

MAKING ROCKS SPEAK AGAIN:

PREHISTORIC ART IN THE WORK OF ALEXANDER DOMOZHAKOV - A LATE 20TH CENTURY KHAKAS PAINTER



Fig. 1. Vladimir Kapielko and Alexander Domozhakov. Archive of S. Narylkov.



Fig. 2. A. Domozhakov, *Childhood of Dingling*, 1991, 110 x 90 cm

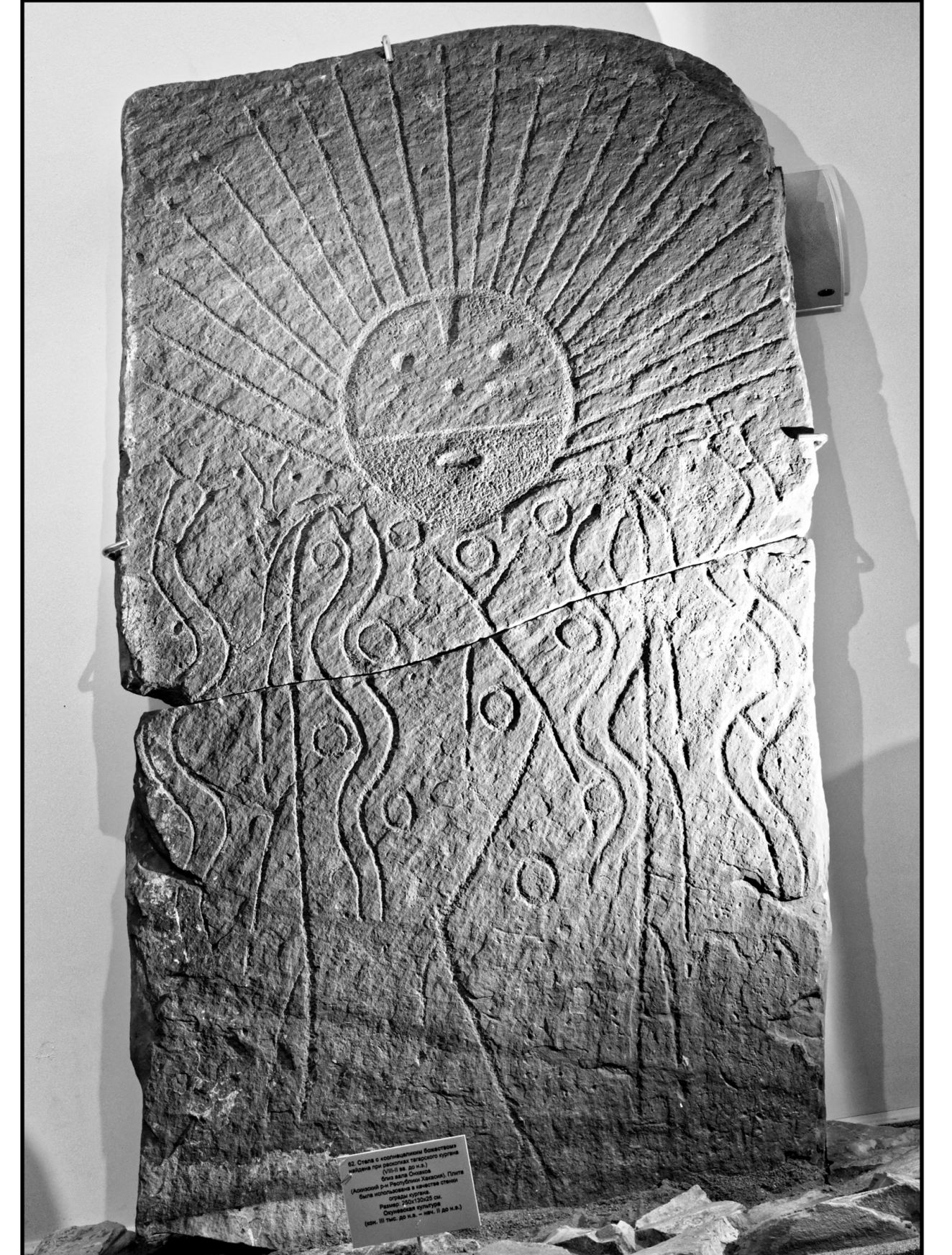


Fig. 3. The Bronze Age Stela of the Okunievo Culture, 250 x 130 cm

Phenomenon of Archeoart

Alexander Viktorovich Domozhakov (1955-1998) was one of the first representatives of an artistic phenomenon emerging in the region of southern Siberia in the second half of the XX century. This phenomenon has been named by art historians as Siberian Neolithic or Archeoart. However, for artists whose works are classified as Archeoart, it is not so much the naming that is important, but the idea behind this phenomenon. For them the crucial thing is, as best as possible, to penetrate the ancient tradition of Siberia, particularly through ancient art (including rock art) in order to build an "artistic bridge" between the past and the present. Why do artists go back so far into the pre/history? The Indigenous people of Siberia believe that by exploring the tradition left by their ancestors, they can better understand their position in the modern world. In addition, rock art, which is one of the main references in Archeoart, is considered by them to be an artistic mastery, to which modern people are hardly able to come even close - considering its form, level of difficulty or where it can be found. That is why the rock art imagery is perceived by Siberian artists as a kind of a gateway to rediscovery of their past, and to rethink their identity. Including the Khakas people, whose world and culture Alexander Domozhakov was trying to understand and present in his works.

Domozhakov's work is a breakthrough in the modern art of southern Siberia. Although it is debated who can be labeled as the precursor of Archeoart, the art of Domozhakov stands out from the others. Domozhakov in fact was one of the first who started exploring ancient art and tradition of his ancestors so consistently - he had been doing it throughout his whole life. Using old symbols in a new abstract way, the artist combined the past with the present, creating an image

of the modern world of southern Siberia. However, in order to understand the message hidden in the works of Domozhakov, we must delve into the culture and tradition of the region, which through the years of communism were marginalized, and now, through the efforts of Indigenous people, are slowly recovering.

Rock Art of Khakasia in the Domozhakov's works

