

DECORATIVE-APPLIED ARTS

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Azerbaijan is the country with the richest artistic heritage. Numerous art relics witness high level and diversity of culture which was being developed during ages at this territory.

Geographical location of Azerbaijan—on intersection of important trade ways from Asia to Europe—as the reason of the fact that Azerbaijan in ancient time was the scene of numerous historical events. Azerbaijan was an integral part of large state formations—ancient Persian Kingdom. Alexander Makedonski's Empire, Arabian Khalifate and during certain historical periods it itself was the centre of such states as Sephevides' Empire.

Azerbaijanian people contributed to the culture of other countries and, creatively using achievements of other people, developed their own original culture.

Genius of Azerbaijanian people demonstrated itself especially brilliantly in decorative-applied art. Folk masters, using simplest resources allotted to them by nature—wood, straw, clay, stones—created beautiful things closely related to household, which served both practical purposes and aesthetic demands. Until the present these things inspire admiration. The most famous museums of the world, such as Louvre in Paris, Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Museum of Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, Hermitage in Sanct-Petersburg etc., private collections of Europe, Asia and America keep with love and care unique specimens of applied art made by clever hands of Azeri masters during many centuries.

Art critics call shield made of damask steel which is exhibited in the Armoury of Moscow Kremlin “Marvel of jeweller's art”. This shield was part of complete armour of Russian Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich; it was made by Azerbaijanian jeweller of XVI-th century Moukhammed Momin. Surface of the shield is inlaid with gold and precious stones. Scenes from the poems of the great Azeri poet of the XII-the century Nizami Gyanjevi are depicted here.

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Ornamented carpet "Sheikh-Sefi" exhibited in Victoria and Albert Museum (London) is also brilliant specimen of Azerbaijanian art. This unique carpet with area of 56.12 square metres was made in 1539.

Not only objects of art made by Azerbaijanian folk masters, but masters themselves were in the past known far from their homeland. Sharaf-ad-Din al-Yazdi, court historiographer of Timur, wrote that builders and folk masters from Azerbaijan took part in construction and decoration of beautiful mosques and palaces in Samarkand.

Long ago, almost all kinds of folk and decorative-applied art were well developed in Azerbaijan. And in all these spheres folk masters achieved equal perfection.

Even in the XIX-th century, when folk handicraft was on the decline, travellers coming to Baku admired artistic and technical virtues of things made by local craftsmen.

Famous French writer A.Dumas and traveller Moan having visited Azerbaijan in 1859 wrote that "carpets, silk fabrics, arms made by local masters not only could compete with our French but, in some sense, surpass them..."

In the past almost all things that were used in a household were hand-made, thus it was very difficult to find a family which was not involved in one or another type of handicraft. Carpet-making was the most popular.

At that time match-making women coming to the bride's house always asked the girl: "Can you make carpets?"

Very interesting is also statistical data: in 1912 in 222 villages of Gyanja region 33069 people were involved in carpet-making. This was half the population of the region. The same situation was in other towns and villages of Azerbaijan.

From the end of the XIX-th century work of handicraftsmen of Azerbaijan began winning recognition in other countries. Successful presentation of Azerbaijan carpets, fabrics, embroideries. Jewellery at Wien World Exhibition in 1873, Paris in 1924 etc. again and again demonstrated their high artistic and technical level.

Nowadays applied art of Azerbaijan flourishes. Hundreds of gifted handicraftsmen working with metal, wood, stones, jewellery, carpet-makers, potters live in towns and villages of Azerbaijan. They follow traditions of old times and have wide popularity.

Comparing to other epochs development of applied arts in Azerbaijan in the XX-th century was very uneven and followed very complicated routes.

Technical progress, mechanization of labour, influence of various modern trends in decorative art on folk art somehow disoriented art of local handicraftsmen. So-called “internationalization” of culture under dictatorship of centre also had its negative effect. It was especially noticeable in large industrial cities: Baku, Gyanja, Sumgait etc. However, time passed and distant regions of the Republic, with strong local traditions, became source of “spring water” supplying cities.

Thus, beginning with the second half of the XX-th century traditional kinds of decorative-applied art of Azerbaijan began playing an important role in life and economics of the Republic.

As in the past, carpet-making plays leading role in applied art. Alongside with such traditional carpet-making centres as Gyanja, Kazakh, Shusha, Agdam, Shemakha, Baku etc. new enterprises of carpet-making appear. Now carpets are made both at large plants and at small enterprises, and also by individuals who work at home.

At present in Azerbaijan about 40 ths. square metres of handmade carpets are produced annually. The carpets are exported to various countries of Europe and Asia.

Success of Azerbaijanian carpets abroad is the result of their high technical and artistic quality. They are characterised by variety and originality of design and colours, types. Specialists distinguish 144 types of ornamental carpets in Azerbaijan; each type is characterised by artistic and technical merits.

Azerbaijanian carpets are constantly exhibited at large international exhibitions and fairs. Success of exhibition “Carpet-making in Azerbaijan” in 1991 in Paris, in the UNESCO Headquarters once more confirmed popularity of Azerbaijanian carpets abroad.

