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Cultural Memory, Identity, and Digital Transformation in Contemporary Kazakh Visual Art: A Psychocultural Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine the transformation of contemporary Kazakh visual art through a psychocultural perspective, focusing on cultural memory, identity representation, symbolic systems, digital mediation, and changing forms of viewer positioning.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative interpretive and multidisciplinary design was employed. The study combined visual analysis, semiotic interpretation, contextual cultural analysis, comparative art-historical analysis, and psychocultural interpretation. The corpus included more than 40 paintings, sculptures, conceptual installations, performances, mixed-media works, and digital artworks produced by selected Kazakh artists from three generational groups. Artworks were purposively selected based on their relevance to cultural memory, identity construction, symbolic representation, postmodern hybridity, technological mediation, and artist-viewer relationships. The analysis was organized around five dimensions: post-Soviet identity and cultural memory, postmodern hybridity, symbolic and archetypal representation, digital mediation, and viewer positioning.

Findings: The analysis revealed that contemporary Kazakh visual art has moved from predominantly representational and object-centered practices toward more hybrid, conceptual, and digitally mediated forms. Cultural symbols and historical references were not simply reproduced but were fragmented, reinterpreted, combined, and placed within new artistic contexts. Postmodern strategies included hybridity, quotation, fragmentation, symbolic layering, and reinterpretation of inherited visual codes. Digital and multimedia practices expanded artistic possibilities through video, animation, mixed media, interactive formats, and immersive environments. These developments also repositioned the viewer from passive observation toward interpretation, spatial engagement, and participation.

Conclusion: Contemporary Kazakh visual art functions as a psychocultural space where cultural memory, identity, symbolic meaning, and technological transformation are continuously negotiated.

Keywords: Cultural Memory, Cultural Identity, Digital Art, Postmodernism, Psychocultural Analysis.



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Introduction

In the modern era, as Kazakhstan steadily upholds and reinforces its national independence, significant attention is being paid to the preservation and revitalization of its cultural and philosophical heritage. A nationwide movement aimed at spiritual development and cultural renaissance has created favorable conditions for the advancement of national philosophy and the arts. This cultural renewal is deeply rooted in state policy and reflects a broader effort to restore historical consciousness among citizens. President Nursultan Nazarbayev emphasized this national priority in his work *"The Future of Kazakhstan Lies in the Nation's Ideological Unity"*, where he urged for the rigorous study, preservation, and restoration of historical values. He argued that returning to one's cultural and historical roots is not only a natural but a positive and necessary process. Such a return is vital in shaping a strong national identity in an increasingly globalized world (Zhubanova, 2021).

Today, this cultural awakening is most vividly observed in the rapid development of Kazakh visual art, particularly painting and sculpture. Despite its relatively recent emergence—spanning only a few generations—Kazakh visual art has undergone an intense and dynamic evolution. From its early formative stages to its current phase of international recognition, the development of this art form illustrates the creative resilience and cultural depth of the Kazakh people. This transformation did not happen in isolation; rather, it was deeply influenced by the nation's desire to reconnect with its philosophical worldview, traditional aesthetics, and symbolic imagination (Isaacs, 2018).

However, in the contemporary context, painting and sculpture have become significantly more complex—not only in terms of technique and composition, but also in meaning and cultural reference. The current artistic landscape is saturated with conceptual layers, often drawing on a wide range of visual languages, including abstract, symbolic, and metaphorical forms. As a result, the gap between artist and audience has widened, sometimes leading to confusion or disengagement among general viewers. Many contemporary artworks are no longer immediately accessible or easily understood, especially when they break away from conventional aesthetic norms or narrative structures.

This complexity reflects a broader shift in global and local art, where form and meaning are constantly redefined.

Understanding the full scope of contemporary Kazakh art requires a nuanced and reflective approach—one that takes into account not only artistic methods and materials, but also cultural memory, historical experience, and national identity. Many artists today are revisiting the experiences and stylistic foundations laid during the formative stages of the national art school. However, rather than merely replicating past traditions, these artists reinterpret them through the lens of modernity. They use a diverse array of visual tools—colors, textures, compositions, and sculptural forms—to reconstruct and reimagine the cultural codes of the past. These reconstructions are not nostalgic imitations; instead, they represent a conscious effort to collect and synthesize scattered elements of cultural memory into a coherent artistic system (Alacovska et al., 2026; Nicolazzi & Tai, 2024).

In this creative process, artists become cultural archivists of sorts, piecing together fragments of national identity into powerful visual narratives. They draw from deep-rooted understandings of the world—reflected in Kazakh cosmology, folklore, and oral traditions—and embed these ideas into contemporary artistic language. Through painting and sculpture, they reconstruct models of the world that are deeply tied to national consciousness and worldview. In this way, the visual arts act not only as a mirror of society but also as a medium for philosophical exploration and cultural affirmation.

It is also important to recognize that this ongoing transformation of visual and sculptural art is occurring within a highly pluralistic artistic environment. Artists are now working across multiple styles, techniques, and philosophies. Some adhere to classical traditions, while others experiment with new media, conceptual approaches, or postmodern expressions. What unites these diverse practices is a shared engagement with the "object"—not just as a physical form, but as a bearer of meaning. In modern works, the object often plays a dual role: it serves as both an aesthetic focal point and a symbolic vehicle. Depending on the artist's intent, the object may heighten beauty and formality or, conversely, challenge and subvert traditional aesthetic norms.

This duality gives rise to a new visual language—one that is highly individualized but still deeply informed by

collective identity. In many contemporary works, one sees a movement away from surface-level representation and toward more abstract, associative, and metaphorical expression. The artistic object becomes a site of negotiation between tradition and innovation, between national memory and personal reflection. In this dynamic, the viewer is invited not merely to look, but to interpret, to engage, and to re-evaluate their own understanding of cultural meaning.

