a recreated teenager's room filled with charming personal belongings—at first glance, these installations seem normal and ordinary. Just like violence in a society that prefers to remain silent and unnoticed.

In recent years, many steps have been taken toward creating a society with prosperous families. However, some issues still require special attention. The determination with which work in this area is being carried out gives hope that such issues will become less frequent. Exhibitions organized in various regions of the country play a crucial role in the large-scale implementation of these goals.

The Academy of Arts of Uzbekistan has held exhibitions focusing on family and Eastern family traditions. In particular, in 2019, in the Central Exhibition Hall, to mark the artist's 60th birthday, Academician Akmal Nur held a solo exhibition, "Onaizor" ("Mother"), dedicated to his mother. The anniversary exhibition features works from a specific stage of the artist's creative journey. The artist utilizes symbols that have historically been associated with family, beauty, and fertility—the red pomegranate, the fiery rooster, and the hot tandoor—and uses them to create his own, highly lyrical interpretation of ancient parables. This exhibition was dedicated to the artist's mother, which is why it features so many works with female images, which the artist attempted to reflect through his mother.

In this exhibition, beginning with the realistic depiction of the artist's mother and the symbolically poetic works, the artist reveals the full spectrum of his inner world. The artist reveals the image of family and the relationship between men and women with bright, vibrant colors, symbolism, and the

hidden meaning inherent to Eastern cultures. Each work presented in this exhibition offers a profound understanding of women in the family, their dreams, love, reveries, and motherhood.

Contemporary curatorial and exhibition projects in Uzbekistan demonstrate a desire to rethink the family: from an institution with a representative function to a social, cultural, and emotional force, supported by both crafts and artistic practices. The family is presented as a spatial and conceptual "node" where crafts, memory, gender, and local identity intersect. Today, it is clear that the family and its forms remain a key element of cultural identity and artistic discourses in Uzbekistan. In July 2024, the Fine Arts Gallery of Uzbekistan hosted a fascinating exhibition, "Flight," a collaborative project by over 70 students and young artists that explored changing family roles and intergenerational relationships through a universal visual language. The youth exhibition "Flight" opened at the Fine Arts Gallery. The Fine Arts Gallery (NBU) has been promoting a new generation of artists in Uzbekistan for several years. Following solo exhibitions, this time they hosted a large-scale showcase of young artists in the national art scene. The best works by approximately 70 artists were selected for the exhibition. The exhibition's title was creatively broad: the artists were invited to reflect on important issues in the "flight" of their thoughts, without limitations in genre, technique, or style. The exhibition featured painting, graphics, sculpture, design, and installations. The project involved not only interns from the Academy of Arts of Uzbekistan, but also students from the K. Behzad National Institute of Arts and Design, Kimyo International University in Tashkent, the Tashkent branch of VGIK, and the Tashkent University of Architecture and Civil Engineering.

Contemporary art in Uzbekistan actively represents family and marital relations through the prism of intergenerational dialogue. Installation artists, media artists, and painters regularly contrast traditional family notions with modern understandings of marriage, kinship, and identity, creating a vibrant cultural cross-section of the transformations of 21st-century Uzbekistan. Contemporary plastic art in 21st-century Uzbekistan demonstrates a significant transformation in the image of the family. Images are becoming more fragmented, polysemantic, and metaphorical. Traditional symbols and archetypes remain, but acquire an ironic, critical, or philosophical context. Family as a theme is no longer presented as static—it is understood through movement, disintegration, reconstruction, and personal exploration. Curatorial and exhibition projects in Uzbekistan from 2000 to 2025 demonstrate a complex understanding of family: from an ethnographic and decorative image to a personal, critical, and psychologically charged artistic expression. The theme of family remains a crucial means of understanding social identity, and curatorial strategies become a space for cultural dialogue between past and present, tradition and personal choice.

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