Recently, personal exhibitions of leading carpet-makers were held. Among those: exhibition of Latif Kerimov’s works in London, Kamil Aliev’s in Ankara, Istanbul, Tehran etc.

Alongside with ornamental carpets, popular worldwide, now carpets with portraits and various scenes are also being made in Azerbaijan.

Representatives of younger generation also participate in development of carpet-making art. Among them there are such artists as Eldar Mikailov

and Arif Ismailov, each of them having specific manner and originality.

Azerbaijan was always famous with its cloths, decorated with embroidery, printed cloths.

During the last decade printed cloths became most popular. At present in Azerbaijan curtains, table-cloths, ladies silk kerchiefs (“kelagai”) using folk motifs are made. In Baku, Gyanja, Sheki, Agdash, Basgala now special workshops produce printed cloths with traditional design. Names of “usta” (master) Gabil and Grakish—hereditary cloth—printers from Basgala, usta Davud from Gyanja and others are well known outside our Republic.

Traditions of ceramics in Azerbaijan continue to develop at present.

Thousands of excellent masters work at porcelain works of Gyanja, ceramic workshops of the Ministry of light industry in Baku, Geokchai, Zakataly, in numerous artels (small enterprise) of Kuba, Masally, Lenkoran and other regions of the Republic.

They produce almost all traditional kinds of ceramic ware—from large, 2-m bowls for wine storing and up to refined shape flower vases and miniature bowls: kyasa, piala.

This work is being done mostly by Baku ceramists united by the Artists Union of Azerbaijan.

• Close relationship of Baku ceramists with traditions of folk art allows them to create unique, original masterpieces. This is confirmed by works of artists-ceramists Mazair Ashraf, Zaid Guseinov, Latifa Kulu-zade, Lia Agamalova et al.

To-day in the workshop of Azerbaijan ceramists one could see many excellent pieces. Dinner set for national food “piti” (red glazed clay) coated with schematic pattern looks brilliant.

Set for narsharab (concentrated pomegranate juice) made of red glazed clay is very nice—one of the jugs is for pomegranate juice, another—for pomegranate sauce.

Artistic work on metal was always one of the most popular kinds of applied arts in Azerbaijan.

Already in the 1-st millenium B.C. at the territory of Azerbaijan they produced artistic utensils and ornaments of iron, copper, silver, gold.

During many centuries, from generation to generation peoples artists passed and developed artistic and technical traditions of their art. Their art became famous far outside the Azerbaijan. Many centuries ago in the East they composed legends about excellent Azerbaijanian goldsmiths, gunsmiths, copper—smiths that produced arms and guns for the whole Middle East, various chased ware with fine decorations—vegetable ornament.

Now in Azerbaijan almost all traditional kinds of artistic metal work still exist: chasing, engraving, stamping, filigree, inlaid work and enamelling. Peoples artists not only keep the best features of national art but also develop and strengthen them.

Metal is used for production of various domestic utensils - bowls, jugs, goblets, candlesticks etc., original in shape and richly decorated.

Passing along the streets of Sheki, Lagich, other old centres of copper chasing works one could hear, as in Middle Ages, melodious tinkling of anvils of copper-smiths.

Modern Azerbaijanian jeweller's pieces are also very artistic. Using new forms and materials Azerbaijanian jewellers keep old ways of artistic metal processing. Various ornaments: buckles for belts, pendants, necklaces, bracelets, ear-rings, rings etc. are being done following best traditions of jewellers art in Azerbaijan.

Filigree work occupies main part in the modern jewellers art of Azerbaijan. Complicated patterns are composed of thin threads of gold and silver.

There are many famous masters of jewellers art in Azerbaijan now. Among them usta Eiyub from Sheki, Geidar Aslan oğlu, Gasan Mutalliboğlu, Jamaledin Eiyub from Baku, Gadzhi-bala from Lenkoran and others. Abovelisted masters are real artists in this sphere.

One should see how they work, how they create most complicated ornaments of the thinnest golden and silver threads.

In modern Azerbaijan one more traditional kind of applied art has been developed-artistic work on wood. From ancient times main kinds of artistic work on wood in Azerbaijan were engraving and inlaid work. Azerbaijanian masters working with wood most widely use two types of fret-work - blind (one-sided) and through one. Both types are used when making domestic items. Peoples's artist Abdul-Gusein has done great service to his country in development of engraving traditions in Azerbaijan.

Among artistic specimens made of wood those decorated using incrustation and intarsion should be distinguished. Various things were made using these technique - from furniture to musical instruments. In this sphere two brothers - Ali and Gusein Paryaby achieved great success. Artistic box made by them and decorated following motifs of legendary epos "Keroglu" had great success at World Exhibition in 1960 in New York.

In general, at present in Azerbaijan besides traditional kinds of decorative-applied art artistic work on bone, leather, production of various domestic utensils from rush and straw etc. have also returned to life. Peoples artists living in distant regions and villages of the Republic are of great assistance in revival of these kinds of decortative-applied art.