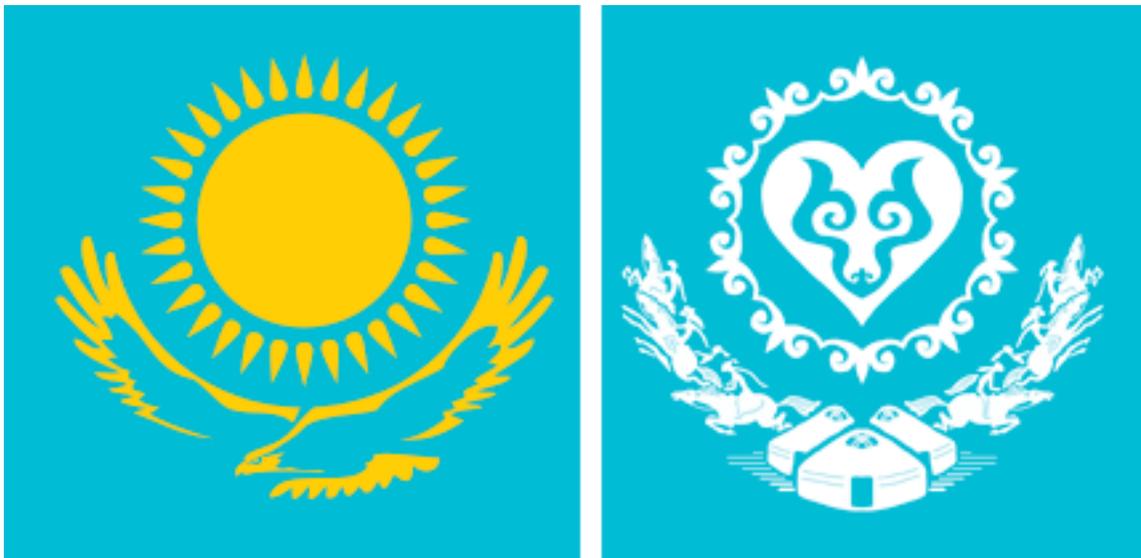


Kazak Aul Zhailau 2012 T-Shirt Design



I was brainstorming on the design of the T-shirt since winter. I designed T-shirts before, but this was a particular challenge, since I wanted all of the demographic of the Zhailau to relate to it, be it little children, teenagers, and adults, both American and Kazak. I tried to be innovative but at the same time be respectful of the tradition of Zhailau T-shirts throughout the years. All the previous designs looked very harmonious with each other, so I didn't want to make a dramatic break. I wanted to be respectful of the Kazakh traditions, too, but at the same time look "fresh." I wanted to avoid the clichés that more often than not become repetitive and dull.

As the basis of the design, I took the **flag** of Kazakstan, since it is the most recognizable symbol of the country and the people:



On the very bottom are three **yurts**. They represent the Kazak Aul organization, the community that raises and nurtures the children.

To the side of the village, we see children racing on the **horses**. Even though, at the Aul we don't have real horses, that animal is one of the most important symbols not only of nomadic culture of Kazaks, but also of the cradle of Kazaks – the vast Eurasian steppe. There are not many peoples in the world that used to live their lives on the horseback. Even in the age of cell-phones and internet, horse is the powerful symbol of dynamism, curiosity, travel, and simply moving forward. I wish that, just like their nomadic ancestors were equipped with the horses, today's children from Kazakstan were equipped with tools that would help them get ahead in life.

All of the kids will eventually leave the Aul. Some of them are not returning this summer. They are like children on the picture who are leaving their village and community, ready to enter the next stage of their life. **Horse racing** is a competition, but Kazak children also do it for fun. So, even though their **life journeys** would be tough, it doesn't mean they can't have fun and enjoy the ride. Like the **branches** of the tree, they'll grow away from their community. But Aul will always be their foundation, their **roots** here in America. Whenever they go, they can always refer back to their roots and community. And like the eagle on the flag, these kids will become the **wings** of their community, they will hopefully help to elevate and present their Aul to the world.



I wanted an all-**gender** friendly design. Even though in the competitive horse racing, it is only boys who usually participate, I decided to include girls as well. You can tell them by their long braids. Also the two figures in the *malaqay* hats are gender ambiguous.

Using the Kazak horse racing was not accidental. It is perhaps the only “serious” traditional sport that includes **children**. In the competitions, you have masses of people from several villages watch the few boys race on their horses. Kazaks used to teach their children to ride horses since they were five or younger. Kids were so adept at horse riding, that they rode the horses due to their light weight. In the West, on the contrary, all the jockeys are grown men:



In my art, I was influenced by the famous Kazakstani artist Evgeni Sidorkin. His well-known drawings of Kazak traditional lifestyle beautifully captures the **energy** and **dynamism** of the Kazak nomadic spirit:



