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SCULPTURES BY ALEXANDER BARANMAA

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Abstract

This article examines the artwork of Tuvan sculptor Alexander Baranmaa. The artist has a sound academic background, beginning his education at a fine arts studio in school, and continuing it at the art department of the Kyzyl Academy of Arts. Alexander Baranmaa received his higher education in the Faculty of Sculpture at the Krasnoyarsk Art Institute. Then he refined his skills as a sculptor in the art studios of the Russian Academy of Arts in Krasnoyarsk under the supervision of People's Artist of the Russian Federation Yuri Ishkhanov. Alexander Baranmaa is an active participant in major regional, national and international exhibitions. His artwork has been included in the collections of large state museums in Russia, as well as in private collections at home and abroad. This article highlights the main features of Alexander Baranmaa's creative method and examines his works "The Birth of Venus", "The Volunteer", "Geniuses. (Alexander Pushkin and Nadia Rusheva)", "Macrocosm", and others.

Keywords: Alexander Baranmaa, sculpture, Tuvan contemporary art, agalmatolite, stone-carving art, images of Tuvan mythology and epic literature in sculpture.

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FORM, a major interregional exhibition that opened in Novokuznetsk on 20 August, 2019, presented works by artists from Kaliningrad to Magadan, who are actively pursuing forms of artistic expression. The sculpture section at the exhibition was relatively large and representative, the attention of viewers and art researchers being drawn in particular to the works of Alexander Baranmaa. Unfortunately, every attempt to find an in-depth analysis of his artwork leads only to reference books or articles in newspapers and popular magazines. But even this information convinces us that the artist has not been receiving the attention he deserves from art historians. This article aims to fill this gap.

Contemporary Tuvan art of the 20th and early 21st centuries is still awaiting thorough analysis and presentation. The foundation was laid the beginning of the 1990s, when Svetlana Chervonnaya's book *Artists of the Republic of Tuva* [3] was published. The author takes an in-depth look not only at the artists' works, but also attempts to relate 20th century art to the traditions and heritage of this territory. The book covers the time when Alexander Baranmaa was just beginning his journey in professional art and, needless to say, he was not included in the artists studied. Nevertheless, this book helps to understand the artistic environment that Alexander Baranmaa later became immersed in.

A two-volume tome called *Fine Art of Siberia of the 17th-Early 21st Century. Dictionary-Index of Artists, Art Historians, Experts on Museum Studies, Researchers, Art Instructors, Collectors, Patrons, and Public and State Officials*, written and compiled by Vladimir Chirkov is one of the most valuable reference books with information about the sculptor [4]. More detailed information about Alexander Baranmaa, along with the reproduction of several of his works, can be found in a very useful publication called *100 Siberian Artists*, which was published thanks to the concerted efforts of Vladimir Chirkov and Olga Galygina [2, pp. 380-381]. It becomes clear from these and other sources that Alexander Baranmaa leads an active exhibition life. Here is a brief list of the most prominent exhibitions he has participated in: Siberia-8 (Krasnoyarsk, 1997), Russia (Moscow, 1999), ...Hallowed Be Thy Name...! (Moscow, 2000), Young Russian Artists (Moscow, 2002), Siberia-9 (Irkutsk, 2003), Russia (Moscow, 2004), Siberia-10 (Novosibirsk, 2008), the Asia-Pacific traditional art festival in Yilan county (Taiwan, 2010), the 4th Siberian Crafts International Exhibition of Masters of National Art Industries and Crafts (Novosibirsk, 2011); he won a national prize (silver medal) in Russian contemporary fine and decorative art for 2011 awarded by the magazine *Russian Gallery – 21st Century* (Moscow, 2012), Siberia-11 (Omsk, 2013), Russia-12 at the Center of Decorative Art (Moscow, 2014), and he won a prize for his sculpture "Eternal Watch" in the Granit nomination for monumental sculpture at the 1st International Sculpture Symposium dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the unification of Russia and Tuva (Kyzyl, 2014). Of these most recent exhibitions, we will mention again the FORM exhibition in Novokuznetsk.

