

DEVELOPMENTAL TRENDS OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN KOSOVO THROUGH THE DECADES



Art History

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Abstract

This analysis addresses the developmental background of artistic institutions in Kosovo after World War II. Data is outlined since the foundation of the Arts School in 1949 in Peja (as the first figurative and applied arts Centre in Kosovo) followed by the constitution of the High Pedagogical School in Prishtina (the branch of Figurative Arts), the Figurative Artists Club of Kosovo - FACK, Association of Kosovo Figurative Artists - AKFA, to the establishment of the Academy of Arts at the University of Prishtina, and then the Association of Applied Arts of Kosovo - AAAK and Kosovo Art Gallery.

Aim: The aim of this paper is to provide a clearer picture of the professional development of visual art in Kosovo through different periods of time. The paper aims at providing evidence not only on the establishment of these credible educational and artistic institutions, it also emphasizes the names of Albanian leading artists who contributed to the constitution, consolidation and creation of the physiognomy of the institutions of secondary, higher and university education, focusing on the artistic sphere, thus enabling the creation of sustainable values and rapid development of visual arts in Kosovo.

Methodology: In the course of the research work, standard methods of science research have been used. The paper is based on primary and secondary sources, archival research, journalistic writings, TV shows, Internet articles, and various other materials.

Outcomes: This paper highlights the achievements of contemporary art in Kosovo, providing the public with factual data regarding the laying of professional foundations and artistic progress in the field of figurative and applied arts in the country throughout the 7 decades.

Conclusion: The subject we are discussing is to promote our sustainable values in the figurative-applied creation, as well as the professional development of all the artistic genres, which from the moment of the establishment of the School of Arts in Peja to the constitution of the Academy of Arts of Kosovo and further, made an extraordinary contribution to the creation of a stable professional base for the progress of Kosovo arts. As a result, the proven cadres that emerged from Kosovo's artistic institutions left traces and names not only in the former Yugoslavia, but also to the world's capital cities, thus honoring Albanians everywhere through the artistic values they reflected.

The Chronology of contemporary art institutionalization in Kosovo

(Artistic journey from the Secondary School of Arts in Peja to the Academy of Arts in Prishtina)

Bearing in mind the culminating results of Albanian artists who had graduated from the Applied Arts School in Peja, founded in 1949, during the first decade of its founding, and in the prestigious Academy of Arts where they attended the studies, it showed an extraordinary success trend, the School in Peja - as an artistic kindergarten, since the first decade of its existence, had become well-known in the area.

Eminent artists, pedagogues of the academies, historians and art critics, had already understood the values, the seriousness and the importance of this institution.

Though they were in their first steps, the cadre from this hearth of knowledge was distinguished for artistic credibility, so they were appreciated, upgraded and respected by the art community throughout Yugoslavia.

They distinguished themselves for authentic expression, individual and identity values, modernism and creativity, and not for innovative expression.

Hence, *the freedom to choose a mode of work, conditioned only with the quest for individual signature and style, to the majority of Kosovar artists, developed the tendency of combining international styles, such as: free figuration, symbolism and abstraction, with local figurative elements and identity, understood as part of their individuality and distinctiveness within the complex Yugoslav context and beyond* (Maliqi, 2013)

Muslim Mulliqi, Gjelosh Gjoka, Tahir Emra, Nusret Salihamixhiqi, Rexhep Ferri, Xhevdet Xhafa, Shyqri Nimani, Engjull Berisha, Nebih Muriqi, Agim Çavderbasha, and many others demonstrate the appropriate artistic quality, the presence of individuality, the personal style of expression, the invention, the courage to explore, and the specific intellect.

So the artists of Kosovo, besides the cultivation of contemporary artistic direction, also characterized the distinguished stylistic profile, as well as the high artistic level.

In the middle of the fifth decade of the 20th century, visual arts creators undertook the initiative for the establishment of the Figurative Art Club of Kosovo, an effort that turned successful in *the autumn of 1957 in Prishtina* (Mulliqi, 1982, 3).