Significantly, the rise of such a diverse and layered artistic language is closely tied to the development of a

new generation of Kazakh artists—painters and sculptors who are shaping what can be described as a “post-independence aesthetic.” This aesthetic is not monolithic. It is characterized by hybridity, experimentation, and fluidity of form. Yet it remains rooted in the national mentality, drawing on symbols, metaphors, and narratives that are distinctly Kazakh. It reflects a deeper philosophical inquiry into questions of identity, history, and belonging—questions that are central to both individual creativity and collective memory (Gere, 2002) (Table 1).

Table 1

Analytical Category, Evidence, Interpretation

Theme	Key Ideas	Implications
Pluralistic Environment	Artists work across classical traditions, new media, conceptual, and postmodern approaches.	Demonstrates diversity of styles and philosophies in contemporary Kazakh art.
The “Object” as Concept	The object functions both as an aesthetic focal point and a symbolic vehicle. It may affirm beauty or subvert norms.	Serves as a unifying element across diverse practices; embodies both form and meaning.
Emergence of a New Visual Language	Shift from surface-level representation to abstract, associative, and metaphorical expression.	Encourages deeper interpretation and active viewer engagement.
Negotiation of Tradition and Innovation	Artistic works balance national memory with personal reflection.	Reflects ongoing dialogue between heritage and modern creativity.
Post-Independence Aesthetic	Characterized by hybridity, experimentation, and fluidity, yet rooted in Kazakh symbols and narratives.	Defines the identity of a new generation of artists; links individual creativity with collective memory.

Stylistically, this new artistic language is often defined by ambiguity, abstraction, and conceptual layering. The visual codes are not always direct or literal; rather, they rely on suggestion, metaphor, and symbolic resonance. In many cases, works adopt a metaphysical or philosophical tone, using visual form as a means of exploring complex ideas and existential themes. This approach requires an active and thoughtful engagement from the viewer, who must interpret rather than simply observe (Graham, 2016).

The aim of this article is to explore the current state of visual art in Kazakhstan by analyzing its developmental trajectory—from its foundational stages to its contemporary manifestations. Through a focus on both painting and sculpture, we will examine how national identity, cultural philosophy, and artistic innovation converge in the visual language of today’s Kazakh artists. Particular attention will be given to how artists use form, symbolism, and composition to articulate complex cultural narratives, as well as how these narratives contribute to the broader project of cultural revitalization in the post-Soviet space.

In doing so, this study seeks not only to describe the surface features of modern Kazakh visual art, but also to identify the deeper philosophical and cultural currents that shape its direction. By tracing the connections between tradition and modernity, between individual vision and national identity, we aim to offer a comprehensive understanding of the evolving role of visual art in Kazakhstan’s cultural landscape. Ultimately, this exploration will contribute to a broader dialogue on the significance of art as a means of cultural continuity and transformation in a rapidly changing world.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Materials

This study employed a qualitative, interpretive, and multidisciplinary design to examine the transformation of contemporary Kazakh visual art from postmodern modes of expression to digitally mediated and interactive practices. The methodological framework combined visual analysis, semiotic interpretation, contextual cultural analysis, comparative art-historical analysis, and psychocultural interpretation. The study did not attempt to measure psychological responses

through questionnaires, interviews, or experimental procedures. Instead, the psychocultural dimension was examined through the ways in which artworks construct and mediate cultural memory, identity, symbolic meaning, perception, and the implied position of the viewer.

The empirical material consisted of more than 40 visual works created by selected contemporary Kazakh artists representing three generational groups. The corpus included paintings, sculptures, conceptual installations, performances, mixed-media works, and digital or multimedia art. Artists represented in the analysis included A. Akanayev, Zh. Kairanbayev, N. Bube, A. Duzelhanov, N. Kilbayev, U. Zhubanyazov, S. Suleimenova, T. Tileuzhanov, K. Serikbol, A. Noda, K. Askarov, A. Begalin, E. Isaev, A. Musrepov, Zh. Yerlanqyzy, A. Saifullaev, A. Batyr, B. Bubikanova, A. Menlibayeva, and other artists whose works contributed to the identified artistic and cultural transformations.

The three generational groups were used as an analytical framework for tracing continuity and change rather than as rigid sociological categories. The first group represented artists whose practices were substantially shaped by late-Soviet and academically oriented traditions; the second included artists whose work developed during the post-independence expansion of postmodern, conceptual, and hybrid aesthetics; and the third consisted mainly of younger artists whose practices more visibly incorporated digital, multimedia, performative, participatory, and technologically mediated forms. The comparison therefore focused on recurring patterns of continuity and transformation rather than assuming stylistic homogeneity within each generation.

Purposive sampling was used because the aim was not statistical representativeness but analytical coverage of major transformations in contemporary Kazakh visual culture. Artworks were selected when they demonstrated clear relevance to one or more of the study's central concerns: cultural memory, post-Soviet or national identity, transformation of traditional visual symbols, postmodern hybridity, innovative use of materials, digital mediation, viewer participation, or the changing relationship between artist, artwork, and audience. Works were also required to have sufficient visual or contextual documentation to support interpretation. Artworks with insufficient

documentation or no clear connection to the analytical objectives were excluded.

The study drew on visual reproductions of artworks, documented exhibition materials, published art-historical and cultural analyses, scholarly discussions of contemporary Kazakh art, and contextual information concerning artists, media, exhibition settings, and cultural symbolism. These materials were used together in order to avoid interpreting artworks solely on the basis of isolated visual impressions.

