

# ***New Tendencies in Visual Arts of Kosova*** *From narration to conceptualism*

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## ***Abstract***

The modern art was brought to Kosova during the 1960s-1970s by the first generations of Albanian creators, who graduated from art academies of main art centres of former Yugoslavia – Ljubljana, Zagreb and Belgrade.

These creators will enter in the history as pioneers of Kosovar modern art. Some of these artists made attempts to develop authentic styles and doctrines. Some others, on the other hand, who did not manage to avoid the influences of their paedagogues, remained, unfortunately, under the *Bacon* and *Chagal* influences.

**The most characteristic representatives in painting are:**

**Nysret Salihamixhiqi, Muslim Mulliqi, Xhevdet Xhafa, Engjëll Berisha, Adem Kastratit, Esat Valla;**

**in sculpture: Agim Çavdarbasha and Agim Rudi;**

**in graphics: Gjelosh Gjokaj, Fatmir Krypa, Agim Salihu and Ymer Shaqiri;**

**in applied arts: Agush Beqiri Nuredin Loxha Simon Shiroka, Shyqri Nimani and Violeta Xhaferi.**

After the 1970s, *new media art*, as a category on its own, appeared. The word group *contemporary art* refers in general to the *art being done now*. A special feature of contemporary art are the issues that are often treated under the influence of concepts representing in the today's world terms such as: *cloning, politics, economy, sexuality, races, ethnicities, human rights, war, poverty* etc. with a special effort in *performances, instillations* and *videos*, exceeding thus completely the conventional limits.

**Key Words:** visual arts, painting, sculpture, graphics, applied arts, innovative trends, video art, media art, modernism, contemporary art, surrealism, fauvism, cubism, expressionism,

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futurism, conceptual art, performance, collage, instillation, frescography, iconography, aquatint, mezzotint, copperwriting, aquarel.

### ***Introduction***

In the Albanian artistic world today, both in Kosova and in Albania, it is given insufficient space to a very limited number of new artists, who make efforts to catch the rhythm of contemporary trends of visual arts.

On the other hand, there are tens of creators of new generation, such as *Sislej Xhafa, Alban Nimani, Erzen Shkollolli, Rudina Xhaferi, Albert Heta, Artan Balaj* and some other ones, who, rebelled against the traditional conventions, have embraced with a passionate devotion the contemporary world trends in order to join the efforts of their international like-minded persons in creation of innovative doctrines of a quite new technology and aesthetics. They are educated or attend university level specialist's trainings at most prestigious European and world centres or institutions. Aware about the long road of the art, they have embraced the rightful, well-known saying of Balzac: *Le hazard est le plus grand artiste!* (*Hazard is the best artist!*)

Kosova, same as all other ethnic Albanian territories on the Balkans, inherits a rich treasure in the field of visual arts. This treasure consists of archeological artefacts in architecture, in production of masterly folk handicrafts, in costume designing, as well as in frescography and iconography. After a several centennial period of stagnation under the Ottoman rule, the Albanian visual art started being revived during the age of ***Albanian National Renaissance***. However, a real activity of modern art was initiated by the migrated creators from Albania, Kosova and Macedonia to the European metropolises. Some of them, who did not return any more to their fatherland, but continued to stay there, have achieved considerable success both in their true disciplines, as well as in other disciplines of visual arts. Among them are especially distinguished: *Çetin Saraçi, Ibrahim Kodra, Abedin Dino, Omer Kaleshi*. Thus, they got

acquainted directly to the innovative trends of modern art in its genesis and core.

As it is known, the time framework of modern art comprises the period from the late XIX century until the 70s of the XX century. It was not any longer important to the modern art to present subjects in a realistic manner, because the invention of photograph had made its function useless. The artists experimented with pleasure, searching for fresh ideas from the nature, from materials and different functions of art. The notion of modern art is close to the one of *modernism*. Its tendencies aspired paths towards abstraction. During this 80-year period, numerous movements evolved, which followed one another quickly with their appropriate denominations, like: *fauvism, cubism, expressionism, futurism, pop art, minimal art, land art, performancë art, conceptual art, photorealism*. It will not be superfluous if we mention here their main representatives, including: Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, Piet Mondrian, Marc Chagal, Salvador Dali, Joan Miro, Paul Klee, Henry Moore, Alexander Calder etc.

