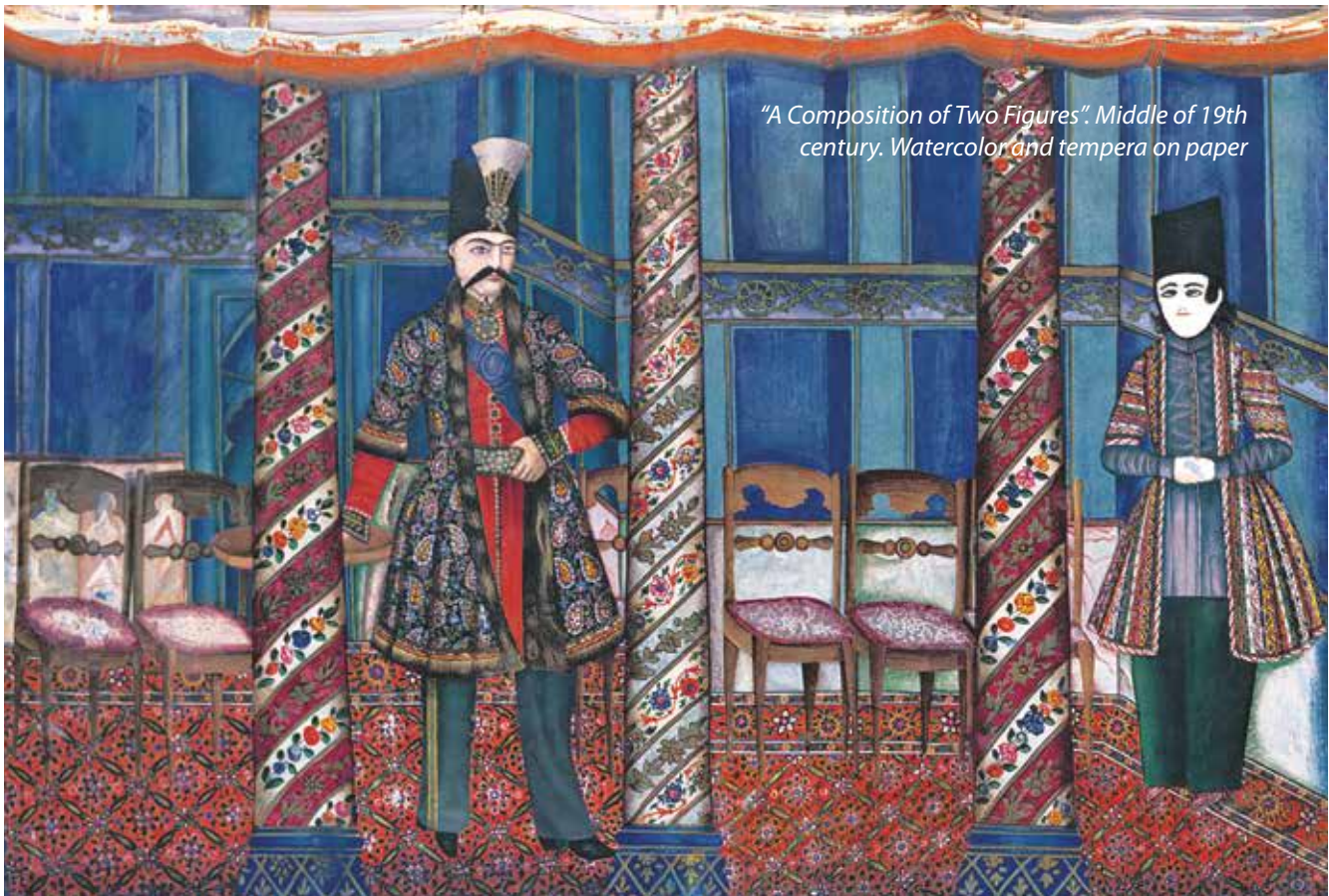


MIRZA GADIM IRAVANI and his creative legacy

Beginning in the 19th century, new trends and styles emerged in Azerbaijani fine art, with a strengthening of realistic tendencies. Without

ditions played a significant role in the formation and development of the Azerbaijani school of art. The events and processes of the first half of the 19th



