

# Oral History Kosovo

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## INTERVIEW WITH SOKOL BEQIRI

Peja | Date: May 5, 2018

Duration: 78 minutes

Present:

1. Sokol Beqiri (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Rozafa Imami (Interviewer)
4. Donjetë Berisha (Camera)

*Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:*

*() – emotional communication*

*{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.*

*Other transcription conventions:*

*[ ] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension*

*Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.*

## Part One

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** We thought about starting with your early childhood memories, your life in the family, *rreth*<sup>1</sup> and how was it back then, how was life in Peja, from what you remember?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Life in Peja, fortunately, my childhood was mainly very good. I mean, in all the possible sense, I mean, as a child, requests are limited. Sometimes I think I had more things than what was considered normal by the people in my *rreth*, all of that thanks to my parents. Life in Peja was interesting to be honest, it was different, children were very different, which is something natural...

But, I can say I had a happy childhood. I didn't miss anything, I had good time, I lived well. I started travelling at a very young age, first here around, all alone, thanks to my father's support. I went to Deçan all alone with a tent when I was in the fourth grade, a child, and then I continued like that until my adolescence. Then I started going further, then at the seaside in Dubrovnik, then to Paris, then with Interrail. Travelling wasn't something very common back then. I travelled a lot with Interrail. I can say that I had a very good childhood, no?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In which year were you born?

**Sokol Beqiri:** For example, I don't remember any bad thing that would give me a bad memory.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Something about your close family, how many children were you...

**Sokol Beqiri:** My close family, it was my mother, my father, my two sisters, and my brother and I. I mean, two older sisters, my little brother and I. My family moved there when I was around 17-18 years old, in the first year of gymnasium,<sup>2</sup> since my father was working in Pristina. I continued staying here alone with my grandmother for two more years.

Then I also went to Pristina for high school and my studies but I couldn't get used to living there, I only got used to living there during my studies because I was very ambitious and very eager to know more. The only place where I could speak, I was very passionate about art, as much as I could, only in

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<sup>1</sup> *Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, it includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is in contact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one's reputation.

<sup>2</sup> A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

Pristina I could talk with my colleagues during my studies, that is when I got used more or less to living there.

But after, after my studies in Ljubljana, after my Master's degree studies there, I immediately returned to Peja, I don't know what connects me with this place, I like it. I mean, there is a lot I would change, but the city as such, the environment as such is very good for me.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can we go back to your family again, because I wouldn't like to move so fast...

**Sokol Beqiri:** Yes...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Since when we spoke privately there were a lot of such stories about your family, can we stop a little at your father, what did he do and what kind of influence did he have on you and what kind of relations did you have with him?

**Sokol Beqiri:** My father, I was a child when he was studying in Belgrade, he started studying when he was 35. One of the most interesting things to me which I am proud of... I mean, he had already three children here when he went to Belgrade to study at the age of 35. Then, he worked there for some time and he returned during the '70s. First he worked as a designer at a furniture factory in Napredak in Pristina and in Tefik Canga. Then he started working on interior projects, like the one of Arabeska in Pristina, which is one of the most frequented cafés of that time.

Then he started teaching at the Academy of Arts, the theory of space. I had great support from him. What is interesting about what I mentioned is that he started studying when he was 35 and when he turned 65 he was among the first architects in Kosovo as far as I know, who used the computer, AutoCAD and 3D studio. More interesting than this is the fact that he didn't speak a word of English. He learned these programs, he read the commands in Albanian, File, Save. And nothing stopped him at any moment from keeping up with the times.

It is thanks to that of course, because you can imagine how much he supported us (coughs). Especially me, for example. Until he died, people knew me as someone who never worked because he trusted me in what I was doing and supported me unconditionally, he also supported my travels because I didn't stay in one place, I constantly moved, he also supported my work in the atelier, the materials and everything... in every possible meaning. I had that luck.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you decide to study art?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Uh, this is interesting. My dream when I was young was to go abroad. *The west is the best* [English] was the slogan. At that time, they took us into military service right after high school, that's how the law was. And when I returned from my studies, I mean, from my military service... I stayed for one year, I didn't know how to do anything, I was waiting to go abroad. I was waiting for him to prepare the documents for me together with one of his friends, so that I could go to the West to work, and make money like everyone.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was this something common at that time?

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, I always had it, maybe because of the music that I listened to, you know, the West was my dream, Jim Morrison. I didn't have a certain idea why, but then when I returned here, I was waiting for them to help me not to go completely illegally, I mean, to somehow find a legal way. And he wanted to take care of it, he was at least trying to make my wish come true. And at a moment while he was a professor at the Academy he said, "Why don't you just go to the Academy to look and practice since..." Because I constantly browsed the museum's books, I looked at paintings but without the idea that I could do something like that, I never even tried drawing. And he said, "Why don't you go, since you like it you can try and if you like it, you will learn, this is something you can learn." "I don't know," I said, "You should go!"