Meanwhile, conceptual exhibitions were established too, and many museums of modern art, such as: *Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco Muesum of Modern Art, Tate Modern, Stedelijk Museum, Centre Georges Pompidou etc.* were constructed.

### ***Most typical representatives of Kosovar visual arts***

#### ***1. Painting***

The creative work of **Nysret Salihmixhiqit** consists of an uninterrupted cycle of his career, *The game*. He is a passionate creator with an unbridled imagination both when he implements linear subtle visions and when he accomplishes painting visions.

**Muslim Mulliqi** (1934-1998) reflects, both in his drawings and in his paintings, the motives of the narrow environment where he lived. It was the Dukagjini Plain, the Rugova Gorge as aureole of Peja city, (*Çarshia e Madhe*) *Large Square* of Gjakova, then the portraits and figures in their different psychological

state, such as: *The Carrier, The Sawyers, The Bride and Mother-in-Law, Junik Castle*. M. Mulliqi gave a precious contribution in the establishment of the Association of Fine Artists of Kosova and of Academy of Arts of University of Prishtina.

**Xhevdet Xhafa** has for a long time cultivated his painting expression through an expressive painting language with a strong dramatic conotation. It is out of this engagement that his cycle *Autobiography* (a combined technique of collage) was created.

**Engjëll Berisha** is one of the most distinguished of painters of painting in Kosova. The motives of his creations make up an uninterrupted cycle called: *The Medallions of Prizren*. Among his principal paintings are: *The Arise of the First Medallion, The Dardan Gate, Dukagjini Tower, Symbols*. These nostalgic motives come out from the national inheritance.

The motives and the technique of the paintings of **Adem Kastrati** (1930-2000) are characteristic from the viewpoint of expression and specific from the one of technology. His whole rich painting work consists of a broad cycle created from his inspirations and from the rich traditional Albanian ethnographic motives of tradition.

**Kadrush Rama** (1938- 2003) is a creator preoccupied with the artistic treatment of the scenery, of figure and still life. His colouring is sensible, paste-like and with an anemic pastel value. His pictorial images represent impressionist images. Among his main works can be distinguished: *Walking, A Quiet Memory, The Meeting*.

**Tahir Emra** is a painter with a distinguished pictorial feeling, which he expresses with an expressionism both figurative and cubist at the same time. His pictorial palette reflects composition of a sensitive colourful range. The colour, the shape, the structure, the light and the shadow are in a harmonious correlation. Among his main works are: *In the armchair, Chicken seller, Halved table*.

The creations of **Rexhep Ferri**, are meditative reflections. The shape, the structure, the line and the reduced colouring are implemented into figures and environment. Among main works of this painter are distinguished: *Two figures waiting, White and black from the Cursed Mountains, Three steps*.

The central motives of the painter **Esat Valla** are characteristic subjects vintaged from the beautiful garden of Albanian ethnographic inheritance. On the other hand, the visual implementation of these images is accomplished from a special angle of observation, with a kind colouring and with a contemporary painting expression. His creations have a breeze of a poetic surrealism both in shapes and in colours. Among his main works are: *The Bride, The Attack of Emptyheaded, The Ram*.

**Nebih Muriqi** approaches with the same devotion both drawing and the painting. His pictorial expression consists in a visual imagination previously urged by his poetic inspiration, which is his preferred discipline. Among his main works we shall distinguish his cycle of drawings and paintings *Migration*.

**Ibrahim Ponosheci** (1947-2008) belongs to the so-called group *The Dukagjini Palette*. In his painting motives human figures with the sceneries having a lyrical-surrealist conotation are interlaced. They always aspire meaningful metaphors related to to the an ethnic environment. Among his main works are: *A painting poem, Eternity, A scenery from Dukagjin*.

**Halil Muhaxheri** belongs also to the group of creators of Dukagjini Plain called *The Dukagjini Palette* who, being of the same study and paedagogic generation at the Faculty of Arts in Prishtina, have composed their spontaneous painting manifest. They have common motives, colouring treatment and visual metaphors.

