



## Research Article

# The world of portraits in Kamil Aliyev's creativity

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### Abstract

Kamil Aliyev graduated from the Azerbaijan State Art College and participated in the Great Patriotic War. Kamil Aliyev began his career in 1937 as a copyist at the “Azerkhalcha” (“Azercarpet”) experimental laboratory. Here he worked together with Latif Karimov. Kamil Aliyev is primarily known as the author of portrait carpets. During his creative career, K. Aliyev created a gallery of dozens of carpets - portraits of famous political and public figures of Azerbaijan and other countries, representatives of culture and art. The introduction of the realistic portrait genre into the art of Azerbaijani carpet weaving is considered Aliyev's main merit. K. Aliyev was awarded the honorary titles of Honored Artist (1968), and then People's Artist of the Azerbaijan SSR (1980). There is a house-museum of Kamil Aliyev in Baku, on the wall of which there is a bas-relief of the artist.

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## Introduction

Kamil Aliyev was born on October 22, 1921, in the city of Iravan, the center of the Irava Khanate, in the ancient Oghuz homeland of Western Azerbaijan. In 1932, when L. Aliyev was only 11 years old, the family moved to Baku and settled in Chambarakand. Two years later, in 1934, Kamil's father, Museyib Aliyev, passed away.

Once, little Kamil asked his grandmother: “What does the word Iravan mean?” Grandmother Gulsum told that ancient story in the light of the knots of the carpet she was weaving: “The great Azerbaijani commander and poet Shah Ismail Khatai was also the ruler of these places, which were called Chukhursad at that time. One day he ordered his vizier Ravangulu Khan Ustajli to build a fortress in Chukhursad. This fortress, which Ravangulu Khan had Azerbaijani craftsmen build for seven years, was called the Ravan Fortress among the people. Thus, our ancestors laid the foundation of the city of Ravan - Iravan with that fortress, and from time to time built and raised it...” [Interesting facts about the life of the carpet artist Kamil Aliyev will not leave anyone indifferent. Video].

This incident, which his grandmother told about and which was forever etched in the memory of little Kamil, is also confirmed in the works of the famous Turkish traveler Evliya Çelebi, academician V.V. Bartold and several other influential historians.

His grandmother Gulsum wove ancient carpets with spices, and his mother Khanim made mysterious and magical patterns on white cloth - this is how she earned money and raised five children. Kamil's passion for the art of carpet weaving was instilled in him by his mother Khanim. Since then, Kamil had fallen under the spell of the magical patterns of those ancient carpets, and his greatest dream was to become an artist.

Kamil Aliyev later recalled: “My mother learned this art from my grandmother. She wove flowered socks, decorated the edges of scarves with strange patterns, and dyed the threads in different colors with the roots of various plants. My

passion for carpet weaving was passed on to me from my mother” [*Interesting facts about the life of the carpet artist Kamil Aliyev will not leave anyone indifferent. Video*].

### Findings

After the death of his father, his mother, Khanim, was left alone with five children. When Kamil was in elementary school at that time, he would draw and copy boards and drawings in his free time. Soon, the whole school knew that Kamil had a talent for drawing. Teachers recommended that Aliyev enter an art school after completing his seven-year education. In addition to drawing, Kamil Aliyev would also make various metal products (scissors, rings, etc.) in his free time. Later, Kamil's older sister, Manzer, and mother, Khanim, took him to the Azerbaijan State Art College (now the Art College of the Academy of Arts). Thus, in 1935, at the age of 14, Kamil Aliyev was already a student of this school. K. Aliyev, who started his education with a decoration course, also became the breadwinner of the family. Kamil began to earn money by drawing slogans for various schools. Kamil studied at this school for three years. People who were closely acquainted with the artist's works advised him to get a job at “Azerkhalcha”(“Azercarpet”). While studying at the “Azerkhalcha” (“Azercarpet”) association, he worked as a copyist.

He works shoulder to shoulder with such artists as Gazanfar Khaligov, Amir Hajiyev, Latif Karimov, Kazim Kazimzade, Ismayil Akhundov. Kamil Aliyev graduated from the Azerbaijan State Art College and participated in the Great Patriotic War. K. Aliyev began his career in 1937 as a copyist in the experimental laboratory of “Azerkhalcha”(“Azercarpet”). Here he worked together with Latif Karimov. Kamil Aliyev's first creative success was the “Fuzuli” (Photo 1) carpet, woven in 1958 in connection with the 400th anniversary of Fuzuli's death.

