

# THE FIRST AZERBAIJANI WOMAN - PROFESSIONAL ARTIST



*Geysar Kashiyeva father Seyfulla Kashiyeu. Studio photo. Tiflis. The 1900's. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan (NMHA). Published for the first time.*



*Kashiyeva in national costume. Studio photo . Tiflis. 1902. NMHA. Published for the first time.*

The visual arts of Azerbaijan are known for many big names of people who worked in different times and left a mark on the culture of our people. However, the name of the artist Geysar Kashiyeva - the

*G. Kashiyeva in art school. Tiflis. 1909. NMHA.*



*G.Kashiyeva. Early 1920's. NMNA*



After studying at the boarding school for a year and having shown outstanding ability in the study of the

*Shirin bay Kesamanski and his wife G.Kashiyeva. Baku, 1917*



first Azerbaijani woman who was a professional artist - is not known to the general public.

Geysar Kashiyeva was born in an Azerbaijani family in Tiflis in 1893<sup>1</sup>. Her parents, who realized the importance of modern education for the future of the child, gave her education at home and then sent her to the Saint Nina boarding school to study the Russian language, modern manners and etiquette.

1. Geysar's father Seyfulla Kashiyev was a major dealer in Tiflis (Editor's note).



*Family of Geysar Kashiyeva. Baku. 1936, NMHA*

language, Geysar entered the Tiflis Russian women's gymnasium in 1901. Even during the period of study in the gymnasium, the girl showed talent for drawing

*My father is ill. Painting by Kashiyeva. 1910. NMHA*



and in 1907, enrolled in the art studio at the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts. The girl's talent manifested itself under the guidance of well-known German professors – art critics Richard Sammer and Oscar Schmerling<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly, in this period, she was the only Azerbaijani woman who visited the studio. Her works were repeatedly exhibited at the exhibitions organized by the society.

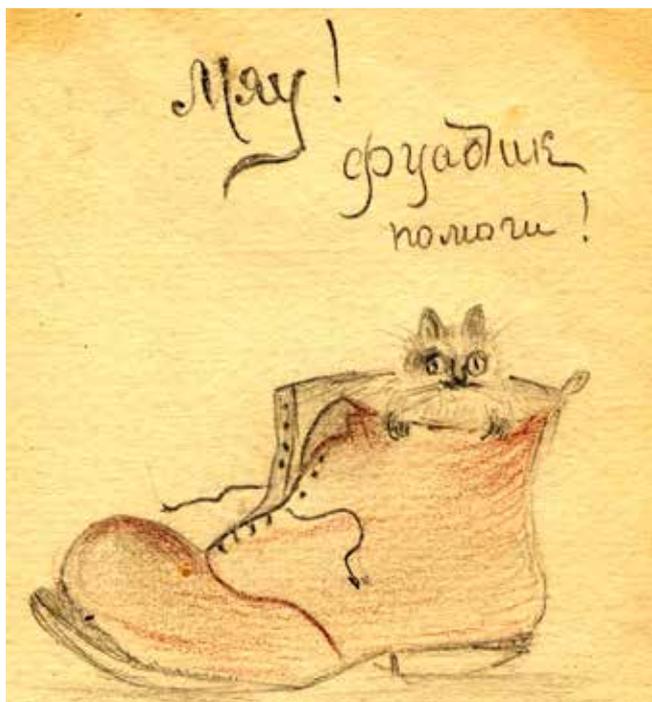
In 1910, Kashiyeva graduated from the gymnasium with honors. The diploma of the art studio at the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts was equivalent to the diploma of an art school, and therefore, Kashiyeva, who completed the full course of study, is considered the first Azerbaijani woman to receive special art education (1).

Her further fate is known in fragments<sup>3</sup>. Her name appears in documents in the mid-1920's as head of the cultural and educational department of the Ali Bayramov Central Women's Club in Baku. It is also known that she played a major role in Sharg Gadini magazine ("Woman of the East"), which was popular in Azerbaijan in the late 1920's - early 30's. She was married to Zulfugar Seyidbayli and they had two daughters - Lamiya and Leya. All this time, the artist continued to create her works, drawing with charcoal, ink, watercolors and oil paints. Zulfugar Seyidbayli, who was appointed manager of the Azerbaijani Soviet Cotton Company, was responsible for one of the most important areas of the republic's economy - the cotton harvest.

The next period when Kashiyeva's name "surfaced" in history is associated with tragic events in the life of the Azerbaijani people. Her husband, who stood out for his enviable hard work and organizational skills, was appointed director of the Azerbaijan pavilion of the Exhibition of Achievements of the People's Economy. This high position entailed work and communication with many figures of the republic, including those who fell into the millstone of Stalin's repression in the 1930's. Accused of having links with the "enemies of the people",

2. German artists - a graduate of the Munich Academy of Art Oscar Schmerling (1863-1938) and Richard Sammer (1862-1938) were closely associated with the intelligentsia of Azerbaijan. Schmerling collaborated with the satirical magazine Molla Nasraddin, which was popular in the Muslim East (Editor's note).
3. Kashiyeva worked in the Caucasian Muslim women's charity society in Tiflis. Sammer persuaded Geysar's parents to send her to study in Moscow at the Stroganov Art School for higher art education. However, her father's death worsened the financial situation of the family and Geysar had to stay. In 1916, she married army officer Shirin Bay Kasamanski, who was receiving treatment after being injured in Tiflis. They had a daughter - Leya. In 1918, the family moved to Baku. Colonel Kasamanski served in the ADR army, and his last position was deputy commander of the 2nd Infantry Division. On 4 January 1920, he died of malaria; given his service to the country, all funeral expenses were paid by the state. The funeral ceremony was held in a solemn atmosphere in Ganja. In 1920-1922, G. Kashiyeva set up a kindergarten in Gazakh (Editor's note).

