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LIFE AS ART

THIS ARTICLE WAS BORN OUT OF MANY YEARS OF ADMIRATION FOR THE PAINTINGS OF MIKAYIL ABDULLAYEV, RESPECT FOR HIS PERSONALITY AND SENSE OF PRIDE IN ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE MASTER.



Lights of Mingachevir



Mikayil Abdullayev



*Illustration for the
“Dada Gorgud” epic*



So what can you write about Mikayil muallim in a small article? Biographical facts, milestones of creative work and heritage that has become the property of the nation? His face, shrewd look, the French beret etched in the memory – an attribute of free bohemia? Encyclo-

pedic knowledge of culture, fantastic memory and knowledge of Eastern poetry and music? He knew how to talk very nicely. He knew a lot and was able to put it in an admirable form, bewitching the listener with his speech and attractiveness of his personality. He was happy to tell about the world

he knew from travel, books, and his own observations and reflections.

Mikayil Abdullayev is a very bright, serious and dramatic painter, even in the most unsophisticated and simple genre paintings. They are permeated by the profound drama of life that can be seen through a



"Sevinj". Canvas, oil paints, 1956

powerful composition with its strong typical plastic painting, line, picture and figurativeness. The harmony in plastic, the softness in shape modeling and the finest silver color range characteristic of his style always highlighted his work at Soviet exhibitions. His palettes have no open bright colors, but the gray colors were very bright and harmonious and emitted light. The composition of paintings, the location of figures in them and the solution of plans differ for their originality.



talented guys - future outstanding painters Ogtay Sadikhzadeh, Boyukaga Mirzazadeh Abdul Khaliq and Gafar Seyfullayev. **The talented Azerbaijani painter Azim Azimzadeh played an important role in the establishment of Mikayil** as he sent him to an art college at the age of 14 in 1935. In 1938, the 17-year-old Mikayil participated in the spring republican exhibition with the landscape "In Mardakan". After graduating from college in 1939, he entered the painting department of the Surikov Moscow State Art Institute. In an article published in the central Moscow magazine *Iskusstvo* in 1940, the well-known painter, teacher and rector of the institute, I. E. Grabar, mentioned him among the best students.

But the institute was evacuated as the Great Patriotic War began. Mikayil had to interrupt his studies and return home, but he was already infected with creativity and constantly worked and learnt professionalism with inspiration and selflessness. In 1943, his work was put on display at an exhibition at the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. In general, **the years of war proved to be extremely interesting for Mikayil Abdullayev: he writes a lot of paintings, landscapes and large compositions based on poems by Nizami whose 800th anniversary was celebrated in the Soviet Union.** He also writes portraits of wounded soldiers, historical compositions, art panels, campaign posters and is involved in military patronage.

In 1943-44, he wrote remarkably deep and lively portraits of Azerbaijani cultural figures. Among them is the only lifetime portrait of Azerbaijani music luminary Uzeyir Hajibayov, portraits of the great poet Samad Vurgun, writer Mirza Ibrahimov, scholar and historian Sara Ashurbayli, actress Marziya Davudova and singer Shovkat Mammadova, as well as a number of



lyrical portraits of women - "My Mother", "Zahra Khanum", "Zemfira", etc.