The boundless wonder and eternal love for the divine spirit and superhuman sublimity of Fuzuli's poetry are reflected in this carpet. The “Fuzuli” carpet, wrapped in the golden dawns of “Shabi-Hijran” - the nights of separation, asked about the great dreams and hopes of the people.

Later, the artist wove portraits of “Nasimi” (Photo 2) and “Nizami Ganjavi” (Photo 3).

Kamil Aliyev's name is mentioned with respect and love in countries near and far around the world. Influential newspapers and magazines, art collections of England, India, the United States of America, Japan, France, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Bulgaria, Turkey, Iran, Nepal, as well as many other countries call him a “master craftsman”, “carpet connoisseur”, “magician of colors and loops”, “living classic of the art of carpet weaving”.

In 1961, he was the director of the Creative-Production Combine of the Art Fund of the Azerbaijan SSR, and in 1964-1971, he was the director of the Baku Jewelry Factory. In that year, Kamil Aliyev was the head of the production department of the local Ministry of Industry. Here he worked together with Latif Karimov. From 1993 until the end of his life, Kamil Aliyev was the general director of the “Azerkhalcha”(“Azercarpet”) scientific-creative production association. The artist was awarded the titles of Honored Artist of the Azerbaijan SSR (1968), People's Artist of the Azerbaijan SSR (1980). In 1998, the Higher Attestation Commission awarded Kamil Aliyev the scientific title of Professor in the field of decorative and applied arts. In 1999, by the decree of the President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev, Kamil Aliyev was awarded the “Independence” Order.

Kamil Aliyev is primarily known as the author of portrait carpets. He created a whole series of carpets dedicated to many famous people. The introduction of the realistic portrait genre into the art of Azerbaijani carpet weaving is considered Aliyev's main achievement.

Kamil Aliyev is known as the author of portrait carpets. The artist created a whole series of portraits dedicated to many famous people. Kamil Aliyev's main success is considered to be the use of the realistic portrait genre in the art of Azerbaijani carpet weaving.

The artist said: “What makes a people a people, makes its name known to the world, preserves it in the historical memory of mankind is its scientific, cultural, literary, artistic, state and political figures. I have always been proud of the outstanding people of Azerbaijan, I have tried to introduce them to the world, to prevent the glorious, bright past of our people from being forgotten. My portrait carpets, which form an entire gallery, were created from this desire. They

served a sacred purpose of introducing and loving Azerbaijan to the world” [*Interesting facts about the life of the carpet artist Kamil Aliyev will not leave anyone indifferent. Video*].

. The artist also had great contributions to the weaving of carpets, to the skilled carpet weavers Khatira Musayeva, Aqiba Musayeva and others who were deeply familiar with the secrets of carpets.

A series of various portraits can be seen in Kamil Aliyev's work. In the early period of his work, K. Aliyev created portraits of Azerbaijani poets and thinkers. Later, he created portraits of foreign literary figures (Shota Rustaveli (Photo 4), Alexander Pushkin (Photo 5), Rabindranath Tagore (Photo 6), etc. During the artist's mature creative period, he mainly devoted himself to political leaders (Heydar Aliyev (Photo 7), Atatürk (Photo 8)).

The artist's portrait carpet dedicated to “Rabindranath Tagore” was highly appreciated by various art critics. The great writer and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore wrote: “Two forces reign in the chaos of nature: the first is sound, the other is line. Each of them has its own language. The true ruler in nature is line. Because sometimes sound falls silent, falls into silence. But lines are silent; even when the universe is silent, lines speak” [*Interesting facts about the life of the carpet artist Kamil Aliyev will not leave anyone indifferent. Video*].

Master artist Kamil Aliyev said: Based on this philosophical position in the “Rabindranath Tagore” carpet, he succeeded in creating a harmony of speaking lines. In this carpet, you can also find numerous images of ancient Indian mythology, the gentle smiles of the legendary Nile nymph - the lily flower, and the mysterious whisper of Indian stilts in the middle field... but the main artistic goal, the aesthetic-philosophical meaning, is spoken by the lines that dominate the world” [*Interesting facts about the life of the carpet artist Kamil Aliyev will not leave anyone indifferent. Video*].