Analytical Procedure

The analytical framework was organized around five interconnected dimensions: post-Soviet identity and cultural memory, postmodern hybridity, symbolic and archetypal representation, digital mediation, and viewer positioning. Each artwork was examined for its formal characteristics, including color, composition, texture, material, spatial organization, scale, representational or abstract elements, and use of conventional or unconventional media. These formal features were subsequently interpreted in relation to the symbolic and cultural structure of the work.

Semiotic analysis focused on recurring visual signs, traditional motifs, mythological references, ornamental forms, historical imagery, archetypal structures, and other culturally recognizable symbols. Particular attention was paid to the way such elements were preserved, fragmented, recontextualized, combined with unrelated imagery, ironized, digitally transformed, or incorporated into new visual systems. This distinction was important because the study approached cultural identity as a process of reinterpretation and reconstruction rather than as the simple reproduction of inherited traditions.

The psychocultural analysis focused on four principal dimensions: identity reconstruction, cultural and collective memory, symbolic cognition, and viewer positioning. Identity reconstruction referred to the ways artworks situated the individual or collective subject in relation to Kazakh history, post-Soviet experience, globalization, and contemporary cultural change. Cultural memory was examined through the reproduction, transformation, or contestation of inherited historical and symbolic narratives. Symbolic cognition referred to the use of metaphorical, archetypal, and culturally familiar visual forms to represent themes such as continuity, rupture, belonging, loss,

modernization, and hybridity. Viewer positioning referred to the role structurally offered to the audience by the work, ranging from relatively passive observation to interpretation, spatial navigation, participation, or immersion.

Postmodernism was operationalized through observable artistic strategies rather than being treated simply as a chronological label. These strategies included eclecticism, fragmentation, quotation, irony, bricolage, hybridization of artistic forms, destabilization of conventional aesthetic hierarchies, repetition or simulation of signs, and reinterpretation of national or historical symbols. This approach made it possible to distinguish postmodern artistic strategies from digital media themselves. A work could therefore be postmodern without being digital, digital without relying strongly on postmodern strategies, or combine both orientations.

Digital and new media practices were examined where the selected corpus included video art, animation, digital image manipulation, multimedia composition, digitally generated imagery, glitch aesthetics, three-dimensional digital processes, augmented reality, virtual environments, or interactive formats. The analysis focused on how digital mediation modified the visual organization of cultural symbols, altered the material basis of the artwork, and repositioned the viewer in relation to the artistic environment. NFT and cryptoart were treated primarily as emerging technological and cultural contexts because the available material did not contain systematic sales data, interviews with collectors, or quantitative evidence concerning the Kazakh digital art market.

The distinction between actual viewer response and viewer positioning was maintained throughout the study. Because no audience interviews, questionnaires, physiological measures, eye-tracking, or behavioral data were collected, the analysis did not claim to measure viewers' emotional or cognitive reactions. Instead, it examined how the formal, spatial, and technological organization of individual works invited particular modes of observation, interpretation, interaction, or embodied engagement. Interactive installations, performances, virtual environments, and multimedia works were therefore analyzed in terms of the participatory possibilities they structurally offered

rather than presumed psychological effects on actual viewers.

A focused case analysis was additionally conducted on *The Theft of Europe*, a group exhibition involving 15 Kazakh artists from different generations. The exhibition was selected because it brought together diverse artistic strategies within a shared curatorial context and provided a useful setting for examining generational differences, mixed media, conceptual objects, digital tools, cultural symbolism, and changing modes of viewer engagement. The exhibition was treated as a contextual case rather than as an experimental study of audience behavior.

The analytical process proceeded in five successive stages. First, the selected works were organized according to artist, approximate period, medium, thematic relevance, and exhibition context. Second, formal visual characteristics were documented. Third, the works were coded according to cultural memory, identity, symbolism, postmodern strategies, media transformation, and digital mediation. Fourth, the coded material was interpreted in relation to symbolic cognition, identity reconstruction, viewer positioning, and embodied or participatory experience. Finally, recurring patterns and contrasts were synthesized across artists, generations, media, and historical phases.

Analytical Rigor and Ethical Considerations

Because the study was qualitative and interpretive, credibility was addressed through triangulation rather than statistical reliability. Interpretations were evaluated against several forms of evidence, including observable visual properties, documented exhibition or artistic contexts, published scholarly discussions, and theoretical concepts relevant to the identified artistic strategies. Interpretive claims were retained only when they could be connected to identifiable characteristics of the artwork or its documented context. Broad claims concerning national mentality, collective psychology, or actual viewer response were avoided when they were not supported by direct evidence.

The comparative analysis of multiple artworks and artists was also used to distinguish recurring tendencies from interpretations derived from isolated examples. Particular care was taken to differentiate directly observable visual features from contextual interpretations and higher-level theoretical interpretations. This was especially important in relation

to archetypes, collective memory, identity, and viewer experience, where theoretical interpretation can otherwise be mistaken for directly observed psychological evidence.

The study relied exclusively on publicly documented artworks, published academic and art-historical sources, exhibition materials, and publicly available professional information about artists. No human participants were recruited, and no interviews, surveys, experimental procedures, personal psychological data, or confidential information were collected. Formal institutional ethics approval and informed consent were therefore not required. Any artwork reproduced in the manuscript should nevertheless be appropriately credited and used in accordance with applicable copyright and journal requirements.

The methodological scope of the study should consequently be understood as interpretive rather than experimental. Its findings identify patterns in visual representation, cultural symbolism, digital mediation, identity construction, and viewer positioning within the selected corpus. Direct conclusions concerning emotional response, psychological impact, or actual audience behavior require future research based on audience interviews, observation, psychometric assessment, or experimental reception methods.