The foundation of the club was enabled by the first generations of the School of Arts in Peja, which studied at the Academy of Arts, together with the professors of the Secondary School of Arts.

The club, which at that time counted 96 members, starting with Academician Muslim Mulliqi (leader of all figurative developments in the country) was rightly defined as the core of an organized and legitimate line. They carried out continuous and professional activity of Club members, and had special predispositions being active and productive. Therefore, with this spirit, they created the climate of knowledge of the culture of figurative arts in our area (Mulliqi, 1982, 3)

From the beginning of functioning of the Figurative Arts Club of Kosovo, respectively in 1958 (Mulliqi, 1982, 3) FACK established the “Artistic Colony” in Deçan, which was organized as a figurative manifestation every year in the period of summer holidays, involving creators from the country and abroad (Muriqi, 1979). (“Deçani Colony” continued its professional activity until the nineties) (Muharremi, 2018).

Establishment of the high pedagogical school in Prishtina

Thanks to the crystalline vision for the development of arts in Kosovo and being aware that artistic progress would be achieved only through the functioning of the higher educational and artistic institutions, the golden generation led by Muslim Mulliqi with the support of Gjoka, Emra, Salihamixhiq, and many other artists, the establishment of the branch of figurative arts was initiated, within the High Pedagogic School in Prishtina, an initiative that was crowned in 1962.

It was this decisive step for the artistic perspective in the country, which took place only a few years after the establishment of this higher education institution in Kosovo, namely in 1957, where by the Decision of the Kosovo Provincial Assembly no. 378 the High Pedagogical School was established in Prishtina (Monografi, 2005, 200).

HPS as the first institution of higher education in Kosovo started working in 1958/59. Initially with two study branches: Mathematics - Physics and Biology - Chemistry. Meanwhile a year later, 1959/60, the branch of Albanian Language and Literature was opened, as well as General Technical and Physical Education. While in 1960/61, two foreign language courses were opened - Russian and English (Monografi, 2005, 200).

The year 1962, as it is well-known, marks the largest decisive turn of laying the foundations of contemporary, quality, and autochthonous art (Mulliqi, 1982, 3), by opening the branch of Figurative Arts within HPS.

The names that made history of contemporary art in Kosovo, as well as the founders, were also included as Pedagogues of various genres in this pedagogical-artistic temple.

The professional cadre belonging to the group of visual arts in the HPS, led by Academician Muslim Mulliqi (who was identified as the initiator of the formation of figurative arts branch in the HPS in Prishtina) consisted of **Tahir Emra, Gjelosh Gjokaj, Shemsedin Kasapolli, Svetomir Arsiq, Hilma Qatoviq, etc** (Nimani, 1986, 26).

These artists-pedagogues, operating at the HPS, qualified the profile of the young art pedagogues (Muharremi, 2018), as they paved the way of these young students, as they attended the lessons, mainly the talents who completed the School of Arts in Peja, or other schools but who were distinguished by the talent for art (Muriqi, 1979, 4).

In parallel with theoretical subjects, the curriculum was elaborated through practical teaching. The young students were formed in accordance with artistic-aesthetic and pedagogical norms. Expanding the creative knowledge, and self-realization - credo, were the basic lectures that students absorbed by the HPS professors.

They were encouraged to create the vocation of modern art by cultivating abstract visions, surrealism, associative symbolism, and other modernist expressions that were in trend for the time. The year 1964 is considered by Shyqri Nimani an important date for basic learning in the field of graphic skills in Kosovo, when the graphic workshop was established. The lessons in the subject of drawing and graphics were led by the Academician, Gjelosh Gjokaj.

According to Nimani, with Gjokaj's professional work, practically the road was paved for continuous development of the graphic art in Kosovo (Nimani, 1986, 26).