The artist has held a number of personal exhibits, thus demonstrating his creative and exhibition activity and the gradual increase in the number of his successful works. The significance of the artist's works is also shown by the collections they are kept in: the All-Russian Museum of Decorative-Applied and National Art (Moscow), the State Museum of the History of Religion (St. Petersburg), the Aldan Maadyr National Museum of the Republic of Tuva (Kyzyl), the Sakhalin Regional State Art Museum (South Sakhalinsk), the Krasnodar Cultural and Historical Museum Complex (Krasnoyarsk) and the Kemerovo Regional Museum of Fine Art. The State Art Museum of the Altai Territory is forming a collection of his works, representing various techniques and subjects and including the sculptures "Tabunshik" (2006, bronze), "Bust of a Commander" (2008, iron, cast-iron molding), "Ezir-Kara" (2008, bronze, granite) and "The Camel (In the Wind)" (2018, agalmatolite). In short, he is a developed master, whose art requires a thorough review. This article is essentially one of the first steps in that direction.

Before taking a closer look at his sculptures and attempting to reveal the figurative facets and aspects of the master's art, let us briefly examine some of the details of Alexander Baranmaa's biography, since the artist obviously underwent a great deal of his development during his childhood and professional education.

Tuva is known for its ancient and large dynasties, which have successfully developed various crafts and elevated them to a high level. Alexander Baranmaa does not belong to one of these dynasties, but it can be said that his family was endowed with a creative spirit. His father, although he worked as an ordinary accountant, was nevertheless known among his fellow villagers as a master in painting traditional chests – *aptara*, which were not only useful (for keeping valuables), but were also a centerpiece in the modest homes of nomads. Therefore, they were usually decorated with bright ornamental patterns. The future artist's father, who went to school in Novosibirsk, where he evidently became acquainted with high art, introduced a new facet into the tradition and began putting customized replicas from well-known paintings of Russian artists Shishkin and Perov on the chests. The sculptor's grandfather on his father's side was a well-known merchant. All of this prepared Alexander well for the challenging and inspiring vocation of artist. Of course, these creative traditions in the family were not the only thing that motivated the artist; there was also a more significant, even key, factor – the mythopoeics of the Tuvan people, which slowly but surely made an impression on Alexander's soul.

Alexander Baranmaa was born on 1 February, 1966 in the village of Samagaltai in the Tes-Khemsy Region of the Tuvan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Of course, like all children, he loved to draw and carve figures out of wood. He did not become particularly interested in art until the sixth grade, and even when a fine art studio opened at the music school he did not rush to join, but thought about it for quite a while before finally deciding to take the plunge. And he immediately felt in his element.

His talent, along with his attentiveness to life and his vivid imagination, which the artist inherited from birth, were later to dovetail with his professional skills. Alexander Baranmaa took the classical route of an artist. First, he attended the art studio at his school, where he was lucky to have Brigad Sanchaevich Dupchor (1932-2007) as his first mentor. This man deserves special attention, because he showed his worth as a poet, prosaic writer, original composer and soft stone carver (agalmatolite), and he was also widely known as a master of musical instruments. His artwork was awarded the Repin State Prize of Russia in 1992, while at home he received the title of National Artist of Tuva. He was an inspired and enthusiastic artist, not simply a national master, but a person deeply immersed in the elements of national heritage and a connoisseur of many, including cryptic, pages of Tuvan culture. He not only shared the secrets of his mastery with his students, but also unfailingly led them to the roots of their native culture.

The path Alexander Baranmaa chose required an elevated level of professional mastery, which brought him to the Kyzyl Academy of Art, from which he graduated with honors in 1989. For his graduate assignment, he did the painting “Moorei” (“The Tournament”). The same year, he began studying at the Krasnoyarsk State Art Institute in the Sculpture Faculty, which he felt a greater affinity for. Here again Alexander Baranmaa was lucky, since sculpture was taught at the institute at this time by Yuri Pavlovich Ishkhanov (1929-2009). Yuri Ishkhanov was a highly professional artist; he graduated in 1959 from the Repin Leningrad Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, did a three-year internship in the art studios of the Russian Academy of Arts under the supervision of well-known Soviet sculptor Nikolai Tomsky, and held the title of National Artist of the R.S.F.S.R. and academician. Alexander's graduate assignment was the composition “My Tuva”. Destiny brought the hero of our essay together with Ishkhanov once more when he spent three years

doing an internship in the art studios of the Academy of Arts that functioned under the Regional Branch of the Urals, Siberia and the Far East in Krasnoyarsk. At the same time, he took active part in regional and large interregional exhibitions and held his first personal exhibits. And finally the work of Alexander Baranmaa gained recognition beyond Russia. We will note two of his convincing victories in Berlin in September 2016 in the Sculpture nomination at the Berlin – A Place of Free Expression of Artists from Post-Soviet Countries International Festival of Fine Art and in 2018 in the Sculpture nomination at the 2nd Dennitsa International Festival of Fine Art.