Findings and Results

Analysis of the selected corpus revealed a series of recurring patterns in the development of contemporary Kazakh visual art. These patterns concerned the treatment of cultural memory and identity, the use of postmodern visual strategies, the diversification of artistic media, the increasing presence of digital mediation, and changes in the position assigned to the viewer. The findings are reported descriptively below without theoretical interpretation.

Cultural Memory and Identity in Visual Representation

Across the analyzed works, references to Kazakh cultural memory appeared through traditional symbols, historical motifs, ornamental forms, mythological imagery, and recognizable cultural signs. These elements were not represented in a uniform manner. In some works, traditional visual material remained recognizable, whereas in others it was fragmented,

recombined, stylized, or placed within contemporary visual contexts.

The analysis also identified repeated engagement with themes of national and post-Soviet identity. Works from different generations incorporated cultural references alongside contemporary artistic forms, creating combinations of historical imagery, individual artistic expression, and current visual language.

The selected works therefore demonstrated several modes of engaging with cultural heritage: direct preservation of recognizable signs, reinterpretation of inherited motifs, juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary elements, and reconstruction of historical or cultural imagery within new visual settings.

One example identified in the corpus was K. Serikbol's *Abak Tamga*, in which culturally recognizable signs and symbolic structures formed a central component of the visual composition. Other artists represented in the corpus similarly used national motifs, historical references, and cultural symbols, although the specific forms and media differed across works.

Postmodern Visual Strategies

The analysis identified a group of recurring formal and conceptual strategies associated with postmodern artistic practice. These included stylistic eclecticism, fragmentation, quotation, juxtaposition, symbolic layering, hybridity, and the combination of otherwise distinct visual languages.

A number of works combined references to traditional Kazakh culture with forms associated with abstraction, conceptual art, installation, performance, or experimental media. Traditional symbols were therefore not consistently presented in their original visual contexts. Instead, they frequently appeared within compositions that combined different stylistic or temporal references.

The analyzed corpus also contained works that moved away from conventional realist representation toward more associative, symbolic, metaphorical, and conceptually layered forms. The visual object frequently functioned simultaneously as a material element and as a carrier of symbolic meaning.

The transition from object-centered representation to hybrid artistic structures was observable across the selected generations. Earlier academic and representational approaches remained present within the broader corpus, while subsequent works

demonstrated greater use of conceptual organization, unconventional materials, mixed media, abstraction, performance, and digital forms.

Table 2 summarizes the main patterns identified in the analysis.

Table 2

Principal Patterns Identified in the Analysis of Contemporary Kazakh Visual Art

Analytical category	Observed pattern in the corpus	Representative evidence
Cultural memory	Reuse and transformation of inherited symbols and historical references	Traditional motifs, mythology, culturally recognizable signs
Identity representation	Combination of national, post-Soviet, and contemporary visual references	Hybrid visual narratives across generations
Postmodern hybridity	Mixing of different styles, materials, symbols, and periods	Eclecticism, fragmentation, quotation, bricolage
Symbolic visual language	Increased use of metaphorical and associative imagery	Archetypal signs, symbolic objects, abstract structures
Material experimentation	Movement beyond conventional painting and sculpture	Metal, leather, found objects, mixed media, installation
Digital mediation	Incorporation of technology into production and presentation	Video, animation, photo manipulation, multimedia, digital imagery
Viewer positioning	Greater emphasis on interpretation and participation	Installation, performance, interactive and immersive formats

Transformation of Media and Artistic Practice

The analyzed works demonstrated substantial diversification in artistic media. Traditional painting and sculpture remained present, but the corpus also included conceptual installation, performance, mixed media, digitally manipulated imagery, animation, video-based practices, and other forms of technologically mediated production.

Alternative physical materials were also observed in several works. These included metal, leather, found objects, and combinations of conventional and unconventional materials. In such cases, material itself became an identifiable element of the artwork's visual organization rather than functioning solely as a technical support.

Mixed-media practices were especially visible in works combining visual imagery with spatial arrangement, objects, sound, movement, or performative elements. The corpus therefore contained both materially based hybrid works and digitally mediated forms.

The comparison across generations showed a gradual expansion of available artistic media. The analyzed material moved from a stronger presence of conventional painting and sculpture toward increasingly diverse combinations of conceptual, performative, multimedia, and digital practices. This pattern did not represent a complete disappearance of traditional forms; rather, traditional and technologically mediated practices coexisted within the contemporary artistic field.

Digital and New Media Expression

A distinct group of works in the corpus involved digital or technologically mediated processes. The forms represented in the study included digital image manipulation, animation, video art, multimedia production, digitally generated imagery, and other screen-based practices. The broader material discussed in the corpus also included emerging forms associated with three-dimensional digital production, augmented reality, virtual environments, and interactive presentation.

Digital mediation altered several observable aspects of artistic production. Images could be manipulated through changes in tone, texture, layering, repetition, and composition. Moving images introduced temporal sequencing and motion into visual works, while multimedia formats allowed the combination of image, sound, movement, and spatial presentation.

Artists such as A. Musrepov, Zh. Yerlanqyzy, A. Saifullaev, and A. Batyr were identified in the analyzed material as representatives of a younger generation working with animation, multimedia, or video-based practices. B. Bubikanova and A. Menlibayeva were also identified as artists whose practices combine culturally recognizable references with experimental contemporary forms.

The digital works examined in the study did not constitute a single stylistic category. Rather, technological media were used across different thematic and visual orientations. Some works retained recognizable cultural imagery, while others emphasized

abstraction, experimental visual organization, contemporary social themes, or hybrid forms.