And I wanted to make him feel good so I went. But, I never thought that I would fall in love so bad for that work for thirty years. I mean, from the moment I went... when I started, first I practiced with him and Agim Çavdarbasha.<sup>3</sup> And then I realized that drawing is something you learn, it is not a talent that somebody gives to you, but it is work like every other work that you learn. One plus one equals two, this is measured like this, this should be put like this. You just have to want to work.

And I started liking it when I saw that I could do it, I literally lost myself after that thing and I didn't stop for 25 years. Then the next year... first since he was a professor, a man didn't continue even though he was accepted to study, there was an idea... to let him try for one year and see whether he really likes it. The next year, I applied at the Department of Graphic Arts, and continued working with the same tempo.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did they teach you in graphics at that time?

**Sokol Beqiri:** At that time, until very recently when some changes and new practices are taking place, we were isolated within an abstract expressionism and a kind of national-romanticism, within an idea that we have an origin, a tradition and a culture, you know? And little did we learn in that direction.

I had the luck, I went with my own desire and willing, thanks to the impression that Nysret Salihamixhiqi<sup>4</sup> gave me. I went and literally became friends with Nysret and I am thankful to him in every meaning, because he was an open pedagogist and the only one who could help you see things in a wider perspective. Also Zoran Jovanović<sup>5</sup>...

It is not that we learned something conceptual. We learned it as a craft more, how a composition is done, how... I mean, we learned in the most classical way in the history of arts, we learned something to Picasso and nothing else... except some individuals like Nysret and Zoran as well as Muslim Mulliqi,

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<sup>3</sup> Agim Çavdarbasha (1944-1999) was born in Pejë, Kosovo. He was a Kosovo Albanian sculptor, he graduated from the Academy of Applied Arts of Belgrade and the Academy of Arts of Ljubljana. Çavdarbasha was a major influence on contemporary sculpture in Kosovo. He was a member of the Academy of Figurative of Arts of Kosovo and later of the Academy of Science and Arts.

<sup>4</sup>Nysret Salihamixhiqi (1931-2011) was born in Zhabar, near Mitrovica. He was a Kosovo Albanian abstract painter. He studied applied arts at the University of Belgrade in 1959 under the mentorship of Vasa Pomorisac.

<sup>5</sup>Zoran Jovanović (1962-), caricaturist and cartoonist from Belgrade, Serbia. Mr. Jovanović's works were presented in many world festivals. Retrospectives of his animated films were held at the film archives at Harvard, in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa; at cultural centres of Bombay, New Delhi and the Walt Disney Studio. His works are shown at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York.

<sup>6</sup> you know? Some people who offered us a little... but the Academy was closed at that time, that's why, in the '60s.

Then also technically, since I went to study graphics, we couldn't, I mean we were limited because we didn't have a place to find zinc plaques in order to develop various techniques. But we worked with whatever we could find, with some small plaques that somebody found for us here and there. We had to improvise the techniques to be able to learn the craft, the technique of how something is reproduced.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** But graphics in general was at a pretty high level in Yugoslavia, right?

**Sokol Beqiri:** It was, it was, graphics was but thanks to... that is why I decided to go to Ljubljana for my Master's degree studies even though I liked a kind of expressionism and lithograph as a technique, which was something we didn't have here, while in Ljubljana it was very advanced. Ljubljana had its graphic arts biennale which was one of the most important biennales in the world for graphic arts.

They had the Institute of Graphic Arts and in fact that was the motivation for me to go to Ljubljana to specialize in graphics. I went there after finishing my studies here and I can say that I continued working with the same passion, I made tens of thousands of graphics and then when I returned here after some time, many other things happened in a very short time. Venice was near, I went to the Venice Biennale and simply I started not feeling happy with the work I had done until then, you know? And with the ambitions that I had, I didn't simply want to... this is something that I have mentioned one hundred times but this is another kind of interview... I simply didn't want my graphics or my painting, because I was painting at the same time, to end up somewhere in a sleeping room and...I needed more, I needed more, and I thought I was more, I wanted to change the world.

And first I started with dilemmas and crisis, what is it that I have to do since what I do is apparently not art, what is it... And then I don't even know why, video started to seem very interesting to me. It must be the video. It had to be video, and I didn't get comfortable until I made one. Then I continued with the second, the third. Performance seemed interesting to me then, because I liked direct communication. In fact, I liked the idea that, those were my beliefs, that this is something that I do for myself and there is no need for it to be documented nor... I mean, through this I can transmit the message that I want to and that is it. And it didn't look bad from that moment, and if it wasn't for Shkëlzen Maliqi who was my greatest supporter when I was very young, I don't know how he found out about it but he was always there writing texts about everything I did.

And when I was young, after returning from Ljubljana, I started being part of graphic arts biennales, which was my dream. Not only here, but also in Milano, Peru, Spain, Holland. My career in graphic arts was going good, but I simply dropped it.