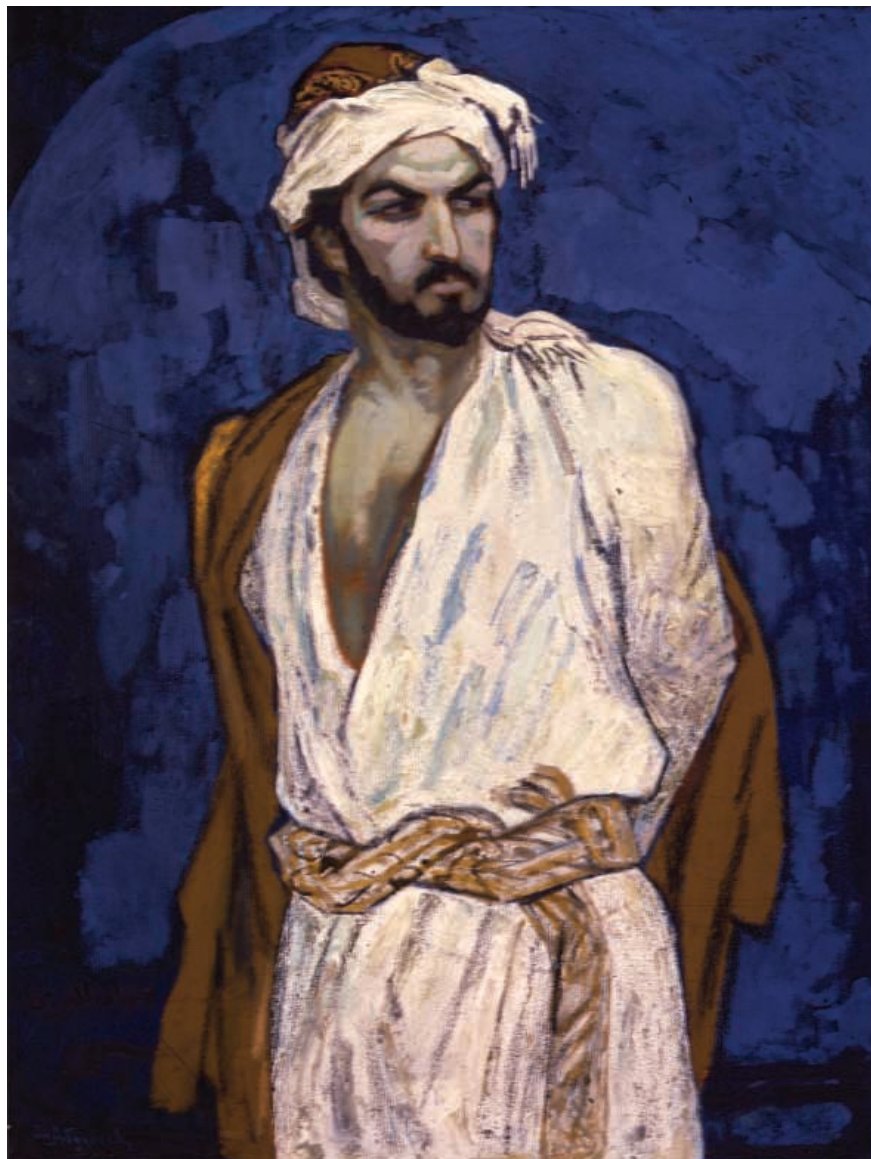
After the war, Mikayil Abdullayev continued his studies in the Moscow studio of Sergey Gerasimov, a talented Soviet painter and teacher, who valued independence and individuality most of all in his students. As a **fourth-year student, Abdullayev creates the painting "Evening" during a summer course in his native Karabakh, which became a landmark in his work and conquered even his teachers.** It caused deep repercussions among viewers with its emotion, wonderful simplicity of feelings, delightful mood of love, peace and joy from the beauty of life. The painting depicts Karabakh women returning from work on a country road at sunset, is full of light and shines with the kindness and silver pearl palette of the painter.

