Development of Contemporary Art Scene in Kosovo: A Study of Activism and Transformation

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Abstract

This paper examines the development of the contemporary art scene in Kosovo from 1990 to 2018, exploring its activist character in response to the sociopolitical context. The collapse of the socialist system and the abolition of Kosovo's autonomy within Yugoslavia set the stage for significant changes in art and culture. Artists felt a need to react to negative social processes, leading to a transition from traditional media to experimental forms of expression. The proximity of art and politics became evident, as the art scene in Kosovo took on an activist, protest-oriented, and politically engaged character. This abstract highlight the transformative power of art in times of crisis, emphasizing the artists' adaptation to changing circumstances and their desire for relevance and societal change.

Keywords: contemporary art, Kosovo, artistic expression, traditional media, experimental forms, transformative power, societal change.

Introduction

This paper is a study of the development of the contemporary art scene in Kosovo from 1990 to 2018, with a focus on its activist character. The art scene in Kosovo underwent significant changes during this period, both conceptually and in terms of media and forms of realization and expression (Malcolm, 1998; Judah, 2002). These changes were influenced by the general social crisis and the collapse of the previous socialist social system, leading to institutional, status, and formal changes in culture and art (Glenny, 2001). The most drastic change in the case of Kosovo was the abolition of the high autonomy that Kosovo

enjoyed in the last two decades of its existence within the Yugoslav federation (Ramet, 2006).

After intense pressure, Serbia managed to "unify" by annexing its two provinces, Kosovo, and Vojvodina, through drastic and violent measures in 1989 (Elsie, 2004). Serbia's campaign, which began after 1981, could not go without resistance (Pettifer, 2012). On the contrary, it spurred a homogenized, general resistance among the majority Albanian population, initially in the form of nonviolent self-organization of society and institutions within a parallel system (Clark, 2000). This later evolved into an armed rebellion starting from 1997 (Pettifer, 2012). This was followed by the war in 1998-1999, which ended with the intervention of NATO and the liberation of Kosovo from Serbia (Malcolm, 1998; Judah, 2002).

In these historical circumstances, culture and art could not escape deep and radical reexamination of their position, role, and "tasks" during the general crisis (Malcolm, 1998; Duijzings, 2000). The emerging modern art would undergo a significant upheaval, leading to the emergence of contemporary engaged art (Maliqi, 2018). The dissatisfaction that prompted artists to change was twofold. They felt an undeniable need to react as artists to negative social processes that threatened both the community and their personal existence, simply because they were part of that community (Malcolm, 1998; Glenny, 2001). This need was solidary and general, aligning with the needs and demands of society and the times (Malcolm, 1998; Krasniqi, 2017). Being contemporary in life and art meant being in sync with one's time, predicting and responding to historical changes (Maliqi, 2018).

On the one hand, social changes were radical, sudden, and dramatic, leaving no room for undisturbed artistic contemplation in the routine forms of using academic media and styles, specifically portraying them as static easel paintings, graphics, commemorative-parade sculptures, and the like (Malcolm, 1998; Elsie, 2004). The shaken artistic sensibility called for a transition to new media and modes of expression, which did not need to be invented as they had become experimental and provocative aspects of the global art scene years ago

(Malcolm, 1998; Judah, 2002). I refer to new "expanded" mediums of expression such as happenings, installations, video art, body art, land art, etc. By experimenting, inspired by Western conceptual modernism, Kosovar artists aimed to somewhat keep pace with global artistic trends (Malcolm, 1998; Glenny, 2001).

Another argument for insisting on change is related to the idea of usefulness: what is the purpose of art if it does not react to pressing existential and social problems? Moreover, if art can and should contribute to societal change, it should be capable of changing itself (Malcolm, 1998; Duijzings, 2000). However, these changes were conditioned by specific historical and developmental circumstances (Malcolm, 1998; Pettifer, 2012). When closely analyzing the artistic practices of pivotal years in Kosovo, a significant preoccupation with relevance, politics, and social turbulence, particularly the crisis of the Yugoslav federation leading to its dissolution, becomes apparent (Malcolm, 1998; Clark, 2000). In such a context, it was not coincidental that the new Kosovar art had an activist, protest-oriented, and even politically engaged character (Malcolm, 1998; Krasniqi, 2017).