*A kitten in a boot. Painting by Kashiyeva for her grandson. 1960's. NMHA.*



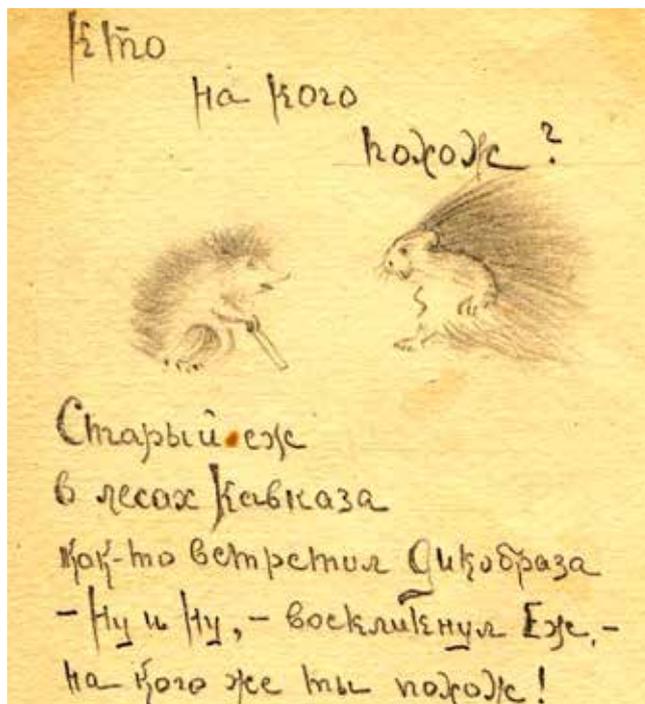
Zulfugar Seyidbayli himself was convicted as an “enemy of the people” and executed<sup>4</sup>. The wife of the “enemy of the people”, Geysar Kashiyeva-Seyidbayli, was arrested and sent to a correctional-labor camp for families of “enemies of the people” despite all her services (2). It is known that children of political prisoners were also sent to special camps for “re-education”, but it was possible to save the child of Zulfugar and Geysar. Leya was left in the care of her old grandmother and compassionate relatives.

During the searches and arrest, most of the documents of the family, as well as most of the paintings and drawings of Kashiyeva-Seyidbayli were lost (3). Only 50 small pictures written with charcoal and wrapped in an old newspaper survived.

Geysar Kashiyeva-Seyidbayli drained the cup of the woes that befell the repressed<sup>5</sup>. Only in 1956, was she rehabilitated and able to return to her daughter in Baku<sup>6</sup>. However, her health was undermined and after 1960 she was seriously ill (4).

Geysar khanum Kashiyeva-Seyidbayli died on 17 April 1972.

*Hedgehog and Porcupine. Painting by Kashiyeva for her grandson. 1960's. NMHA.*



The National Museum of History of Azerbaijan keeps a small collection of personal items and pictures of Geysar Kashiyeva. Among them are pencil drawings and sketches she made for her grandson: “A kitten in a boot”, “Hedgehog and Porcupine”, documents and photographs of the family.

The Mustafayev Azerbaijani Museum of Arts keeps the works “Firefighter”, “Georgian Woman”, “Villager”, “Woman Scientist”, “The Old Watchman”, “The Portrait of Gogol” and “Azerbaijani Scientist”<sup>7</sup>. ♦

## References

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2. National Museum of history of Azerbaijan, fund of documentary sources. Folder 2040. From memoirs of daughter G. Kashiyeva
3. Программы Азербайджанского телевидения и радиовещания. № 17 (1619). 23 апреля 1988 г.
4. Ibid.

4. Zulfugar Abbas oglu Seyidbayli was arrested on 7 December 1937 (Editor’s note)
5. G. Kashiyeva spent 5 years in Temenkov camps in Mordovia. She set up a garment factory here, drew posters and led a wall newspaper. In 1942, she was allowed to live in exile in Salyan and then Agdash. In the early 1950’s, she began to work in children’s home No 2, where she set up a sewing shop (Editor’s note)
6. Kashiyeva’s daughter Leya later became a chemist and a candidate of chemical sciences, taught at the University of Baku and died in 1994. Z. Seyidbayli was posthumously rehabilitated in 1956 (Editor’s note)
7. Kashiyeva also drew works “Portrait of Goncharov”, “Types of Nikolay Gogol”, “Lakeside” and “Baba Yaga”, whose fate is unknown (Editor’s note)