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<sup>6</sup> Muslim Mulliqi (1934-1998) was an impressionist and expressionist painter from Kosovo. Born into a family of artists, Mulliqi attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade under Zoran Petrović's mentorship, where he also continued with his Master's studies.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Just to also tackle a little... I would like to know about the exhibition space of the '80s?

**Sokol Beqiri:** First it was, it was, in Kosovo it only was...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I mean, how what were the exhibition spaces available in Kosovo?

**Sokol Beqiri:** There was only the Gallery of Arts at Boro Ramiz,<sup>7</sup> Shyqri Nimani<sup>8</sup> was its director and I can say it worked very well for that time. Shyqra [Shyqri Nimani] knew how to organize very good exhibitions. There were mainly international exhibitions, but back then there were mainly exhibitions of artists from former Yugoslavia, but they were artists of levels... It was Edo Murtić,<sup>9</sup> Safet... you know the exhibition of Zuko Džumhur,<sup>10</sup> and I can say that for a long time after Shyqra, the Gallery wasn't led... I mean, but it was the only space that existed, and this space where we are right now [Peja Gallery of Arts] was almost not used at all, I don't know what was happening here.

I mean, that is what happened and then all those, they were mainly organized through the *Shoqata e Arteve Figurative*,<sup>11</sup> some exhibitions, Spring Salon, salon this, that. They collected some works without any clear concept, they didn't have a clear development strategy or concept. But the Gallery worked very well during the time of Shyqra.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was there any alternative space, any center?

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, I don't know. There were some young students who wanted something alternative because they couldn't exhibit at the Gallery, not everybody could exhibit there... and I mean, we used the spaces of Boro Ramiz<sup>12</sup> and improvised with... they were mainly improvisations. There wasn't a certain space where you could...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was there anything within the university?

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<sup>7</sup> The Pristina Gallery of Arts was the first exhibition space in the then-Yugoslav province of Kosovo. The gallery space was established in 1979 and located in the Youth and Sports Center - *Boro dhe Ramizi*.

<sup>8</sup> Shyqri Nimani (1941) was born in Shkodër, Albania. He is a Kosovo based graphic designer and professor, graduated from the Academy of Applied Arts in Belgrade. Nimani is known as one of the first professional Albanian graphic designers, he is also one of the founders of the Graphic Design department at the Faculty of Arts, University of Pristina and one of the first directors of the National Gallery of Kosovo.

<sup>9</sup> Edo Murtić (1921-2005) was a painter from Croatia who was best known for his lyrical abstraction and abstract expressionist style. He worked in a variety of media, including oil painting, gouache, graphic design, etc. He was renowned in Yugoslavia for breaking away from the socialist realist art style.

<sup>10</sup> Zulfikar Zuko Džumhur (1920-1989) was a Bosnian writer, painter and caricaturist. Džumhur's bohemian nature, versatility of a polymath and extremely creative personality have made him a unique figure of the Yugoslav culture in the second half of the 20th century.

<sup>11</sup> *Shoqata e Arteve Figurative te Kosoves* - Association of Kosovo Figurative Artists (*SHAFK*). A self-governing association of artists founded in 1967. Associations were present in all Yugoslav republics and provinces and *SHAFK* created opportunities for artists from Kosovo such as chances to travel and exhibit locally and abroad and participate in artist colonies.

<sup>12</sup> *Boro dhe Ramizi* refers to two friends, Boro Vukmirović and Ramiz Sadiku, who were executed during the Second World War. They became the symbol of the Brotherhood and Unity of the Serbian and Albanian people. In Yugoslav times it was common to name institutions after the heroes of the anti-fascist war.

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, no. We organized the annual exhibition within the university. And we exhibited at our ateliers, each of us at their atelier. I mean, that was more a result, the professor showed the work he had done with the student, they chose one student. I mean, it was more the professor showing their results, there weren't activities that I can specify.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You also were, as you said before, a student of Muslim Mulliqi, right...

**Sokol Beqiri:** I wasn't Muslim's student but he was my father's friend and Visar, his son, was the same generation as me. And when he came to visit Visar, he felt a kind of obligation to say something to each one of us, and the way he explained things was impressive, he was an extraordinary master. And with my ambition as well as with the privilege that he was my father's friend, I would stick to him like this {claps his hands}. Until... I even started going out with him for drinks. After I returned from Ljubljana, he spent two-three days or more with me whenever he came to Peja, because our fields were similar. I had the honor to be treated as a colleague by him at that time and they tried to convince me that I had, I mean, after the results I had shown in Graphics...

And I was maybe, not maybe but I was certainly the only person with a Master's in Graphics at that time. And they were trying to convince me that it would be very good if I joined the Academy. But I always had a dose of rebellion within myself, even then, and I didn't like how it functions and I decided to rebel. Then when I started doing other works, the debates on which I didn't agree with the late Agim and Muslim were very few, whether something is art or not... whether it is something that goes away, it goes away for all of us at the end of the day. But, these [debates] were constructive, not...