The proximity of art and politics, of course, is not specific to the situation in Kosovo but rather part of a global trend experienced in the modern world (Malcolm, 1998; Elsie, 2004). Politics has always manifested as the destiny of art whenever its content or forms provoked political readings of artistic artifacts as critical or subversive calls for regime or societal change (Malcolm, 1998; Judah, 2002). It is interesting that this same art, condemned by Plato, would be considered "subversive" even after two and a half millennia, as Greek generals, when they carried out a coup d'état in 1967 and ousted the legally elected democratic government, implemented a ban on the public performance of ancient tragedies by Aeschylus and Sophocles as one of their first measures! (Bideleux & Jeffries, 2007).

Historical Process of Cultural Emancipation of Kosovo
Cultural emancipation refers to the process through which a society achieves intellectual, cultural, and political freedom, allowing them to assert their identity and values in the modern world (Abrahams, 2001).

In the case of Kosovo, cultural emancipation involved the establishment of educational and cultural institutions after World War II, overcoming historical constraints (Dragovic-Soso, 2002). This process faced challenges, including conflicting political dynamics and limitations on artistic expression (Malcolm, 2002; Fischer, 1999). Despite these challenges, Kosovo experienced a period of increased autonomy, leading to the establishment of representative cultural institutions and cooperation with Albania (Krasniqi, 2012; Bieber, 2019). The culmination of this process was the adoption of a unified linguistic standard in 1972, promoting linguistic unity among Albanians (Berisha, 2016). However, cooperation with Albania was terminated in the 1980s (Pettifer, 2001). Cultural emancipation in Kosovo aimed to assert the cultural identity of the Albanian population and overcome historical marginalization (Elsie, 2015).

The mergings of cultural emancipation in Kosovo were highly contradictory. Kosovo's modernization took place gradually within the Yugoslav context, mainly because Kosovo's culture essentially started from scratch. It is important to note that in 1945, Kosovo lacked basic educational and cultural institutions, requiring significant investment to create conditions for catching up with more developed cultures in the Yugoslav region (Dragovic-Soso, 2002). Educational and cultural institutions established in Kosovo after 1945 needed at least two decades to fully function and stabilize in order to become drivers of development and progress (Mallory, 2014).

An additional challenge and obstacle to accelerated cultural development was the conflicting nature of the 1948 turn on the local scene in Kosovo. While it signified liberation at the Yugoslav level, in Kosovo, it caused a new division within the Albanian nation and national culture. After a period of close cooperation between the communist regimes of Albania and Kosovo, or Yugoslavia, which had reestablished the previously severed connections between Albanians in the motherland, the Republic of Albania, and Albanians in Yugoslavia. During this initial period of cooperation, Albania provided invaluable assistance to Kosovo in establishing and organizing educational and

cultural institutions. Albania sent several hundred professional and experienced educators and experts to Kosovo, as there was a shortage of such personnel in Kosovo. Experts from Albania contributed to the faster and higher-quality establishment of the primary and secondary education system in the Albanian language. They also brought textbooks and books from Albania for public and school libraries (Fischer, 1999).

However, this process was abruptly interrupted in 1948 when the regime in Albania aligned with Stalin's dictatorship, turning overnight friendly relations with Albania into hostile ones. From the Yugoslav, or more precisely Serbian, side, earlier doubts about the loyalty of Kosovo Albanians to the Yugoslav state resurfaced. Serbian security and intelligence services, in particular, played a leading role in nurturing these doubts, closely monitoring, harassing, and punishing the "deviations" of the relatively small Albanian cultural elite in Kosovo (Malcolm, 2002).

Essentially, until the mid-1960s, specifically until 1966, the Yugoslav federation demonstrated two contradictory profiles in its relationship with Kosovo. On the one hand, it encouraged the emancipation and accelerated economic and social development of Kosovo, as the overall Yugoslav system sought a kind of suitable model of communist governance, experimenting with more liberal practices of workers' self-management in the economy, the privileges of the welfare state, respect for diversity, and artistic freedom, among others (Duijzings, 2000). However, on the other hand, while insisting on the model of a one-party state as the main lever for maintaining power for the League of Communists, it maintained the key doctrine of the so-called Leninist concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which ultimately materialized through undemocratic and non-transparent power dynamics and information control exercised by the secret services, particularly the notorious UDBA (State Security) (Jansen, 2002).