"A Composition of Two Figures". Middle of 19th century. Watercolor and tempera on paper

completely abandoning the traditions of miniature art, artists actively employed perspective in composition, including in portraits. **The combination and complementarity of miniature elements with realistic tra-**

century led to the fusion of realistic trends, which had gained strength in Russia and Europe, with local traditions of fine art. Whereas the decorativeness inherent in the traditions of miniature and Qajar court painting still

predominated in the work of Azerbaijani artists at the beginning of the century, signs of a new style began to emerge in the second half of the century.

A striking example of this trend of renewal is the work of Mirza Gadim Iravani (1825-1879), which is represented in the graphic collection of the Azerbaijan National Museum of Art. **Without completely departing from the traditions of medieval miniature art, the artist strove for realistic similarity and maximum rendition of the psychological image of his subjects.** His works display the outward resemblance and free flowing expression characteristic of European portraiture. Striving for innovation, the artist always emphasizes his commitment to ornamental images.

Mirza Gadim was born in Iravan and was the family's only child. His father, Mammad Huseyn, was a renowned master of artistic woodworking. Seeing his son's passion for art, he began teaching him ornamental art. Gadim graduated from the Tiflis Progymnasium,



"A Nightingale and Rosebush". Middle of 19th century. Watercolor on paper

"A Mullah". Middle of 19th century. Watercolor on paper



where he received a good education, particularly mastering Russian, French, and Persian. **During his studies, he was introduced to Russian fine art, an experience that influenced his future.** After progressing from the progymnasium at age 15, Gadim returned to his hometown and then worked in government service for the rest of his life, spending 35 years devoting his leisure time to painting, a passion he retained throughout his life. Suffice it to say that he decorated the walls of his study with sketches. Stencil designs for embroidery, murals, graphics, and oil-on-glass portraits occupied an important place in his work.

Iravani's work can be roughly divided into three stages: early, middle and mature (late). In his early years, the artist created **silk embroideries, wall designs, various drawings, and stencils for artistic gold embroidery.** His stencils for wall designs feature diamonds, squares, circles, and eight-pointed stars. Stylized floral ornaments (islîmi) and symmetrical images of birds

“A Soldier”. Middle of 19th century. Watercolor on paper



indicate the artist’s familiarity with national motifs. The most notable among the stencils from this series are the pencil and ink drawings «Seated Woman,» «Dancer» and «Love Scene».

Iravani’s early works also include his **first oil-on-glass portraits «Woman», «Girl Playing Music», and «Dervish», as well as watercolor and tempera portraits «Turkish Sultan» (Mahmud II) and «Mullah».** These works are executed in a simplified style and aim merely to convey the subject to the viewer. Particularly noteworthy is the graphic work «Turkish Sultan», which depicts the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II on horseback, wearing a military uniform with dark blue epaulettes, a sabre and a traditional fez. This work is remarkable for the detailed development of the character.

Iravani’s manuscript is compositionally original, if not unique, and features a lyric poem in Arabic script presented as an image of **a rose and a nightingale**

traditionally perceived in the East as symbols of love. The poem is written in ink in the Nastalig and Shikeste calligraphic scripts. Thematically related to this work is the watercolor painting «Nightingale and Rose Bush», which delights the eye with its bright and pure colors, precise chiaroscuro, and meticulous detail. One gets the impression that the artist deliberately underdid the thorny stem and petals of the flower.

The second phase of Mirza Gadim’s career is marked primarily by the murals of the Sardar Palace in Iravan.



