

THE MUSEUM AS A RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AVANT-GARDE: THE ACTIVITIES OF THE STATE MUSEUM OF ARTS NAMED AFTER SAVITSKIY

Khanna Utemuratova

PhD student, Department of History of Uzbekistan and Karakalpakstan,
Karakalpak State University named after Berdakh, Nukus city, 230100, Uzbekistan

E-mail: khannautemuratova@gmail.com,

F-ORCID: 0009-0001-5998-8717

Abstract: This article analyzes the research activities of the I.V. Savitsky State Museum of Arts of the Republic of Karakalpakstan as a specialized center for the study of Russian and Central Asian avant-garde art. The study examines the museum's transformation from a regional institution into an internationally recognized research center with a unique collection from the 1920s and 1930s. The article examines the museum's key research areas: attribution and cataloging of avant-garde works, provenance research, the study of artists' biographies, scholarly commentary on the collection, international relations, and publications. It also examines the museum's contribution to expanding the historiography of the Russian avant-garde through the introduction of previously unknown works and names into scholarly circulation. The study demonstrates how, thanks to the uniqueness of its collection and systematic research, this regional museum is becoming a center for international art history research. It concludes that the museum has made a significant contribution to global art studies and highlights prospects for further development of its research activities in the context of digitalization and expanding international cooperation.

Key words: The State Museum of Art named after I.V. Savitskiy, Russian avant-garde, museum research activities, Central Asian avant-garde, museum science, provenance research, attribution, I.V. Savitsky, museum collection, art history, cataloging of museum collections, artistic culture.

Introduction. The State Museum of Arts of the Republic of Karakalpakstan named after I.V. Savitsky occupies a unique place in the international museum and academic landscape. Founded in 1966 in Nukus, the museum has become one of the world's largest centers for the preservation and study of Russian and Central Asian avant-garde art of the 1920s–1930s.

The phenomenon of the Nukus Museum has repeatedly attracted scholarly attention; however, most studies focus on the history of the collection, the personality of its founder I.V. Savitsky, and the cultural-historical significance of the collection. The museum's research activity as a systematic institutional practice remains insufficiently studied. Meanwhile, it is precisely this activity that determined the transformation of the museum from a regional collection into an internationally recognized research center.

The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research activities of the Savitsky Museum as a specialized center for avant-garde studies, to identify the stages of its development, its methodological features, and its contribution to global art history.

The object of the study is the research activity of an art museum, while the subject is the specific features of this activity in the Savitsky Museum as a center for avant-garde studies. The source base includes museum catalogs and publications, archival materials, conference documents, interviews with museum staff, exhibition materials, and international publications on the museum's collection.

Methods. The methodological framework of the study is interdisciplinary, combining approaches from museology, art history, institutional history, and sociology of science. The theoretical basis is the concept of the museum as a “knowledge producer,” developed in contemporary museum studies. According to this approach, museums not only preserve and exhibit objects but also actively produce knowledge through research practices, publications, and academic events.

The works of E. Hooper-Greenhill, S. Macdonald, and T. Bennett, who conceptualize the museum as an epistemological space, allow the Savitsky Museum's research activity to be examined within the broader transformation of museum institutions in the 20th century.

The historical-genetic method is used to reconstruct the formation of the museum as a research center and identify key stages of development. Institutional analysis is applied to study organizational structures, research funding mechanisms, and connections with other academic institutions. Comparative analysis allows comparison with other avant-garde research centers such as the Tretyakov Gallery, the Russian Museum, and Western modern art museums.

The study faces several limitations: limited access to archival materials, especially from the Soviet period; restricted international dissemination of earlier research published in Uzbek and Russian; and the informal nature of some research activities that were not documented. These limitations are addressed through source triangulation, combining archival documents, published materials, oral testimonies, and international scholarship.

Results. The Savitsky Museum's research activities began long before its official opening in 1966. Igor Vitalyevich Savitsky (1915-1984), an artist and archaeologist by training, arrived in Karakalpakstan in 1950 as part of the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition. His systematic study of Karakalpak applied art and the subsequent publication of his seminal monograph, "The Art of Karakalpakstan," laid the foundation for the future museum's research [1].