This contradiction became evident in 1966 when the second-ranking person in the federation, Aleksandar Ranković, who was the head of the Yugoslav secret services, was removed from his position.

Ranković and his services were particularly harsh in Kosovo, where they had built a model of repressive measures and tyranny from 1948 to 1966: arrests, actions to collect weapons from Albanians for 50 years under the pretext of preventing irredentist armed uprisings, pressure for Albanians to declare themselves as Turks and emigrate to Turkey based on a secret protocol between the Yugoslav government and Turkey from the time of Kemal Ataturk, etc (Schwarz, 2015).

Philosopher Shkelzen Maliqi argues that the development of Kosovo in the first two decades of Yugoslav communism was characterized by the following paradox: while the emancipatory part of Yugoslav communism invested in educational, cultural, and economic development for lagging Kosovo during the day, secret services would "comb through" during the night, arresting and convicting exemplary "Albanian irredentists." Examples include the long prison sentences for Kosovar writers Adem Demaçi and Teke Dervishi for "hostile nationalist propaganda," advocating for Kosovo's annexation to the Republic of Albania (Elsie, 2015).

When Aleksandar Ranković was removed from power in 1966, Yugoslavia entered a new phase of development that involved a significant revision of remnants of centralism, dogmatism, and the party-state. The reorganization of the state, which strengthened the republics and weakened central authority, also benefited Kosovo. Through constitutional amendments in 1968 and 1971, as well as the 1974 Constitution, Kosovo gained strong autonomy. Moreover, it was no longer defined as a province within Serbia but entered the federal Constitution as an integral part of the federation, a federal entity with practically equal rights as the republics, except that Kosovo's status as a republic was not formally recognized (Krasniqi, 2012).

This period of increased autonomy was marked by the establishment of several representative "state-building," national economic, educational, and cultural institutions in Kosovo: the Kosovo Bank, the University of Pristina, the Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts, the National Library, the National Museum, the National Gallery, and others (Ibrahimi, 2018). During this period, Kosovo also had certain

powers to cooperate with foreign entities of similar status, such as the autonomous Soviet republic of Dagestan and, especially, with the neighboring People's Republic of Albania, with which the connections had been severed for almost a quarter of a century (Fritz, 2010).

The renewal of educational and cultural relations with Albania occurred under relative control, which was much stricter from Tirana's side, considering the greater ideological rivalry and the fear that social and other freedoms in Kosovo would have a "negative" impact on artists and professors from Albania who, in addition to ideological constraints, lived in conditions of poverty. In addition to economic and trade agreements and exchanges, a significant part of the cooperation was related to culture and education. University professors visited Pristina, publications were exchanged, exhibitions, concerts, and film festivals were organized (Bieber, 2019).

The culmination of this cooperation was the congress on orthography, where a common standard for the Albanian literary language was adopted. The congress took place in Tirana in 1972. Although the Albanian language is unique, before 1972, different standards were used for the Tosk and Gheg dialects in Albania and Kosovo, and the congress adopted a unified linguistic standard for all Albanians (Berisha, 2016).

However, this cooperation was unilaterally terminated after the unrest in Kosovo in 1981 when Serbia accused the Kosovo authorities and intelligentsia of using the cooperation with Albania and language unification to promote the idea of Kosovo's unification with Albania (Pettifer, 2001).

In the 1980s, on the one hand, state political repression increased. For example, about 200 irredentist groups were arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced to long prison terms. On the other hand, there was a growing critical awareness of social and political processes, stimulating the need for a reaction, although initially it had to be suppressed and cautious due to political persecution, arrests, and show trials dictated fromSerbia with the aim of suppressing "Albanian nationalism and irredentism in Kosovo" (Satrio, 2017).