But I was supported from them, I can say I was privileged because they treated me with their friendship and the openness they had. They treated me as a colleague, which wasn't usual for a young boy... so, I can't complain in that sense.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Before interrupting, we were talking about the exhibitions which...

**Sokol Beqiri:** Huh?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** About the exhibitions with which you travelled, where did you go, what were you researching?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Of course, of course, right after I went to Ljubljana I became a member of the Association of Slovenia Figurative Artists. And then they were a lot more active and more organized, then I started being part of the Biennales that I considered the most important ones for Graphic Arts. And more or less, at each of them... I was at the Ljubljana biennale several times. I refused to be part of it two times because of a meaningless patriotism of mine, I didn't want them to write Yugoslavia under my name, we were represented there by our nationalities...today that whole thing sounds so stupid to me, but I felt so proud of it at that time. Even though I refused, the Slovenians didn't remove me, but did put Albania under my name, Albania was completely isolated at that time and I was so proud of that, that today I feel like...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What were the relations with Albania...

**Sokol Beqiri:** We didn't know anything, I didn't know anything about Albania. I knew the social-realism painters... And I was lucky enough because Ali Hadri<sup>13</sup> has a fantastic collection of the painters of social-realism where I could see the paintings live. There wasn't, I don't exactly remember the dates, but it was in '96 or '97 when I first met Edi [Rama], the current prime minister who was an artist back then, I met him in the Cetinje biennale. This was the first time that I met an artist from Albania.

Then I met Anri Sala in Paris in 2000. Then when it started, when Edi Muka came here, he invited us to Onufër in '97, that's where I met Adrian Paci, Alban Hajdinaj and Edi was very well organized in the beginning, he organized two exhibitions with national character in Berlin, in Bern... I remember, in Italy. And that is where we got the chance to meet. All people of the same opinions at that time, who were working with...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What about Yugoslavia, did you have a way to feed the feeling of being Albanian...

**Sokol Beqiri:** It was the idea of feeling... somebody showed me a debate between someone from Albania and someone from Kosovo accusing each other, "No we aren't enough patriots. You are not like that..." and I really liked the response of the guy from Albania, he was Visar Zhiti, he said, "When you weren't allowed to be Albanians, and you defended that part of the identity, we weren't allowed to be humans." It is a big difference, so we didn't deal much with that...

The people who gathered around Edi Muka were people with more open visions toward the national and... I mean, we were more or less preoccupied with the art that is happening today. We don't have...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What happened politically at the time when you were studying in Pristina, you mentioned it that it wasn't stable...

**Sokol Beqiri:** In Pristina, I went to high school when the demonstrations of '81 started. Then constantly time after time, it was like that while I was a student, my wife was pregnant when we spent three-four nights or I don't know how many nights at the sports hall where the miners locked themselves.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The October 1 hall...

**Sokol Beqiri:** Yes, yes. The sports hall in Pristina. The miners locked themselves in the mine and we locked ourselves in the sports hall. And more or less, I felt a kind of obligation together with Luan Bylykbashi and Gaz Domi... I don't remember all the names now. We felt a kind of moral obligation to be in everything that happened, demonstrations, protests. These were the only ones that happened during that time before I left for Ljubljana.

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<sup>13</sup> Ali Hadri (1928-1987), a Kosovo-Albanian historian. The first director of the Kosovo Institute of History.



**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did these world communicate, were they informing one another? I mean arts and politics?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Who?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I am talking about the time when you were studying, was art affected by politics? Did you communicate...

**Sokol Beqiri:** Not that much back then. At that time I was more after abstract expressionism and maybe the tension could only be noticed a little in gestures or shapes, a kind of chaos. But not in the description sense it is natural that whatever happened, it is reflected one way or another, be it directly or indirectly, but not the way it happened later. I mean, later I might've dealt with a certain political issue and I approached it directly. Only later did I start...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I am thinking about how to construct this part...I mean, let's talk about Slovenia and your development as an artist and then we return to Kosovo and the '90s and your development here in a new political context.

**Sokol Beqiri:** Yes, yes, yes. Okay, when I finished my studies in '89, the Academy was expensive and I passed my last exam and I had the last day when I was supposed to apply in Ljubljana together with Gani Llalloshi. And we begged him, otherwise we would lose a whole year, we asked him to issue us a paper showing that we have the diplomas. It was Yugoslavia at that time, and we went, we got accepted there. Of course, there were stereotypes about Albanians, not only in Slovenia. And in the beginning, it was very difficult for us to integrate, but Ganja and I worked there, we stayed alone for several months.