Digital Art, Glitch Aesthetics, and Cryptoart

The material reviewed in the study also contained examples and discussions associated with newer digital-native artistic practices, particularly glitch aesthetics and cryptoart. Glitch-based imagery was characterized by deliberate visual distortion, disruption, fragmentation, or manipulation of digital information.

NFT and cryptoart practices appeared in the broader contemporary context considered by the study. However, the available dataset did not contain systematic sales records, market statistics, or collector interviews. Accordingly, the empirical finding was limited to the presence of NFT and blockchain-related practices as emerging components of the digital art environment rather than evidence of a quantified transformation of the Kazakh art market.

The analyzed material therefore supported the identification of cryptoart and NFT-related practices as emerging technological formats, but not conclusions concerning their prevalence, economic scale, or market impact.

Transformation of the Artist-Viewer Relationship

Another recurring pattern concerned the position assigned to the viewer. In conventional painting and sculpture, the viewer was primarily positioned as an observer and interpreter of the completed work. In installation, performance, multimedia, and interactive formats, the organization of the artwork provided a wider range of possible modes of engagement.

Several analyzed works required greater interpretive involvement because their meanings were conveyed through symbolic, abstract, associative, or fragmented visual structures rather than through direct narrative representation.

Interactive and spatially organized works additionally positioned the viewer in relation to the physical or mediated environment of the artwork. In these cases, spatial movement, proximity, navigation, or interaction formed part of the structure through which the work could be encountered.

The results therefore indicated a descriptive shift from predominantly observational viewing toward a broader range of interpretive, spatial, and participatory positions. Because actual audience responses were not measured, these findings concern the structural position

offered to viewers by the artworks rather than documented psychological reactions.

Findings from The Theft of Europe Exhibition

The focused analysis of *The Theft of Europe*, which brought together 15 Kazakh artists from different generations, provided a concentrated example of several patterns identified across the larger corpus. The exhibition included mixed-media and conceptual works as well as the use of digital tools and contemporary visual strategies.

The exhibition demonstrated coexistence of different generational and stylistic approaches within a shared curatorial context. Traditional cultural references, contemporary social imagery, conceptual objects, and technologically mediated elements appeared alongside one another rather than forming separate chronological categories.

The case analysis also showed differences in the ways artists organized visual symbols and material forms. Some works relied more heavily on culturally recognizable or historical references, while others used experimental materials, abstraction, conceptual structures, or digitally mediated presentation.

The exhibition environment further demonstrated the importance of spatial presentation. The relationship between individual works, objects, installations, and viewers differed from conventional isolated presentation of painting or sculpture, particularly where the form of the work required spatial navigation or closer interpretive engagement.

Generational Patterns

Comparison across the three generational groups identified both continuity and change. The first group demonstrated a stronger relationship with academically established and representational forms. The second group showed greater use of postmodern, conceptual, symbolic, and hybrid strategies. The younger group contained a more visible presence of multimedia, performance, digital imagery, animation, video, and technologically mediated formats.

These differences were not absolute. Traditional imagery also appeared in younger artists' works, while experimental and conceptual practices were not confined exclusively to the youngest group. Similarly, established artists could combine traditional motifs with contemporary techniques.

The principal generational finding was therefore not the replacement of one artistic language by another but an expansion of available forms and strategies. The analyzed corpus demonstrated increasing coexistence of representational, symbolic, conceptual, performative, hybrid, and digital practices.

Viewer Positioning and Embodied Engagement

Analysis of the artworks also identified changes in the spatial and sensory organization of viewing. Conventional two-dimensional works primarily established a visual relationship between viewer and image, whereas installations, performances, multimedia environments, and interactive formats potentially required greater attention to physical space, movement, proximity, sound, or temporal sequence.

In such works, visual experience was not restricted to viewing a static image from a fixed position. The structure of the artwork could involve movement through space, changing visual perspectives, interaction with technological interfaces, or engagement with multiple sensory elements.

These characteristics were coded as embodied or participatory affordances of the artwork. They were not interpreted as measured emotional or psychological responses, since no audience-based data were collected.

Challenges Identified in Digital Practice

The material analyzed in relation to digital artistic practice also identified several practical limitations associated with new media. Digital works depended on software, hardware, platforms, and file formats that could change or become obsolete. Preservation and long-term accessibility were therefore identified as issues affecting technologically mediated work.

Institutional presentation constituted another observable challenge within the material reviewed. Digital and interactive forms required different approaches to storage, display, documentation, and exhibition than conventional painting and sculpture.

At the same time, digital formats expanded possibilities for online presentation, remote access, multimedia production, and experimentation with visual form. These features appeared across the contemporary digital practices included in the corpus.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the transformation of contemporary Kazakh visual art across post-Soviet, postmodern, and digitally mediated contexts, with particular attention to cultural memory, identity, symbolic representation, artistic hybridity, and the changing position of the viewer. The findings indicate that this transformation cannot be described as a simple linear movement from traditional art toward digital technology. Instead, contemporary Kazakh visual culture is characterized by the coexistence and recombination of different historical, symbolic, material, and technological layers. Traditional cultural signs remain visible, but they are repeatedly fragmented, recontextualized, hybridized, or incorporated into conceptual and digital forms. At the same time, the development of installation, performance, multimedia, and interactive practices has expanded the role assigned to the viewer beyond conventional observation toward interpretation, spatial engagement, and participation.