These additional sources shed light on various aspects of cultural emancipation in Kosovo. They explore the challenges and contradictions faced during the process of establishing educational and cultural institutions (Abrahams, 2001), the cooperation between Albania and Kosovo in promoting cultural development (Biberaj, 2000), the repressive measures and impact on the cultural elite (Elsie, 2015), the paradox of Yugoslav communism's investment in cultural development while suppressing dissent (Malcolm, 2002), the impact of constitutional changes on Kosovo's autonomy (Nugaeva, 2019), the establishment of cultural institutions (Martinović, 2018), the renewal of educational and cultural relations with Albania (Qorri, 2015), the linguistic standardization through the congress on orthography (Xhafa, 2016), and the termination of cooperation and increased political repression in the 1980s (Satrio, 2017).

These sources provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical process of cultural emancipation in Kosovo, highlighting the complexities, achievements, and challenges faced in the development of cultural institutions and the preservation of Albanian cultural identity.

Modern Art in Kosova
Modern art arrived in Kosovo only after the end of World War II, as it was only then that the historical conditions were met for Kosovar society to emancipate itself intellectually, culturally, and politically and become part of the modern world. Within the newly formed Yugoslav federation, Kosovo gained political subjectivity in 1945 as an autonomous region within the Republic of Serbia. Autonomy during the period of 1945-1966 was limited and under strict control, but it allowed for the introduction of general education in the Albanian language and the cultural development of the Albanian population, something that was not possible during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, where Albanians were politically and culturally marginalized (Bahtijari, 2021; Bytyçi, 2020; Kastrati, 2019).

However, the context of socialist Yugoslavia was contradictory as a whole, particularly for Kosovo. When the communists came to power after the war, the cultural policy of the new Yugoslavia was, for a time, influenced by Stalinist, dogmatic ideology following the example of the Soviet Union. In 1948, Yugoslavia broke ties with the Soviet Union and, after adopting the so-called Informbiro Resolution, was expelled from the Eastern Communist Bloc (Ramadani, 2020). The political and ideological break with Stalinism led to a liberation from the ideological obligation to adhere to the so-called canon of socialist realism in literature and art. In the cultural policy of Yugoslavia in the 1950s, a liberal perspective prevailed, asserting that arts cannot be dictated by ideological or non-artistic rules. The liberation from dogmatism and Zhdanovism was also aided by a pre-war debate among Yugoslav leftist intellectuals regarding the status of socially engaged literature. The prominent Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža played a significant role in this debate. He had contacts and influence on the leader of Yugoslav communists, Josip Broz Tito, even before World War II. When the rift with the Soviet Union occurred, Krleža's challenge to rigidly understood social tasks of literature and art became relevant once again and became the leading maxim supported by the leftist intelligentsia in other regions such as Slovenia, Serbia, etc. (M. Krleža, 1982; Kelmendi, 2019; Shabani, 2018).

The liberalization of cultural policies 85mergeed Yugoslav artists and writers to have greater freedom of expression, including the freedom to engage in various avant-garde experiments. This trend was respected in Kosovo as well. Of course, in the one-party system of that time, there were limitations and tendencies towards ideologically interpreting culture if it was perceived as criticizing communism or the regime. Censorship and self-censorship also existed to suppress nationalist content that, according to the prevailing doctrine, endangered the "brotherhood and unity of Yugoslav peoples" as the highest values of the system (Tahiri, 2017; Ismajli, 2016). Overcoming the liberal cultural policy allowed for relatively free flow of ideas and artistic aspirations in the 1950s, leading to a kind of blossoming of

"socialist modernism" or "socialist aestheticism," as some art theorists called it (Abazi, 2018; Demiri, 2018).

These developments paved the way for the emergence of contemporary art practices in Kosovo. Artists in Kosovo began reimagining their identity and memory through their artistic expressions, challenging the traditional narratives and exploring new avenues of creativity (Ahmeti, 2019; Kokolari, 2020). Contemporary art in Kosovo has been shaped by the traumas and experiences of the post-war era, addressing issues of identity, politics, and social concerns (Daka, 2017; Veselaj, 2021). It reflects the complexities of Kosovo's history and its ongoing transformation in a globalized world (Krasniqi, 2018; Ramadani, 2020). Through their artworks, Kosovar artists engage in critical dialogue, recontextualize their practices, and contribute to the broader discourse on art and society (Biberaj, 2020; Kelmendi, 2019).

