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ART-ACTIVISM IN KAZAKHSTAN: SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF VALUE MEMES

This article examines the value systems revealed in public discussions of four contemporary Kazakh art activists: Saule Suleimenova, Saule Dyusseimbina, Vladislav Sludsky and Galiya Toremuratova. The article employs an analytical approach based on Spiral Dynamics theory and conducts a content analysis of 61,263 words from digital publications, interviews, public statements, and other publicly available materials. The study identifies the primary and secondary vMEMEs presented in these narratives. It is studied how these value structures are connected with the socio-political landscape of Kazakhstan. For all significant units of the body, a coding matrix based on the eight-level model «Spiral Dynamics» was used, which allowed a comparative analysis of different cases. The results show that all four artists operate in complex value systems, with «Orange», «Green» and «Yellow» being the main vMEMEs influencing their communication practices. These levels demonstrate a general orientation towards innovation, civic humanism, systematic reflection and ethical criticism. Secondary MEMEs, especially Blue and Purple, serve as cultural and moral foundations, while Turquoise selectively appears in discussions related to collective healing and universal dignity. Although each artist has a unique value profile, their collective understanding reveals a broader movement towards post materialistic and integrative forms of civil expression in Kazakhstan. By focusing on value discourse rather than public perception, the study highlights the capacity of art activism to shape cultural meanings, harmonize collective identities, and express new ethical perspectives in a rapidly changing society.

Keywords: vMEMEs, art, art-activism, Spiral Dynamics, visual politics, value systems.

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Қазақстандағы арт-активизм: құндылық мемдерін әлеуметтік-саяси талдау

Бұл мақалада қазіргі заманғы төрт қазақстандық арт-активистің Сауле Сүлейменованың, Сауле Дюсембинаның, Владислав Слудский мен Галия Тoremuratovаның қоғамдық дискурсындағы құндылық жүйелері қарастырылады. Мақалада спиральды динамика теориясына негізделген аналитикалық тәсіл қолданылады және цифрлық жарияланымдар, сұхбаттар, қоғамдық мәлімдемелер мен басқа да ашық дереккөздерден жинақталған 61 263 сөз көлеміндегі контентке талдау жүргізіледі. Зерттеу олардың нарративтерінде көрініс тапқан негізгі және қосымша vMEME-лерді анықтайды және осы құндылық құрылымдарының Қазақстанның әлеуметтік-саяси ландшафтымен байланысын зерттейді. Корпустың барлық маңызды бірліктеріне сегіз деңгейлі «спиральды динамика» моделіне негізделген кодтау матрицасы қолданылып, түрлі жағдайларды салыстырмалы талдауға мүмкіндік берді. Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, төрт суретшінің барлығы да күрделі құндылық жүйелерінде әрекет етеді, ал олардың коммуникациялық практикаларына ықпал ететін басты vMEME-лер «қызғылт сары», «жасыл» және «сары». Бұл деңгейлер инновацияға бағытталғандықты, азаматтық гуманизмді, жүйелі рефлексия мен этикалық сындрды көрсетеді. Екіншілік мемдер, әсіресе көк және күлгін деңгейлер, мәдени және моральдық тіректер ретінде көрінеді, ал кейбір жағдайларда бирюзалық деңгей ұжымдық сауығу мен жалпыадамзаттық қадір-қасиет тақырыптарында байқалады. Әр суретшінің құндылық профилі бірегей болғанымен, олардың жинақталған дискурсы Қазақстандағы постматериалистік және интегративті азаматтық өзін-өріктеудің кең ауқымды үрдісін айқындайды. Зерттеу қоғамдық қабылдаудан гөрі құндылық дискурсына назар аудара отырып, арт-активизмнің мәдени мағыналар қалыптастыру, ұжымдық идентичтіктерді келісу және тез өзгеріп жатқан қоғамдағы жаңа этикалық көзқарастарды білдіру қабілетін айқындайды.

Түйін сөздер: өнер, арт-активизм, спиральды динамика, vMEMEs, визуалдық саясат,

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Арт-активизм в Казахстане: социо-политический анализ ценностных мемов

В данной статье рассматриваются системы ценностей, выявленные в публичных дискуссиях четырёх современных казахстанских арт-активистов: Сауле Сулейменовой, Сауле Дюсембиной, Владислава Слудского и Галии Торемуратовой. В статье используется аналитический подход теории спиральной динамики и проводится контент-анализ 61 263 слов из цифровых публикаций, интервью, публичных заявлений и других общедоступных материалов, исследование выявляет основные и второстепенные vMEMEs, представленные в их нарративах. Изучается, как эти ценностные структуры связаны с социально-политическим ландшафтом Казахстана. Для всех значимых единиц корпуса была использована кодировочная матрица, основанная на восьмиуровневой модели «спиральная динамика», что позволило провести сравнительный анализ различных случаев. Результаты показывают, что все четыре художника действуют в сложных ценностных системах, при этом «оранжевый», «зелёный» и «жёлтый» являются основными vMEMEs, влияющими на их коммуникационные практики. Данные уровни демонстрируют общую ориентацию на инновации, гражданский гуманизм, систематическую рефлексию и этическую критику. Вторичные мемы, особенно синий и фиолетовый, выступают в качестве культурных и моральных основ, в то время как бирюзовый выборочно появляется в дискуссиях, связанных с коллективным исцелением и всеобщим достоинством. Хотя каждый художник обладает уникальным ценностным профилем, их совокупное понимание раскрывает более широкое движение к постматериалистическим и интегративным формам гражданского самовыражения в Казахстане. Сосредоточившись на ценностном дискурсе, а не на восприятии публикой, исследование подчёркивает способность арт-активизма формировать культурные смыслы, согласовывать коллективные идентичности и выражать новые этические взгляды в быстро меняющемся обществе.