Finally, in the last period of Kamil Aliyev's creativity, he created carpets consisting mainly of portraits of “holy” people. Among them, one can note the image of K. Aliyev's “Mother” (Photo 9) and the portrait carpets of “Peace of Movsum Agi” (Photo 10), with whom he was personally acquainted. In addition to their artistic solution, these carpets are interesting for the artist's special attitude towards them. According to K. Aliyev's wife, these two carpet portraits were of particular importance to him.

In the fall of 1994, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel (Photo 11) was presented with a carpet with a portrait of Kamil Aliyev. Demirel was so impressed by this work of art and the vivid nature of the portrait that he said, “This is Suleyman Demirel, but who am I?” He was presented with one of the carpets from this series depicting Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev. President H. Aliyev highly appreciated the artist's work and called him “an old friend” [*Interesting facts about the life of the carpet artist Kamil Aliyev will not leave anyone indifferent. Video*].

Kamil Aliyev always said that “carpet is a strategic asset like oil.” This belief always made him think about the future of carpet weaving. On his own initiative and with his own funds, he created the Carpet House with the hope that one day a museum would be organized there.

The carpets created by Kamil Aliyev in different years are currently exhibited in exhibition halls in Turkey, Iran, the USA, India, Russia, and Uzbekistan. In 1998, carpets woven with the idea of Kamil Aliyev were awarded the XXIII International Award for “Best Trademark” (Trade Leaders Club, Geneva, Switzerland) and the X Gold Award of America “For Quality” (New York, USA).

The first exhibition of Kamil Aliyev's works was held in Nepal in 1984. The carpets woven under K. Aliyev's supervision were highly appreciated at this exhibition. In 1987, an exhibition of K. Aliyev's works was held in Delhi, the capital of India, in 1990 in three cities of Turkey - Ankara, Izmir and Istanbul, and in 1994 in Tehran, the capital of Iran. In 1999, an exhibition of Kamil Aliyev's works was held in London (Great Britain).

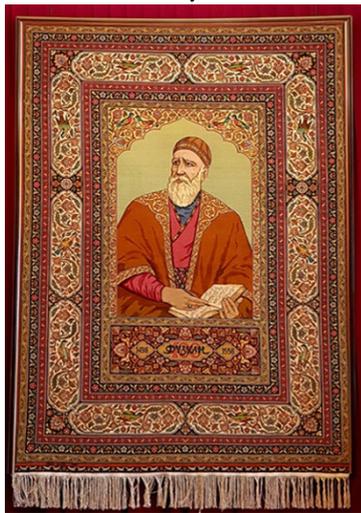
Kamil Aliyev decorated the middle area of portrait carpets with decorative compositions known as “Islimibandlik”, “Tirme”, “Butali”. The artist also used the same compositions in ornamental carpets. Thus, K. Aliyev prefers the “Islimibandlik” composition found in the carpet portraits of N.S. Khrushchev (1960) (Photo 12), Nasimi (1973), Heydar Aliyev (1998, 1999) (Photo 13, Photo 14), Shota Rustaveli (1981), M.F. Akhundov (1978) (Photo 15), Leonid Brezhnev (1981) (Photo 16), Indira Gandhi (1985) (Photo 17), King Fahd (1996) (Photo 18) and Ilham Aliyev (1997) (Photo 19).

The “Indira Gandhi” carpet was built and created on lyrical sounds rather than philosophical lines. The carpet breathes the breath of her magical lyrics, fresh as a flower, pure, naive Vedic-Sanskrit texts. The light of Indira Gandhi’s radiant smile inspired the entire carpet.