From 1867 to 1880, state funds were allocated for renovation and restoration work on this palace, which had previously served as the residence of Iravan khans. Mirza Gadim, who had no formal artistic training but was widely known for his talent, was also involved in this project. He was tasked with **restoring the mural portraits and ornamental compositions in the palace's Mirror Hall**. It is worth noting that in 1843, German traveler August von Haxthausen visited Iravan. In his description of the Mirror Hall of the Sardar Palace, he noted portraits of the Iranian Shah Fatali, his son Abbas Mirza, the last sardar (military leader) Huseyn-Gulu Khan, his brother Hasan, as well as the popular epic heroes Rostam, Sohrab and Isfandiyar. Large portraits in the Qajar style were placed in niches on the upper tier of the Mirror Hall. By reworking some of the paintings in the palace, the artist gave them new life and, true to his style, revealed the psychological traits of the char-



"The Turkish Sultan" (Mahmud II). Middle of 19th century. Watercolor and tempera on paper



acters. Photographs taken by Russian photographer D. Yermakov in the 1880s clearly show eight portraits on the walls of the Mirror Hall.

Unfortunately, the Sardar Palace, one of the pearls of Eastern architecture, has not survived to this day. The deliberate destruction by **Armenian nationalists played no less a role in this than earthquakes and other adverse natural factors**.

In 1914, the palace was severely damaged, after which the portraits Mirza Gadim had worked on were transferred to the Tiflis Military History Museum and have since been housed in the Georgian State Art Museum. The graphic collection of the National Museum of Art

«Portrait of Qajar Princess Mah Talat». 1870s. Watercolor and tempera on paper



of Azerbaijan includes Mirza Gadim's preparatory portrait works, such as «Abbas Mirza», «Fatali Shah» and «Warrior», in which the imagery and compositional structure are stylistically connected with the portrait works from the Sardar Palace.

The portrait of «Fatali Shah Seated on a Carpet» was created for the Sardar Palace in both painted and graphic versions in the 1850s. When compared, these portraits, both in the Qajar style, share similar and distinctive features. In the graphic version, the shah is depicted seated on a green couch leaning on a pillow. The subject's distinctive long black beard, red robe, royal crown, saber, and belt richly inlaid with precious stones and pearls serve as distinctive elements that complement the image of an oriental monarch. The blue carpet in the interior decorated with floral patterns borders and buta patterns serves as a hallmark of the miniature style, while the conventionality of the subject's facial features indicates that the artist had not yet achieved iconographic authenticity.

A portrait of another prominent military and political figure, Abbas Mirza, painted in black watercolor,

«Portrait of Qajar Prince Majullah Mirza». 1870s. Watercolor and tempera on paper



represents the artist's preparatory work for portraits of Iranian military leaders. Abbas Mirza is depicted in natural size, in a three-quarter turn. He wears a tall conical headdress, which, together with his long black beard, frames his prominent features. The artist's primary goal was to realistically convey the subject's character. The artist also skillfully utilized chiaroscuro in depicting the folds of Abbas Mirza's arkhaluk (caftan).

Mirza Gadim's oil-on-canvas portraits completed for the Sardar Palace represent **the early examples of Azerbaijani easel painting. These paintings brought the artist widespread renown, demonstrating his growing professionalism and interest in portraying royal figures.** For example, in the 1860s, Mirza Gadim Iravani created a watercolor portrait of Grand Duke Alexander Alexandrovich and Princess Maria Feodorovna, the future imperial couple, from a magazine reproduction.

In the mature period of Mirza Gadim Irevani's life he created a portrait gallery that most vividly reveals the artist's aspirations for a new style of depiction. Over the last 15 years of his life, the artist created such sig-

“Portrait of Fatali Shah”. Middle of 19th century.
Watercolor and tempera on paper



nificant examples of the portrait genre executed in watercolor and tempera as «Seated Woman», «Portrait of the Qajar Princess Mah Talat Khanum» and «Portrait of the Qajar Prince Majullah Mirza». Perhaps the best work of **Iravani's mature period is the portrait «Seated Woman», which was created in the 1870s.** The artist depicted a young and beautiful woman seated on a cushion, her legs crossed. She is slightly turned to the right, her gaze passive. Her face, with large brown eyes, fused eyebrows and a small nose and mouth, is depicted quite realistically and convincingly. The woman's hair flowing over her face and shoulders is covered with a

patterned shawl. The rose pinned to her hair and the scarf in her hand symbolically indicate the sitter's love experiences, while the chain around her neck is depicted schematically. The woman wears a yellow shirt, over which she wears a kuladja (soul warmer) decorated with images of the «buta» pattern and floral ornaments, which are intended to convey the beauty of folk clothing. The background is a light-colored wall decorated with a patterned border, and the floor is adorned with a rug with geometric and floral designs, through which the artist sought to emphasize the perspective of the image and enhance its authenticity. By depicting the texture of the pillow and the folds of the skirt, as well as the sun's reflections on the fabric, the artist strove to achieve a harmonious blend of realism and traditional miniature style.