Ключевые слова: искусство, арт-активизм, спиральная динамика, vMEMEs, визуальная политика, системы ценностей.

Introduction

The growing visibility of art-activism testifies to the significant social and political changes that have occurred in the country over the last decade (Strehovec, 2021; Okwir, 2025). As civic engagement becomes increasingly prevalent in both physical and digital spaces, artistic practices are emerging as a powerful means of expressing public interests, challenging dominant narratives, and forming new collective identities (Serafini, 2022).

In this context, value-oriented MEMEs (vMEMEs), as visual objects and cultural symbols, play a crucial role in shaping public discussions, uniting communities, and facilitating an understanding of complex political ideas (Vishwakarma, 2024; Verma, 2025). Despite the growing presence of vMEMEs in Kazakhstan's protest culture and contemporary art scene, they are still often overlooked in local studies, particularly in terms of their ideological role, artistic techniques, and social impact (Talwar, 2018).

The study of this issue is crucial for understanding how new forms of symbolic speech and transmission operate in modern conditions, their inter-

actions with power dynamics, and their impact on social changes (Castellano, 2020). An analysis of value-oriented MEMEs in Kazakh art-activism is relevant and necessary for the development of interdisciplinary studies on digital culture, political communication, and cultural influence in Central Asia.

Despite the growing interest, vMEMEs are still little studied especially with regard to their fundamental ideas, modes of distribution and socio-cultural effects. Studying these aspects is crucial to understanding how contemporary artistic practices interact with collective value systems and how new forms of symbolic communication are emerging in the local cultural environment. ‘

Thus, a sociopolitical analysis of value-oriented MEMEs in Kazakh art-activism is timely and necessary for the development of interdisciplinary studies of visual culture, digital communication, and value changes in Central Asia.

The aim of the research is to identify value systems in their public narratives, to examine how these systems relate to the social and political environment, and to understand how their art-activism reflects, reinforces or challenges existing cultural and societal meanings.

The subject of research is a body of public discourse by four Kazakh artists Suleimenova Saule, Dyusseimbina Saule, Toremuratova Galiya and curator Sludsky Vladislav. The analysis included digital publications, interviews, statements of artists and other materials provided to the public.

The object of research is to analyze the primary and secondary vMEMEs found in the discourse, as well as the social and political aspects present in their artistic communication.

Research hypotheses:

H1. The public discourse of selected artists will demonstrate the predominance of vMEMEs associated with the Green and Orange levels of Spiral Dynamics, reflecting humanistic, dialogic, and progressive value orientations characteristic of modern art activism.

H2. Secondary vMEMEs with Blue and Purple levels are likely to manifest in symbolic or referential forms, acting as cultural anchors that contextualize the art-activists' messages within the socio-historical environment of Kazakhstan.

H3. The spread of MEMEs about values on public platforms will contribute to strengthening or challenging existing value structures in society, highlighting the potential of art-activist discourse to influence collective meaningfulness and cultural shifts.

Relevance of the study. The study provides a profound understanding of how contemporary Kazakh art-activism reflects, shapes, and transposes public values. By analyzing public discourse using a Spiral Dynamics model, this study offers a new perspective, and the results will help us better understand how vMEMEs work in art communication. They provide insight into how artists shape collective perceptions of social reality. In addition, this study fosters dialogue among the visual arts, sociology, political communication, and the theory of values, enriching the discussion about cultural changes in Kazakhstan. Through its methods and ideas, the study lays the foundation for future research on the evolution of values, symbolic communication and the role of art in contemporary societies.

Conceptual model of the study. The study is based on a model combining the theory of Spiral Dynamics with discursive and content analysis, where it is considered how Kazakh art activists express their value systems through public discourse. The model assumes that the statements, social media posts, and interviews of each artist contain recognizable vMEMEs corresponding to specific stages of the value hierarchy of Spiral Dynamics. By identi-

fying major and minor vMEMEs in the work of the four selected artists, the model links individual art stories with broader social and cultural contexts. It is assumed that the expression and dissemination of these value structures contribute to the formation of meanings and transformation of values in Kazakh society.

Literature review

Spiral Dynamics is a model for the development of value systems that explains how individuals and societies create meaning through stable vMEMEs. Each vMEME reflects a key way of perceiving the world, approaching ethics and solving problems. vMEMEs can exist together in one discussion. In this study, spiral dynamics serve as a coding system for determining value orientations in the public narratives of artistic activists. To make the study easier to read, it uses color labels as a short form for vMEMEs. Here are the short definitions:

1. Beige – survival, basic needs, immediate safety.
2. Purple – kinship, tradition, memory of ancestors, belonging, symbolic continuity.
3. Red – power, assertiveness, confrontation, establishment of borders.
4. Blue – duty, order, moral rules, discipline, institutional legitimacy.
5. Orange – achievements, innovation, rationality, professional growth, efficiency.
6. Green – empathy, equality, civic care, dialogue, inclusion.
7. Yellow – systemic thinking, complexity, integration of multiple viewpoints.
8. Turquoise – holistic ethics, collective healing, universal dignity, unity.