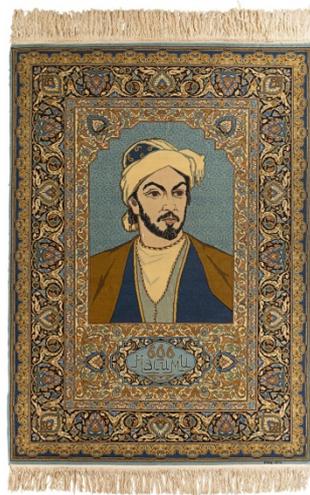
The portrait carpets “M.F.Akhundov” (1978), “Rabindranath Tagore” (1987), “Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh” (1992) (Photo 20), “Ayatollah Khamenei” (1993) (Photo 21), “Suleyman Demirel” (1994), “Prince of Dubai” (1995) (Photo 22), “B.N.Yeltsin (1996) (Photo 23), Bill and Hillary Clinton (1997) (Photo 24), Heydar Aliyev (1998), Zarifa Aliyeva (2003) (Photo 25), Ana (2003), Heydar Aliyev (2004) were woven by artist K.Aliyev based on the classical ornamental composition “Tirme”. The portraits created by K.Aliyev are framed in both rectangular and circular frames.

The “Butali” composition is rarely found in Kamil Aliyev’s portrait carpets. The “Buta” element is found in the composition of the central field of the carpets depicting Atatürk (both versions), Lenin (1981) (Photo 26) and UNESCO Director-General Amadou-Mahtar Mbou (1984) (Photo 27). There is a certain similarity in the use of the “Butali” composition in the carpets with the portraits of Lenin and Mbou.

**Table 1.** Kamil Aliyev’s artworks



**Figure 1.** Fuzili. 1958  
140x220 sm. Azerbaijan National  
Museum of Art



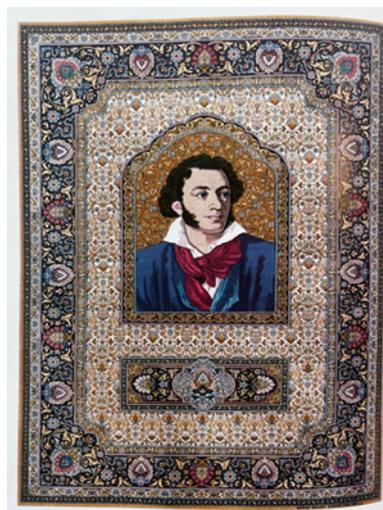
**Figure 2.** İ.Nasimi. 1973  
120x180 sm.



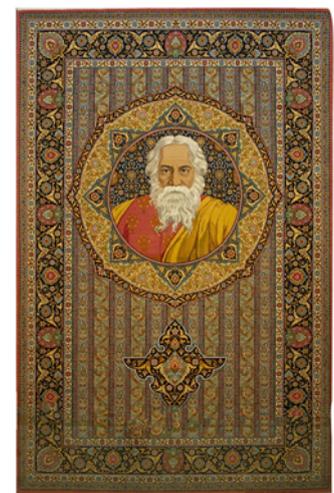
**Figure 3.** Nizami Ganjavi 1978. 119x183  
sm. Latif Karimov Azerbaijani Carpet  
Museum



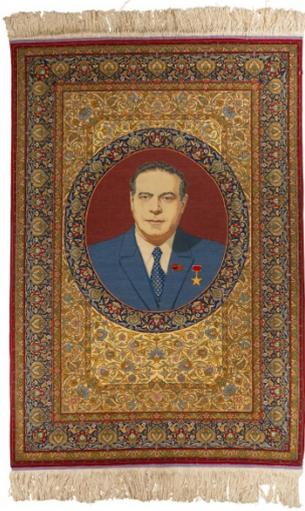
**Figure 4.** Shota Rustaveli. 1981.  
180x128 sm



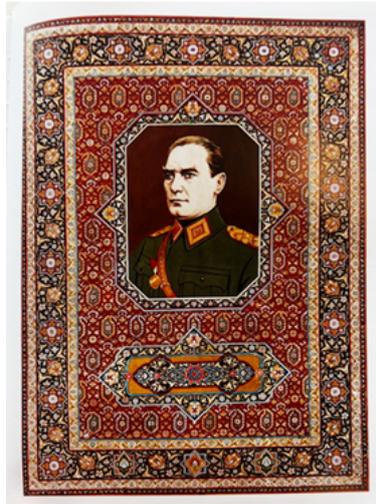
**Figure 5.** Alexandr Pushkin. 1987.  
130x200 sm.