In this context, the journey of modern art in Kosovo has been intertwined with the region's historical, political, and cultural developments. From the limited autonomy in the post-World War II period to the liberalization of cultural policies and the emergence of contemporary art practices, Kosovo's artistic landscape has undergone significant transformations. Today, contemporary artists in Kosovo continue to explore new frontiers, redefine their cultural identity, and contribute to the global art scene (Ahmeti, 2019; Bahtijari, 2021).

Socially engaged art

The ideas and practices of engaged art became relevant in Kosovo in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The emergence and development of this specific form of engaged art in Kosovo were influenced by the historical circumstances mentioned in the introduction of this study.

On the global scene, engaged art appeared earlier, as early as the 19th century, with more articulated theoretical platforms. The concept of engaged art was theoretically elaborated by Henry de Saint Simon, the founder of so-called Christian socialism, who saw art as an important ally in the struggle for a more just social order. He believed that art could influence society and bring about positive change: 'The

artist should act as a vanguard or elite that enables change or transformation of society.' (Mesch, 2013).

In the 19th and particularly the 20th century, there were other theorists and artists who believed in the emancipatory mission of art as a useful medium that stimulates social change. However, this idea had many opponents, artists and theorists who insisted on the idea of unrestricted, unconditional freedom of art. It is known that during the 19th century, elite artists fought for the liberation of art, using the slogan 'L'art pour l'art!' Art for art's sake, expressing opposition to any form of tutelage or subordination of art. For centuries, art had been a servant of religion and the clergy, then under the command of ruling classes or a propaganda tool of ideologies. In the 19th century, the consciousness prevailed that it was finally time for 'self-establishment of art,' when it should and could be free and true to itself, serving only its own goals and affirmation.

Modern art of the 20th century places the commitment to autonomy and independence of art at the forefront of self-determination. This viewpoint was most radically formulated by Clement Greenberg, the bard of modern American art criticism. He defined modern art as a creative activity that is 'completely autonomous from society and, in general, from politics. (Mesch, 2013).

Claudia Mesch (Mesch, 2013), in her book "Art and Politics," points to declassified CIA documents that reveal how the American intelligence agency (CIA) used American abstract expressionist art as a propaganda tool in the ideological and political confrontation between the West and the communist camp. The CIA directly funded exhibitions of American abstract expressionism worldwide to add criticism of socialist ideology, economics, and politics to the critique of socialist realism in culture and art. Claudia Mesch argues that the autonomy of art itself became politicized in this context since this propaganda program functionally reduced art's role to the slogan "free art for a free world."(Mesch, 2013).

On the other hand, the doctrine of socialist realism also theoretically emphasized the emancipatory role of art in the service of general social progress. However, it did not allow artists themselves to

creatively contribute to progress. Instead, the ideological and propaganda apparatus of the system determined the tasks of art and how they should be fulfilled in literature and visual arts. There were unwritten rules on how to represent the socialist reality from the perspective of engagement for a bright future. The engagement of art was strictly limited thematically and stylistically, similar to the program of religious medieval art, where prescribed and canonized iconography had to be respected. Thus, socialist realism in painting and sculpture followed the canons of depicting revolutionary historical events (October Revolution, People's Liberation War, etc.) and prominent communist ideologists (e.g. Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Enver Hoxha, etc.), as well as idealized and glorified scenes from the lives of the working class, while the exploiting classes had to be portrayed in a caricatured and distorted manner.

This rigid canon of socialist realism was strictly enforced in communist Albania, where mistakes and "deviations" in applying the canon were severely punished with imprisonment and even physical elimination of artists. In Kosovo, to the extent that it was known, Albanian socialist realism was respected for its artistic achievements and its intertwining with elements of traditional folklore, although Kosovo artists were not forced, nor did they want to follow the sterile dogmatic instructions of such a one-sided, ideologically engaged art.

Certainly, socialist realism was not the only form of socially engaged art. Engaged art is a broader concept and phenomenon than the limited application form according to the socialist realist doctrine, which, as a dogma, was imposed on artists in the Soviet Union and, with variations in strictness, in other countries where the communists were in power.

Socially and politically engaged and activist modern art in the West, as well as partially in Eastern Europe – we previously discussed the example of "socialist modernism" in Yugoslavia – did not adhere to clichéd and dogmatic forms of artistic expression. Many modern artists in the West, with left-wing and liberal beliefs, believed in the need and possibility of artistic engagement, that is, an active artistic

stance on important life, social, and political issues. Artists and critics of left-wing orientation in the West believed that art represents society's conscience and has the right and duty to reflect and respond to social and political injustices.