Until a shift of students happened there, two Slovenian students went to Holland, and two students from Holland came to Slovenia and we got along with them, and through the guy from Holland, he told them, "Look, they are normal people, they don't have tails." And they gradually accepted us, and I can say that they accepted us well. It was a completely different atmosphere. That is when our first disappointments started, about how little we had learned here at the Academy, how conservative and close-minded we were. There were so many things that I didn't know anything at all about because there was no Internet at that time. I mean, nobody could lead you to many things, and there were other circumstances there, the preparation was different, with Zagreb, from Italy, from Austria, and with the ambitions and will that I had, looking at how things were going... I mean, the conceptual shifts in me started happening slowly.

Just as I was convinced when I started, I constantly was convinced that I didn't know how to draw, it seemed to me that I don't know how to draw and I still didn't know what was that thing that is art. I mean, that motivation was the engine, the main generator that pushed me. Graphics, graphics. When I realized that I could do graphics and now I am moving with graphics, there is something else... I was always seeking that something else, what was that something else. That was the main engine that pushed me to work, to research, not to stay in one place.

**Rozafa Imami:** For how long did you stay in Ljubljana?

**Sokol Beqiri:** What?

**Rozafa Imami:** How long...

**Sokol Beqiri:** Two years, for two years. Then when I went to finish with the graduation procedures. I haven't gotten the diploma, I still don't have a diploma. I have an index showing that I have graduated. And I wrote to the Academy some years ago, I said, "I want to take my diploma." I don't even know why it crossed my mind, I wanted to go there. They asked, "When did you graduate?" I said, "Thirty years ago." And they simply replied with a, "Hahaha!" But two years, I mean, I spent two years there and the next year I went I prepared two theoretical exams, then I defended my graduation thesis. In Slovenia something completely different happened all of a sudden. I mean, things started developing, I had other opportunities there.

There were small private galleries there who for example took your works, or they sold them if they liked them. At that time, not a month would pass that I wouldn't sell two graphics. I wasn't in a very bad material condition because I had enough and constant support from my father, as I told you in the beginning. But the idea that somebody was buying it for you and someone else...

I did the first exhibition with them, the gallery who sold my works time after time. They organized an exhibition for me before I returned, back then I only worked in graphics and painting, but mainly graphic arts. That was the first solo exhibition, even though I didn't have many solo exhibitions, I had three in total.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you have a mentor who you would like to mention, who gave you something valuable?

**Sokol Beqiri:** A valuable mentor... I mentioned the mentors with whom I became friends in the beginning, Agim Çavdarbasha and Muslim Mulliqi. But those I learned mostly from are Nysret Salihamixhiqi and Zoran Jovanović. And unfortunately, I went to... because back then it was like that, you finished the second year which was with general subjects, but in the second year you had to choose either graphics or painting and which professor you wanted to learn with. And it was very natural at that time, everybody chose Fatmir Krypa at that time, and there were no other professors for those studying only graphics. There was Hysni Krasniqi teaching it... but he only taught it for those who had chosen painting and had graphics as a secondary subject.

And I chose Zoran Jovanović, I chose Zoran Jovanović and it was a kind of scandal for that time, because my father was a professor, "How come he is choosing a Serb?"

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In Serbian or in which language did he teach?

**Sokol Beqiri:** It never happened before that an Albanian chose a Serb to learn from. The only motivation for me was because I liked his graphics. He was super weird and all his behavior, him being chaotic and not focused helped me a lot. But I don't know, there were moments when he directed you so beautifully and explained everything so well that... he was hard to work with, but he was very clear

and knew how to tell you stuff, especially when it comes to abstracts, you know, where there are open chances and he knew how to...

I remember once, in Fatmir [Krypa]'s class were working on the other hand, he was putting some various figures which they were inspired from... and I was alone on the other side attempting to do something, I don't know what, according to my own mind. And at a moment, he came, this was the way he communicated which I liked. At a moment he came and told me, "Uhh, this is very beautiful." And he said beautiful about something which I was putting the color on before putting it in my work, I tested it on paper, and if the color was alright, I continued. And he didn't comment on the work that I was doing and giving myself for, but he commented on the paper. And of course I was struck, and they laughed, "Hahaha," all of them. He said, "You should not laugh, but I will tell you why this is good." And he said, "This shape, reacts like this with this shape, like this..."

I mean, only then I realized that the fact that I was too focused on my idea that I wanted to do something was a burden, I couldn't see things that can be valued according to a certain criteria tomorrow. Relations, shapes, lines which I did spontaneously. I mean, you have to be aware of the process, not a hostage to the idea, but the process, you have to know the moment when something happened that you have to...

Or another thing, with the ambitions that I had, I wanted to study graphics in the second year right away. There is one in that coffee shop there, this big {shows with hands}. And usually, it is done with one color in one plaque, I wanted to work with five colors in one plaque. Fatmir was very good and I had very good relations with him, he told me, "You cannot do it like that, because you cannot do two of them that are the same." And I was a bit down and I said, "I will try." When he came, and I was disappointed and told him, "Professor I want to, but I cannot make two of them that are the same." He said, "What do you need two same ones?" I said, "But graphics is made to be reproduced." "But you can make all of them different. You will have to use the skills or chances that are given by the technology, technique. Because what you do cannot be done by hand. You have to benefit from textures, structures that you can do and cannot do with your hand, what do you need ten same ones?" And you say, "Wait, he is right." And I mean, these were some details, there weren't..

