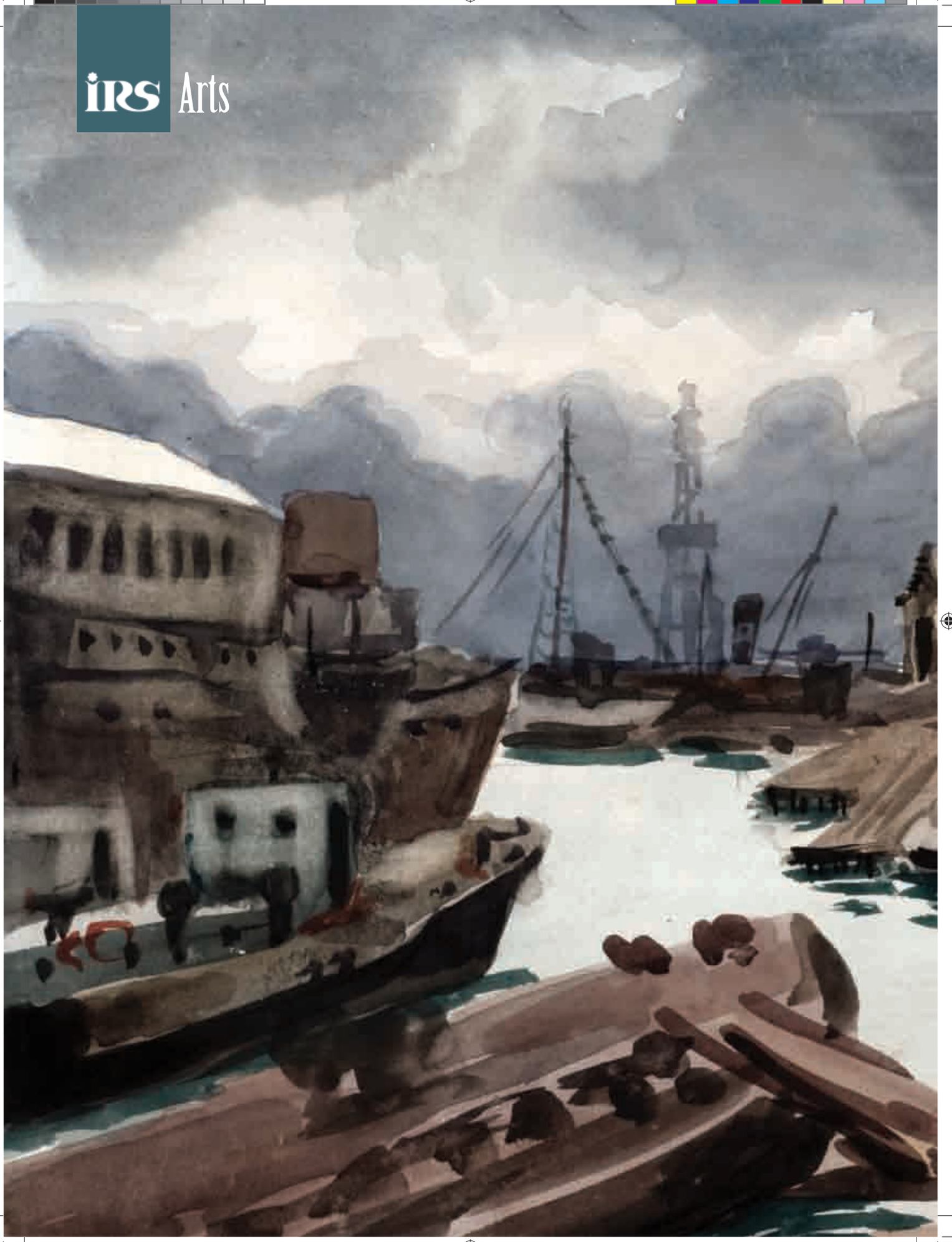

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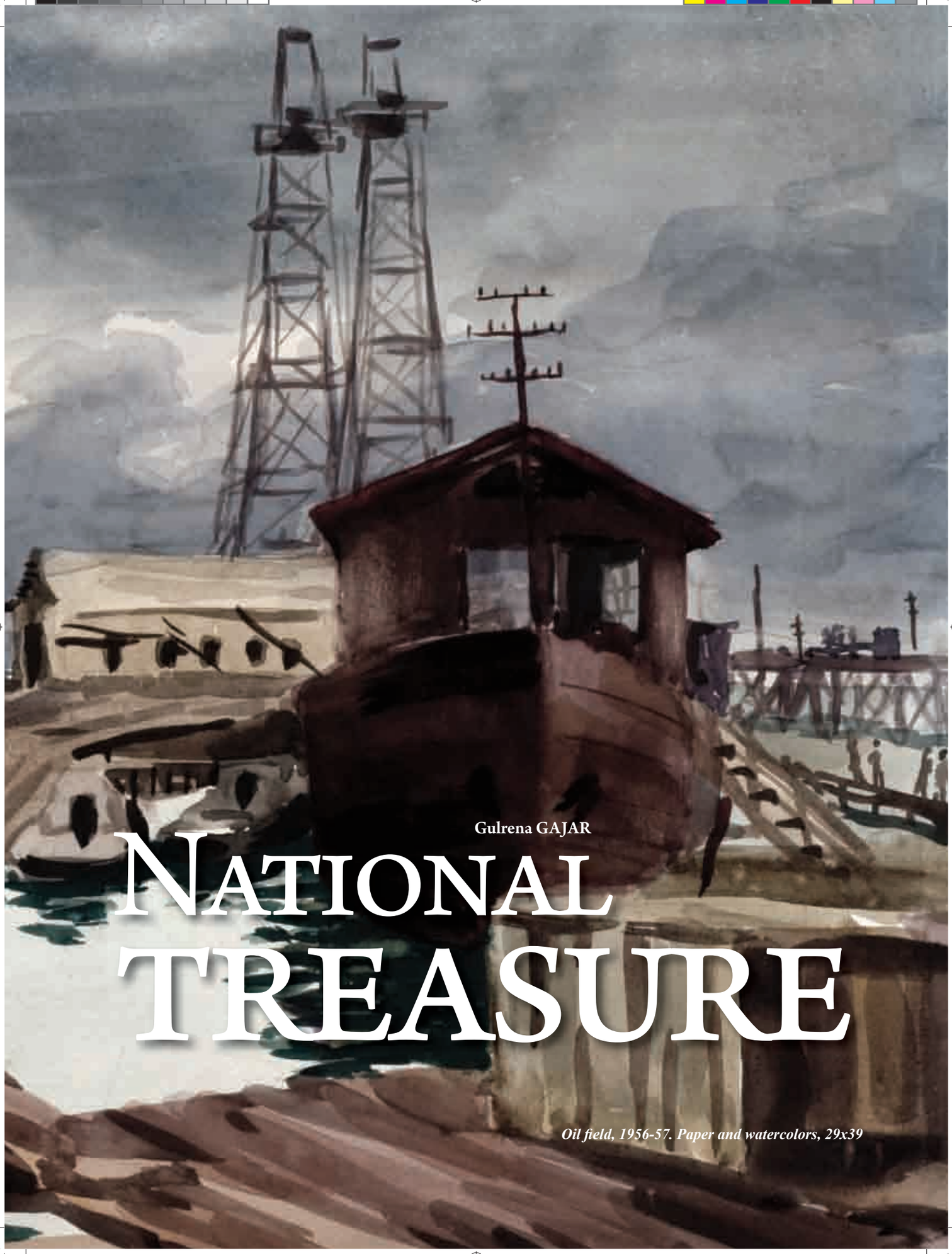

Gulrena GAJAR

NATIONAL TREASURE

Oil field, 1956-57. Paper and watercolors, 29x39

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Maral Rahmanzadeh, self-portrait, 1948, canvas, oil, 90x70

Maral Rahmanzadeh in Bayil, 1951

JULY 23 MARKS THE 95TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF THE PEOPLE'S ARTIST OF AZERBAIJAN MARAL RAHMANZADEH, WHO PASSED AWAY SLIGHTLY MORE THAN THREE YEARS BEFORE HER JUBILEE.

If we summarize the creative legacy of the artist, three main areas can be highlighted thematically. **First, we should especially stress the interest in the personality of the woman** deeply rooted in the character of Maral khanum, a woman of extraordinary and gifted individuality, and therefore, **the study of the image of the Azerbaijani woman and the search for ethnic identity through self-knowledge were the basis of her artistic aspirations.** Maral khanum expresses herself precisely by creating female characters in national costume, but even if the costume is not purely Azerbaijani, it still dresses an outstanding, graceful and mysteriously attractive woman who has breeding, stature and power – these are the prerequisites in the works of Maral Rahmanzadeh. She worked incredibly a lot and enthusiastically and always wrote from life, making many preparatory sketches.

Through her research in art, the artist curiously walked to self-knowledge. A striking example is a self-portrait of 1948. The great German romantic Novalis observed through his character Heinrich von Ofterdingen: *"Where are we really going? - Always home!"*

The second area of the creative interests of Maral khanum is cognition of nature. This is a search for ethnic identity again, but through research into landscapes of nature, and what is notable is that outside her native Baku, she is interested mainly in mountains: Most landscapes of Maral khanum were made in various mountainous areas of Azerbaijan. Isn't this the work of the spirit striving upward - to mountain heights and

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"Dance of Lankaran Girls", 1970, linocut, 62x41

heaven - and isn't this a desire to soar and rise over your point of view?