Also **Masar Caka** (1945-2000) belongs to the so-called group *The Dukagjini Palette*. His painting motives of the long cycle *The disguised*, have to do with the emancipation of the Albanian woman. He had a special colouring sensitivity with an interlaced impressionist-surrealist imagination. Among his main works are distinguished: *The Past* and *The Figure*.

Another creator of rural environment is also **Nimon Lokaj**, a passionate painter in gathering of rural sceneries, which he turns into painting images with metaphoric reductions. Such are *The fresh verticals* (1999), special pastorals created according to his synthesizing treatments, inspired by an idyllic environment of extraordinary beauties of natural constellation of the surroundings of Deçan, in whose atmosphere the painter lives and creates.

The creator **Hajrush Fazliu**, who represents a gradual qualitative advancement, works out his painting compositions interlacing classical objects with colouring atmospheres of contemporary aesthetics..

**Isa Alimusaj** has created a vast cycle of oil paintings and in colouring collages, with specific stylisations, which make the author clearly identifiable.

The paintings of **Nagib Berisha** constitute strong expressive compositions with motives from the Albanian cultural heritage.

On the other hand, a central subject of the paintings of **Daut Berisha**, who lives and acts in Paris, is the man in correlation with the environment, as an existential issue.

In his painting repertoire, **Shyqri Gjurkaj** has made a central object the stone as a metaphor and as a meaningful symbol. He treats consequently this inspiration years and decades successively. He has been living and creating for quite a long time in Sweden.

**Gani Llallosi** is a creator inclined to investigate new paths in order to find the most adequate way of personal expression. He draws, paints and combines by interweaving different creative techniques. He has been living and creating for a long time in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

**Veli Blakçori** deals successfully, in addition to painting, also with caricature. His interests have been focused in the recent years also in sculpture and porcelain.

Among the women dealing with fine arts in a continuous manner, is also **Miradije Ramiqi**, who, along with painting, creates also poetry.

**Eshref Qahili** is a painter, who prefers a dynamic composition either with a sensitive pastel range or with a warm harmony, or with the fresh colouring.

**Alije Vokshi** and **Zake Prelvukaj** are also passionate creators, who are continuing insistently their artistic careers.

**Arian Berisha** is one of the most prospective artists of the new generation. His pictorial expression is distinguished for the expressive colouring and dynamic shapes (forms).

**Agron Bytyqi** has expressed an emphasized affinity for a surrealist expression of Salvadorian style.

## 2. Sculpture

The work of **Agim Çavdarbasha** (1944-1999) is voluminous and of high artistic quality with shapes and innovative synthesization according to the contemporary aesthetics. Several years earlier before he passed away, Çavdarbasha had shown an extraordinary will to challenge the disease that had laid him low, as well as a titanic energy to achieve true fine arts values. Among most distinguished works are: *The Sphere* (marble, 1981), *Waiting* (bronze, 1977), *The Cage* (marble, 1995), *Two forms* (wood, 1996).

**Agim Rudi** is focused with devotion both in sculpture and drawing, aspiring at contemporary fine arts values.

**Fatmir Hoxha** is a creator determined mainly for sculptural realistic expression, wherein the search of meaningful psychological features is essential. In the series of such works it is distinguished also the monumental sculptural image of the figure of *Prof. Anton Çetta* (1984-1996).

**Aziz Islamaj** is a creator investigating clear sculptural forms and structures, both when he engraves the wood and when he dresses the granite.

**Luan Mulliqi** is one of the most committed sculptors of the medium generation of Kosovar creators. He is a creator with a fine sense for plasticity. His sculptural examples consist of shapes, structures and pantomime of a different range.

**Ismet Jonuzi** deals, apart from sculpture, also with other fine arts disciplines, such as drawing, painting and porcelain. His sculptural expression represents features of contemporary fine arts streams and trends (*Waves*, 1998).

**Adem Rusinovci** belongs to the new generation of more talented sculptors of Kosova. He prefers the wood, metal and painted polyester with intensive complementary colours.

## 3. Graphics

**Gjelosh Gjokaj** is the first creator in graphics in the Pan-Albanian areas. He creates with the same devotion also in fields of drawing, graphics and painting. His artistic work is

voluminous and of good quality. During his artistic evolution, he has tried expressions from expression in metaphysics in order to reach a poetic lyricism. Among his main evaluated works are: *The Head, Birds* and *Emigrants*. After staying for several years in Rome, Gjokaj went to live and create in Augsburg, Germany, where he is still nowadays.. He is quite successfully devoted to the medium of painting.

