

## THE REPRESENTATION OF THE NATIONAL ARTISTIC INTELLIGENSIA IN THE SOVIET ART OF THE 1950s - 1980s IN THE MARI LAND

\*Elvira Kolcheva<sup>1</sup>, Galina Boyarinova<sup>2</sup>, Valentina Kutasova<sup>3</sup> and Yuliya Tsykina<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Associate Prof., Ms., Mari State University, Russia, [elviramk@mail.ru](mailto:elviramk@mail.ru)

<sup>2</sup> Associate Prof., Ms., Mari State University, Russia, [marlit@marsu.ru](mailto:marlit@marsu.ru)

<sup>3</sup> Associate Prof., Ms., Mari State University, Russia, [vkutasova@mail.ru](mailto:vkutasova@mail.ru)

<sup>4</sup> Associate Prof., Ms., Mari State University, Russia, [suleimani@mail.ru](mailto:suleimani@mail.ru)

\*Corresponding author

### Abstract

The Soviet period for many nations of the former Russian Empire was the time of laying down their own professional ethno-national culture. It was the consequence of the internal cultural development of the ethnic groups themselves having begun at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the result of the Soviet national policy which proclaimed the objective of setting up culture "national in form and socialist in content" in the USSR. The post-war years played a special role in this process. The professional institutions of the artistic culture of the Mari people were being strengthened and the national intelligentsia was being formed in the Mari ASSR. The Mari Branch of the Union of Artists of the RSFSR was established in 1961.

The artists performed work commissioned by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic, their works being purchased by the Mari Museum of Local History now called Evseev National Museum of the Republic of Mari. Its repository and also one of the Republican Museum of Fine Arts, contain a well-stocked collection of paintings of artists of that period of time. The theme of the national creative intelligentsia was substantively reflected in the art of that time. In the folklore the ethnic cultural hero is a warrior hero, then in the Mari professional artistic culture of the Soviet period he, above all, is a national writer, a poet and a composer. The figures of culture and art are now thought to be genuine subjects of ethnic and national culture. Their deeds, their creativity were perceived as those personalities who promoted the Mari people culture on their way of development and recognition not only by the Soviet but also by the entire world community. A brilliant gallery of such images was created in the 1960s by Alexei Zarubin, the first Chairman of the Mari Branch of the Union of Artists. The works of Yuri Belkov, Alexei Butov, Anatoly Pushkov's ones should also be mentioned here.

The portrait images of cultural professionals to be the contemporaries of their painters are characterised not only by formal similarity, but by liveliness, psychological depth, which at times, is completely outlying the official positive ideology, according to which the Soviet man knows no doubts and happily marches toward the communist future.

The genre of a collective portrait is being evolved which is implemented as a genre painting. People of art are depicted in the process of holding artistic discussions. Painters and sculptors turn to the biographies of

the passed away “fathers” of the Mari professional culture. The founder of the Mari professional music, Ivan Klyuchnikov-Palantai (1886-1926) takes a notable space in the genre of a retrospective portrait.

The image of the founder of the Mari literature S.G. Chavain (1888-1937) was quite popular with the artists, several paintings being devoted to him. A. Butov portrayed the writer in the background of the rural landscape, on the bank of the Ilet River (“Chavain on the Ilet”, 1968). Thus, the artistic and cultural value of the works of the Soviet period in the history of the Mari fine arts was once again acknowledged.

**Keywords:** The Soviet fine arts of the 1950s - 1980s, the artistic culture of the Mari people, the portraits of Mari composers, the portraits of Mari Writers

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Soviet period was the time of establishing their own professional ethno-national culture for many peoples of the former Russian Empire. It was the consequence of both the internal cultural development of the ethnic groups themselves begun at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the result of the national policy of the Soviet state having proclaimed the goal of building a culture "national in form and socialist in content" in the USSR. The post-war years played a special role in this process. The professional artistic culture institutions of the Mari people were strengthened, the cadres of the national intelligentsia being established in the Mari ASSR.

The Mari branch of the Union of Artists of the RSFSR was founded in 1961. The artists executed work commissioned by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic, the works being purchased by the Mari Museum of the Local History and Research. Its reserve collection - now it is T. Evseev National Museum of the Republic of Mari El - and that of the Republican Museum of Fine Arts contain the richest collection of paintings of the artists of that time.