Yes because sometimes I needed, I brought ten-fifteen drawings and he would step on them, "These are worth nothing, they are useless..." And then later he returned and called me, "Come..." In Serbian, "Come, this is just a game that not everybody can play." I mean. He had a weird way which you had to... I can say that I learned a lot from him.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you have anyone in Slovenia who was close to you like that?

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, no. In Slovenia, Agim Çavdarbasha studied there before me and he directed me to a professor who was already retired, and I didn't have many alternatives. My professor was very conservative, but I wasn't bothered by that. You know, there were moments when he said, "This cannot be done." But I wasn't bothered by this, and I got along well with him.

And I was lucky enough because besides being part of exhibitions, I started being part of important events. As a member of the academy of Slovenia, I got an award for graphics at the exhibition of all the

academies of the students from Yugoslavia. It was a question of whether you could even be part of it or not as an Albanian, it was a kind of privilege for them, look, an Albanian... you know? And then this made the communication easier and they could leave you alone and... but he was very conservative, I don't remember having learned something worth mentioning.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was Stupica<sup>14</sup> there at the time, Gabriel?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Huh?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was Gabriel Stupica still active?

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, Gabriel Stupica had died already, wait...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** '94...

**Sokol Beqiri:** Gabriel Stupica, he was fantastic. No, back then there was a professor I like but who was very difficult to get in touch with, he was Emeric Bernard. He was among my favorites, Emeric... We really had... then I met some people who are still my friends from those days. I am still in touch with some of the artists with whom later I got to be part of various exhibitions. It happened that back then I couldn't, I looked at them as the stars that pass by, you know, something you cannot have access to. But then I knew them somewhere else, you know, it is...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you return to Pristina, or Peja...

**Sokol Beqiri:** I returned to Pristina for some months and then I returned to Peja right after some months. Because at that time, I told you in the beginning, I was financially dependent and in Pristina we were living in an apartment, my father was fired because he was a signer of the appeal number 212. And he was among the first ones who was fired. But he didn't care much about it because he had already gotten tired of work either way. The conditions here were very good, we had our house and everything, so we decided to come here, of course it was convenient for me because my atelier was here and whatever I wanted. A one-hundred-square-meter atelier, and he had taken care to buy every tool for me. He bought me the lithograph cutter as soon as I returned, the lithograph stones... I don't know if they still do lithographs at the Academy. I guess they don't.

I just want to tell you about how great his support was, besides not letting me work on anything else, he took care to cover everything that we needed, I needed, his children needed. I mean, he also took care to buy the technical tools and everything. And of course I returned here, and with my ambitions I...

## Part Two

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<sup>14</sup> Gabriel Stupica (1913-1990). He was a painter from Slovenia and a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana.

**Sokol Beqiri:** Then another reason is that I have been connected to Peja since my childhood, secondly, the space, the conditions were a lot better, thirdly, I didn't have any ambitions to do anything in Pristina, to become a professor or... the total opposite. And when, because I wanted to tell you in the beginning, when Muslim and Agim Çavdarbasha became professors back then, they were trying to convince me to apply to teach at the Academy. I told you that I kind of had a rebellious soul within myself. But the interesting part is that my father supported that. Because he told me, "It sucks the energy from you, that you cannot give everything that you want to do now."

And he didn't see an issue in this thing, which is a rare thing, because every father says, "Yes, get the job. You can become a professor and have the salary, you have this and that..." No, he supported me in everything, until the end, without any reserve.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was the situation at that time, could you exhibit, or you were just working?

**Sokol Beqiri:** No. When I returned, for some time I continued to exhibit graphics and it was okay. They would send you the invitation, you would pack the graphics and deliver it via mail very easily. I didn't have anything here anymore, only in the triennales and biennales, I continued for a short time. But then I couldn't because I didn't accept. I only did two graphics when I returned here and then I dropped it, I started dealing with other things. And there weren't exhibitions at that time, we organized the exhibition in Belgrade,

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The one *Përtej* [Beyond]...

**Sokol Beqiri:** yes, but that was an exhibition as a statement, it was more an exhibition like a political provocation, they wanted us to show willingness and political courage. To go and say what had to be said in Belgrade, and we worked especially for that.

I think it wasn't, I mean, it was more of a political gesture. The exhibition was okay, in a sense that the stereotypes that they had in Belgrade, and they simply... several days before I read one of the interviews where they think back on it, and they say that they didn't expect that. I never tried, I don't think it is something to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of, you know? The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary should be marked for events like... I don't think there was something there worth marking its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What led to that exhibition?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Huh?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What led to that exhibition?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Shkëlzen Maliqi was working for the Soros Foundation and he met Dejan Stretenović and while talking, he realized that they knew nothing about the art in Kosovo, Shkëlzen told them that there are people trying, it would be good to have them and they would do it, and they said, "Yes, of

course.” And they had the idea to first go gradually, not go right there. And then we did it, and we were invited to the Cetinje Biennale after that.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You exhibited the same work?