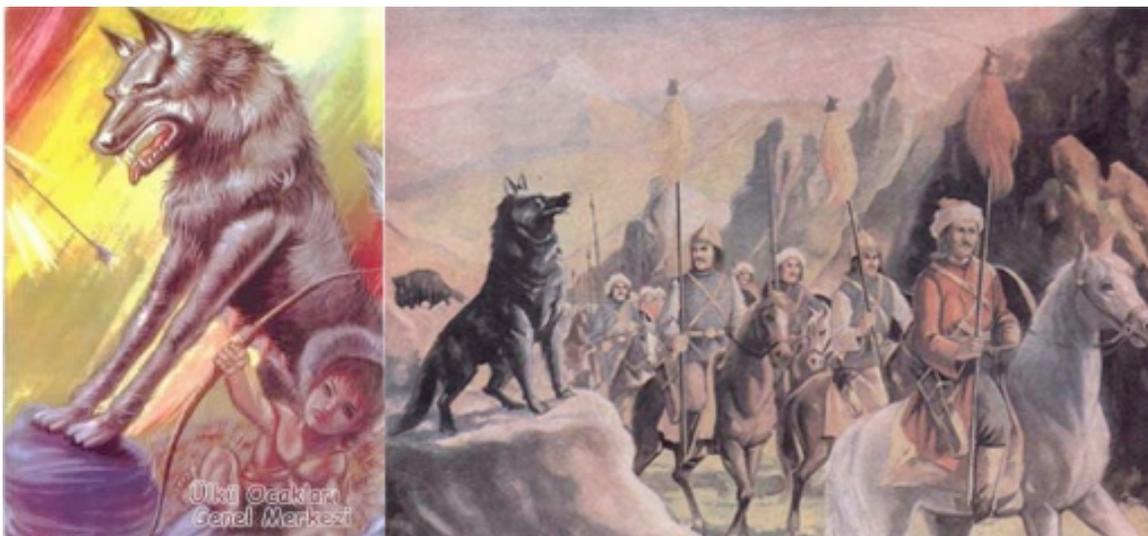
Above the yurts and riders, there is a mythological and metaphorical symbol. I substituted the sun for the **heart**. It is **love** that started the Aul, and it is love that keeps it going. Like the sun, it generates warmth towards the community and the children. It blesses them to be daring and explorative.

In the middle of the sun, there is a **floral** design. It refers to the **natural** quality of love between a parent and an adopted child. It sprouts from a little thing into an organic and harmonious relationship between two individuals.

The floral design is also a face of the **female wolf**, a mythological progenitor of Kazak people:



According to the old Turkic mythology, our people were descended from the she-wolf who gave birth to ten boys in the Altay Mountains. These ten boys were the ancestors to all Turkic peoples. And the Kazaks, the only Turkic group that still lives around the ancestral home – the **Altay Mountains**, are the closest to their roots. The design around the heart represents these **ancestors**. They also represent **unity of the children** of Aul, who are standing in the circle and receiving the love and warmth that they so need.



Wolf is the most beautiful and often ignored animalistic **symbol** of Kazaks. Unlike the eagle and the horse, wolf was never domesticated, it never submitted to the will of men. Even the larger predators like bears and lions can be tamed and trained to perform in the circus. Wolf is the symbol of freedom and pride of Central Asian nomads. Kazak poets and warriors used to liken themselves to the wolves.

Our ancestors used to have standards made to look like a wolf's head with a hole in it that made a piercing howling sound when the warrior was carrying it while riding the horse:



Wolf was never worshipped in any religious sort of way. It had a **totemic** quality to it, meaning it was an emblem of the people and served as a reminder of their ancestry. In general, it serves no different purpose than a symbolism of bald eagle for Americans, bear – for Russians, rooster – for French, or dragon and panda – for Chinese.

As I was thinking about the relevance of the wolf, I remembered another creation myth – of **Rome**. When two royal twins were abandoned to die in the river, they were found by a she-wolf who suckled them. When one of them grew up, he founded the new city and named it after himself – Rome.



I thought it was a beautiful metaphor for the Kazak Aul: for the orphans and the parents who adopted them and nurtured them for a better life. Rome had a profound influence on the **Western civilization** in general, and on the United States in particular. And since the Kazak kids were adopted by the Western parents, the merging of the two she-wolf symbols – Kazak and Western – creates an intriguing interplay. A heart-wolf, therefore, becomes a symbol for the Western-run camp of Kazak culture.

Also, the **gender** of the she-wolf is important. As I witnessed, it were the women in both Aul and the Kazak team that were the engines of the community. They keep it going and serve as an inspiration to the rest of us. If we are bricks, the organizing ladies are the mortar.

Another **gender** consideration was to make sure that the T-shirt can be worn by both girls and boys. I didn't want to alienate boys from the design of a heart with a floral ornament on it. So the fact that the heart has the ancestral wolf on it, will hopefully make it “cooler” for the boys.

I hope you enjoyed reading about the ideas and the creative process behind my design. I welcome any kind of **feedback**.



P.S.

As I finished designing the wolf, I noticed that the wolf inside the heart reminds me of the *Wolf Trap performing center*, which is located just a short drive away from my house (I never been there).

I'd like to believe that my subconscious didn't play a trick on me and that the similarity is accidental :)

WOLF TRAP
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