It is worth pointing out that the figurative art group at the HPS has continuously contributed to the qualification of a considerable number of educational staff, some of whom were

involved in lower and secondary education, while others continued with the university studies in the academies of applied arts in different centers of Yugoslavia and abroad (Nimani, 1986, 26).

Due to the institutional values the HPS in Prishtina was vested with, as well as a due to the clear vision for the artistic perspective in the country, as well as the dedication of the members of the Figurative Artists Club of Kosovo in 1965 (Muharremi, 2018), the cornerstone of the Association of Figurative Artists in Kosovo was laid. This association, *accelerated the dynamics of the development of the visual thinking of the Kosovar creators, and through the exhibitions it organized, successfully informed the Yugoslav and world public about the development and achievements of contemporary Kosovar art* (Mulliqi, 1982, 3)

AFAK, according to Muslim Mulliqi, who is identified as the initiator of its establishment, was qualified as a subject of a hasty general cultural and educational development in a region that in the past had nothing in this field. He emphasizes the great contribution of the association to social emancipation, so that the people of Kosovo enrich their artistic and spiritual values and that their intellectual scope is richer.

Mulliqi also appreciates the impact that members of the association made about the establishment of cultural and artistic institutions - the Academy of Figurative Arts and the Kosovo Arts Gallery (Mulliqi, 1982, 3).

Constitution of the Arts Academy as a unit of the University of Prishtina

Development of modern figurative and applied art in the late 60-ties was marking amazing results. Thanks to the School of Arts in Peja, the Higher Pedagogical School, the Figurative Artists' Club, the Association of Figurative Artists of Kosovo, the figurative and applied activities were greatly intensified in the country.

These mechanisms strongly influenced the organization of artistic life in the field of visual arts. A series of collective and personal exhibitions were organized under their stamp. Moreover, cooperation was initiated with similar institutions and associations operating in the Republics of Yugoslavia.

Kosovo artists were invited to collective exhibitions in the former Yugoslavia, as well as to group exhibitions organized around the world metropolis.

Many of them distinguished for individual tendencies, innovative expressions, new contents, contemporary varieties and creative forms, organized their exhibitions in the Art Gallery, Museums outside Kosovo.

Meanwhile in the country numerous individual and collective exhibitions were organized. In this period of time, a Biennial, Spring and Autumn Salons were organized. Many artistic awards that promoted creative activity and art cultivation were established. So, in general, a dynamic movement unseen before in Kosovo was felt.

Regarding the rapid development of arts in Kosovo, during the sixth decade of the last century, the newspaper "Rilindja", in May 1968, in the article "**It is the time that appreciates the painting**", by author Ymer Shkreli reflects the opinions of Kosovo artists in terms of the rapid achievements of modern figurative art, the amazing results in this area as well as the many rewards that Kosovar creators have acquired over this time.

The artist Muslim Mulliqi based the achievements in this direction into three figurative art development stages in Kosovo.

“To begin with, opening of the first school of figurative art in Peja, that played an important role in the figurative life in the Province. The second stage refers to the engagements of the Painters Club of Kosovo. And the third, of utmost importance is also the opening of the High Pedagogical School in Prishtina” says Mulliqi.

The painter, expressing enthusiasm for the encouraging moment, which laid the foundations of a figurative tradition, calls the third stage as decisive for the formation of a figurative routine and for cultivation of the branch of art in general.

“Today we have an orchestra of creators, who with attitudes and styles of diversity maintain their individual colors, have affirmed and broke out of the province and beyond”.

He also speaks for the parallel cultivation of all fields of figurative art, estimating that although all branches of figurative arts were being developed in parallel, the artistic genre of painting was leading in Kosovo (Shkreli, 1968, 11).

Throughout this decade, "Grozhnjan Colony" was also established, as the annual figurative manifestation of AFAK. This colony had contributed greatly to the development, publication and affirmation of figurative values, since in this city of Istra, international youth musical events were organized every year (Shkreli, 1968, 11), where tourism was developed and colony participating figurative artists were benefiting from this.