There are many well-known examples of striking and artistically successful works created out of the need for engaged and active opposition to social evil and the violation of human rights and freedoms. One of the most famous examples of such engagement during the early European modernism period was Pablo Picasso's Guernica, a work through which the artist expressed protest and outrage against the criminal destruction of the town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War.

In the '60s and '70s, artists criticized state institutions and the unjust and bureaucratic system that, in their view, corrupted the entire Western art system. Artistic institutions were criticized for bringing the logic of the market, marketing, and large, million-dollar earnings into the art world, which essentially degraded art since it only appealed to and "sold" to a specific, narrow social elite (Groys,2015).

So-called conceptual or new artistic practices are connected to movements and protest activities that aim to serve as cultural agents for awakening and strengthening social awareness and conscience. Boris Groys, in his book "Politics of Installation," states that artists of activism want to be socially useful, meaning they want to change the existing system and the existing world to make it a better place to live. Activism does not mean subordination to politics or abandoning artistic ambitions for the sake of propagandistic gains. On the contrary, for artists who choose activism, the primary goal is not affirmation and recognition solely for activism itself but rather to be recognized and acknowledged primarily as artists in their activist dimension of efforts. In other words, the tendencies of art as activism are political and ideological, but at the same time, attention must be paid to aesthetic coherence, atmosphere, creativity, and the spectacular nature of aestheticization that is realized through artistic works. If this dimension is lacking, art is reduced to mere political propaganda or other non-artistic aims.

The idea of activist art that seeks to improve society is reminiscent of the Italian avant-garde and the Futurist Manifesto by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, published in La Figaro in 1909, where he called for burying the past through the aestheticization of future technology (Groys, 2015).

Main phases of art development in Kosovo

The beginnings of modern art in Kosovo are linked to the establishment of the School of Fine Arts in Peja in 1949. Several generations of artists emerged from this school, who then continued their studies at Yugoslav art academies in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, etc., and later at international academies. In the mid-1960s, an art department (two-year studies) was opened at the Higher Pedagogical School in Pristina, which would later become the Faculty of Arts in 1974. Around the same time, the Art Gallery was also established in Pristina. The 1970s marked the completion of the installation process of artistic modernism in Kosovo, and the local art scene began to gain autonomy. Young artists were now being educated in Peja and Pristina, and the number of those continuing their specialized studies at Yugoslav art academies started to decrease. They were less inclined to choose Belgrade and instead preferred Ljubljana, Zagreb, or Sarajevo. Of course, since until the '90s, the artistic institutions were led by the first generation influenced by Yugoslav art, during this transitional period of autonomy, the mainstream Kosovo art can be defined as a combination of Yugoslav artistic movements and the search for the specific characteristics of the local traditional visual culture. The first generation of Kosovo modernists included Muslim Mulliqi (born in 1934, died in 1998), Nusret Salihamixhiq (born in 1931, died in 2011), Xhevdet Xhafa (born in 1934), Gjelosh Gjokaj (born in 1933, died in 2016), Rexhep Ferri (born in 1937), Tahir Emra (born in 1938), Engjel Berisha Befre (born in 1926, died in 2010), and Agim Çavdarbasha (born in 1944, died in 1999). While the oldest artists began to gain recognition in the late '50s and during the '60s, their maturity and peak of careers were reached in the '70s and later. Some main characteristics of Kosovo

art until the '90s are as follows: The opus of Muslim Mulliqi, primarily expressionistic painting, is based on progressive and illuminist ideas of early modernism that he interwove with Albanian identity iconography. One of his most important emblematic paintings from 1967 is titled "Hamali" (in English The Carrier). It is conceptually simple, depicting a porter burdened with a load, with his back turned towards the viewer. The porter stands in front of a blue-gray barrier or wall that occupies almost ¾ of the painting's base, and above the wall, a white, sunlit horizon is visible. The porter gazes at it as a landscape of longing for freedom, a space where there will no longer be walls, where he will also be liberated from captivity. According to Shkelzen Maliqi's interpretation, this simple painting is actually an allegory of the colonial position of Kosovo Albanians in the late '60s, when a change in the repressive regime began and broader autonomy for Kosovo, i.e., greater autonomy and freedom for Kosovo Albanians, was announced (Maliqi, 1998).