Art-activism, visuality and digital space of civic activity. Art activism has become an important way for people to interact with social and political issues, especially where official ways of political expression are limited. In such situations, art serves not only as a form of beauty but also as an act of citizenship that defies accepted ideas and recovers symbolic power (Abram, 2024; Demos, 2016). Modern Artistry transforms visual culture into a field of political struggle, where creative actions are closely linked to civic and ideological positions (Delgado, 2013). This type of activism destroys the dominant control over social dialogue, using symbolic interventions such as frescoes, graffiti, installations and digital images as tools to create counter narratives and encourage participation (Ricci, 2023; Kebede, 2023).

As part of a broader area of artifice, vMEMEs have become a form of visual expression of views, where digital creations simplify complex political and ethical messages by turning them into easily disseminated, emotionally resonant images. Their strength lies in the ability to quickly convey deep meaning, overcoming traditional communication barriers and spreading through networks (Escobar, 2019; Dalton, 2025). vMEMEs act as micro narratives, ideological tools and emotional mechanisms, helping to shape the community through humor, irony, anger and common understanding (Cedeno-Vega, 2025). They allow individuals and groups to express dissent and alternative identities in ways that are often complex but widely understood (Wieder, 2018).

The political value of vMEMEs is particularly evident in digital spaces, where the limitations of

physical discord no longer apply and for many societies social networks have become key platforms. The platforms support what Roque (2024) describes as «distributed activism», a style of civic participation that is spatially distributed, time-varying and rich in meaning. Thanks to these platforms, the vMEMEs display not only as content, but also as a way of creating alternative public spaces. Social network algorithms also promote growth and adaptation, contributing to the spread of stories and iterative community formation (Sadler, 2010). Art-activism, for example, through the same «MEMEs» performs the function of what Delgado (2013) calls «post political expressions», subtle, indirect gestures that bear an ideological load and simultaneously oppose appearances and repressions. Their humor, ambiguity and modularity make them effective in situations where open protest is risky or controlled. In Kazakhstan, these features are not only stylistic but also tactical, allowing the authors to codify political dissent in forms that remain credible, culturally relevant and convenient for dissemination. Embedding civic values, moral criticism and symbolic resistance into compact visual units, MEMEs become key tools for forming collective consciousness, criticizing power and creating new spaces for political thought.

Value shifts and visual politics: memetic communication in the dynamics of social change. From

the perspective of Spiral Dynamics, value-oriented MEMEs serve as visual and cultural expressions that simultaneously reflect and shape changes in value systems and social complexity. In transition societies such as Kazakhstan, the conflict between traditional, materialistic-modernist and post-materialist value structures is explored through symbolic

practices such as art activism. Visual art is a way of expressing emerging vMEME, especially when it comes to cultural memory, national identity and ideological conflict.

In these situations, artistic production makes it possible to challenge the dominant narratives and present alternative and diverse points of view (Brody, 2023; Rapošová, 2018; Castellano, 2020). Visual forms link collective trauma with aspirations for the future, giving societies an opportunity to overcome historical gaps and design changing ethical frameworks (Clark, 2022; Tolonen, 2017). Participatory art practices reinforce this dynamic by encouraging collaborative creativity in the community and strengthening emerging value systems oriented towards inclusiveness, dialogue and social responsibility. Initiatives at the community level, such as mural painting, joint performances or memetic activism, promote solidarity at the grass-roots level and create local spaces for collective expression and symbolic empowerment (Davies, 2017). In the model of Spiral Dynamics, this is consistent with the growth of the Green level of consciousness, emphasizing empathy, equality and systemic thinking. Art activism not only performs a visual function, but also serves as an instrument of social cohesion and civic education, codifying and strengthening developing moral principles (Annet, 2024; Shields, 2023).

From an aesthetic point of view, value-oriented MEMEs often use such techniques as collation, satire, minimalism and cultural references to engage viewers on both a cognitive and emotional level. Such techniques help creators bypass rational defenses and elicit instinctive emotional responses that find response at various levels of vMEME, especially by binding Orange criticism, for example, a rational critique of corruption with Green inclusiveness and Yellow systemic criticism (Peterson, 2019; Verma, 2025).

In Kazakhstan, the mixed visual language of art activists combines Soviet images, local traditions, folklore, global culture and modern civic aesthetics, creating symbolically rich texts that communicate across intergenerational and ideological divides (Ricci, 2023).

Despite the growing importance of visual activism in Central Asia, scientific analysis is still limited, especially with regard to its ideological and political role. Much of the literature is still focused on the Western or Latin American context, leaving post-Soviet digital cultures understudied, which creates a critical gap, as Kazakhstan offers

a rich and complex example to study as symbolic communication reflects and promotes the change of value systems in conditions of cultural mixing (He, 2023; Alizadeh et al., 2021). Future research should combine memetic analysis with the theory of value systems, digital semiotics and political psychology to help clarify how art causes changes in the collective consciousness and contributes to the reconstruction of civic identity in the constantly changing ideological landscapes (Castellano, 2020; Tolonen, 2017).

Methods

This study used qualitative and quantitative content analysis to study value systems expressed in the public discourse of three contemporary Kazakh artists and art-curator. The aim was to identify basic and secondary vMEME in their narratives and to examine how these value orientations relate to the broader socio-political context of Kazakhstan. The data set included textual materials created by each art-activist, such as social media posts, public state-

ments, interviews, comments on exhibitions and other digital publications that are publicly available. Inclusion criteria:

- only texts published on open access platforms (social networks, websites, online exhibitions, interviews, public lectures) were included;
- both explicit and implicit attitudes and narratives that could point to basic value orientations were considered;
- each dataset included materials from the artist's first year of active public discussion. Because four art-activists started their public work at different times, we adjusted the time interval for each case. Moreover, the corpus of Sludsky in spring years has only one-off publications, where the share of the corpus is not more than 5%.
- excluded from coding too fragmented, purely visual or with no meaningful semantic content.