In 1949, Mikayil Abdullayev successfully completes his education, returns to Baku and begins work with joyful ecstasy on a series of paintings devoted to post-war industrial construction. The celebration of creation – this is the main theme of interest for the painter now. The largest Mingachevir hydroelectric power plant of the Caucasus built at that time appeared in Abdullayev's paintings as a romantic combination of nature, man and technology. The press noted that *with Abdullayev's help, the motif of a landscape with the lights of new buildings became one of the most popular subjects of the Soviet landscape painting of the postwar years.* According to Samad Vurgun, during the construction of the Mingachevir hydroelectric power plant, simple country boys "comprehended the language of machines", plunging into the "divine work of creating order out of chaos". Mikayil Abdullayev managed to embody this poetry of labor in his works warmly, simply,

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*"Samad Vurgun".
Canvas, oil paints, 1956*



*"Trial of Nasimi".
Canvas, oil paints, 1970*

sincerely and with great professionalism. These are **"Mingachevir Lights" (1948), "Terror in the South" (1950), "On the Banks of the Kura River", "Born at the Sea" (1954), "Builders of Happiness" (1951), "Friends" (1953), and deeply personal, poetic portraits "My Mother" (1951), "In the Morning. The Painter's Wife" (1952), "Before the Mirror" (1955), "Still Life with a Musk-Melon" (1955), "Team Leader Rakhshanda" (1956), "For the Child", "Joy" (1956).**

The latter picture is the quintessence of the painter's plastic and color quest and embodies the ideal of the Azerbaijani Madonna, a woman and mother deeply connected with her native land and surrounding nature. This painting caused a great resonance **in the All-Union Exhibition for the 40th Anniversary of the October Revolution and at the World Art Exhibition in Brussels in 1958.** Academician Grabar wrote in *Iskusstvo* magazine: *"Here is a large canvas by M. Abdullayev named 'Joy' by the painter. It is extremely rich in color and light. It depicts a woman with a child sitting in a meadow, surrounded*



"Soldier" (right-hand section of the "Azerbaijani fields" triptych). Canvas, oil paints, 1964-1965

by lush southern nature and flooded with dazzling hot sunlight. The picture has nothing that would resemble a European open-air or impressionism, but a truly inspiring hymn is sung for the joy of being and never-ending happiness."

In 1958, for the painting "Joy" and a series of Indian sketches, the painter was awarded a medal and diploma of the Soviet Academy of Arts. A distinguishing feature of Abdullayev's work in this period is the intense flavor that enhances the emotional content of a picture, ringing, decorative palette, and in-depth and energetic attitude. He continues a series of portraits of cultural figures - poet Suleyman Rustam, dancer Amina Dilbazi, writer Hasan Seyidbayli and poet Samad Vurgun. They are all full of romanticism and true love for models.

A very important place in the painter's creative work is taken by his **foreign experiences expressed in the long series "In Italy", "In Hungary" and "In India".** Each of these cultures left a deep mark on his art: Italian landscapes and museums, Hungarian cities and girls, and colorful Indian life. But most of all, he develops the Indian theme, as it was closer to him than the others. *"I was surrounded by the same warm, earth colors, the same rhythmic structure of color that created familiar harmony for me. India strikes with its variety of types,"* he wrote after a visit to that country in 1957. Abdullayev's watchful eye on India is fresh, emotional, insightful and, as always harmonious. The streets and squares of Delhi and Calcutta, the temples of Jaipur and Agra, the muddy waters of the Ganges and people around - beautiful women in expensive colorful clothes, beggars in search of work, proud Bengali girls and little boys: the spiritual beauty and richness of a great nation are visible in all of them.

For 30 years, the painter devel-



"Indian women". Canvas, oil paints, 1959-1960

oped the Indian theme, to which he devoted about 500 paintings and graphic works. In 1971, M. Abdullayev was awarded the international Jawaharlal Nehru Prize. *"This is the first time that I've seen such sincere and expert works about my country, and they are infinitely dear to me as an Indian. This artist feels my people with his heart,"* Indian Ambassador to the USSR Dhar said.

In the 1960's - and this is the imperative of time - the decorative beginning and small-scale and intimate tones become stronger in his art. These are portraits, landscapes and psychological compositions. The elderly couple in the picture "In Absheron" (1964) is a vivid illustration of the deep changes that took place in the painter's work and his improvement. The same depth and spirituality is in the lyrical landscapes "Karabakh", "Goygol", etc.