**Figure 6.** Rabindranath Tagore  
1987. 130x200 sm.



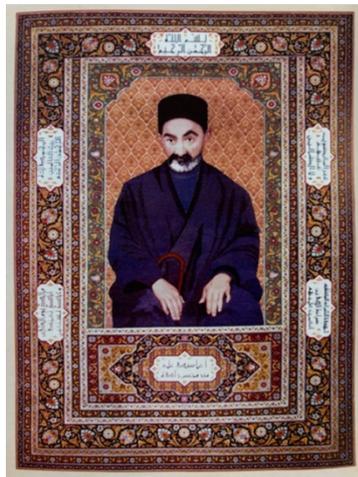
**Figure 7.** Heydar Aliyev.1980120x180 sm.



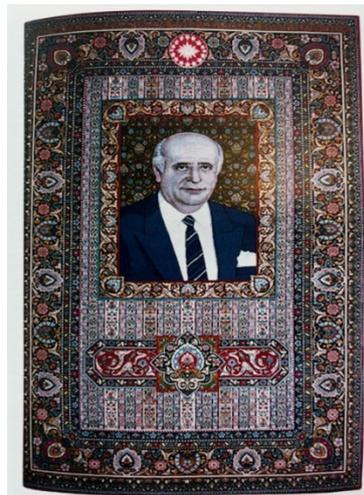
**Figure 8.** Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. 1996 sm.155x255 sm.Azerbaijan National Museum of Art



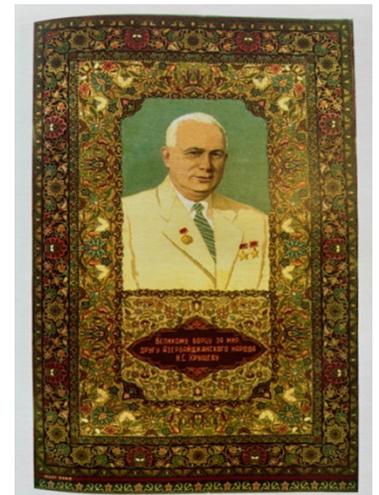
**Figure 9.** My mother. 2002. 138x185 sm.



**Figure 10.** Mir Movsum Agha. 2005. 145x240 sm. Shrine of Mir Movsum Agha



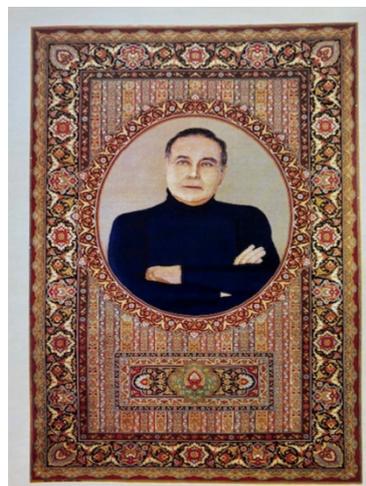
**Figure 11.** Suleyman Demirel. 134x200 sm. Suleyman Demirel's personal collection



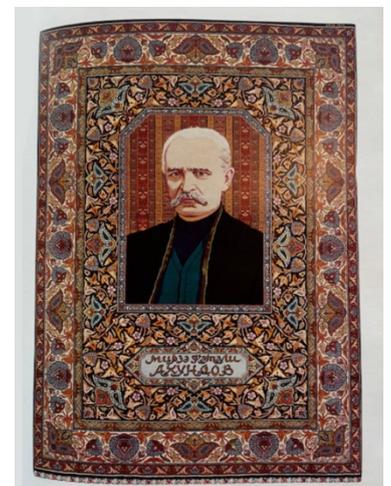
**Figure 12.** N.S. Khrushchev.1960. 150x250 sm.În N.S.Khrushchev's family



**Figure 13.** Heydar Aliyev.1998. 140x230 sm. Nakhchivan State Carpet Museum.



**Figure 14.** Heydar Aliyev.1999. 140x230 sm. Personal collection of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan I.Aliyev