In another graphic portrait, Mirza Gadim depicted a representative of high society – the Iranian princess Mah Talat. The character's name appears in the description on the lower window frame, in the background of the composition.

This painting demonstrates a higher level of perspective and a balance of miniature elements with realism.

It is worth noting that Mirza Gadim created two portraits of Princess Mah Talat in the 1870s, and they have survived to this day. In one of them, housed in the Georgian State Museum of Art, the character's facial features are not entirely clear. In the other portrait, which is on display in the

National Museum of Art of Azerbaijan, the facial features are more expressive, the complexion is brighter, and the overall image is more detailed. The artist meticulously conveyed the dark chestnut curls that fall over the woman's face and shoulders. The head is covered with a shawl, which is decorated with flowers and a tiram made of precious stones, and a «buta» pattern; a chain adorned with pearls is attached to the earrings. Sparkling rings on the hands indicate the artist's special attention to every detail. The top shirt is a koynak, an arkhaluk, a red kuladja, which is also decorated with buta images and gold embroidery, and the wide green

"A Seated Woman". 1870s. Watercolor and tempera on paper



“A Dervish”. 1840s. Glass, watercolor



brocade skirt indicate the character's nobility. In the background, an open window is visible, decorated at the top with colored glass in the shape of a shebeke and adorned with green curtains. The floor is covered with a traditional carpet with a floral pattern – a detail found in all of Mirza Gadim Iravani's paintings.

In a graphic portrait of another member of the Iranian Qajar dynasty, Prince Majullah Mirza, the artist also inscribed his subject's name – “the worthy Prince Majullah Mirza” – along with his signature on the border. The prince himself is depicted in kind, dressed in a red arkhuluk, which is adorned with buta motifs and gold embroidery, as well as blue trousers. The artist placed particular emphasis on the young prince's facial features and the thoughtful expression in his eyes. In depicting the subject's blue shirt and the curtain in the

background, the artist sought to convey the effect of chiaroscuro.

In his «Composition of Two Figures», the artist placed two human figures in the center of the interior, demonstrating his skill in conveying depth and perspective. In this work, the artist, breaking from his usual style, placed the human figures in the background, while the foreground features columns decorated with blue and red spiral borders.

Mirza Gadim died in his native Iravan in 1875 at the age of 50, at the height of his creative output. He was buried in his hometown, but **his grave, unfortunately, has not survived.** Years later, at the beginning of the 20th century, the artist's sons, Alakbar bey and Alasgar bey Gadimbayovs, were forced to leave their native Iravan and move to Baku due to the outbreak of ethnic strife between Azerbaijanis and Armenians. However, many of **Mirza Gadim's works and library were left in Iravan. The artist's surviving works were retrieved in 1921** by his daughter-in-law, Fatma Gadimbayova, and taken to Baku. Between 1933 and 1939, members of the artist's family donated 26 of his works to the Azerbaijan Museum of Art. In addition, three works by Mirza Gadim Irvani, «Portrait of Mah Talat», and two compositions of «Rose and Nightingale», are kept in the State Museum of Georgia, and another miniature work is in the St. Petersburg Hermitage.

Mirza Gadim Iravani showed a keen interest in human appearance. Achieving physical similarity in portraiture became a turning point in modern Azerbaijani fine art. **As the founder of Azerbaijani easel painting, Mirza Gadim introduced elements of realism to domestic art.** The traditions he established were continued by the leader of the realistic school in Azerbaijani fine art, Azim Azimzada, and his followers. ❀

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