The size of the analyzed body varied according to the artist and reflected differences in the beginning and intensity of their public activity. The total number of words for each performer is as follows (see Table 1).

Table 1

Period of analysis and volume of the public discourse of four artists

Artist	Analysis period	Number of words
Suleimenova Saule	2013-2025	22,732
Dyusseimbina Saule	2020-2025	4,635
Toremuratova Galiya	2019-2025	7,827
Sludsky Stanislav	2014-2024	26,069

Note: Compiled by the author.

The activation period for each case was set individually. It began at an early stage, when the art-activist started participating in public discussions. Thus, the analysis reflected the entire communication path of each art-activist and was not limited to fixed time frames.

The content analysis involved several steps. First, all text units were broken down into content parts called «units of analysis». Each unit represented a separate statement, thought or narrative element related to the expression of values. Second, each unit was coded using a predetermined matrix based on a Spiral Dynamics model. The matrix included eight levels of «Beige» and defined them through language, themes, emotions and ideas. A full coding matrix can be found at the link. To ensure the

reliability and consistency of the process, Cohen's Kappa (κ) was calculated for all eight vMEME categories and the resulting reliability coefficient was $\kappa = 0.69$, which corresponds to the average level of consistency. Both primary and secondary vMEMEs were defined for each unit. The process allowed comparisons both within individual cases and between different cases. Coding was done manually and partially automated by an AI-integrated software assistant, which provided both qualitative data and quantitative frequency distributions for visual representations.

Ethical aspects. All the art-activists were informed about the purpose of the study, and they also agreed to have their discourse analyzed for the general public. As the study was based on material

already publicly available, no confidential personal information was collected. However, the study was ethical.

Methodological rationale. The study selected content analysis to reveal hidden value structures in narratives and discussions. The Spiral Dynamics served as a suitable theoretical basis, since it reveals multiple coexisting value orientations relevant in changing cultural and complex social conditions.

Results and discussion

Analysis of the public discourse of Saule Suleimenova, Saule Dyusseimbina, Galiya Toremuratova and Vladislav Sludsky shows that all four function within complex value systems, where each artist also reveals the unique basic structure of vMEME and shows their different approaches to interaction and response to Kazakhstan's socio-political landscape through art-activism.

Dominant and complementary vMEME profiles. Comparing the public discourse of four artists reveals unique but similar patterns of vMEMEs, which reflect ways of working with ethical, cultural and political meanings in contemporary Kazakh art-activism. Saule Suleimenova has the broadest spectrum of value orientations among the four. Her discourse is based on a mixed triad of Orange, Blue and Green with strong Yellow and Turquoise layers above them. Purple, Red and Beige provide cultural, emotional and material support. The Orange expressions are manifested in her experimental use of plastic and in the analytical discussions of large-scale artistic production.

«Ой, я уже сейчас работаю с пластиковыми пакетами. Это на самом деле очень большая проблема для всех окружающих... и утром она мне сказала, что она не могла дышать из-за этого пластика...»

[Oh, I'm already working with plastic bags. It's actually a very big problem for everyone around... and in the morning she told me that she could not breathe because of this plastic...]

«...Потому что сам пластик, вот этот тонкий пластик полиэтилен пакетный, он по определению блестящий, он более насыщенный по цвету. Я пришла тогда домой, в Астане к маме домой, вывалила пакеты, которые у нее были...»

[... Because the plastic itself, this thin plastic is a polyethylene bag, it's by definition shiny, it's

richer in color. I came home then, in Astana to my mother's house, dropped off the bags that she had...]

Blue is manifested in its focus on truth, responsibility and moral duty, especially with regard to state violence, memory politics and witness ethics. Green is evident in its emphasis on solidarity, collective grief and civic care, especially in the stories about *«The Coast of Africa»*. The Yellow one is revealed in her analysis of Kazakhstan as a multilayered social, bureaucratic and ecological education. The color of Turquoise manifests itself in her universal reflections on dignity, equality and collective healing. Together these layers create a holistic, ethically rich and systemically conscious value system where art acts as both a means of grieving and a trigger for civic change. Moreover, in quantitative terms Purple vMEME is one of the dominant, but it is a manifestation of healthy Purple and as an application of traditional elements as part of its art.

Saule Dyusseimbina has a different orientation and it focuses on the triad of Green, Orange and Yellow, supported by Blue, Purple and Red. Green is the most pronounced vMEME where the discourse includes humor, self-irony, empathy and a deep awareness of everyday vulnerability in personal relationships, including with students, colleagues, patients and strangers.

«Люблю первоапрельский конкурс и всё, что с ним связано – с людьми, атмосферой, с весенним настроем и настроением! Получили уколочик любви и радости от общения с друзьями!»

[«I love the First April Contest and everything related to it – people, atmosphere, spring mood and mood! Got the love and joy of being with friends!»]