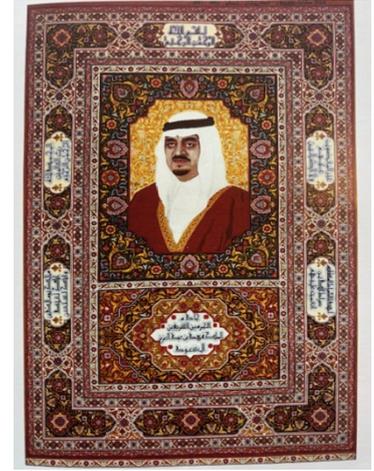
**Figure 15.** M.F.Akhundov.1978. 130x180 sm. Russian Union of Artists. Moscow



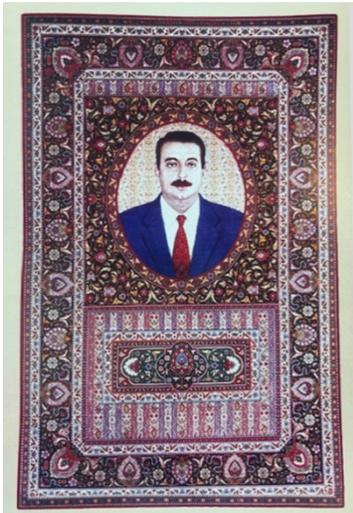
**Figure 16.** L.İ.Brezhnev.1981.  
125x180 sm.



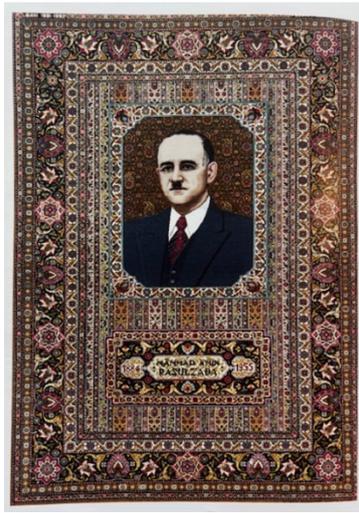
**Figure 17.** İndira Gandhi.1985.  
130x190 sm. State Museum of India.



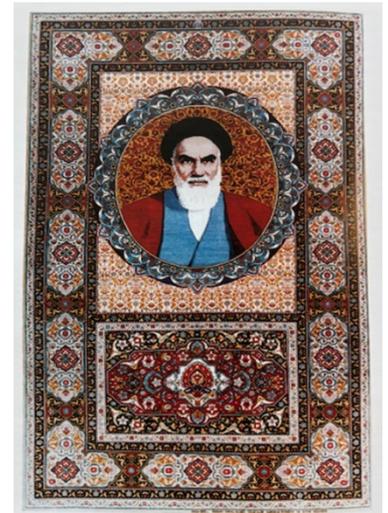
**Figure 18.** King Fahd Abdulaziz Al Saud.  
1996. 150x250 sm. National Museum of Saudi Arabia.



**Figure 19.** İlham Aliyev.1997.  
130x200 sm. From the personal collection of Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev



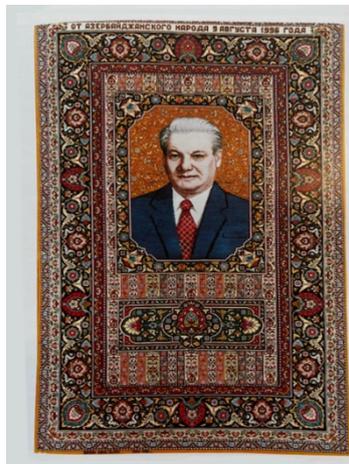
**Figure 20.** Mammadamin Rasulzadeh. 1992.130x190 sm.  
Azerbaijan National Museum of Art



**Figure 21.** Ayatollah Khomeini.  
1993. 150x235 sm. Khomeini's Mausoleum



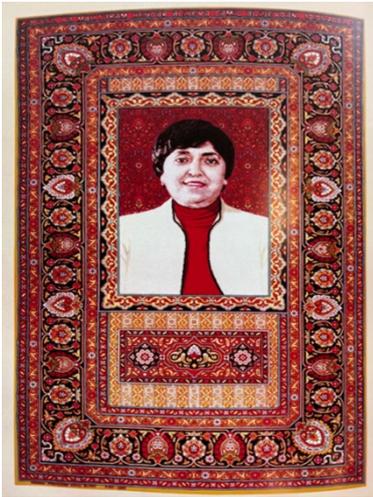
**Figure 22.** Prince of Dubai.  
1995.130x200 sm. Prince's personal collection.