The theme of the national creative intelligentsia was reflected in the art of that period. If the folkloric cultural character is a warrior-hero, a national writer, a poet, a composer becomes such a character for the national culture of the Mari of the new stage which is the Soviet period (Kolcheva, 2015, p.14).

## 2. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE DOMESTIC WRITERS IN THE SOVIET ART OF THE 1950s- 1980s IN THE MARI LAND

The regional branch of the Writers' Union was established in 1934 in the Mari Republic but the national literature suffered serious damage during the Stalinist repressions. Nevertheless, in the 1950s – 1980s the Mari literature set the pitch in the development of the national artistic culture. Within a relatively short period of time the Mari literature was enriched with all kinds and genres of poetry, prose and drama. "The process of establishing new principles of typification, the intense search for new aesthetic criteria" was actively evolving, "the inner world of heroes was becoming more complicated" (Boyarinova, 2005, p.113). Retaining fidelity to the national traditions, the Mari writers created a variety of life phenomena, characters, leaning toward in-depth and all-round image of a man, the national poetics being enriched. At that time, the artistic creations of V. Yuksern, A. Yusykein, Z. Katkova, Yu. Artamonov, K. Korshunov, A. Volkov, N. Arban, M. Rybakov, M. Kazakov, V. Columb and others were widely appreciated.

A brilliant gallery of creative personalities' portraits was created by the first Chairman of the Mari Branch of the Union of Artists, Aleksey P. Zarubin in the 1960s. Those are the portraits of Mari writers Arseniy Volkov, Nikolai Arban, poet Semyon Vishnevsky (1961), composers A.Ya. Eshpai, I.S. Palantai (1960), People's Artist of the Mari ASSR A. Tikhonova (1959), etc. Aleksey P. Zarubin's works are characterized by image plastic persuasiveness and optimistic interpretation.

Vivid individualization is a peculiar feature of the portraits of the writers painted by N. Zarubin. This is the portrait of Nikolai Arban (Nikolai M. Derevyashkin, 1912 - 1995), a well-known Mari comedy dramatist whose talent was multifaceted: he was a musician, an amateur composer and an artist, he staged dances, composed poems. The play "Summer Night" (1948) is to this day in the repertoire of Shketan Mari Drama Theater. Bright humor, unpretentious jokes, abundance of lyrics, a mundane conflict and its happy ending, humor associated with the traditional laughter culture of the Mari people added special charm and attraction to his works. He often used the nation's rich song collection however often the text belonged to the author

himself. N. Arban is depicted full face sitting on a chair, against the background of a white wall, the back of the chair serving as a support for the writer on the left side. He is leaning slightly on the chairback, the left hand being on it. This lends energy and liveliness to the pose of the sitting central figure of the canvas. His right hand is on his lap, he is holding a thick book in a yellow cover. His gaze is lowered down but his face is conveying a subtle irony and mockery, a suppressed smile.

Anatoly S. Pushkov's portraits of the artists are characterized not only by their formal likeness, psychological depth sometimes completely alien to the official positive ideology according to which the Soviet man knows no doubts and happily goes towards the communist future. Mari writer Tynysh Osip (Iosif A. Borisov) (1893 - 1971) looks a true intellectual, full of doubt and introspection in the portrait of 1968. Tynysh Osip had had close ties with the national theater. On October 29, 1919, "The Law is Guilty" play was staged after his play. This date is considered to be the birthdate of the Mari national theater. The writer combined his literary activity with research, scientific and methodological work. He was also known as an interpreter, he is the author of the ABC book and teaching aids for schools. He was arrested in 1937 on a false charge and was imprisoned till 1943. The writer is depicted against the background of a green wall; he can be standing or sitting, leaning against it. This "official" colour of the wall, reminiscent of the secret police institutions (NKVD), here, paradoxically, looks decorative and life-affirming. The noble appearance of the writer, his high forehead of a thinker is specifically standing out against the background of the wall. His gaze is directed downward, his lips are sorrowfully compressed, he is deep in contemplation, he is holding a book in his right hand bookmarking the page with his forefinger. In 1967 Tynysh Osip - a writer, a researcher and a teacher - was awarded with the Order of Badge of Honor for his fruitful literary and active public activity. The picture was painted after the award ceremony. Perhaps, the artistic solution of the picture can be explained by this circumstance. The portrait created by A. Pushkov is one of the best representations of the national intelligentsia created in the Mari visual art.

However, not only contemporaries are the subject of artistic reflection in the art of that period. The painters and sculptors turn to the biographies of the "fathers" of the Mari professional culture who have already passed away. The genre of a retrospective portrait appears in the Mari fine arts at that time.