A central finding was the continuing importance of cultural memory and identity across different generations and media. Traditional motifs, mythological references, historical imagery, and culturally recognizable symbols were not confined to works associated with heritage preservation. They also appeared within experimental, conceptual, and technologically mediated practices. This finding is consistent with research on contemporary art in Central Asia showing that post-Soviet artists have repeatedly revisited questions of lost heritage, self-representation, geography, national belonging, and cultural memory. [Kudaibergenova \(2017\)](#), for example, showed that contemporary Central Asian artists reimagined inherited narratives of the Silk Road, mobility, and regional identity rather than simply reproducing established historical representations. Her later analysis of cultural production in Kazakhstan similarly demonstrated that independent artists have used alternative artistic languages to negotiate memory, authenticity, nationhood, and cultural codes in the post-Soviet period ([Kudaibergenova, 2018](#)).

The findings of the present study therefore support an understanding of cultural memory as an active process of reconstruction rather than a static repository of inherited symbols. Within the analyzed works, tradition

was repeatedly transformed through juxtaposition, stylization, fragmentation, conceptual reframing, and changes of medium. This observation is compatible with [Asavei \(2021\)](#) argument that contemporary artistic engagement with tradition does not necessarily involve either passive preservation or total rejection; tradition itself can become a field of reinterpretation and critical negotiation. More specifically in Kazakhstan, [Zeinullin et al. \(2026\)](#) found that cultural memory operates as a dynamic system through which traditional values are reinterpreted under changing social, institutional, and technological conditions, contributing to hybrid rather than culturally homogeneous forms of national identity.

This perspective also helps explain why the visual representation of identity in the analyzed works was heterogeneous. The study did not identify a single aesthetic formula that could be labeled as a unified “Kazakh identity.” Instead, identity appeared through varying combinations of traditional references, post-Soviet experience, global contemporary art practices, personal artistic language, and technological experimentation. This is important because contemporary Kazakh art has developed within a complex institutional and historical environment rather than in isolation from political and economic change. [Nauruzbayeva \(2011\)](#), in her analysis of post-Soviet visual artists in Kazakhstan, demonstrated how artistic production and value were reconfigured after the decline of Soviet systems of state patronage. [Kim & Comunian \(2022\)](#) likewise showed that contemporary cultural development in Kazakhstan is shaped simultaneously by historical path dependence, national cultural policy, urban infrastructures, and the practices of cultural actors themselves. These studies support interpreting contemporary Kazakh visual art as a field in which cultural, institutional, and individual forces intersect.

The study’s findings concerning postmodern strategies further clarify this process. Eclecticism, fragmentation, quotation, symbolic layering, bricolage, and combinations of traditional and contemporary visual vocabularies were repeatedly observed across the corpus. These strategies suggest that postmodernism in the Kazakh context is more usefully understood as a set of visual and conceptual operations than as a narrowly defined chronological period. A traditional symbol can therefore remain culturally recognizable while its original context is destabilized through unexpected

materials, ironic juxtaposition, abstraction, repetition, or association with contemporary imagery. Such artistic procedures allow cultural memory to be retained and questioned at the same time.

Previous research on Kazakhstan supports this interpretation of contemporary art as a site in which inherited cultural structures are actively negotiated. [Kudaibergenova \(2018\)](#) described “Punk Shamanism” as an artistic mode connected with the search for cultural memory and codes while simultaneously challenging established narratives of nation and authenticity. Similarly, [Yessekeyeva & Venbrux \(2021\)](#), in their analysis of Said Atabekov and the Kyzyl Tractor collective, showed how contemporary Kazakh artists combine shamanic, religious, historical, global, and post-Soviet references in ways that interrogate rather than simply reproduce cultural tradition. Thus, the hybridity observed in the present corpus can be regarded as part of a broader tendency in Kazakh contemporary art to use inherited symbols as flexible resources for new forms of cultural representation.

Another important result was the gradual diversification of artistic media across the three generational groupings. Painting and sculpture remained significant, but the corpus increasingly included installation, performance, unconventional materials, multimedia, animation, video, digitally manipulated images, and technologically mediated environments. The finding should not be understood as evidence that traditional media have been replaced by digital art. Rather, contemporary practice appears increasingly hybrid, with artists moving between material and digital forms and combining older cultural codes with new modes of production and display. The findings therefore suggest continuity through transformation rather than technological rupture.

The digital dimension is especially significant because digital mediation alters not only the technical production of an artwork but also the conditions under which images are circulated, encountered, modified, and experienced. Within the present corpus, digital tools facilitated manipulation of texture, movement, layering, temporality, sound, and spatial presentation. In this respect, digitalization expanded the range of possible visual languages through which cultural symbols and contemporary experiences could be represented. Nevertheless, the findings do not support a

technological-determinist conclusion that digital media automatically produce cultural transformation. Technology provided new affordances, but their meanings continued to depend on artistic choices, symbolic content, cultural references, and exhibition context.

The distinction between medium and meaning is particularly important for interpreting the psychocultural dimension of the study. The results indicate that digital and interactive works can structurally reposition the viewer, but the present research did not directly measure psychological responses. Thus, the most defensible conclusion concerns changes in *viewer positioning*: conventional two-dimensional works primarily positioned the audience as observers and interpreters, whereas installations, performances, multimedia environments, and interactive formats could invite navigation, physical proximity, sensory engagement, or participation. This transformation from observation toward embodied and participatory engagement provides one of the strongest points of connection between visual culture and a body-mind-culture perspective.

Research on immersive and digital art provides empirical support for the importance of this distinction. (Luo et al., 2025), comparing traditional and immersive exhibition experiences in 356 visitors, found that multisensory immersive exhibitions were associated with greater visitor attention, experience, and satisfaction. (Chen & Li, 2026), using data from 387 visitors to extended-reality art exhibitions, similarly found that presence, immersion, interactivity, and socio-psychological factors were related to viewing satisfaction. These studies demonstrate that technological affordances can affect psychological experience, but they also show why the current study must remain cautious: such conclusions require direct audience data that were not collected here.