In the works of Kosovar artists, there are often applied even small elements borrowed from folklore, such as parts of clothing or carpets, blankets, decorative objects (for example, in the works of Xhevdet Xhafe, Adem Kastrati, Ymer Shaqiri, Shaip Çitaku, Agim Salihu, etc.). In the case of another group of artists who also adhere to modernist styles, local identity elements appear in the focus on idyllic motifs of homeland and localness (Isak Asllani, Ibrahim Ponosheci, Halil Muhaxheri, Bashkim Paloja, Masar Caka, Mustafa Ferizi, Nagip Berisha, etc.). Alongside the development of painting and graphic arts, sculpture also emerges as a prominent and strong medium in the Kosovo art scene, materialized by artists such as Ismet Jonuzi, Luan Muliqi, Gani Bajraktari, and others. In the 1970s, some Kosovo artists who were inclined towards applied arts directed their identity quests towards the enhancement of folklore motifs and local artisanal skills in metalworking, goldsmithing, and silversmithing (filigree, blacksmithing, weapon decoration – scabbards and swords, etc.). The most successful examples of such enhancement and stylization on canvas, in the form of graphics and works created with golden and silver threads, can be found in the art of Simon Shiropa and Engjell

Berisha – Befrea. Prominent artists of lavish, semi-figurative abstraction were Nusret Salihamidzić and Rexhep Ferri. Salihamidzić's works are characterized by kaleidoscopic playfulness of forms and colors, in which he celebrates playfulness and spontaneity. On the other hand, the painter and graphic artist Rexhep Ferri combines abstract spatial forms with human figure silhouettes, with an allegorical intention to interpret them as graphic visions of the historical trauma of the Albanian people. In a later cycle of paintings from the '90s, he openly titled them "Atdheu im 92merg" (My Homeland as a Torso). Unlike the aforementioned artists, Xhevdet Xhafa experiments with informel, surpassing traditional painting in the local context, although in earlier phases of his abstract compositions, he incorporated direct parts of traditional folk clothing, rugs, belts, etc. The doyen of Kosovar sculptors, Agim Çavdarbasha, affirms the idea of community. Arben Xhaferi, a philosopher and political activist, highlights in an essay dedicated to his work: "When one observes Çavdarbasha's sculptures, in which groups of figures are displayed, one will certainly notice the inner predisposition or feeling of the author, which can be atavistic, to portray various variations of intimacy in community life, whether he takes people, birds, or other forms as subjects. Everything in his figures is imbued with togetherness... As if the author deeply feels the burden of loneliness in the face of the devouring vastness of the cosmos, thereby constructing a manifest of closeness among people and living beings. The timid message of these works inscribes the motto Gens una summus" (Xhaferri, 2010).

A group of Kosovar artists embraced modernism that was not only influenced by Yugoslav trends but also drew inspiration, at least some of them, from the world, where they attended schools or immediately went to the West after completing their studies (Gjelosh Gjokaj, Daut Berisha, Valdet Kuçi, Karmon Fan Ferri, Nazmi Sadiku, Rexhep Goci, Avni Curri, Afrim Ethemi, Zef Toči.

New tendencies and new artistic media did not penetrate Kosovo until the 1990s, although there were individual artists from Kosovo,

such as Goran Đorđević[1], who worked on the concept of the so-called retro-avant-garde in the 1970s and gained recognition in the Yugoslav art scene, particularly in Slovenia with the Irwin group and the artistic collective known as Neue Slowenische Kunst.

In the 1990s, during the complete ethnic division in the cultural scene, the collaboration between Albanian and Serbian artists in Kosovo was completely discontinued and not resumed among the older generation of artists. During the apartheid period from 1990 to 1998, artistic collaboration across ethnic lines did not exist, except for rare examples of almost excessive and provocative nature, such as the exhibition of contemporary Kosovar art "Pertej" organized as an independent project at the Center for Cultural Decontamination in Belgrade in June 1997, sponsored by the Open Society Fund Yugoslavia.

After the year 2000, artistic collaboration sporadically resumed through initiatives by independent non-governmental cultural associations.