The third vector of the painter's interest coincides largely with the second one, although it manifested itself before – it is the oil theme. Oil production on land and in the sea is also a purely Azerbaijani landscape, though it is modern-industrial, it is our native landscape, which the artist deeply loves and feels concerned about. This is a series of landscapes - lithographs, linocuts, drawings, etchings and watercolors - the whole palette of techniques used by graphic artists (this is the kind of diploma Maral Rahmanzadeh received as she graduated from the Moscow's Surikov State Art Institute) is performed professionally and very elegantly. In general, all the artist's works of that time on the topic of oil (and oil is considered the blood of the earth in the esoteric sense) are full of sincere and romantic awe, sensuality, elegance and high style, they are made in the spirit of great French romantics and fill us with a sense of drama and grandeur (these are works of the 1940's and 1950's).

Later, **in the 1960's, the creative work of the artist became stylized and decorative**, especially in the illustrations to the tales and lyric poems of Azerbaijani poets. Maral khanum created many illustrations for literary works, including those of Nizami, Khatai, Heyran khanum, Natavan, Jafar Jabbarli, Pushkin and Lermontov.

Maral khanum became involved in painting at a very young age, and in school she made progress on this subject. At the end of the seven-year school in 1930, she entered the Art College, and after 3 years, she was sent to study at the Moscow Art Institute. It was a fairy tale: a new world, new cities and people, amazing teachers, open communication and free life!

It is amazing how fate sometimes transforms a human: a girl who wore a veil until 15 years gets into the thick of artistic and bohemian life in distant Moscow at 18, and here she gets married and is surrounded by the most famous artists of the time! She has many friends and travels around the country for summer internships. Her mentors are well-known Soviet painters Radlov, Pavlinov, Mur, Kravchenko and Favorskiy. The young Maral enthusiastically and joyfully perceives life and liberty gained by the woman in the 20th century, the right to education and freedom of self-expression - the whole world is open to her! But the thrill of freedom and novelty did not last long - the Great Patriotic War begins in 1941 and in Baku, her father is declared "an enemy of the people" and exiled to Tashkent. Maral returns to Baku to support her mother, sisters and brothers. (Note that they all subsequently received artistic education, her brothers became sculptors, her older sister – an architect and her younger sister - a musician). In 1942, Maral's father is executed, the war is in full swing and there is famine in Baku, but Maral is not broken, be-

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"View of the city from the sea", from the "Baku" series, 1959, lithography, 32x46

Khazar, canvas, oil, 60x80

cause she is a painter and work is her salvation!

Note that during her career, **Maral Rahmanzadeh exhibited her works in many countries around the world, representing not only the Soviet Union but also Azerbaijan and its culture**. In many parts of the world - in Africa, Asia, Europe and America, people learned about the art of Azerbaijan, getting acquainted with the painter and her works. But most of all, she loved to travel in her native Azerbaijan – which is proved by **the many field sketches and studies, which later turned into a series of linocuts, lithographs, etchings and painted canvases. They are all (mostly works of the 1960's and 1970's) full of love, admiration and respect for the greatness of her country's nature.** She worked on Oil Rocks with enthusiasm, and her "oil" pictures are full of drama and beauty - here the conflict between Man and the Elements is expressed in the waves of the sea, threatening skies and elegantly drawn, but firm masculine symmetrical rows of towers tightly biting into the body of the earth and water.

Yet Rahmanzadeh is an artist depicting the women's principle in life. This is evident in her numerous portraits of women working in fields and as fitters at factories, beauty queens

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"Night", 1960, Colored linocut, 70x46

"The Old Town", 1940, autolithography, 40x31.5

of Nigeria, Senegal, Cuba, Iran, and of course, women from different regions of Azerbaijan with their inherent national costumes (with notable pleasure, the artist paints sophisticated forms of folk costumes and jewelry - however, she wore them with no less pleasure in everyday life.) But **the true life of the soul can be felt the most in her self-portraits.** Maral khanum appears to be guided by words of Cezanne: *"The highest purpose of art is the face!"*

In my memory, **Maral Rahmanzadeh remained as a stunningly beautiful woman.** Even though she was about 70 years old at the time, it was a Woman in every sense of the word: an interesting, charming and mysterious woman with the smile of a lady from the Renaissance (which once again proves that true beauty does not disappear with age, but matures and gets saturated). Her stately posture and the proud carriage of her head betrayed a strong character full of dignity. Her clear blue eyes shone with the purity of heaven and seemed like distant stars. And on all the old family photographs, everyone gives the impression of spiritual and artistically gifted people. When Maral khanum appeared in society, all eyes rushed to her. Her appearance fully corresponded to her name: she had the grace of a doe and the elegance of a beauty queen who knows her worth.

I do not remember who - I think, Lessing said while examining the "Iliad" that Homer, describing the beauty of Helen who appeared before the elders, **describes not her beauty, but the impression she made on them**. This description is the most powerful and profound. Maral Rahmanzadeh made a deep impression: she was majestically restrained, independent from everything and everyone, and gifted with freedom and self-sufficiency. She was a Personality, Painter and a true national treasure.

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