Given the growing number of applied art artists in Kosovo, the Association of Applied Artists was established in 1972 (Buzhançiq, 1986, 6), which was fruitful in evolution of applied arts in the country.

Hence, it is to estimate that the HPS art group and many of the members of AFAK and AAAK are considered as initiators and cornerstones of the Academy of Arts in Kosovo. As the Kosovo Assembly adopted the Law on the Establishment of the Academy of Figurative Arts in Prishtina on 31 July 1973, and the University of Prishtina leadership on 21 September 1973 approved the Decision to start with the work, the Academy started its activity on 25 December of the academic year 1973/74 (Monografi, 2005, 186).

The top art institution initially included the *branch of Figurative Arts, now with full-scale studies and with several departments: painting, sculpture, graphics and later graphic design* (Ferizi, 2011, 569).

In the academic year 1975/76, with the Law on the Academy of Arts of Prishtina, the Music Arts Branch was established, whereas in 1989/90 school year the Dramatic Arts Branch was established, initially with the Department of Acting (Monografi, 2005, 187).

In 1986/87 the Academy was converted into Faculty of Arts, thus, it was named as The Faculty of Arts in Prishtina (Monografi, 2005, 187).

The constitution of the Academy and later of the Faculty of Arts was the coronation of the many years of successful efforts of the creators of the sections of the figurative arts, the musical arts and the dramatic arts operating within the HPS.

This faculty started to operate within the University of Prishtina, and provided education to generations of different creative vocations, who enriched Kosovo's visual arts with new achievements (Ferizi, 2011, 569).

Since the first, far-reaching initiatives, the Faculty of Arts has brought thousands of graduated artists to all artistic disciplines.

Considering that during the 1970-1980 period, figurative and applied art in Kosovo was reaching its peak, it was a necessity of time for this field of activity to have available space for exhibition, so that creators could express artistic creativity and communicate closely with the audience.

National Art Gallery of Kosovo

In 1979, the Art Gallery of Kosovo was established and started to operate, whose function was to present works and affirm art, as well as to maintain and preserve artistic creations. This led to frequent individual appearances of painters, sculptors, local painters and those coming from environments of other countries (Ferizi, 2011, 569).

GAK's activity content was conceived in a typical contemporary way (Buzhançiq, 1986,6). There were numerous and quality exhibitions organized, where in addition to contemporary Kosovo artists, also prominent names of Yugoslav and international art exhibited at the premises of the Kosovo Arts Gallery.

GAK since its establishment took care of creating the fund of artistic works by the creators who frequented these exhibition spaces.

This Gallery for many years was quite active in the work of promoting the creative work of Albanian and foreign artists. It expanded the artistic activity until the end of the eighth decade, respectively, until 1989 when Serbia abolished the autonomy of Kosovo and as a result Kosovo lost the entire legislative-executive power.

In 1990 Serbia imposed the violent measures all over Kosovo, particularly in closing all educational, cultural, health institutions, aiming at making the segregation of schools in Kosovo. Given that the Albanians were denied the basic rights to education, culture and life, in the circumstances in which they were, they were constrained to organize peaceful resistance. Therefore, an almost parallel system was created in all life segments.

The parallel education system in Kosovo was more than engaging in the suppression of Albanians to illiteracy. It was also the main means through which Albanians were trying to realize the Republic. Almost everyone in Kosovo was involved in this state-building exercise: teachers, students, parents, as well as all who contributed financially and provided their homes. Kosovo was organizing a parallel public education system as well as, in essence, a parallel state. Just as Judah explains, "If we talk from a political perspective, schools had a tremendous impact because all school documents were sealed as if they were published by the "Republic of Kosovo" (Shahini, 2016).

Initially, the parallel education system encircled all the peaceful resistance of Albanians, but later began to expose the limits of this resistance, and paved the way for a new chapter in Kosovo's history (Shahini, 2016).

