Dear Colleagues,

Central Asia is a region of ancient art traditions. This history can be divided into three main periods:

- Ancient and Antique (2nd to 8th century)
- Islamic (8th to 20th centuries)
- Modern (20th century onwards) pre and post Soviet since 1990.

Masters of the Arts who wished to pass on their crafts skills and knowledge to students from one generation to the next, established the tradition of “Usto-Shogird”. This form of one on one apprenticeship between master and student endured for many centuries and was common in the sphere of arts and crafts. The system is still popular in rural areas of Uzbekistan today and exists as a traditionally oral form of teaching of crafts skills. Baysun, the southern region of Uzbekistan, has been identified as a continuous centre for Usto-Shogird for nearly 2 thousand years.

Influential European forms of art such as Theatre, Cinema, Painting, Sculpture, Ballet and Opera, became very popular in the 20th century and developed quickly alongside the more traditional forms of culture in Uzbekistan such as Ceramics, Weaving and Textiles. Both of these branches of the arts follow very different methods of teaching. Usto-Shogird persisted for the traditional forms whereas a European style of classroom based mass education emerged for the newly introduced arts. This mass education system was formed in the region in the early 20th century after the formation of the USSR and the new states of Central Asia and Kazakhstan joining it.

Following the collapse of the Soviet system in 1990 and after gaining independence, the young State of Uzbekistan faced the necessity of reforming its education systems to international norms and standards. The modern system of education in Uzbekistan is based upon the “National Program of Preparation of Human Resources and Education”, established on the initiative of President I. Karimov and accepted as a Law of the State during the Independence period in 1997.
Before we look at Art Education we have to examine the general situation and changes in the field of education in Uzbekistan.

Education specialists who introduced the above new national program studied the experiences of both domestic and foreign environments before implementing the following changes:

1. Starting from 1998, basic schooling in Uzbekistan takes place over 11 years but after completing 8 years the pupil can enter specialist educational establishments. This allows for specialisation to take place if it is appropriate.

2. The 3 year specialist secondary education takes place in 2 types of educational establishment. Academic lyceums and professional colleges that are organised on a base of higher educational establishments.

3. A two level system of achievement recognition was introduced for higher education; Baccalaureate (4 years) followed by Master of Arts (2 years).

These changes were made in order to improve the quality of higher education and to provide qualified specialists to meet modern requirements.

When the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov; was asked what realization of the new National program will give, he answered that first of all: ‘the provided measures will positively effect the social-political climate and radically change the environment in the country’, secondly: ‘the new model of education will speed up the process of individuals identifying their place in society’.

All these transformations naturally included art education too. Today, the sphere of art education in Uzbekistan has 2 directions. Firstly, the teaching of art in schools and secondly teaching in the specialist art educational establishments (secondary schools, colleges and institutes) that prepare professional actors, stage directors, dancers, artists and art teachers.

At this point of my presentation I would like to consider the issues relating to the sphere of painting, sculpture and also applied art in Uzbekistan. The modern system of learning was established in the 20th century even though the traditions of art teaching already had deep roots here. During the Soviet period there were schools of painting and sculpture at educational institutes and colleges that were established in Uzbekistan. However this higher level of education in Uzbekistan was only available in the capital city of Tashkent as well as in Moscow,
Leningrad and other cities of USSR. This meant that culturally rich cities such as Samarkand and Bukhara did not benefit from the new centres. In addition, Communist ideology strongly effected the methods of teaching and often only one – realistic - method or style of art was recognized and followed. These method was determined centrally in Moscow and all centres of Art throughout the USSR had to adhere to the same principles. Use of any other methods was not permitted.

The prohibitions on different styles were removed after Independence and more attention was paid to issues of national uniqueness. The interest in ‘Miniature Painting Of The East’ (a style of Islamic art from the middle ages) was reborn. Together with this, Uzbek artists actively started to use various forms of avant-garde art. Post-modernist, conceptual works and different installations started to appear in exhibitions more and more often. However, the region’s traditional arts remained and the method of academic drawing remains the same. But whilst the unchangeable forms of teaching in traditional kinds of applied arts remain effective, the teaching of fine art needs innovations. The ‘Border’ project organized by the Swiss Bureau for Co-operation in 2003 for educational institutes and colleges at the Academy of Art was very interesting in this respect since it acknowledged this very fact.

The Academy of Art of Uzbekistan was founded in 1997 by the Decree of President Islam Karimov, and it is considered as a Government Ministry in it’s own right. One of the Academy’s priorities was establishing the system of ‘continuous art education’. As a result, educational secondary schools of applied and fine arts were opened in 12 regions of the republic. Three colleges were founded in Tashkent and one in Kokand. The First National Institute of Arts and Design was established on the base of the art faculty of the Institute of Arts in Tashkent. The name of this Institute reflects the desire to develop what has been a weak industry – national design. In this way, the full cycle of art education is complete: the primary one (secondary school from 5th to 8th years), medium one ( from 8 to 11th years and colleges from 1st to 3rd year) and the highest (Baccalaureate 1st till 4th year in Institute and MA from 5th till 6th year)

The Academy has noticeably widened the geographical spread of teaching of art and the quantity of students embraced by studying art. The results of this process for the last 5-6 years have been very encouraging. One of the indications is the fact that students of these educational lyceums from different regions of Uzbekistan started to win major prizes and other big awards in prestige international competitions of picture and painting.
Whilst the structure of education in Uzbekistan has changed significantly, the reforms didn’t consider the specifics means of teaching art. For example, the previous curriculum in art colleges took place over 4 years and now according to law should be 3 years. However, the 4 year education in exceptional cases for a few disciplines (such as painting and sculpture) has remained the same by special dispensation of the government.

Development of the content part of the education system is very important. The State pays special attention to the establishment of the technical base of specialized secondary education institutes that are provided with up to date computers and equipment. In spite of this, teachers often don’t have enough skills to work with the new media and Internet. Uzbekistan is making its first attempts to use information technology in the field of art. Together with electronic textbooks on the history of world art, new multi-media programs for different fields are being created. These are: ‘Eastern Miniatures’, ‘Blue ceramics of Samarkand’, ‘Baysun Folklore’, ‘Shashmakom’, ‘Culture and Art of Uzbekistan’ and others. The emergence of the special UNESCO department in Uzbekistan at the National Institute of Art and Design of Academy of Art became an important factor in the expansion of information technology in art education.

As a whole, the topic of art education raised by the initiative of UNESCO is very important for Uzbekistan. In spite of quite a rich heritage of national art, the significance of art education in the modern education system of Uzbekistan is not fully appreciated. If we look in at the Internet we can see that there are lots of sections dedicated to education of economics, foreign languages, history, but almost nothing or very little about the issues of methods and theory of art education, (i.e. music, fine arts). The situation is especially critical in rural local centres and far away regions where the local authorities do not appreciate the significance of art in bringing up children and forming their view on the world.

The social coefficient (prestige) of art in the system of general education remains quite low. There is also a problem with teaching the Art as a tool for teaching other related subjects. This issue is almost not discussable. This all is the evidence that the republics of Central Asia should be included to the International discussion of the problems of art education.

Dr. Akbar Khakimov, Professor of Art
Director of Research Art Institute