When discussing the works of Domozhakov, it is impossible not to mention the contribution made to the artistic development of Domozhakov by Vladimir Fieofanovich Kapielko (1937-2000). Kapielko opened Domozhakov's way to the ancient world of his ancestors. Both artists together participated in archaeological expeditions (Kapielko developed a fine method of tracing rock art, which is used by researcher till now), documented petroglyphs and studied the history and culture of the region. Alexander Domozhakov became interested in petroglyphs and the ancient art of the region in the early 1980s particularly thanks to his relation with Kapielko. One of the effects of their joint work is the Rock Art Hall at the Khakas National Museum of Local Lore in Abakan, which visitors admire till today. It was just then, i.e. during the work on the Rock Art Hall, that Domozhakov started to be particularly fascinated by the ancient art and begun implementing these images into his paintings. The Bronze Age Okunievo stone steles, that can be seen today in the Museum in Abakan (Fig. 3), inspired him to create a series of paintings presenting ancient stone faces (Fig. 4 and 5). In his early works, the ancient imagery is shown realistically. In the 90-ies, however, his style evolved seriously both in form and color into abstraction. Domozhakov interpreted the signs left by his ancestors in his own way. The painting *Childhood of Dingling*

(Dingling is the name of ancient Proto-Turkic tribe, who lived in southern Siberia about two thousand years ago) is one of many examples in which the artist presents his own vision of the old world (Fig. 2). This painting shows a smiling god of the sun accompanied by helping spirits who travel around the world on a kind of a boat. All the motifs are inspired by prehistoric art - humans as helping spirits are based on prehistoric petroglyphs, the boat is also well known motif of the Siberian rock art, and the solar god-like image most probably was influenced by the famous Okunievo stela with huge sun-like face (Fig. 3). This stela is still exhibited in the Khakas National Museum of Local Lore in Abakan.

Rock art - shamanism - modern art

An important and often repeated topic in the works of Domozhakov is shamanism. To show the indigeneity of Khakas shamanism, the artist also referred to rock art imagery. Petroglyph depicting the shaman from the Oglakhty, in the upper Yenisei River, became an inspiration for several paintings of the artist (Fig. 6 and 7). Alexander Domozhakov was not the first who used rock art in modern art in Siberia - Kapielko preceded him in this matter. In Kapielko's paintings the rock images, however, are presented realistically. Domozhakov moved into new direction - his art is strongly symbolic, abstract, emanating powerful palette of colors. Today many Siberian artists and art historian consider him the most influential artist of late XX century, his art still inspires others. Alexander Domozhakov had a unique talent to make the ancient rocks to speak again.