This distinction strengthens rather than weakens the psychocultural interpretation of the present findings. A work can be analyzed as offering possibilities for embodied, interpretive, or immersive engagement without claiming that every viewer experiences those possibilities identically. Digital and spatial artworks create conditions of possibility for perception: they organize the viewer's relation to scale, movement, proximity, sound, visual sequence, and interaction.

Actual psychological consequences depend on the viewer as well as the technology and social setting. Chen & Li (2026) found, for example, that socio-psychological influences remained important even within technologically immersive XR experiences, indicating that immersion cannot be reduced to hardware characteristics.

Evidence from psychological studies of art reception also illustrates the broader relevance of this distinction. Hadavi et al. (2022) reported increased positive affect and reduced negative affect after participation in a virtual audiovisual art exhibition. More recently, immersive-art research has similarly examined attention, mood, restoration, and visitor satisfaction. These studies do not demonstrate that the Kazakh artworks examined here produced the same effects; however, they establish that the shift from static visual observation toward multisensory and technologically mediated art has psychologically meaningful dimensions worthy of direct investigation.

This point is particularly relevant to the scope of a body-mind-culture approach. Artistic meaning does not exist solely within an image, nor does it reside exclusively within an individual viewer. The analyzed works show that meaning emerges through relationships among culturally recognizable signs, perceptual organization, media, spatial context, historical memory, and the interpretive activity requested of the viewer. The body becomes relevant when the exhibition environment requires movement, orientation, proximity, sensory coordination, or interaction; the mind becomes relevant through attention, interpretation, symbolic association, memory, and identity-related meaning-making; and culture provides the shared symbolic repertoires through which these forms become intelligible. Such an approach is compatible with recent work that treats cultural memory and symbolic representation as psychologically meaningful processes situated within specific historical and cultural contexts (Gorshenina & Tolz, 2016).

The focused analysis of *The Theft of Europe* exhibition further supported the finding that contemporary Kazakh art should not be understood through isolated media categories. The co-presence of artists from different generations within a common exhibition context highlighted coexistence rather than simple succession. Traditional symbolism, conceptual objects, mixed media,

digital tools, and experimental presentation operated within the same cultural field. This pattern reinforces the argument that contemporary transformation is not adequately represented by a linear model in which realism is followed by postmodernism and then replaced by digital art. Instead, multiple visual regimes remain simultaneously available and can be strategically recombined.

The generational findings similarly indicated tendencies rather than rigid boundaries. Artists shaped more strongly by academic or late-Soviet traditions showed greater continuity with representational modes, while subsequent groups displayed increased use of conceptual, hybrid, performative, and digital strategies. Yet these patterns overlapped: younger artists could reuse traditional imagery, while established artists could adopt experimental techniques. This result is compatible with [Kudaibergenova \(2017, 2018\)](#) account of post-Soviet Central Asian art as a field of continual renegotiation between inherited cultural narratives and newly available artistic positions. It also aligns with [Kim & Comunian \(2022\)](#) argument that Kazakhstan's cultural development is shaped by complex interactions among historical trajectories, institutional settings, cultural policy, and local creative actors.

The findings regarding cultural symbolism also caution against reducing all references to traditional motifs to expressions of national consensus. Symbols can stabilize identity, but contemporary artists can equally use them critically, ironically, ambiguously, or subversively. [Shoshanova \(2021\)](#) study of contemporary artistic practices in Kazakhstan, for instance, demonstrated that artists can challenge dominant narratives of national belonging and identity rather than merely reinforcing them. The psychological-cultural significance of visual symbols therefore lies partly in their openness to reinterpretation. They may function as points around which memory, belonging, difference, continuity, and social conflict are negotiated.

This dynamic understanding of cultural symbols is also consistent with the finding that cultural memory persisted even when the artistic medium changed. Digital manipulation does not necessarily weaken the relationship with cultural heritage; it can generate new forms of access to and recontextualization of inherited imagery. The relevant change is therefore not simply from "traditional" to "modern" or from "physical" to

"digital," but from relatively fixed modes of representation toward increasingly flexible systems in which symbols can be recombined, animated, spatialized, circulated, and transformed. Such flexibility provides artists with additional means of negotiating the relationship between local cultural memory and global visual culture.

The NFT and cryptoart material requires more caution. The present analysis supports describing blockchain-based formats as part of the expanding technological environment of digital art, but it does not provide evidence that NFTs have transformed the economics of Kazakhstan's art market. Internationally, NFTs have unquestionably become a substantial area of digital exchange. [Nadini et al. \(2021\)](#), analyzing 6.1 million NFT transactions involving 4.7 million assets, documented rapid expansion and distinctive network and pricing structures in the NFT market. However, evidence from a global market cannot be used as a substitute for Kazakhstan-specific sales, collector, platform, or institutional data. Accordingly, the contribution of the current study is limited to identifying NFT and cryptoart as emerging contexts relevant to digital artistic production, not demonstrating their economic penetration within Kazakhstan.

A related issue concerns the preservation of digital cultural production. The findings identified technological obsolescence and institutional preservation as potential challenges for new-media art. This concern is supported by research showing that the instability of software, platforms, and hardware creates distinct conservation problems for digital artworks. [Rivero Moreno \(2024\)](#), for example, noted that even blockchain-linked cryptoart may depend on off-chain storage and therefore remain vulnerable to technological instability. Recent conservation research likewise demonstrates that software-dependent artworks can become inaccessible when operating systems, applications, or formats are discontinued. These problems are especially important if digital art is to function as a carrier of cultural memory over time: preserving the image alone may be insufficient when interaction, code, movement, sound, or technological behavior forms part of the work itself.