Alexander Baranmaa is an established sculptor, which is also shown by the fact that he works in all forms of this art and uses a diversity of genres and subjects, as well as different techniques. Most of his works are indoor sculptures and figurines. However, the work “Eternal Watch” (illus. 1) and the sacral Buddhist sculpture “Emchi Buran” (2012) show his excellent sense of space and large form, as well as his ability to expressively combine sculpture with open spaces, as well as wed it with the complex interior of the Buddhist temple of Erzín Khuree in Kyzyl, for example. Alexander Baranmaa is interested in monumental sculpture, which is shown by his enthusiasm and achievements in creating ice sculptural compositions. And here he has achieved great mastery, as we can see from his numerous awards and diplomas. In December 2015, his composition “Siberian Wind” won a prize at the Ice Fairy Tale in the Center of Asia Ice Sculpture Festival in Kyzyl.



*Illus. 1. Alexander Baranmaa. Eternal Watch, 2008.
Bronze (casting, 2017). 12 x 12 x 4.5 cm.*



*Illus. 2. Alexander Barnamaa.
Venus's Torso, 2018.
Serpentine. 29 x 14 x 14 cm.*

Let us take a closer look at Alexander Baranmaa's indoor works, since they are the most numerous and denote quite a number of the sculptor's creative achievements. Despite the small size of the works, essentially all of them possess the author's sense

of monumentality. This is not only an aspect of the artist's creative method, but also expresses his underlying desire, whenever possible, to turn certain works into monuments. This is essentially what happened with the work "Eternal Watch" (illus. 1). At first, it appeared as a small statue with generalized energetic forms, but after it was awarded a prize at the 1st International Sculpture Symposium, he successfully transformed it into a monumental work.

When examining the collection of the artist's work, our attention is drawn to the themes that interest him the most. Of course, in the traditions of sculpture, he cannot fail to give tribute to eternal sculptural themes, such as the poetics of the human body. Inspired by antique images, he created "Venus's Torso" (2018, illus. 2). His use of a beautiful material, carefully polished serpentine, which produces an expressive play of light and shadow (intense flickering gleams), and the intricate movement of the body of the antique goddess around an axis allow him to achieve the sense of a living human body.



Illus. 3. Alexander Baranmaa. The Birth of Venus, 2018. Agalmatolite. 22 x 12 x 5 cm.

The artist is inspired by the image of the goddess of beauty and love, which can be seen in another sculpture on the classical theme – "The Birth of Venus" (illus. 3). Many artists have addressed this theme; however, Alexander Baranmaa has been able to find his own inflection. The model chosen for the sculpture is clearly Oriental, which is shown by the shape of the eyes and proportions of the figure. This expresses the author's thoughts that beauty and love are universal and are manifested in every culture. It is also obvious that the image embodies his own ideal of female beauty. And he found an expressive way to depict the arms – they seem to show the goddess in both dance and flight. The arms form the S-shaped line of beauty, enveloping the head and torso, designated by outstanding English artist and art theorist William Hogarth, the author of the book *An Analysis of Beauty*. The gesture is semantically very intensive – it conveys both the flapping of a bird's wings (possibly

a swan's) and the characteristic movement of the arms of dancers performing a Tuvan dance, while, most important, they convey the sense of a living human body full of wakening energy and convinced of its beauty and invincible feminine strength. He also makes an apposite choice of material – stratified agalmatolite that combines light gray and warm light brown striations, which can best be seen in the lower part of the statuette, visually portraying Venus's nakedness as she emerges from the sea water and surf.