**Fatmir Krypa** is one of the most distinguished creators of graphic art in Pan-Albanian spaces. His inspirations come out mainly from the Albanian ethnographic heritage. He is distinguished also for his technologic pedantry of graphic execution. Among his main works are: *The Highlander-Woman, Time metamorphosis, Revival of Illyrian Trunk*

**Hysni Krasniqi** cultivates consequently his thematic cycle with rural images. They are idyllic rural images with different treatment subjects. His works are: *Ears of wheat, Corn harvest, Fire-flies*.

**Agim Salihu** is one of the most distinguished contemporary graphic artists on the whole Albanian artistic space. He has an emphasized sense for the medium of graphics, especially for the techniques of the deep printing (aquatint and combined technique). His expression is subtle and imaginary in a continuous innovative search. The pivotal motive of his graphics and drawings is the cycle *The Cursed Mountains (Bjeshkët e Nemuna)*.

**Shaip Çitaku** prefers the technique of copperwriting, through which he works out with a linear subtlety dynamic compositions interwoven with geometric objects.

The graphics and assemblages of **Bahri Drançolli**, who lives and acts in Munich, have for thirty years now had an originality and an emphasized contemporary expression.

**Karmon Fan Ferri** (1946-1992) has left a file of works in graphics, in the seriography technique, as well as in painting. His pictorial images reflect abstractions with dynamic structures, shapes and colours. For a long time he has lived and acted in Munich until he died in 1992.

**Mikel Gjokaj**, who has been living and creating in Rome for a long time, uses the medium of graphics with technical-technological perfection of deep printing (*Ikarus*). On the other



hand, he expresses himself also in painting with a kind colourful palette, especially in his cycle of sceneries created in aquarel technique combined with other materials.

**Ymer Shaqiri**, who since some years has been living and creating in exile, is a devoted creator of the medium of graphics. He prefers the techniques of copper-writing, of aquatint, of empty needle and of mezzotint, accomplishing therewith the motives with a traditional Albanian provenience, such as: *old doors, minted metal handles, tower gates etc.*

Of preferred techniques of **Enver Rakovica** in graphics, it is mainly the seriography, in which he has created a successful cycle with elevated motives over an expressive colourful abstraction.

A general characteristic of these creators is their aspiration in search of paths, let us say, narrative paths, in order to express themselves according to the syntagma "neither so conservative, nor that modern, but with sustainable picture values."

#### *4. Applied arts*

**Simon Shiroka** (1944-1989) has cultivated with devotion the splendid tradition of the Albanian filigree art. On the other hand, he has investigated also new paths to accomplish his ideas, by applying combined techniques, utilising threedimensional possibilities and creating magic rhythms. Among his main works are: *Albanian folk games, Rosetta.*

**Agush Beqiri** (1931- 2006) was the most distinguished interior artist (interior designer and decorator) and wall-paperer in Kosova. He has accomplished a great number of interiors for different institutions and enterprises on the whole Kosovar space. Beqiri's interiors are distinguished by the creative invention, stylistic clearness and purity of architectonic execution. There are another two successful fields of him: horticulture and tapestry. In both these fields Beqiri utilises essential elements from the Albanian national textile spring.

**Nuredin Loxha** (1935-1992) was the most distinguished creator in the field of scenography and costume designing in Kosova. His creative work is multivoluminous and qualitative.

He dedicated all his life to the artistic shaping of scenes and theatre and film costumes as a many years long scenographer of the national Theatre in Prishtina. Among his main works are: *The great pledge, Golgotha, The living Sphynx*.

**Matej Rodiqi** lives and acts in Belgrade. In addition to art of advertising graphics and preparation of books, he deals also with a great success with the art of tapestry. He used to be a professor of the subject of advertising graphics at the Faculty of Arts in Prishtina. He has won some important prizes.

**Lazër Lumezi** is a typical artist with talent for applied arts, with an extraordinary devotion to create in the course of rich tradition of Albanian heritage in silversmithery, but with a contemporary aesthetic according to personal innovations. He is evaluated as one of the most distinguished in the field of silversmithery in Croatian areas. He lives and creates in Zagreb.