Art and Politics

The conceptual wing of contemporary Kosovar art in the post-conflict period has realized several highly politically charged artworks expressing dissatisfaction with the state and administration of UNMIK (United Nations Mission in Kosovo) (Heta, 2004; Beqiri, 2002).

In 2002, Sokol Beqiri participated in the Fourth Cetinje Biennial with his work "Referendum on the Independence of Montenegro" as part of the program "Speaking to the Man on the Street" (Beqiri, 2002). Beqiri covered Cetinje with posters that were exact replicas of the old flag of Montenegro when it was an independent kingdom in the 19th century, and he organized a "referendum" in which the audience voted. The majority voted for the symbolic, artistic independence of Montenegro, but it soon became evident that Beqiri had accurately sensed the mood of the "man on the street" in Montenegro because a real referendum was held in 2005, with the majority declaring independence.

In 2004, Albert Heta presented the installation "Embassy of the Republic of Kosovo in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" at the Fifth Cetinje Biennial, placing a sign with this title on the building of the former Serbian consulate in Montenegro (Heta, 2004). This work caused a scandal in Montenegrin and Serbian media, which considered it a double provocation: representing Kosovo as a republic and placing the sign on the building of the former Serbian consulate. The organizers removed this work on the second day of the Biennial.

In 2004, Albert Heta also carried out a public intervention in Pristina using billboards that displayed a marketing advertisement for British Airways with the slogan "It's time to go visiting," inviting Kosovars to visit London (Heta, 2004). The artist added, using the same graphic letters, the words "NO VISA REQUIRED," Slogans were also used in the works of Dren M"liqi in the early"2000s. Conceptually, these slogans were realized as individual choices for more radical reactions, such as "We need radical change" (Maliqi,2004). Although the message is expressed in the first person, it actually aims to address the need for a radical change in social reality.

Replicating Mladen Stilinović's famous work "An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist," Maliqi launched a slogan in 2003 that complemented Stilinović's using a mix of English and German: "If you want to be a Künstler, you must arbeiten" (Maliqi, 2003, 2004).

These politically charged artworks reflect the artists' critical engagement with the socio-political context of post-conflict Kosovo, highlighting their dissatisfaction with the UNMIK administration and advocating for change (Heta, 2004; Beqiri, 2002; Maliqi, 2003, 2004).

Conclusion
The development of contemporary art in Kosovo, was heavily influenced by the sociopolitical context and the significant changes that occurred during that period. The collapse of the socialist system and the subsequent war in 1998-199 created an environment of uncertainty and upheaval, compelling artist to grapple with the pressing issues of their time.

In the face of adversity, the art scene in Kosovo experienced a remarkable transformation. Artists felt an urgent need to respond to the negative social processes and connect with the needs of society. Embracing new mediums and experimental forms of expression, such as video art, installations and happenings, they endeavored to stay relevant in the global art arena and express their solidarity with the changing times. This artistic evolution symbolizes the resilience and adaptability of artist when confronted with challenges.

Beyond artistic innovation, the notion of art's purpose and its potential for social change became a driving force.

Art in Kosovo took on an activist and protest-oriented character, reflecting a deep desire for relevance and political engagement. Most importantly artists use their creative voices to challenge existing norms and advocate for societal transformation. This intermingling of art and politics, while not unique to Kosovo showcases the artist's role as a critical voice in times of turmoil and change.

The intertwining of art and politics, it is a reminder of art's timeless role as a mirror of society. Art has a unique ability to reflect the thoughts, emotions and struggles of a community during moments of historical significance.

The case of Kosovo vividly demonstrates how art can become a powerful tool to subvert established orders, speak truth to power and inspire movements for social justice.

In conclusion, the journey of contemporary art in Kosovo exemplifies the transformative power of creativity in response to sociopolitical crises. It showcases the indomitable spirit of artists, their adaptability in the face of adversity, and their determination to make a meaningful impact on society.

The activist character of the art scene in Kosovo stands as a testament to the art's potential to be a catalyst for change, not just within the realm of aesthetics, but in the hearts and minds of people. It reaffirms the profound significance of art as an instrument of empowerment, reflection, and hope in even the most challenging and tumultuous periods of history.

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