

Kosovo's history through artists

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Abstract

Kosovo is a new state. For more than 100 years after Albania's declaration of independence on 28 of November 1912, it remained outside its native ethnic lands. The tragic fate that followed after this date was imposed by the interests of Great Powers, Balkan political conjunctures, and greedy neighbors, which made Kosovo to be part of the borders of an unstable organization, artificial and fabricated badly as it was Yugoslavia, initially under monarchical regime and later under communist regime. Alone and isolated, under constant pressure of denationalization, violence, humiliation, and violation of ethnic national rights by Serbian ruling clique, denying its values in many fields, historical, anthropological, philological, civic, especially cultural and artistic, denied and ignored without any premises and conditions for future development. This is one of the reasons why today in our media, in our academic, university and wide intellectual and popular layers, - values, traditions, and cultural heritage should be made familiar and it is a duty for every specialist and art scholar, as there is a national and civic aspect. In this regard, the valuable assistance comes from artistic creativity of many painters in Albania, Europe and worldwide, who represent an important cultural and historical reality, sustainable and beneficial, with tremendous impacts in national identity and the forming of aesthetic and artistic awareness of generations.

The research by its nature has been linked in particular with visioning (seeing, visiting) of various works in art galleries, private galleries, private collections and artists' studios, in archives and museums, in their original form, not book editions and duplications, which has helped me to be clear in opinions about the works and their artistic values, especially colors, light shades, painting palette in general. While works of foreign authors that are outside Albania and Kosovo, in most cases I have used catalogs and publications, as well as websites, projections, etc.

Keywords: Kosovo, History, visual arts.

Introduction

The pictorial opus that comes from prominent works in the visual arts that have made Kosovo and its history its theme have been and still are ethnographic and anthropologic values indelible identifying signs reflected in these works, as well as the works of some eminent Albanian and foreign personalities of visual arts who have brought through their works pieces the Albanian national spirit, - this object is mostly focused on aesthetical side, analytical, but linked inextricably to the powers of their synthesis which originate from the history of Albanian and Kosovo people, the tragic and dramatic human experiences, lightening of the ethnological and heritage values reflected through subjects and pictorial figures.

On the other hand, I must point it out that the "Kosovar topic", if we were to name it like this, was not present and has not been dealt by Albanian figurative artists for

the most part, for various reasons, some of them political. But later on the occasion of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Albanian League of Prizren finally a union of artists from all lands was achieved and many exchanges in exhibitions and numerous accomplishments with Kosovo was reached toping this topic.

Schools gave a great contribution to the figurative arts in Kosovo in the 20th century, when the painting was not considered as craft, but as art. This started with the establishment of some schools with the help of Yugoslav painters like: Vlada Radovic, Svetozar Kamenovic, etc.

Of this period dates also the establishment of first school of Applicative Art in the city of Peja from where the first generations of artist originated, who built the foundations of art in Kosovo, names like: Muslim Mulliqi, Agim Cavdarbasha, Nysret Salihmixhiq, Nebih Muriqi. Some of them became critics of art, not only of the art in Kosovo, but wider. These artists managed to establish the Faculty of Art in the University of Pristina.

Unfortunately for many of these facts there is no written history, in a single publication, much less in a series of books and in a detailed written study. However, there are exhibitions, writings, other publications, from where I researched a lot of data and useful information.

Kosovo's History through Art

Although there is a lack of voluminous studies devoted to artistic creativity of Kosovo's painters, although numerous exhibitions have taken place, especially in the later period of the 20th century, when Kosovo had undergone a difficult period especially during the last war. It cannot be said that there is a lack of sufficient bibliographical sources, especially critical articles, essays, scientific and publicist articles, written by kosovar researchers like Hivzi Muharremi ... The Albanian people in Kosovo during its time of survival and sufferings, has been represented with dignity by the brush of painters in their pictorial tableaux, events and phenomena that were deeply rooted in the creators conscience. If we take as an example the works of Muslim Mulliqi, through his vast creativity, we see life and difficulties of that particular time. In his motifs, the type of Albanian man dominates in all colors and spiritual situations, there is often expression of the life of mothers, their motherhood, which raised their children in the fear of war, raids and attacks, hungry old men, tired and broken workers from the hard work, exasperation and the torment of the working man in the form of survival, sacred suffering, but shouldn't be forgotten the sceneries from the Rugova Gorge, the symphonies directed from Agim Cavdarbasha's chisels, such idyllic feminine figures of Nebih Muriqi, as well as modern collage paintings of Xhevdet Xhafa and so on.

