# THE CONTEMPORARY VIEW ON THE DOCUMENTING THE PRESENT: DIGITALISATION AND THE STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN UZBEKISTAN

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***Annotation.*** *This article considers existing documentation practices in Uzbekistan and their limitations, arguing for more sustained initiatives and a shared digital infrastructure that can support the long-term study of contemporary art.*

**Introduction**

In Uzbekistan, information about contemporary art is distributed across institutional websites, social media, online publications, exhibition catalogues, personal archives, and independent art platforms. These sources document an active cultural scene, but the information they contain is rarely connected or preserved systematically. Exhibition announcements and project updates often remain on social media, while websites may become inactive and documentation may be lost when initiatives conclude.

This creates a challenge for understanding how the art scene develops over time. Without accessible records of exhibitions, artistic practices, public programmes, and independent initiatives, it becomes difficult to reconstruct past activities, trace relationships between practitioners, or identify changes in the field. Documenting contemporary art is therefore not a matter of preserving individual projects but rather creating the conditions for future research.

**Methods**

Documentation of contemporary art in Uzbekistan already takes several forms. Institutional publications, printed catalogues, exhibition records, online archives, art blogs, and artists’ personal collections preserve different aspects of artistic activity. These materials provide valuable starting points for future research, although their scope, accessibility, and continuity vary.

One example is *San’at*, the journal of the Academy of Arts of Uzbekistan, published since 2004. Its coverage of artistic and cultural activity offers a source for tracing developments over time. It has become an important tool for documenting and subsequently archiving artistic events online. Established following the Cabinet of Ministers’ Resolution “On the Organization of the Activities of the Academy of Arts of Uzbekistan” (1997), the journal publishes materials on historical monuments, traditional crafts, the history of architecture, painting, design, music, theatre, and cinema, as well as reviews of international cultural relations. The publication is issued in Russian, Uzbek, and English, while its website provides access to articles in both Russian and English(1). Other resources include Jamshid Rashidov’s online catalogue of artists of Uzbekistan, Umar Kurbanov’s art blog, Astral Nomads, and Oleg Karpov’s Turkestan Photo Archive. Each preserves particular forms of information, from reproductions of artworks and critical commentary to photographic records and documentation of contemporary art across Central Asia. Rashidov’s project presents photographs and scanned reproductions of works by forty-five artists, covering the period from the 1900s to the 2020s. The catalogue primarily reflects the academic school of painting and includes such masters as Ural Tansykbaev, Chingiz

Akhmarov, Javlon Umarbekov, Akmal Nur, and Bobur Ismailov. Alongside these resources, social media platforms, particularly Instagram and Telegram, have become important tools for documenting and communicating ongoing artistic activity. Facebook also served as a space for art-related discussion and criticism, especially before the pandemic. These platforms allow practitioners to share information quickly and reach audiences without relying on institutional channels.

However, these tools serve different purposes and do not necessarily ensure long-term preservation. Social media posts are organised around platform-specific feeds rather than research needs. Exhibition announcements may remain accessible without links to subsequent documentation, while images and texts are often separated from information about artists, venues, dates, and related projects. Personal archives and independent websites can preserve more substantial records but depend on individual resources and continued maintenance.

More sustainable documentation could build on these existing practices rather than replace them. Possible approaches include maintaining a regularly updated digital database, establishing shared standards for describing projects, preserving copies of online materials, and linking records across artists, exhibitions, institutions, and independent initiatives. Such a system would require clear responsibilities for maintenance, source verification, and long-term access.

**Results and Discussion**

When documentation depends primarily on temporary online content, the immediate visibility of an event does not guarantee its future accessibility. An exhibition may be announced and discussed extensively but leave little retrievable information about the works presented, participating artists, curatorial approach, or public programme. Once the original posts become difficult to find, the event may effectively disappear from the accessible record.

Existing archives also demonstrate how documentation choices shape the picture of an art scene. Jamshid Rashidov’s online catalogue, for example, contains photographs and scanned reproductions of works by 45 artists from the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Its selection primarily reflects the academic school of painting, with only three women artists represented. Although the catalogue preserves valuable material, its scope illustrates how individual collections can provide an incomplete picture of artistic production.

Other resources document different aspects of the field. Astral Nomads covers contemporary art in Uzbekistan alongside practices in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan; Turkestan Photo Archive preserves photographic material; and Umar Kurbanov’s blog records art-related activity and commentary. Together, these resources demonstrate that documentation already exists, but remains dispersed across collections with different priorities, formats, and degrees of accessibility.

This fragmentation makes it difficult to compare activities across periods, identify underrepresented practices, or trace the emergence and disappearance of independent initiatives. It can also privilege projects that receive institutional support or generate substantial online visibility, while overlooking smaller-scale, community-based, and less extensively documented activities.

Sustained documentation would make it possible to study contemporary art not only through individual exhibitions but also through the relationships and processes that shape the field. Records collected over time could help researchers investigate changes in artistic practices, the development of cultural organisations, the emergence of new forms of collaboration, and the shifting geography of artistic activity. This requires documenting more than completed

exhibitions. Public programmes, workshops, artist-led initiatives, research projects, and informal platforms also contribute to the development of artistic communities. Recording these activities alongside exhibitions would provide a broader basis for understanding how ideas circulate, how practitioners collaborate, and how cultural infrastructure changes.

A shared digital resource could connect existing archives and publications while allowing artists, curators, researchers, and independent initiatives to contribute information. Basic records could include project titles, dates, locations, participants, descriptions, images, related publications, and links to original sources. Clear attribution and the identification of missing or uncertain information would help preserve the distinction between documented facts and incomplete records. Such an archive would not, by itself, produce a comprehensive or neutral history of contemporary art. Its purpose would be to make existing evidence easier to find, connect, and examine, while leaving room for corrections, new contributions, and critical interpretation.

Long-term preservation also requires more than placing materials online. The UNESCO Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage highlights the need to safeguard digital materials for future generations. (2) Similarly, the International Council of Museums’ principles of museum documentation highlight the importance of recording information systematically to support research and access. In practice, this points to the importance of maintaining copies of records, documenting their sources, using consistent metadata, and ensuring that the infrastructure remains accessible and supported over time. (3)

**Conclusion**

Contemporary art in Uzbekistan is already documented through institutional publications, catalogues, independent archives, personal collections, and digital platforms. The central challenge is that these records remain fragmented, uneven, and vulnerable to loss. Online visibility provides an important means of communicating artistic activity, but it cannot substitute for sustained documentation. Further research and collaborative initiatives are needed to assess existing resources, identify gaps, and develop practical approaches to long-term preservation. A shared digital infrastructure, supported by regular contributions, consistent documentation standards, and clear maintenance responsibilities, could help connect existing materials and preserve evidence of ongoing artistic activity.

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