There are also documental-historical works among the artist's oeuvre, for example, *The Volunteer* (2015), devoted to the heroic feats of the Tuvans during the Great Patriotic War (illus. 4). The theme dictated the precision of reproduction and the close attention to detail. However, the artist's penchant for metaphor, which is another feature of his creative method, prompted the expressive compositional approach. Three figures – the son headed for the front with his horse, the soldier's father, and his mother – are portrayed as large faces against the background of the fluttering flag of the Tuvan People's Republic. The soldier's face is shown in profile, from this angle he is clearly striving forward with all his might, having already left his customary and everyday life behind; he is the epitome of calm resolve and energy. The father, in national costume, on the contrary, is depicted en face, thus creating an intricate compositional cross-point. He seems to be arresting the movement conveyed so energetically by his son and his horse, whereby transforming this energy of combat and battle into the energy of communication with the audience. The en face angle intensifies the appeal to those who might have seen soldiers off into bloody battle to commit acts of bravery, but even more it is appealing to future generations, imploring them not to forget this sacrifice and remember the heroic feats of young self-sacrificing soldiers. His image is significant and symbolic. It is a specific father seeing his son off to war, it is the image of a story-teller telling the story of soldiers' acts of valour, and it is also the spirit of the Tuvan land itself, which is revealed not only in the face, but also in the costume. The Tuvan hat topped with a boundless knot is the kind of hat worn by fighters in national Tuvan tournaments. This knot is a symbol of wishful thinking known in many nomadic tribes of Central Asia. The mother's face is portrayed at a three-quarter turn. This new angle noticeably enlivens the composition and gives it new emotional nuances. The emphasis is on the mother's eyes, who is not even looking at her son, but seems to be gazing into the distance, striving to perceive, feel with her heart, as they say, what awaits the soldier. Courage, wisdom and love are metaphorically embodied in Alexander Baranmaa's relief.



Illus. 4.
Alexander Baranmaa.
The Volunteer, 2015.
Tinted plastic.
64 x 110 cm.

The next thematic multi-figure, but this time three-dimensional, composition by the sculptor I would like to examine in detail is *Geniuses (Alexander Pushkin and Nadya Rusheva)* (2003, illus. 5). The subject was inspired by an extraordinary phenomenon – in Kyzyl, the amazing talent of a young girl, Nadya Rusheva, flourished in ordinary and simple conditions, under the nurturing of her wonderful creative parents. She became world renowned as a remarkable drawer. After her tragic and premature death, her parents donated a unique collection of drawings to museums in gratitude to the land where the girl's talent budded. *Pushkiniana* occupies a leading place in Nadya Rusheva's creative work. She traced the poet's life in pictures from his earliest days to his tragic death. As she said herself, Pushkin was her most beloved poet and an endless source of creative inspiration. Nadya knew many of his works by heart; she literally felt a kindred oneness with the poet.

Alexander Baranmaa portrays the figures at full height. Pushkin naturally rises over the girl and does not simply hover over her and accompany her on her way, but seems to be protecting her from behind. They are both looking in opposite directions – the girl is looking openly and trustingly at the viewer, while the poet is gazing into the distance. His eyes express poetic inspiration, confidence and creative strength. His left hand lies encouragingly and protectively on the girl's shoulder, while the right hand lies motionless on the poet's breast, conveying both an outburst of inspiration while also responding to some heartfelt pain. The two geniuses, according to the sculptor, are separate from each other in time and space, but united in their creative aspiration.



Illus. 5. Alexander Baranmaa. The Geniuses (Alexander Pushkin and Nadya Rusheva). Modeling 2003, the sculpture was redone in artificial granite in 2017. 44 x 16 x 13 cm.

A large number of Alexander Baranmaa's indoor sculptures depict themes and images gleaned from the abundance of Tuvan folklore and epic literature. The sculpture *Race Horse Ezir-Kara* arouses particular interest with its expressive form and theme. The subject of this sculpture is realistic and dramatic, dating to the 1930s and devoted to an unusual horse, the winner of several horse races, which became a legend in Tuva and was repressed, just like its owner. This was a unique case when the same horse won all the tournaments several years in a row. The horse is the foundation of life and an object of pride for the nomad, while this horse was well-known in every family in Tuva. It was given the title of "Best Falcon and Eagle", and songs were composed about it. Its owner, an ordinary cattle-breeder, stood up for another man during the repressions, was accused of being a counterrevolutionary and executed, while his horse was subjected to the rigors of hard labor.



Illus. 6. Alexander Baranmaa. Ezir-Kara, 2006. Marble. 28 x 46 x 14 cm. Russian Academy of Arts Foundation in Krasnoyarsk.