Mikayil Abdullayev's fame grew, and his exhibitions were held in Baku, Moscow, Berlin, Leipzig, Warsaw and Delhi. The Leipzig publishing house Zeman produces an album of the painter's reproductions - it was a huge victory for Azerbaijani art. Started in the 1960's, **the series of works "My**



Mosaic based on Mikayil Abdullayev's painting in the Nizami underground station in Baku

Countrymen" showed the true Azerbaijani nature of Mikayil Abdullayev's art. He is interested in the great culture of the people and carefully examines the historical-literary, ethnographic, epistolary sources of the Middle Ages, working on the images of Nasimi, Nizami, Ajami, Tusi, Ibn Sina, Sultan Juneyd, Ashig Alasgar, Babak and others. He is a brilliant connoisseur of legendary epics, folk characters, classical Azerbaijani poetry and music, and all the artistic heritage of the East. Admiring the grandeur of the monuments of ancient architecture, elegance and aesthetic power of medieval miniatures, brilliant conciseness and decorative rugs, harmonious perfection of classical poetry and mugham, he innovatively expresses it in the illustrations to the national heroic epic "Dada Gorgud" and Fizuli's poem "Layla and Majnun" made in the tradition of miniatures. Credit for the revival of interest in Azerbaijan miniature rightfully belongs to Mikayil Abdullayev, the appearance of these illustrations in 1958 was an event in the easel and book graphics of our country.

In a small magazine article, it is impossible to cover the entire range of interests of the outstanding painter and to describe his immense legacy. He was kind, simple, and did a lot of work on himself. He was loved, respected and valued by many. He associated with many famous people of his time: **Giacomo Manzu and Renato Guttuso, Alberto Moravia and Chingiz Aytmatov, Veymarn and Alpatova, Kagan and Chegodayev, Vuchetich and Ugarov, Deyneka and Chuykov, Gerasimov and Grabar, Garayev and Amirov, Hajibayov and Niyazi, Shovkat Mammadova and Sara Ashurbayli, Samad Vurgun and Rasul Rza, Rustam Ibrahimbayov and Sattar Bahlulzadeh.** As a member of the Supreme Council, he was able to



deal with many problems and actually help ordinary people. He was friends with composers and writers, scientists and ordinary workers – in all of them, he was interested in the depth of their character and did not differentiate between people because of their positions. For him, there was no structural hierarchy and ambitions.

He painted portraits of painters Guttuso and Manzu, composers Shostakovich and Amirov, writers Moravia and Aytmatov, many, many women and men. He was interested in theater - he created the stage design for Hajibayov's operas and Niyazi's ballet "Chitra", as well as monumental mosaics on Nizami's "Khamsah" for a Baku metro station.

Mikayil Abdullayev is a wonderful teacher who trained many students, including prominent painters. He was the first Azerbaijani painter awarded the title of People's Artist of the USSR and an active member of the Soviet Academy of Arts.

He is the only painter, apart from Tahir Salahov, who actively and genuinely appeared in the press. His three books and more than 200

articles always raised problems and carried analysis, while the breadth of vision and world outlook allowed him to accurately locate an original path to the solution of real problems. His memoirs are written in a live, fresh, expressive language and have a lot of amazing observations and rare information such as his work on a portrait of Indira Gandhi - then the portrait was presented to her as a gift by Brezhnev.

He had an amazing sense of humor, he told funny stories and jokes, and easily found a common language with people. He possessed a quality that was rare for a painter – he willingly showed his colleagues unfinished pictures and did not take offense at their comments, but rather listened to them carefully and helped his fellow painters. He was a man of outstanding talent, sophisticated yet easy to communicate, had a sharp mind, a sense of humor, and was passionate about painting, to which he devoted his life.

The great English artist and art critic Sir Ernest Gombrich once said: "There really is no such thing as art. There are only artists." 🌟