Given the circumstances and historical conditions in which Albanian people lived in Kosovo, we can say that for a short time (but with a clear vision and persistency); results were achieved in educating young artists of visual arts. Meanwhile, the Association of Figurative Artists was formed, which filled a great historical gap inherited from the oriental past of the country, and so these can be considered as the first sparks of productivity in the field of figurative arts.

Certainly, during mass demonstrations of 1968, in the streets and squares, which were organized to seek freedom and equal rights as other peoples of the former Yugoslavia, neither Muslim Mulliqi couldn't remain silent, because precisely in these demonstrations which were deadly and many people were cruelly imprisoned and maltreated, just because they wanted to raise their voice for their rights and just because they were Albanians.

Despite the turbulences of the time, the artist had given himself a task not to interrupt its artistic creativity. Naturally, he moved to another stage of creativity, in the second phase, identified mostly with the work "Two heads and two masks", which is also considered as a novelty. It has bright blue and green color, as well as a sharp contrast between heads and masks. Psychologically during the perception we feel that the heads of Muslim remind us of the aggravated spiritual situation of the man and of our people, where suffering sublimates, almost sanctified, becomes an imminent psychological element because if we look deeper and cautiously, in the aesthetic plan we will recognize the ultimate message of resistance and survival, the inescapable power of the nation's historical existence, and at the same time, as counterpoint and contrast clearly visible, masks can be seen to symbolize the invader's force, the dark side, the wicked, regressive, grotesque, curious and monstrous.

Within the second phase, the painter builds a full set of tabloids, among them "Invasion of new spaces". Unlike the static figures of the past, here figures appear in motion forming an entirety of people scattered across the sky, but without losing their dramatically psychological effect.

In the second phase of creativity, he manages not to lose the influence and the inspiration of his own land. But, in the other hand, Mulliqi succeeds in keeping his sensitivity to the turmoil of the time. All this he captures in a more modern presentation, with colors, figures and vivifying rhythms, with burst of hope brought in a space full of willingness.

The struggle for freedom and independence of the Albanian people, led by Ismajl Qemajli and Isa Boletini, found Abdurrahim Buza completely alone at a young age. And since then he didn't stop until his last breath, giving contribution not with rifle and sword, but with paintbrush and pencil. From the age of seven, Buza experienced the horror of massacres, deportations, looting and hunger caused by Montenegrins and Serbs, the horrors which were stuck deep in his mind and later expressed in his paintings that he made during his artistic creativity.

Although at a very young age, he faced the loss of the family, which had the fate of many other Albanians. Forced deportation from Gjakova to the city of Skopje, where later he was born. The blood that flew in his veins didn't allow him to go away spiritually from that land, reminding and bringing Kosovo through his numerous paintings. Kosovo was not just a land, relief, portrait, but even history, spirit, a being, immanence, ethnological bulb, a great space of active experience, featured in special pictorial synthesis by a special purpose paintbrush. It is sufficient to bring in mind the picture "Kosovo's wedding", a work that was presented at the first open exhibition in April 1945.

The creator was appreciated by critics and art scholars as a special "bell" with national lyrical sounds, not only by his treatise of historical motifs, but also by the concerns

and feelings he reflected through his works, by the harmonious matching off colors, for his unique style, which enabled, among other things, the inspiration from virtues of the nation and the wonderful whole Albanian ethnographic phenomena, the field in which he explored with persistence and found the spiritual essence condensed in the course of time. That original revelation previously not encountered, which gave power and rare expressivity to the process of creativity. From all this we see Abdurrahim Buza as an artist with willpower, very persistent and hardworking to discover everything inside oneself, now as aesthetic matter in motion and constant formation, which makes him capable of producing an artistic ocean of works and different genres.