Initially, the museum's research focused on two areas: the study of traditional applied art of Karakalpakstan and the compilation of documentation on the republic's contemporary art. Savitsky developed a systematic fieldwork methodology that included photographic documentation, description of techniques, interviews with artisans, and the study of ornamental systems. This work was conducted in the traditions of the Russian ethnographic school, but had a specific character, driven by the need to urgently document vanishing traditions. A fundamental turning point in the museum's research was the beginning of the systematic collection of Russian and Central Asian avant-garde works in the late 1960s and early 1970s [2]. Savitsky recognized that building a collection of banned art required not only collecting but also research. Many artists were forgotten, their biographies unknown, and their works unattributed. In the absence of publications on these masters, Savitsky was forced to conduct his own research.

An important area of research was the study of the Central Asian avant-garde—a group of artists active in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in the 1920s and 1930s. Savitsky uncovered an

entire layer of artistic culture that remained unknown even to specialists. He sought out early works by A. Volkov, V. Ufimtsev, N. Karakhan, M. Kurzin, and U. Tansykbaev, documenting their creative biographies.

The research results from this period were partially published in local publications, primarily as short notes on exhibitions or articles on Karakalpak art. However, the bulk of the research work remained in manuscripts, card indexes, and correspondence. Savitsky created a research infrastructure for the future scholarly exploration of the collection.

The death of I.V. Savitsky in 1984 presented the museum with the task of institutionalizing research activities. The new museum leadership recognized the need to systematize the accumulated material and continue research.

A fundamentally important area of research was the preparation of scholarly catalogs of the collection. The first catalogs, published in the late 1980s and 1990s, introduced previously unknown works into scholarly circulation. Cataloging required attribution work, clarification of dates, technological research, and the writing of biographical notes on the artists.

Provenance research—the study of the history of works—developed. This focus was particularly important for the collection of "forbidden" art, as it allowed for the reconstruction of the artists' fates, the mechanisms of artistic repression, and the means of saving works [3].

The beginning of the 21st century opened up new opportunities for the museum's research activities, linked to digital technologies. The creation of electronic databases for the collection, the digitization of works, and the development of virtual exhibitions have expanded the accessibility of materials for researchers worldwide.

Publication activity is a key indicator of the museum's scientific work and a channel for disseminating research results. The museum's publication history reflects the stages of its research development and changing opportunities for knowledge dissemination.

After Uzbekistan gained independence, the first comprehensive catalogs of the avant-garde collection were published. The catalog "Avant-Garde, Stopped in its Tracks" (1995) presented a significant portion of the collection and introduced previously unknown works into scholarly circulation. The publication was accompanied by scholarly articles by museum staff and international researchers. Monographs on the work of individual artists, including Alexander Volkov, Robert Falk, and Lyubov Leporskaya, were also published [4]. These publications are based on materials from the museum's collection and the results of research.

A significant portion of the publications are in English, ensuring the international dissemination of research results. The museum collaborates with leading art publishers in Europe and the United States.

Digital publishing is also being developed. A museum website with virtual exhibitions and online catalogs has been created. Materials about the collection are posted on international museum platforms.

Participation in international events facilitates the establishment of scholarly contacts, the initiation of joint projects, and the exchange of experience. Museum staff gain access to the latest methodological approaches and become familiar with international research standards.

The museum is a member of ICOM (International Council of Museums), which provides participation in a professional network, access to international resources, and the opportunity to exchange experiences with leading museums worldwide [5].

The museum also develops educational programs for researchers and students. Seminars on attribution and avant-garde studies, internships for young art historians, and lecture courses are organized.

Collaboration with universities is developing. Art history students complete internships at the museum and write their theses based on the collection. Museum staff lecture at universities in Uzbekistan and abroad.