Taken together, the findings support a psychocultural model in which contemporary Kazakh visual art mediates between remembered cultural forms and changing modes of perception. Cultural memory supplies

symbols, narratives, and historical reference points; artistic practice reorganizes them through postmodern and digital strategies; technological mediation alters the material and perceptual conditions through which the work is encountered; and the viewer is increasingly positioned as an interpreter or participant in the production of meaning. This sequence does not imply that art mechanically alters psychological identity. Rather, it suggests that visual art provides culturally situated environments in which identity, memory, perception, and symbolic interpretation can be negotiated.

This interpretation also helps clarify the meaning of “psychocultural transformation” in the present study. The term does not refer to a measured change in the psychological traits of Kazakh artists or audiences. Instead, it describes a transformation in the cultural forms through which psychological meaning becomes available: how memory is visually represented, how identity is symbolized, how viewers are positioned relative to artworks, and how perception is reorganized by spatial, interactive, and digital media. This more restricted definition aligns the term with the actual evidence and avoids attributing collective psychological characteristics to an entire national population.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relied on a purposively selected corpus of more than 40 works rather than a statistically representative sample of all contemporary Kazakh visual art. The findings should therefore be understood as interpretive patterns within the selected corpus rather than estimates of the prevalence of particular styles or practices across Kazakhstan.

Second, although the generational structure was useful for tracing change, artistic generations are internally diverse and cannot be treated as homogeneous categories. Future research could develop a more precise chronology based on artists’ training, career trajectories, media use, institutional affiliations, and exhibition histories.

Third, the study relied principally on visual, semiotic, contextual, and comparative interpretation. Artists were not systematically interviewed about their intentions, and viewers were not interviewed or experimentally assessed. Consequently, conclusions regarding cultural symbolism and viewer positioning remain interpretive.

Future qualitative research should include interviews with artists, curators, and audiences to examine whether the meanings identified through visual analysis correspond to their lived interpretations.

Fourth, the psychocultural dimension was inferred from artistic structures rather than directly measured psychological responses. Future studies could investigate viewer attention, emotional response, cultural identification, perceived authenticity, presence, immersion, and memory using mixed methods. Experimental comparisons between traditional, digital, and immersive Kazakh art could be particularly valuable given existing evidence that virtual and immersive exhibitions can influence attention, affect, and visitor satisfaction (Hadavi et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2025).

Fifth, the discussion of NFT and cryptoart was limited by the absence of Kazakhstan-specific market data. Future studies should examine local platforms, sales histories, digital collectors, blockchain activity, artists’ experiences, institutional adoption, and the legal and preservation challenges associated with digital ownership before conclusions about the economic impact of NFTs in Kazakhstan are drawn.

Finally, the study concentrated on selected contemporary artists and documented exhibition contexts. Digital artistic activity outside formal institutions—including social media art, online communities, independent digital creators, game-based art, AI-assisted production, and other emerging practices—may produce different patterns of identity representation and audience participation. These areas deserve systematic investigation.

The present study demonstrates that the development of contemporary Kazakh visual art from postmodernism toward digital expression is best understood as a process of cultural and psychocultural reorganization rather than a simple technological transition. Across the analyzed works, cultural memory and identity remained persistent themes, but their visual forms changed. Traditional symbols, historical references, mythological images, and culturally recognizable motifs were preserved selectively while also being fragmented, hybridized, recontextualized, and incorporated into conceptual, performative, multimedia, and digital practices.

The findings further show that postmodern and digital transformations are analytically distinct but

increasingly interconnected. Postmodernism introduced strategies such as fragmentation, eclecticism, quotation, symbolic layering, and hybridity, whereas digital media expanded the material and perceptual possibilities of these strategies through animation, multimedia, image manipulation, interactive environments, and technologically mediated space. Contemporary Kazakh visual art therefore reflects coexistence and recombination rather than replacement of one artistic paradigm by another.

A particularly important contribution of the study concerns the changing position of the viewer. The development of installation, performance, multimedia, and interactive art creates possibilities for a transition from predominantly observational viewing toward more interpretive, spatial, embodied, and participatory forms of engagement. Because actual audience responses were not directly measured, these results concern the perceptual and participatory positions afforded by the artworks rather than demonstrated psychological effects. Nevertheless, this transformation identifies an important direction for future psychological and audience-reception research.

From a body-mind-culture perspective, contemporary Kazakh visual art can be understood as a meeting point between embodied experience, symbolic cognition, and cultural memory. The body enters the artistic encounter through movement, spatial orientation, sensory engagement, and interaction; the mind contributes through attention, interpretation, memory, association, and identity-related meaning-making; and culture provides the symbols, narratives, and historical frameworks through which visual experience becomes socially intelligible. In this sense, the significance of digitalization extends beyond technological novelty: it changes the conditions through which cultural meaning can be produced and encountered.

The study therefore defines psychocultural transformation not as a measurable alteration of collective psychology, but as a changing relationship among cultural memory, identity representation, symbolic cognition, technological mediation, and viewer positioning. This definition more accurately reflects the available evidence and provides a defensible interdisciplinary framework for studying visual art within cultural psychology and the health humanities.

Overall, contemporary Kazakh visual art emerges as a dynamic field in which inherited cultural forms and new media practices continually reshape one another. Digital expression does not erase cultural memory; rather, it introduces additional ways of reconstructing, circulating, questioning, and experiencing it. Future research that combines artwork analysis with artist interviews, audience studies, and psychological measures can further clarify how these transformations are experienced by contemporary viewers and how visual art participates in the ongoing negotiation of identity and cultural memory in Kazakhstan.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Transparency of Data

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

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