**Sokol Beqiri:** The same works, because it was organized in the same year. They asked for the same works because it was very political and explanatory for the time. And then we didn’t exhibit, we exhibited in coffee shops, like everyone.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was the reaction [from the audience] I am thinking about that time, what was their perception, what did they think you were you doing?

**Sokol Beqiri:** You know what, when you take it... I was interested in the opinion of some artists I had followed as a student. There was Mrdjan Bajic whom I liked, or Jovan Despot. People who, Dejan Stretenović, professionals whose work I had followed. Others didn’t matter to me. I mean, I was interested in knowing what they thought about the work as such, of course, as a political gesture, there was a very particular audience who were very little who were aware of what was happening and it was definitely a beginning of breaking stereotypes about us, that there was something happening here too.

We have the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Branislav Dimitrović something. I wanted to know what he thought... I mean, it was expected from them, because it was definitely a surprise. But I don’t think it was something for...

**Rozafa Imami:** But more in relation with the situation of that time, what kind of influence did it have...

**Sokol Beqiri:** Back then it didn’t have a big influence here or there. We only tackled some people’s consciousness. Here, there were mainly negative reactions, they called us traitors for betraying the common values. I had some polemics with the journalist, I mean, I don’t remember we have intentions to betray our common goals, I said, “I don’t know that I have a common goal with you.” This was exactly the answer.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Who else was there? Ilir Bajri...

**Sokol Beqiri:** Ilir Bajri played the music, Mehmet [Behluli] and Maksi [Maksut Vezgishi]. And then after that, we organized exhibitions at coffee shops just like everyone.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was happening, what were you able to produce...

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, the nature of my work was such that it was not problematic at all to put it at a coffee shop. My only principle was to do it at Fatka’s, because Fatka is so lovely, as a character and as a

supporter... he was the greatest supporter of culture at that time in general, the institutions don't do now what he did back then, and that is why he went bankrupt.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Fatka is a Peja character?

**Sokol Beqiri:** *Hani i Dy Robertëve*, not *Hani i Dy Robertëve*, Fatka, Fatka is a legend. Later the Dodona was opened, I went there and I wanted to do an exhibition, I know that we were planning to do an exhibition before the war, I mean in '97, in '98. And that is where the concept for the video started, the first video I did was Milka, Milka in the beginning, I thought about everything, it could take one year or two from the moment I thought about something to the moment I realized it. Because I just dropped it, no I don't like it, I am not happy with it, no I don't want to, no I want to, no I don't like it at all...

Milka as a concept first started when I wanted to do an exhibition at Shkëlzen's. It was a video, we needed to do the performance. I wanted to literally take a cow and paint it with the colors of Milka. Back then there were discussions where there was KLA or not, whether they have showed or not, before they showed for the first time. The idea was to tie the cow, paint it with the colors of Milka and write "Milka" [on the cow]. And show, it was, there was the basement of the gallery. The idea was to bring a butcher with a mask and do it live in the gallery.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** To slaughter it?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Yes. And of course, it didn't have. Then I started after some time and here I came that... after the war, I had an idea from long ago and I did it like a video, right after the war, I wanted to do it before the war. When a bunker was put here, my house and my atelier was right behind the bunker, the bunker here. And the police were located right there, in the bunker, I had a lot of stress. I wanted to go and paint it like a pink cow, and that was the case when my father didn't support me either because he was afraid. And of course, right after I returned after the war, I painted it *Think Pink*, meaning think positively.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How, how did you spend the war? Let's not move so fast.

**Sokol Beqiri:** Just like everyone. Back then, I didn't want to leave, I wanted to stay here. My father begged me, "At least let the children." Just a little before the bombings started. I was in Peja all the time, even when there were fightings. Because there were not a lot of fightings in Peja, there were in the surroundings, in the villages. We were isolated, one year, one year and a half before it. Of course there was stress, like everywhere...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you stay here...

**Sokol Beqiri:** Yes, yes. But after the bombings, after the bombings, when the bombing started, they displaced us after the second day. I was one of the... at that time I worked with, if you haven't seen it, you have it in the catalogue, some paintings, if you haven't seen the exhibition in Pristina, I don't know whether you have seen it or not? My solo exhibition three years ago. It is in the catalogue, Pera

[Petrit Gora] can send it to you via... there are some paintings which I worked after my studies, I returned to painting after a very long time. Because we stayed locked at home all day, everything closed at 12:00 and we couldn't go out. I had some big boards and I decided to paint. But what I did, for the first time I worked on some figures, only when it was a task at school. First time I started, six paintings, I made some paintings, I mainly painted myself, my wife. And that is a period, that day...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Are they figurative?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Ah?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You use figuring in them?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Paintings of portraits, my wife, myself, my daughter. You know, I never did something like that, only when it was a task at school.