Illus. 7. Alexander Baranmaa. Ezir-Kara. Front. 2008. Bronze, granite. 20 x 8.5 x 6 cm.



*Illus. 8, Alexander Barnanmaa. Ezir-Kara. Back. 2008. Bronze, granite.
20 x 8.5 x 6 cm.*

Alexander Baranmaa returns to this image several times. In 2006, he depicts it in marble, successfully combining the head and neck of the horse in compositional harmony with a swooping falcon (illus. 6). In the next version in 2008, he retains the theme and composition (illus. 7-8). The horse is again united with a falcon, but the dynamics and material are different. The sculpture is composed of two parts – a black granite base, which is rough hewn, thus giving it the appearance of a rocky cliff, and the horse's head, made from bronze, which emerges from the rock in a sudden outburst. This is essentially another model for a monument; it is easy to imagine a monumental work transferred into the open, with sloping and sharply pointed Tuvan mountains in the background. The material opened up new possibilities for the master. The falcon and horse are now striving in the same direction, the bird's eye and the race horse's eye coincide, and the energy of the falcon's flapping wings intensifies Ezir-Kara's surge forward. This is what the back of the sculpture looks like, while on the front the artist essentially portrays the legend and song about the race horse in bronze. Here we see the irrepressible galloping of a race horse and the traced image, like a petroglyph, of a small colt, as well as flames that envelope the horse's head. This is a generalized image of steppe grasses bending in the wind and the flame of human hatred that destroyed both the horse's master Soyan Sandanmaa and Eriz-Kara himself. This work is also interesting in that it shows how a real historical fact slowly develops into a legend and becomes part of art culture.



*Illus. 9. Alexander Baranmaa. Race
Horse Ezir-Kara. Front.
2019. Bronze, wood. 24 x 37 x 11 cm.*



*Illus. 10. Alexander Baranmaa. Race
Horse Ezir-Kara. Back.
2019. Bronze, wood. 24 x 37 x 11 cm.*

Alexander Baranmaa portrays many images from mythology and epic literature in different materials. Works such as *Steppe Breeze*, *Mongulek*, *The Steppe Warrior*, *The Queen*, *Man Bird*, and others are among the sculptor's creative achievements. Here we will take a closer look at his bronze piece *The Macrocosm* (illus. 11).



*Illus. 11. Alexander Baranmaa.
Macrocosm.
2015. Bronze. 21.5 x 22 x 9 cm.*

It portrays the flight of a shaman through the heavenly realms. His figure is reminiscent of a bird, the stretched out neck carrying a head with a sharply pointed beard (like a beak) and a shaman hat that looks like a plume of feathers on a bird's head. He is carrying a drum and leather baton which, as we know, symbolically convey the image of the world's axis or the World Tree. The arms are folded like a bird's wings. The onslaught of the oncoming wind is conveyed visually and successfully – ribbons flutter on the shaman's shoulders and his legs are borne upwards in a strong gust of wind. The composition is arranged in such a way that we see the earth flying by under the shaman's figure – mountains open up, the clouds above them, and a huge wave that carries the figure through space. A macrocosm contains the entire Universe, and people who realize this and are not inhibited by their smallness in daring flight, penetrating one heavenly realm after another (in shamanic practice, there are no less than seven heavenly realms), are no longer grains of sand, but active elements in the universe, both experiencing it and striving to possess every new expanse and element.

Let us sum up our discourse. We have touched on such topics of Alexander Baranmaa's artwork as the poetics of the human body, the documentary-historical theme, and subjects of Tuvan folklore and epic literature. The sculptor's creative method is characterized by metaphorical elements, a striving for monumentalism, mythologism, and the traditions of Tuvan culture. Furthermore, this presentation of Alexander Baranmaa's artwork makes it possible to see not only the consistent sophistication of his art, but also the dynamics of his worldview. He sees humans as a channel leading to the world's mysteries, who in their microcosm are similar to the Macrocosm, as the wise men of antiquity believed. Immersion in the mythology and epic heritage of Tuva revealed a wealth of images and subjects for the sculptor. And this is not all. The high artistic value of the epic musical canvases prompted expressive compositional approaches; his works have acquired a sculpturesque grace and intense rhythm. We believe that this creative potential and the new horizons of his world vision will spur the artist on to create even more deeply significant and expressive works.

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