Orange color is prominent due to its participation in international fairs, residences and professional contests, as well as systematic updating of prices, reproduction and quality control of digital prints. The Yellow color is clearly seen in her reflections on visas, global artistic infrastructure, colonialism and post-colonialism, nuclear heritage, and curatorial structures such as the Sydney Biennale. It consistently links personal stories to larger political structures. The supporting elements of «Blue» vMEME are manifested in its orientation towards justice and institutional integrity. The Purple is traced in references to local myths and cultural symbols, and the Red appears in moments of sharp criticism or ironic resentment. Dyusseimbina combines emotional humanism, professional growth and

systemic criticism, with art activism often taking the form of subtle, witty interventions into the everyday institutional environment.

Among the four art-activists Vladislav Sludsky shows the clearest configuration of «Orange»,

«Blue» and «Yellow». Orange dominates his approach, focusing on the art world as an economic and structural system influenced by markets, contracts, pricing strategies, risk management, and long-term planning.

«...это целый отдельный мир, как учиться навигации в этом сложном мире искусства. Но в целом, если ты умеешь, можно зарабатывать...»

[... it's a whole separate world, how to learn navigation in this complex world of art. But in general, if you know, you can earn...]

«...не надо инвестировать в то, что ты не знаешь... Первые 5–10 лет я бы советовал ходить в музеи и смотреть на правила игры...»

[... do not invest in what you do not know... The first 5-10 years, I would advise going to museums and looking at the rules of the game...]

«...с миллионом можно делать рынки... можно открыть представительство, субсидировать карьеры художников, строить экосистему...»

[... with a million you can make markets... you can open an office, subsidize the careers of artists, build an ecosystem...]

Blue is evident in his attention to rule-based management, cultural policy, expert advice, sequencing of regulation and administrative responsibility that he considers necessary for the functioning of a cultural ecosystem. Yellow manifests itself in its participation in global art markets, center-periphery dynamics, technological changes and decolonial trends, where it places local cultural actors into broader models of global capitalism and cultural flow. Compared to the discourse of three other artists, Sludsky's discourse shows less Green vMEME emotional openness, interconnectedness and vulnerability are present, but they take second place to professional, institutional and strategic issues. Purple, Red and Beige are only present in minimal quantities. His discourse reflects the modern, technocratic and globally connected type of art-activist discourse, where criticism focuses on structural problems and institutional barriers rather than emotional or symbolic traumas.

Galiya Toremuratova shows a Green, Blue and Orange core with an emerging Yellow and strong symbolic Purple vMEME. The Green color plays a key role in her reflections on motherhood, emotional work, self-acceptance, teamwork and «quiet» support that often goes unnoticed in public discussions.

«...бессонные ночи, стрессы и внутренние переживания это то, что часто скрыто за радостью от материнства... в этом процессе важно не забывать о себе...»

[... sleepless nights, stress and inner experiences are something that is often hidden behind the joy of motherhood... in this process it is important not to forget about yourself...]

«...Работа в команде, где каждый участник способен слушать и вносить вклад, создаёт уникальную атмосферу доверия и сотрудничества...»

[... Working in a team, where each participant is able to listen and contribute, creates a unique atmosphere of trust and cooperation...]

The Blue color is manifested in her strong sense of duty, discipline, gratitude, faith and respect for pedagogical ethics, basing her views on moral self-control and responsibility. The Orange color is manifested in her professional role as a designer and educator, her commitment to competence and her orientation towards student development and the future of Kazakh design. The color Yellow is seen in the metaphors that describe life as a series of paths, pockets, layers and genealogies, as well as its reflexive analysis of how family models, gender roles and inherited narratives change over time. Purple is particularly vivid in her work, focusing on the memory of ancestors, ancestry and images related to several generations.

«...это работа не просто живопись. Это диалог сквозь время... Погружаясь в портреты, я будто встречаюсь с истоками себя...»

[... this work is not just a painting. It is a dialogue through time... Immersing myself in portraits, I feel as if I am meeting with the origins of myself...]

While Red and Beige sometimes appear in the moments of setting boundaries, physical exhaustion or emotional stress. Her constellation reflects a caring, culturally grounded and professionally oriented worldview where art-activism reimagines female

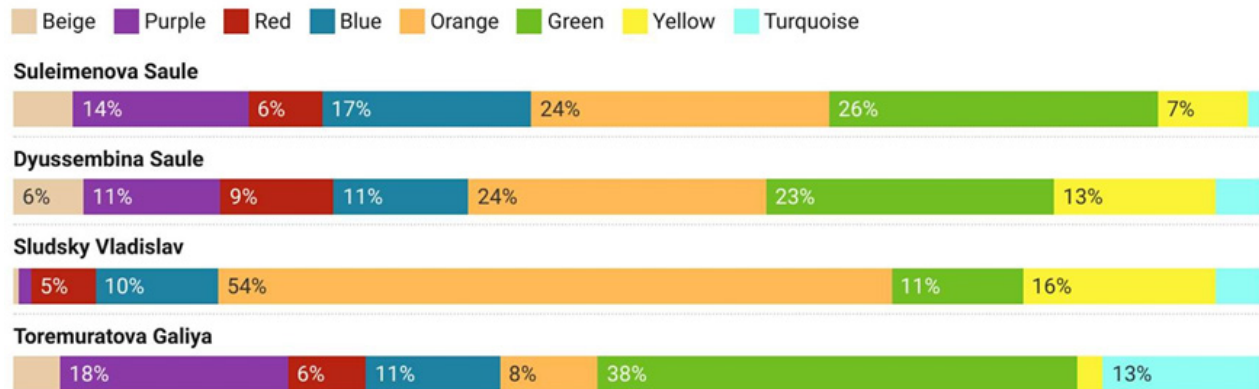
subjectivity and emotional work into a still patriarchal and productivity-oriented society.