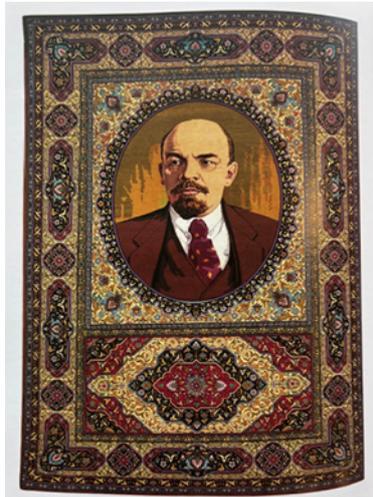
**Figure 23.** B.N.Yeltsin. 1996.  
130x200 sm. B.N.Yeltsin's personal collection.



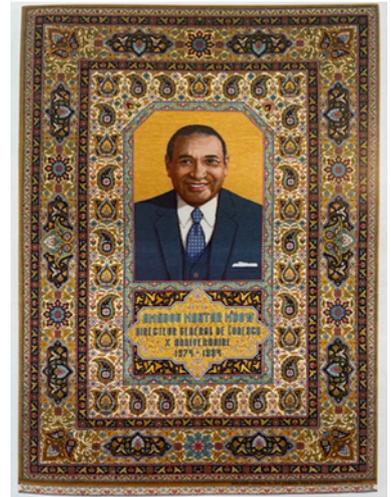
**Figure 24.** Bill and Hillary Clinton. 1997.  
180x170 sm. In the USA.



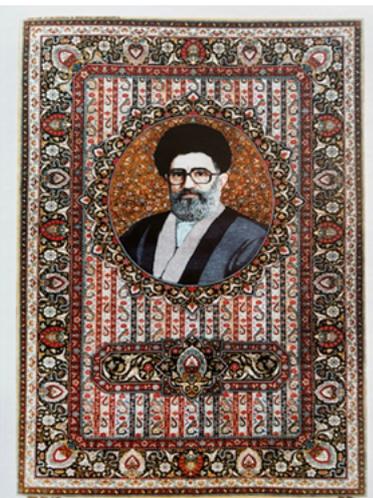
**Figure 25.** Academician Zarifa Aliyeva. 2001. 106x162 sm.



**Figure 26.** V.İ.Lenin. 1984 143x205 sm.



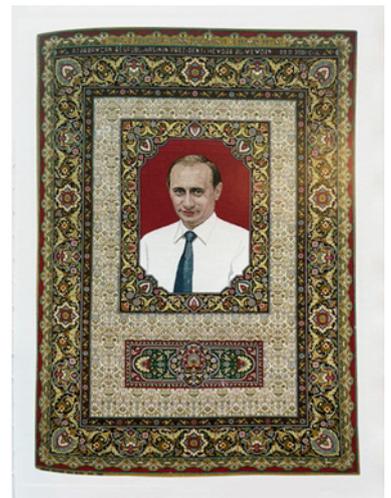
**Figure 27.** M'Bou.1984.120x175 sm.M'Bou's personal collection.



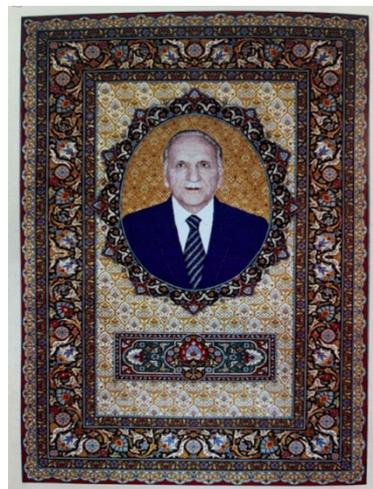
**Figure 28.** Ayatollah Khamenei. 1993. 130x250 sm. Khamenei's personal collection.



**Figure 29.** Sheikh Mahmoud Bin Rashid Al-Mahmoud, Emir of Dubai. 1999.130x200 sm. The Emir's personal collection.



**Figure 30.** V.V.Putin. 2001. 150x248 sm. V.V.Putin's personal collection.



**Figure 31.** Carpet dedicated to the memory of People's Artist Kamil Aliyev. 2006. 127x190 cm. Kamil Aliyev's personal Carpet Museum.