"Gjelosh Gjokaj is the first Albanian graphic artist. During his creative evolution he has tried pictorial expressions that range from tracing in metaphysics to reach a poetic lyricism. Among his main works are "Head", "Birds", and "Migrants".¹

Graphic apocalyptic images with the disruption of the figure and great deformations that speak of extermination, forcible displacement, murder, imprisonment and systematic executions by Slavic denationalization regime are main motif of the artistic creativity of Gjelosh Gjokaj, extending mostly during the '70. In this period, the characters often dress up with the metallic uniform, a colorful and formal pictorial finding created by him to protect people, in our case Albanians, from repression and violence. Despite the exterior appearance, which brings sadness, within his soul a renewed sense of hope was vivid. He knew that the day would come when again the compatriots would become masters in their own country.

In many cases Gjelosh Gjokaj sent messages of peace to the world, messages of interethnic and racial understanding among peoples, appealing for constructive politics towards those who make politics in the world. Artistic creativity and overall activity of the painter, born in Montenegro, but living in Kosovo and later in Germany, contains a giant opus of works not only in paintings, but in graphic drawings, so it is very difficult to be researched in its entirety, if not impossible, because many of the painting and works are widespread in Europe, America, in various collections and owners, in art museums, some in private residences, in various institutions everywhere in the world. Taking into the account this distribution of works in many places, we have to admit that we have been unable to carry out a comprehensive and exhaustive research process. Despite the constraints imposed by the conditions, from the conducted research we have come to a complete evaluation and study of all creative opus of the master Gjoka.

Not less motifs from Kosovo have created Yugoslav painters, starting in the 19th century with painter Paja Jovanovic. In his works there was considerable number of Albanian themes from all the regions. The friendship he had with Idromeni and his stay in the city of Shkodra had lured his palette and paintbrush to realize beautiful paintings with our traditional dresses, as can be seen in his numerous works, among them "The Albanian warrior", "A story from Kosovo", "Preparing the bride" and many more works, followed after a century by Vlada Radovic and Svetozar Kamenovic, who had given enough of creativity to the creative history of Kosovo. Meanwhile, these artists

¹ Albanian Academy of Sciences (2008), Fjalor Enciklopedik Shqiptar, Çavdarbasha Agim (1944-1999), Tiranë.

had a “teaching” role, after having conveyed the first knowledge about figurative arts for the first group of artists who then founded and developed visual arts in Kosovo.

Conclusions

To create a cultural tradition you must have inherited a wealth of assets that make up the cultural heritage of a country. Unfortunately, Kosovo did not have this luck. She could not, because of his historical conditions, to inherit authentic and original Albanian artistic values, artifacts from an early civilization. It is a well known fact of the abduction and taking over by a Serbian regime, as well as the attempt to eradicate and destroy everything that symbolized Albanian antiquity in the territory of Kosovo, because all the institutions were led by serbs. However painting and his creators enabled that Albanian ethnography and especially Kosovar ethnos to be preserved, which later had an important access in understanding and interpretation of Albanian identity in Kosovo, as a precious and invaluable ethno-cultural value. Almost every work realized within motifs that contained folkloric elements, such as the “Albanian Dance” of the painter Abdurrahim Buza, where together ladies and men create a dancing ring, dressed in national costumes. There is no better presentation of national costumes from all Albanian lands, as the artist had united them in the painting “Assembly of the Albanian League of Prizren”, where all the assemblers were sitting on the red carpet with some black spots, which suited the flag with double headed eagle hanging on the wall.

Successive occupying regimes in Kosovo have left visible consequences in the field of visual arts. Even Albania was isolated when it comes to developing and keeping alive relations with the Albanian people of Kosovo, even when talking about common art and culture as one nation. Kosovo and Albania had their borders closed for a long period of time, but the difference between them was that the first was isolated by foreign occupier and the latter had an hermetic isolation of the isolationist regime of communist party of Enver Hoxha, where the paintbrush and the palette were strictly controlled and therefore the visual art remained unknown in the international arena and not properly affirmed. Even those exhibitions that were made were individual. No cultural event dedicated to visual art was realized from the Kosovo elite in institutional level before the war. It only happened after the last war, and as it is already overdue.

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