Then the quantitative analysis of the bodies of all 4 art-activists shown in figure 1 allows to compare the

main value orientations identified by qualitative analysis. Figure 1 shows that, although all four art-activists have multi-level value profiles, their communicative focuses are grouped around certain clusters.

Figure 1

Distribution of vMEMEs in the public discourse of four Kazakh artists



Note: Compiled by the author.

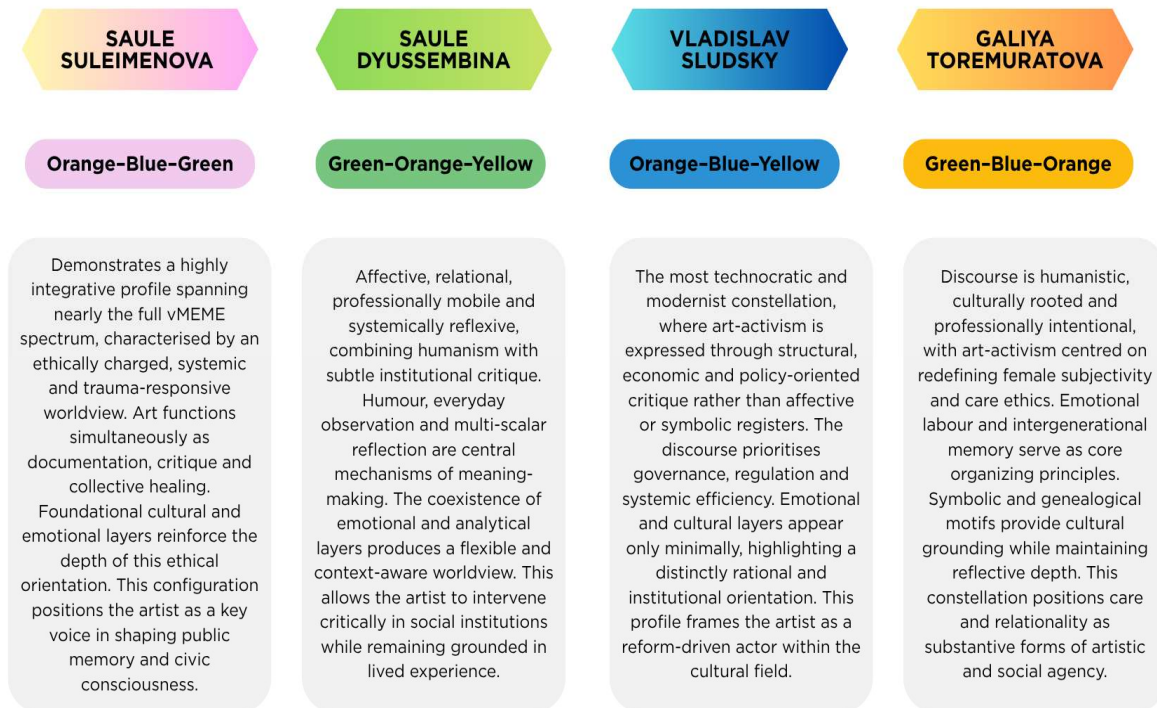
All artists have medium-spectrum vMEMEs, namely Orange, Green and Yellow, they are the main forces shaping their public narratives. This distribution confirms the H1 hypothesis, assuming that modern Kazakh art-activism is mainly influenced by innovation rationality (Orange), empathic civil humanism (Green) and deep systemic understanding (Yellow). Value orientation is related to progressive, dialogic and socially engaged artistic practices in a global context.

It is also important to note that each discourse has its own unique aspects. Saule Suleimenova has the widest vertical range. For example, although quantitatively it has a strong Purple, it is completely healthy secondary character as integration as a cultural and traditional element, but qualitatively the discourse combines strong Green and Yellow components with noticeable Orange and some Turquoise, what makes her discourse most integrative and ethically expansive in the group. Dyusseimbina's distribution is denser yet still balanced across the Green, Orange and Yellow categories, underscoring the relational, humorous and reflexive nature of her public presence. In contrast, the profile of Sludsky consists mainly of Orange (more than 50%), with less Blue and Yellow, and only a little Green, Purple and Beige and visually highlights the results of qualitative analysis. Toremuratova's chart

emphasizes on Green (38%), along with Blue, Yellow, and moderate Orange. It reflects values rooted in care, cultural heritage, ethical responsibility, and genealogical reflection, as noted earlier in the qualitative analysis.

In aggregate, the results show that individual value constellations show that each artist expresses a unique but similar structure of vMEMEs and reflects both the general conditions of the generation as well as different personal, professional and aesthetic paths. The above narrative characteristics are shown in Figure 2, where the main and secondary vMEMEs demonstrated by each artist are presented, as well as includes a brief interpretation of their common value constellations. Figure 2 gives a clear idea of the distribution of vMEMEs values in the data set and allows a direct comparison between the four cases.

First, Figure 2 clearly shows that all four artists have a common mid-level value core, with Orange, Blue and Green, albeit in different proportions, acting as central organizing vMEMEs, which also confirms the H1 hypothesis as already mentioned. However, Figure 2 also shows that the degree of emphasis on Green varies considerably. It is most pronounced in the Toremuratova and Dyusseimbina, balanced but interwoven with higher-order strata in the Suleimenova, and weakest in the Sludsky, where the discourse is more technocratic and institutional.