The Savitsky Museum has established partnerships with leading museums worldwide: the Tretyakov Gallery, the Russian Museum, the Museum Ludwig, the Centre Pompidou, and MoMA. This collaboration includes exhibition exchanges, joint research projects, and consultations on attribution and restoration.

Discussion. An analysis of the Savitsky State Museum of Art's research activities allows us to formulate a number of theoretical and practical conclusions and raise questions for further discussion.

1. A Peripheral Museum as a Producer of Central Knowledge

The case of the Savitsky Museum presents a paradox: an institution located on the geographical and cultural periphery becomes a center for the production of expert knowledge in its field. This challenges traditional notions of center-periphery relations in scholarship. The key factor enabling this transformation was the uniqueness of the collection. Possessing material unavailable to other research centers created an epistemological advantage [6]. The museum became a must-see for any serious scholar of the avant-garde. However, the uniqueness of the collection alone is not sufficient. Systematic research, publications, and international integration are necessary. The Savitsky Museum demonstrates that a peripheral institution can compete with central institutions, provided its research is of high quality.

2. Institutional Resilience in the Face of Instability

The museum's history demonstrates the institution's ability to sustain scholarly activity in the face of political instability, economic difficulties, and ideological pressure. This raises the question of the sources of institutional resilience. A key factor was the personality of its founder, I.V. Savitsky, whose vision and perseverance created an institution with a strong mission. After his death, this mission was institutionalized and supported by subsequent directors. The collection's international recognition generated external support that compensated for the lack of internal resources. Grant funding and international projects ensured the continuation of its work even during difficult periods [7].

3. Digitalization and Democratization of Access

The development of digital technologies opens up new opportunities for the museum's research activities. The creation of online catalogs, virtual exhibitions, and digital archives makes the collection accessible to researchers worldwide without the need for a physical presence in Nukus. This addresses the museum's geographic remoteness, which has traditionally

limited access to the collection. Digitalization democratizes access, allowing a wide range of researchers to work with materials.

However, digitalization also raises new questions. How accurately does a digital image convey the qualities of the original? Can virtual access replace in-person study of a work? Which research tasks require physical presence, and which can be accomplished remotely?

The museum is developing a hybrid model that combines digital access with opportunities for in-depth study of originals. High-quality digitization provides preliminary acquaintance and stimulates interest, but serious attribution and technological research requires working with the originals.

4. Prospects for Integration into Global Research Networks

The future of the museum as a research center is linked to deeper integration into international scientific networks. Participation in collaborative projects, data exchange, and joint publications expand research capabilities. This development requires investment in research infrastructure: modernizing storage facilities, acquiring equipment for technical and technological research, developing the library and archives, and training staff.

A promising direction is the development of the museum as an educational center training specialists in the study of avant-garde and Central Asian art. The creation of postgraduate programs and research fellowships will attract young scholars [8].

Conclusion. The I.V. Savitsky State Museum of Arts of the Republic of Karakalpakstan represents a unique example of the transformation of a regional museum into an internationally recognized research center. This transformation was made possible by a combination of several factors: the uniqueness of the collection, systematic research, dedication to the professional community, and international integration.

The museum's research activities encompass a wide range of areas: attribution and cataloging of works, provenance research, the study of artists' biographies, the study of the Central Asian avant-garde, and the study of traditional Karakalpak art. Each of these areas has made a significant contribution to their respective fields of knowledge.

The museum's contribution to expanding the historiography of the Russian and Central Asian avant-garde is difficult to overestimate. The introduction of thousands of previously unknown works into scholarly circulation, the rehabilitation of forgotten names, and the identification of regional variations of modernism have significantly enriched art studies. The museum's future as a research center is linked to deeper international integration, the development of digital forms of collection presentation, and the expansion of educational activities. Implementing these initiatives requires support from the state and the international community.

The Savitsky Museum's experience is significant not only for art history but also for museology, demonstrating the productive model of a museum as a research center. It is an example of how a cultural institution, created by the enthusiasm of one person, can become a significant factor in international cultural and scientific life.

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