Religion, Power, and Contemporary Art in Central Asia: Visualizing and Performing Islam

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Abstract

This article examines diverse perceptions and discourses of Islam, fundamentalism, spirituality, and culture in the contemporary Central Asian context, revealed through the study of contemporary art and its discussions about these phenomena. While many online sources and social media accounts provide a framework for different types of religiosity—cultural, pious, or fundamental—contemporary art in the region serves as a platform for critiquing religion as a whole. I use the examples of the most famous works by prominent Central Asian contemporary artists, who discuss Tengrism, Islam, and other religious practices in their works, performances, and videos. The diversity of online platforms that transfer discussions of Islam and religion to the digital forums through which third-wave artists promote their works also create space for more pluralistic views of—and discourses on—Islam.

Supplementary Material

FIGURE 1 Katipa apai and her priest, Anatoly Chernoussov, at their performance at STAB, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
SOURCE: ART INITIATIVES.

FIGURE 2   Kuanysh Bazargaliev, Triptych 2016.
SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

FIGURE 3   Syrlybek Bekbotayev, "Leaf" (2014)
SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

FIGURE 4   Syrlybek Bekbotayev, "Cinema for Aruakhs" (2011)
              SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

FIGURE 5   "Kazakh Feng Shui" from Katipa apai performance in Bishkek 2016.
SOURCE: ART INITIATIVES.

FIGURE 6   Saule Suleimenova, from *I am Kazakh* series (2010)
SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

FIGURE 7   Anvar Musrepov, "Praying" (2017)

SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

FIGURE 8   Anvar Musrepov, "Kazakh Woman in a Burka" (2016)
            SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

FIGURE 9   Still from Anvar Musrepov's video "Haram" (Sin) (2016)
SOURCE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.