Albanian houses became schools all over the territory of the country. Even the University of Prishtina with all the academic units was conducting the teaching process at private homes.

The Faculty of Arts, as well as other academic institutions, held their pedagogical-artistic activity at private homes and in the artistic studios of the professors. This nationwide activism to preserve our ethnicity, undoubtedly, had an impact on Albanian artists.

Though in total isolation and general artistic darkness, thanks to the revolutionary spirit and patriotic feelings (unbeaten within them) they did not stay with hands crossed, and in this hopeless situation they found motivation and other alternatives to survive artistically.

At that time, several Cafe - Galleries opened in Kosovo. It was the Cafe “Hani i 2 Robertëve” in Prishtina, the Cafe “Koha” Prishtina, Gallery “Dodona” Prishtina, “Intermedia” - Prishtina, Gallery “Evropa” in Peja that provided their exhibition premises to Albanian artists.

According to the philosopher, art critic, e intellectual, Shkelzen Maliqi, The adrenaline of the resistance of those years brought to Kosovo another postmodern art spirit, which also reacted to Serbian repression, and to the conservatism and academic art of visual art in Kosovo, where the older generation was still opposed to the spread of new forms of expression in art (like video, performance, and installation) (Maliqi, 2013). Maliqi further demonstrates for the presence of the video-performance and installation, which appeared in Kosovo in the mid-1990s, marking the first exhibitions that interfered with objects and installations, thus turning from painting into new media.

During the war of '98 -'99 in Kosovo, the vast majority of artists' houses and studios were burned down and destroyed, and completely destroyed by the state apparatus of Serbia. Unfortunately, the savage regime left Albanian artists without the vital creativity that they had accomplished over the years.

However, our country, thanks to the Kosovo Liberation Army, supported by NATO and the European States, in 1999 finally defeated the Serbian conqueror. Consequently, the oppressed Albanian people, the long suffering, the killed, the massacred, the raped, the expelled from the ethnic lands people won the freedom dreamt over the centuries.

The new reality, despite the difficulties, encouraged our creators, yet to find the courage to consolidate and continue with the artistic expression and cultivation of their spiritual nurturing. Though in new and difficult circumstances, but enthusiastic about the power of freedom, they started everything from scratch.

The younger generations continued to pursue the modernist artistic spirit. There were new forms of expression in art that became tempting for many talented artists, which enriched and dynamized the visual arts scene (Maliqi, 2013).

Innovations and artistic creativity increased considerably the interest of young artists. This scene of new artistic practices, the connoisseur of cultural circumstances in the country, Shkëlzen Maliqi, calls as *the central stream of post-war art developments* (Maliqi, 2013).

After 1999, in the spirit of freedom, the highest instances of state cultural institutions have established several important artistic awards. In the field of figurative arts, to emphasize is "Muslim Mulliqi Annual Award", which is awarded by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of the Republic of Kosovo. Furthermore, it is also worth mentioning the exhibition of photograph related with the award of "John Mill", and the international exhibition "Muslim Mulliqi Award", as annual events of Kosovo Art Gallery.

Nowadays, in our new state, there are many institutions and associations that cultivate visual arts. Public Faculty of Arts in Prishtina, Private Faculties of Arts in Prishtina, National Gallery of Arts of Kosovo, Art Gallery of the Ministry of Culture of Kosovo, School of Art "Odhise Paskali" in Peja, School of Art "Adem Kastrati" in Gjilan , that as cultural institutions continue to contribute to the development of art in Kosovo.

Kosovo's most important artistic Institutions



Art School "Odhise Paskali"–Pejë



Former building of the Higher Pedagogical School Prishtinë (since 2002 Faculty of Education)



Faculty of Arts, University of Pristina, Prishtinë



Kosova National Art Gallery, Prishtinë



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³ Ibidem

⁴ Ibidem

⁵ Muriqi, Nebih (1979) 'Zhvillimi i pikturës shqiptare në Kosovë (1949-1979)-vazhdim', Fjala

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