**Blerim Luzha** is among rare Albanian creators who has dedicated all his career to the field of textiles. His creations in *The cycle of designs* are distinguished for the rich imagination of stylizing of floral motives with a colouring of warm and fresh ranges and with attractive structures.

**Shyqri Nimani** is assessed to be the most distinguished creator of graphic design in Pan-Albanian areas. His works are distinguished for the creative spirit, the clarity of ideas and sensitivity of colours (*Japanese cycle: Beautiful Japan and I, Geisha, Nature protection*); on the other hand, of Albanian and other motives, the following are distinguished: *Troubadour, Family 117, " Elena Gjika, Let us rebuilt Kosova together, Albanian Saint Teresa*. Sh. Nimani deals successfully also with translation of distinguished world writers and poets, as well as with the compilation of monographies on the Albanian and world art. He has given a precious contribution in the establishment of the Association of Applied Artists of Kosova, of the Academy of Arts of University of Prishtina and of Art Gallery of Kosova (*according to J. Papagjoni*).

**Violeta Xhaferi** is the author of some costume designing projects for the Albanian National Theatre of Prishtina. She has designed costumes also for films. In the recent years she has been dealing mainly with painting, in which the current events

are reflected. There is quite a time that she has been living and creating in Kristiansand, Norway.

### **Conclusion**

After the modern period, the art was transformed at a wide range along with the economic, global, political and socio-cultural changes. Many borders of artistic traditions of different peoples are disappearing due to the velocity of transformation of ideas, money and informations. The development of contemporary art is being controlled and managed by the great international biennals of Venice, of Sao. Paulo, of Whitney, of Kwan Ju, of Havana, or of Echigo-Tsumari Triennial. On the other hand, the most important and world famous exhibition is *Documenta* in Kassel, Germany.

In the recent years in Kosova, especially after the last War (1999), the ineterest to aproach the most contemporary trends and challenges is evident. For this purpose some important institutions for information, training and cultivation of innovative conceptual ideas, such as Art Centre Qendra *ARTC* (*Art Resource and Training Center*) with donations have been established. Their devotion and inventive inclinations are encouraging.

However, in order to create in accordance with the manifest of an avantgarde movement, such as *conceptual art*, or, as otherwise *idea art* called, there should exist an affintiy towards innovative paths with a passionate devotion. Therefore, there is no doubt that the conceptual art, in an environment with the current aesthetic level, as the one in Kosova is, is not evaluated (read: *is not understood*) either by the snobist minority, or by the overwhelming creative majority of visual arts.

Nowadays in the Albanian artistic world, both in Kosova and in Albania, insufficient space is given to young artists, who make efforts to catch the pace under the rhythm of most contemporary trends of visual arts.

There are tens of creators of the new generation, such as si Sislej Xhafa, Alban Nimani, Erzen Shkollolli, Rudina Xhaferi, Albert Heta, Artan Balaj and some other ones, who have embraced

hastily and with a passionate devotion the world contemporary trends. They are being educated or getting specialized in the most prestigious centres and institutions of European and world metropolises, aware that the road of art is very long and that its end cannot be reached ever. Really "hazard is the greatest artist!"

*Translated by Fatos Shala.*

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*The titles of colour reproductions:*

- 1) Agim Çavdarbasha: Sphere (*Sfera*), 1981.
- 2) Adem Kastrati: Lamenting of Rexha (*Vajtimi i Rexhës*), 1978.
- 3) Fatmir Krypa: Highland-Woman (*Malësorja*), 1980.
- 4) Nuredin Loxha: The Great Pledge) *Besa e Madhe*, a scheme for a costume, 1978.
- 5) Muslim Mulliqi: A Passage to Heaven (*Udhëtimi në qiell*), 1975.
- 6) Esat Valla: The Ram (*Dashi*), 1997.
- 7) Isa Alimusaj: Dardan Profiles (*Profile dardane*), 1997.
- 8) Shyqri Nimani: Albanian Saint Teresa (*Shën Tereza Shqiptare*), 2003.
- 9) Halil Muhaxheri: The Market (*Tregu*), 1979.
- 10) Ismail Qosja: A Portrait of a Girl (*Portret i vajzës*), 1983.