Figure 2*Dominant and secondary vMEMEs in the public discourse of four artists**Note: Compiled by the author.*

Next, we can see that Blue is contextual and symbolic as predicted by the H2 hypothesis. Blue acts as a stabilizing force in all cases, although it performs different functions. It is ethical and fair for Suleimenova, normative and institutional for Sludsky, and pedagogical and moral for Toremuratova. There is also a significant variation in the presence of higher order vMEMEs, especially Yellow and Turquoise. Yellow is present in the profiles of all four female artists, but is dominant in two and also has a different configuration. The Yellow has a pronounced systemic and integrative character in Dyussembina and Sludsky and as supporting deeply reflexive in Suleimenova, and is presented in symbolic-metaphorical form in Toremuratova. It is noteworthy that the Turquoise content is only present in the discourse of Toremuratova and Suleimenova emphasizing a unique orientation to collective healing, universal dignity and social change, which indicates that, although all four artists are involved in multi-level meaning creativity, they do so with varying degrees of complexity and in different forms of systemic integration. Figure 2 also demonstrates the uniqueness of each artist's value configuration:

1. Suleimenova covers almost the entire vertical hierarchy of the spiral. It creates the most coherent and ethically rich profile.

2. Dyussembina combines relational humanism with systemic criticism and professional mobility.

3. Sludsky presents a modernist, structural, market-oriented model of art-activism.

4. Toremuratova combines care ethics, teaching ethics, cultural rootedness and emerging systemic reflexivity.

The results partially confirm the H3 hypothesis, showing that on public platforms these virtual memes and expressions serve as resources that express, challenge, and reshape value positions in the public sphere of Kazakhstan. In other words, they help shape collective meanings rather than directly change societal attitudes. In all four cases, virtual memes and expressions are sequentially grouped around the orange, green, and yellow value frameworks and often address common national themes such as trauma and memory politics, institutional criticism, Civic care, gender roles and professional or institutional reforms. The reference point for "shaping" is not a measured change in public opinion, but rather the existence of stable, repeti-

tive value frameworks and problem definitions that circulate within society and provide templates for discussing socio-political realities. Given the design of the study, we interpret this as a discursive influence rather than a change in behavior or relationship.

Figure 3 shows the general structure of vMEME development, which serves as a map for understanding the different value orientations represented in the works of four artists.

Each level demonstrates that vMEME does not exist as a separate category. Instead, they create an interconnected continuum of development where earlier levels lay the foundation for more complex value systems. Figure 3 shows that higher order

vMEME (Green, Yellow, Turquoise) include more reflexive, integrative and ethically broad worldviews. Mid-spectrum levels (Blue and Orange) provide the structural, strategic, and normative orientations that are vital to institutional activity and innovation. The lower levels of the spectrum (Beige, Purple, Red) still play the role of cultural, emotional and bodily background that shapes meaning, identity and moral beliefs. As the comparison of artists shows, everyone uses this multi-layered spectrum in their own way. However, they find the closest connection with Green, Orange and Yellow bands, emphasizing the importance of humanistic, innovative and systemic values in modern Kazakh art-activism.

Figure 3
vMEME development outline



Note: Compiled by the author.

In all four cases, Orange, Green and Yellow are highlighted as the main layers, reflecting a common view of innovation, civic humanism, and systemic reflexes. The secondary value MEMEs, Blue and Purple, serve as stabilizing cultural anchors, while the Turquoise one appears from time to time, indicating deeper reflections on dignity, collective healing, and social unity. Despite these common trends, each artist has a unique value profile formed by his experience, artistic methods and involvement in cultural life.

The prevalence of Orange, Green and Yellow themes indicates that Kazakh art activism is developing within the framework of a new post-materialist concept. The concept emphasizes ethical awareness, critical thinking and the importance of social connections. The combination of systemic, normative and inherited layers shows that artistic discussion helps to navigate complex socio-political situations, while opening up new ways of creating common meanings. The results highlight the role of artists as cultural mediators, transforming fragment-

ed civil realities into understandable symbolic stories that appeal to different audiences. The interaction of value layers also illustrates how art-activism in Kazakhstan promotes moral reassessment and rethinking of collective identities under conditions of social change.

The results build on previous studies of visual activism (Serafini, 2018; Castellano, 2020; Vishwakarma & Dave, 2024), demonstrating that vMEMEs can effectively reveal basic value systems in artistic communication. Like global studies of art activism in transitional societies (Delgado, 2013; Brody, 2023), the artists discussed here use symbolic, emotional and systemic approaches to challenge common narratives and shape new civic visions. In contrast to many existing works on the Western context, this study shows that similar methods of transferring values also work in Central Asia, influenced by local cultural memory, institutional factors and regional socio-political constraints.

In the context of art activism, it can be seen as a useful tool for conflict resolution and institution building, not simply as a way to protest. Research shows that value-based artistic practices promote symbolic mediation, collective understanding and ethical debate, which are vital for societies undergoing profound change. Key example is the work of Saule Suleiman «Qantar», which served not as confrontation, but as a common space for collective reflection and moral responsibility. The work of art connected different social and ideological groups, creating a moment of symbolic unity based on dignity, grief and civic empathy rather than political division. From a public policy perspective, this shows that art activism can be an important way to promote inclusive dialogue, cultural healing and governance based on shared values. Expanding collaboration with art-activist communities can strengthen social trust, reinforce national and civil histories, and help change the relationship between state and society through openness, reflection, and symbolic participation instead of forced control. Thus, art activism is not a threat to institutional stability but a resource for flexible governance and value-based social integration.