After denunciation of I.V. Stalin's personality cult at the Twentieth Congress in 1956, many prominent figures of literature and art were rehabilitated, among them Sergei G. Chavain (1888-1937), the founder of the Mari literature. S. Chavain was not only the pioneer of literature, he played a huge role in educating the native people, in training literary personnel, in establishing the national intelligentsia, in journalism, in setting up the writers' power. After a long period of oblivion, his works had been given a new lease of life.

S. Chavain's heroic drama "Akpatty" is the production describing the participation of the Mari people in the Pugachev's rebellion. This play has become the peak point in the writer's dramaturgy (Ilyin, 1956, p. 1). Later, based on this drama, composer Eric Sapaev created the opera under the same name (1963), which became the first Mari national opera.

The figure of the classicist became popular with the artists who started travelling to Chavain's homeland which is in the vicinity of Chavainur village to enter his spirit, to find out the sources of his inspiration. So, there appeared numerous poetic landscapes of Chavain's places in the Mari fine arts of that period.

In 1982, the monument created by the honored artist of the RSFSR sculptor Boris I. Dyuzhev was erected in the boulevard named in the honour of S. Chavain.

Creatively speaking, the portrait of A. Butov "Chavain on the Ilet River" (1968) is the most interesting among the easel productions. The artist portrayed the writer against the background of the rural landscape, on the bank of the Ilet River. The writer is wearing a black jacket and trousers, an embroidered Mari shirt marking him as a national intellectual. There is an old wooden bridge across the river to the right of him. The village can be seen over the river. The writer's gaze is unfocused, he is deep in contemplation, his hands are locked on his chest, in his right hand he is having a book, obviously, it is the novel "Elnet" (1936, p. 1). Elnet is the name of the Ilet River in the Mari language. Apparently, the writer is thinking over the plot travelling through the sites where the actions of the famous novel take place. The novel "Elnet" is the most significant production of the founder of the Mari literature. The ideological growth of the Mari intelligentsia and peasants during the period of 1908 – 1917 is described in the novel. The fate of the village teacher Grigory Vetkan shows the difficult path of the Mari democratic intelligentsia, bringing those into the ranks of the fighters. The novel reveals the inner nature of those who devoted their life to the people's revolution. The second part of the novel was published only in 1963. The picture was painted in five years after that, perhaps it is connected with the fact mentioned. In 1971 the second Mari opera "Elnet", based on this production and written by composer I. Molotov (libretto of S. Nikolaev) was staged in Shketan Music and Drama Theater.

### 3. THE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE NATIONAL COMPOSERS IN THE SOVIET ART OF THE 1950s - 1980s IN THE MARI LAND

In 1953 the Mari ASSR Union of Composers was established. Already in the early 1960s the composers E.N. Sapaev, P.M. Dvoirin, A.B. Luppov and other significant personalities for the Mari music come forward.

One of the founders of the Mari professional musical culture was Yakov A. Eshpai (Ishpaykin, 1890-1963). He was a composer, a musicologist-folklorist, a choirmaster and a teacher. He was the creator of the first Mari instrumental productions for a symphonic orchestra, a brass band, a folk instruments orchestra, for the violin and the piano, a large number of solo and choral vocal compositions. He recorded and processed over 500 folk melodies. In 1960, A. Zarubin painted his chest-high portrait.

The elderly composer is portrayed slightly turned, almost full face. He is sitting leaning with his right arm elbow on the back of the chair against the background of the gray wall. He is wearing a white shirt with a dark tie and a dark jacket. The coloration of the painting is scanty, cold, and only the hands are in a warm brownish-ocher tone. Yakov A. Eshpai's numerous awards are not shown, because it is not a ceremonial portrait, but a psychological one. An attentive intelligent gaze with the half-closed eyes is directed through the glasses directly onto the onlooker. The composer is close cropped, gray-haired, his forehead is high. The hands are locked. The artist created the image of a modest and a reserved person, a strong personality, a genuine intellectual.

His son, the would-be outstanding composer of the world scale, Andrei Ya. Eshpai (1925-2015), is portrayed by A. Zarubin in a different way. The artist portrayed the young composer at home at work at the piano, against the background the colourful red-blue carpet, he is having a score in his right hand. He is wearing a white shirt with a red tie of a grayish, warm color and a buttoned vest. The scarlet color of the music manuscript looks in contrast to the dazzling white sheets, being a powerful decorative emphasis which attracts the viewer's eyes. A. Eshpai's gaze is directed to it, he is looking at the notes. The composer's creative dialog with his work is depicted in this way. The painting is filled with dynamics and light, energy of creativity and life.