Fig. 4. A. Domozhakov, *From the depths of the ages*, 1989, 61 x 42,5 cm



Fig. 5. Fragment of the Bronze Age Stela of the Okunievo Culture, full size 187 x 94 cm



Fig. 6. A. Domozhakov, *The shaman's drum*, 1990, 120 x 60 cm

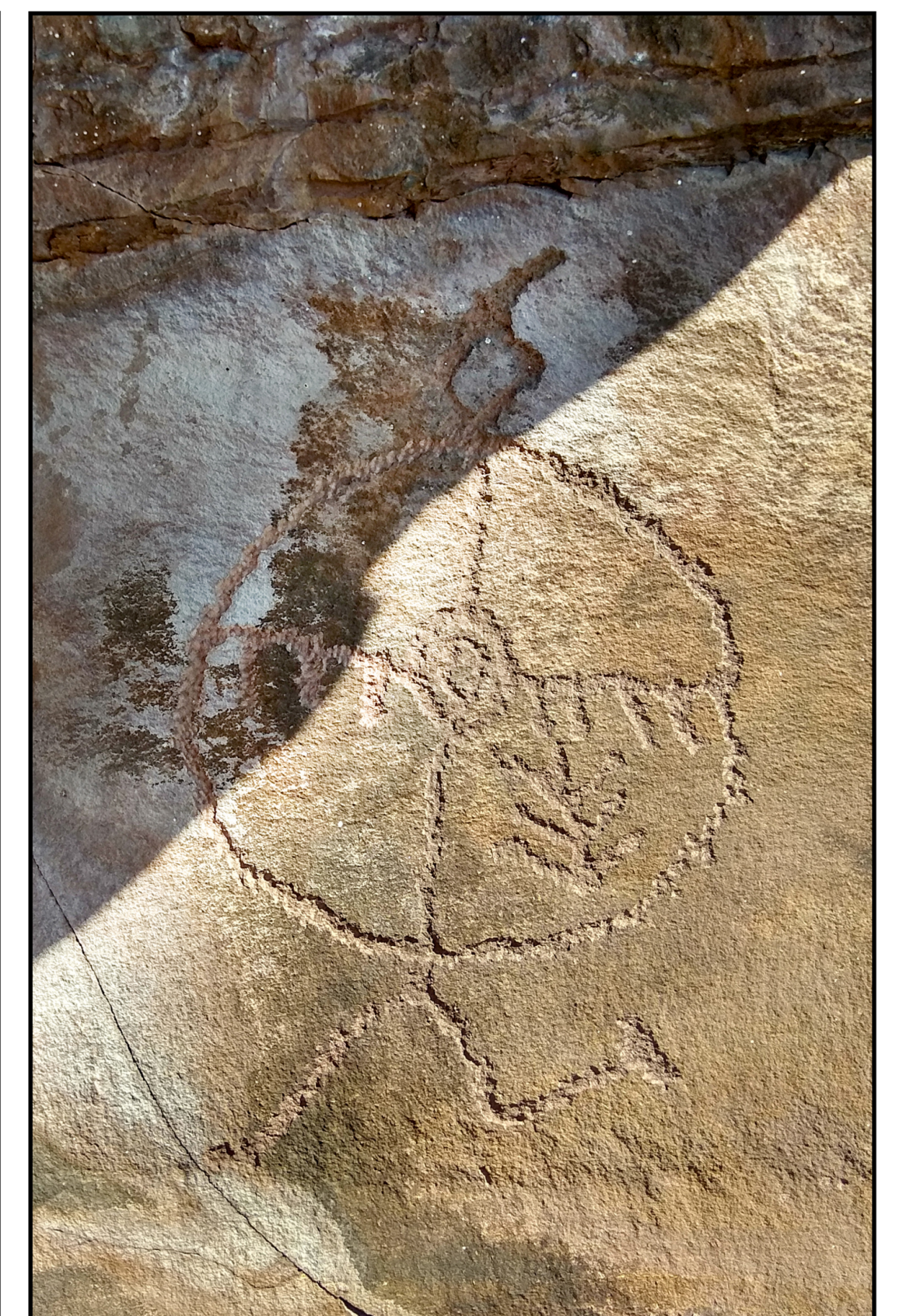


Fig. 7. Petroglyph of the figure of shaman, Oglakhty, Khakasia, size ca. 15 x 20 cm. believed to be from historical times