Explanation of the paradoxical results. Some results contradict the original assumptions. First, the significant presence of Purple in some profiles, despite its limited number, shows that ancestral memory and cultural heritage still retain symbolic significance even in modern value systems. Secondly, the relatively small presence of Green in Sludsky's work contrasts with global art-activism trends that usually focus on structural change rather than emotional expression. Third, Turquoise vMEMEs ap-

pear selectively rather than ubiquitously, indicating that transpersonal or holistic values exist but are not yet widespread.

Limitations in the study. The significant limitation of this study is due to the nature of the data. The analysis focuses on the public discourse of art-activists, which may not fully reflect their personal or everyday values. Art-activists can strategically use certain vMEME for professional, civic or communicative purposes while adhering to different value orientations in their personal lives. In addition, the emphasis on text and digital sources limits the understanding of non-verbal, performative and material aspects of their artistic practice. The sample size is limited to four well-known individuals, despite the analytical saturation, it does not reflect the entire spectrum of Kazakh art activism. Moreover, this study focuses exclusively on the level of public discourse of artists and does not analyze the empirical perception of the audience or make claims about the actual social influence. Instead, we work with the idea of discursive power. We see it as a set of symbols that different social groups can interpret, use or re-think. Any conclusions about possible cultural changes are related to this idea and do not imply a direct causal relationship.

Areas for future research. In future studies, the data set should be expanded to include more Kazakh artists and use different methods such as visual analysis, ethnography and audience perception research. Long-term studies could explore how the profiles of artists' values change in response to political changes, historical events or digital activism. Comparative studies in the context of Central Asia, Eastern Europe and the global South can help to determine whether the identified value models are region-specific or reflect broader mercantilist cultural trends. Moreover, the integration of psychological assessments or interviews can shed light on the differences between public and private value orientations, removing the aforementioned limitation. Finally, future research could explore how audiences interpret, assimilate or re-think vMEME present in art communication, highlighting the contribution of art activism to broader cultural change and development of collective values.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that value-oriented MEMEs (vMEMEs) in Kazakh art-activism operate as layered discursive formations that shape, reflect, and occasionally challenge ethical, cultural, and political value systems. Both major and minor

vMEMEs were identified, revealing how these interacting layers influence contemporary interpretations of art, social engagement, and public discourse in Kazakhstan. These findings highlight the dynamic role of artistic narratives in negotiating and transforming societal values in the country's evolving sociopolitical landscape.

The results of this study indicate that medium-spectrum vMEMEs, particularly Green, Orange and Yellow, have a significant influence on the public discourse of Kazakh art activists. These vMEMEs reflect commitments to civic humanism, creative innovation, and systemic reflexivity, collectively shaping the emerging landscape of Kazakh art-activism. At the same time, Blue and Purple vMEMEs serve as contextual and symbolic anchors, linking artistic discourse with moral norms, cultural heritage, and shared identity, which demonstrates how traditional and modern value systems coexist in the work of these artists. While vMEMEs do not necessarily produce measurable changes in attitudes or behaviors, they operate as discursive resources that articulate, contest, and symbolically reorganize collective value positions. Their influence is primarily manifested at the level of meaning-making, providing interpretive frameworks through which sociopolitical issues are framed, debated, and re-signified. Together, these findings highlight the dynamic role of artistic narratives in shaping, reflecting, and negotiating ethical, cultural, and political values within Kazakhstan's contemporary public sphere.

Across all four analyzed cases, vMEMEs consistently cluster around Orange (achievement, institutional critique, rational reform), Green (civic care, equality, inclusivity), and Yellow (systemic reflexivity, integrative thinking) value frames. The recurrence and stability of these configurations indicate that Kazakh art-activism is not randomly expressive but structurally aligned with post-traditional and transitional value systems. Importantly, these frames are not isolated expressions; they repeatedly converge around nationally salient themes such as historical trauma, memory politics, institutional accountability, gender norms, and professional reform.

From a Spiral Dynamics perspective, the dominance of Orange-Green-Yellow configurations suggest an ongoing value transition within Kazakhstan's urban civic discourse. vMEMEs serve as semiotic mediators in this transition, translating abstract value tensions into accessible visual-symbolic forms. Their role is therefore not causal in a deterministic sense but facilitative and structuring: they contribute to the stabilization and circulation of emergent value complexes in the public communicative space.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates that combining Spiral Dynamics coding with content analysis allows for systematic identification of latent value patterns in digital-visual activism. This contributes to interdisciplinary research at the intersection of visual culture, political communication, and value theory. The research advances the understanding of how symbolic artifacts function as carriers of macro-value transformations in semi-authoritarian or transitional sociopolitical contexts.

At the same time, the study's scope remains limited to discursive analysis. It does not empirically measure audience reception, attitude change, or behavioral outcomes. Therefore, conclusions regarding societal transformation must remain interpretative rather than causal. Future research should integrate longitudinal discourse analysis, audience studies, and network diffusion metrics to assess the scale, depth, and durability of value shifts.

In sum, vMEMEs in Kazakh art-activism should be understood as structured value-signaling mechanisms embedded in public communication processes. They do not directly change society; rather, they shape the symbolic conditions under which societal change becomes thinkable and communicatively negotiable. This positions vMEMEs as analytically significant actors within the broader ecosystem of cultural and political transformation in Central Asia.

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