Among Aliyev's works, there are also many carpets consisting of floral elements, the central field of which is combined with an "Islimi" pattern. This ornamental field solution is found in carpets with portraits of Alexander Pushkin (1987), Ayatollah Khomeini (1993) (Photo 28), the Clintons (1997), the Emir of Dubai Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid al-Maktoum (1999) (Photo 29), and Russian President Vladimir Putin (2001) (Photo 30).

### Conclusion

Kamil Aliyev dyed the yarn threads of his carpets himself in his workshop. In doing so, he used traditional natural dyes. To convey tones and halftones, K. Aliyev used a special thin double thread made of high-quality wool. The artist divided the ends of these threads into eight parts, thereby creating delicate transitions of colors on the surface of the carpet. This approach increased the artistic quality of Kamil Aliyev's portrait carpets.

The Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum preserves 29 subject and ornamental author's carpets, some of which are included in the permanent exhibition, as well as 702 sketches and technical drawings, tablets, three tablecloths and a silk scarf made in the printing and ink technique, a porcelain set consisting of 41 items decorated with ornaments based on the artist's sketch, and a small photo archive.

People's Artist Kamil Aliyev's unique talent was convincingly and vividly confirmed in all the exhibitions where his carpets were exhibited.

Kamil Aliyev died on March 1, 2005 in Baku. He was buried in the Alley of Honor in Baku.

Kamil Aliyev spent the last 11 months of his life in the historical part of the Icherisheher district of Baku. The family house-museum is located in a four-story stone building, where an exhibition of 127 author's carpets is exhibited. Among the exhibits are unfinished works of Aliyev. A portrait dedicated to his memory was woven in 2006 (Photo 31).

On October 29, 2007, the opening ceremony of the bas-relief of Kamil Aliyev on the wall of the house where the artist lived in Baku (Icherisheher, Gulla Street, building 18) took place. The author of the bas-relief is Honored Artist of Azerbaijan Zeynalabdin Isgandarov. The bas-relief was created by the Baku City Executive Authority in accordance with the relevant decree of the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev.

### Biodata of Author



Associate Professor *Farida Mir-Bagirzade*, leading researcher of the department of "Fine, decorative and applied arts and heraldry" of the Institute of Architecture and Art of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan. Since 2000 and to this day, she has been teaching at the Azerbaijan State University of Culture and Art (2000-2001, 2023-2025) on the theory and history of fine arts. In addition, she developed her pedagogical activity at the Azerbaijan State Economic University at the "Design" (2009-2011) faculty, at the Baku Academy of Choreography at the "Art Criticism" faculty (2018-2023).

Participated in the TV programs of public television "New Day" and central television AZ TV on "Morning" as an art critic expert from 2018 to 2023.

Author of 12 scientific books (1 collection of articles, 6 monographs, 1 scientific book, 4 textbooks), 15 educational curricula and more than 200 scientific articles. Among them: *Philosophy in Art* (Collection of Articles, 2006), *Symbols and Meanings in the Value System* (Monograph, 2007), *The Works of the Architect of Azerbaijan Altay Seyid Huseyn oglu Mir-Bagirov* (Monograph, 2008), *The Works of the People's Artist of Azerbaijan Togrul Narimanbekov* (Monograph, 2008), *The Role, Place and Meaning of Symbols in Cognition* (Monograph, 2011), *The Works of the People's Artist of Azerbaijan Togrul Narimanbekov* (Monograph, 2014), *Values of Modern Azerbaijani Culture in the Works of Altay Seyid Huseyn oglu Mir-Bagirov* (Monograph, 2020), *History of World Art: Modern Period* (Study Guide, 2021), *American (USA) Fine Arts. Study Guide*, 2021), *Art That Stores the Code of Memory and Symbols* (Scientific Book, 2021), *Elements of Dance in Fine Arts* (Study Guide, 2022), *History of World Art: Ancient Period* (Study Guide, 2022).

Participated in international seminars on various cultures and art organized by the non-governmental organization "Simurg" and "Light of Science" from 2017 to 2024.

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