The *genre of the collective portrait* embodied in a plot-driven painting is being developed at this time period. The art figures are having creative discussions in such paintings (D. Mitrofanov, Palantai among the Composers, 1957, A. Butov, The Mari Writers, 1969).

The "Collective Portrait of the Mari Composers" (1967) painted by Dmitry A. Mitrofanov shows the creators of the first Mari opera "Akpatyr". The opera "Akpatyr" premiered on April 5, 1963 and became a landmark event in the history of the Mari culture. The creation of a large-scale opera met the main task of the Mari musical art at that time as it was considered to be the main indicator of the national musical culture development at that time. They needed a personality that could implement the "opera dream" into life. Eric N. Sapaev (1932-1963) - the composer with a bright talent and a difficult fate - has become an iconic figure for the Mari music. He also created a number of symphonic, chamber-instrumental, vocal productions, songs and music for plays. The picture was painted a year before the posthumous awarding the composer with the title of the Laureate of the Mari Komsomol League Olyk Ipai Prize in 1968, and in 1970 he was also posthumously awarded with the State Prize of the MASSR

The composer is depicted standing at the table covered with a green cloth, the notes being on the table. E. N. Sapaev is conducting, his right hand is raised representing a specific gesture. The buildings of Shketan Mari State Music and Drama Theater (built in 1953-1960) and Gorky Volga Region Forestry Institute can be seen through the window of the room. In 1994, the theater was renamed for the Mari State Opera and Ballet Theater, at the same time it was given the name of Eric Sapaev. Despite the name of the painting, the poets, the authors of the "Akpatyr" opera libretto are also depicted on the picture besides Sapaev, from left to right: Mikhail Yakimov, Gennady Matyukovsky (standing), Ivan Osmin. The moment of intense creative work is shown, the librettists are listening to music, they are focused on it. Everyone is aware of his high historical mission and responsibility. The same is felt by the viewer. The painting completely meets the standards of socialist realism.

The founder of the Mari professional music, Ivan Klyuchnikov-Palantai (1886-1926) was paid significant importance to in the retrospective portrait genre. His representations were created by painters O. Novikov, A. Butov, sculptor P. Kalinin. In addition to the psychological portraits of the musician, the plot-driven paintings are created, for example, on his childhood to emphasize the connection with the folk culture (D.A. Mitrofanov. Klyuchnikov-Palantai's Childhood, 1962). A. Butov seeks to show the creative process of the composer (Palantai at Work, 1962). A. Zarubin depicts the composer in the open country indicating thereby

the source of his inspiration (A sketch for the Portrait of I.S.Palantai,1961). In 1985, B.I. Dyuzhev created a monumental sculpture of the founder of the Mari musical art now located in Chavain Boulevard in Yoshkar-Ola.

B.I. Dyuzhev's monuments to S. Chavain and I. Klyuchnikov-Palanthai are included in the register of the regional objects of the cultural heritage of the Russian Federation's nations (Resolution, 2007). This once again confirmed the artistic and cultural value of the Mari fine arts productions of the Soviet period.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Thus, the Soviet post-Stalin period of the 1950s-1980s was an important stage in the development of the professional artistic culture of the Mari nation. The art community are now considered to be the genuine subjects of the ethno-national culture represented in the fine arts of the Mari Land. Their deeds, their creativity were seen to be promoting the culture of the Mari nation along the path of development and recognition by both the Soviet and the world community.

#### **5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This research was funded by the Russian Humanitarian Academic Foundation (Grant No. 12-14-12001).

#### **REFERENCE LIST**

Boyarinova, G.N. (2005). *The Problem of the Character in Modern Mari Drama: Monograph.* Mari State University, Yoshkar-Ola. 127 p.

Ilyin, V. (1956). About the Premiere of "Akpatyr" Drama. *The Young Communist* of December 15.

Kolcheva, E.M. (2015). Representation of the Ethno-Cultural Space of the Mari Nation in the Soviet Art of the 1950s-1980s. *Bulletin of the Mari State University. Series: Historical Sciences. Juridical sciences.* No.4. P. 12-17.

The Decree of the Mari Republic Government of June 27, 2007. No. 162.