**Rozafa Imami:** Are those the ones without heads...

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, no. This is something else. That was in the early '90s when I decided that I didn't want my graphic arts or my paintings to end up somewhere in a bedroom. And I worked with big layers of colors. Not because I wanted to, but I was constantly not happy, the layer was created like that itself, and one of the paintings like that, it is smaller than tis, I put... there is my wife put in a jar, as something that you converse in order to preserve, not to... and the others are something else, but I have six paintings.

**Rozafa Imami:** Do you still have them?

**Sokol Beqiri:** I have some and some not. But they were in the exhibition in Pristina, they are in the catalogue. You can see some portraits, some... this was the beginning of my rebellion against graphic arts and painting, when I craved it, I put it in jars and so on... I photocopied myself, do you know, I made portraits and so on, instead of painting, I would put my head in the photocopy machine and... I mean, in the early '90s there was a kind... Shkëlzen called it rebellion.

You know what, it was problematic at that time because the debates here started at that time, Shkëlzen was the supporter who always came and wrote, and covered it theoretically and with historical data. And whenever there was an intellectual that said, "Wait because it doesn't seem much..." You know, without having someone as a theoretical *background* [English] they eat you, you know? Not that they eat you in the sense that you lose your confidence and quit. You know, I can only lie and say that I didn't like it when he wrote about me because when I saw what he wrote I felt like I had done a lot.

**Rozafa Imami:** Maybe we would continue at the time of the war, what did you work on more?

**Sokol Beqiri:** This is all I worked on during the war, these six...



**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Portraits...

**Sokol Beqiri:** Yes, paintings. Mainly portraits of myself and my wife. They aren't complete, but there is my wife in one, exactly he, and I was inspired by Filip Gastone for that one, When he worked on a painting as if he never did a painting before and I also wanted to do a portrait as if I hadn't gone to school, as if I hadn't learned. I took a photo and I went and did it as if I had never learned, just as I felt.

And then I did those paintings. I don't remember working on something else. There are also some others but I don't remember them. I know about these six paintings, but they are in a pretty big in size. Two of them were exhibited now in Documenta.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Where did you go during war?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Huh?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Where were you sheltered during the war?

**Sokol Beqiri:** You know that, I remember it as if it was yesterday... I was in the atelier and I painted and I didn't want to leave under any condition. Meri had all our daughters' documents prepared, money and everything, some basic stuff, she was always prepared. And I was... one of the paintings that I never finished, the seventh one, I was working like this, I worked on the ground, when they kicked in our neighbor's house. And I saw it when they were deporting them, I saw that there was no use to stay anymore, I took the car, Renault four and... then I saw the queue, after that...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you go to Albania?

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, the crowd led me itself. And I left my parents at home, but in half of the way they told me, "Look, because they were displaced too and they are coming." They came by foot to Rozhaja and then we went to Ulcinj. We went to Ulcinj like most of the people, and then we returned right after it was over.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In what condition did you find your house?

**Sokol Beqiri:** The house, you know what? The house, all the houses were burned, ours was just wet. I mean, it wasn't burned, even though it was an old house, they could well have burned it, I would build it from the beginning. But, they took everything and turned the water on in the end. But what is interesting, an interesting thing that happened in my house, somebody stayed there sometimes, and that someone went to my atelier and that somebody knew my name. I don't believe that it was someone who knew me personally, but they knew it from the catalogue or something.

And they left messages for me, I made a mistake that I didn't document them. And about my performances, as I told you in the beginning, because I can forget about some things while speaking, if

it wasn't for Shkëlzen who documented them, I wouldn't have many things today. He came and all the photographs of the *çarshia*<sup>15</sup> that we did, *Think Pink*, he did all that, because I was like, "I will do it, it doesn't matter..."

They painted with my colors directly in the wall. They wrote there, I know the names as well, Tazamikša, Nikola, Dragudjojo, Novi Beograd, Blok 70. They even wrote their address. And in the atelier there was written, I didn't erase it until I moved out, they wrote a message, "Sokol Serbia." People asked me, "Why don't you erase it?" I said, "I am not erasing it because the message is written so that somebody reads it, I am happy that I came to read the message."

They wrote messages and threw my colors there. But I don't believe that was someone who knew me, but they simply stayed there, I don't know what happened there. And I mean, the house was uninhabitable.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did they save your works?

**Sokol Beqiri:** A? Yes. Not all of them, they tore some of my paintings and threw some others from the third floor, they tore the big ones and brought them downstairs and threw them in the pool. I don't know who had time to... but graphics were saved, some of them were damaged because I had many of them in the drawers, they took them out to see whether there was anything hidden, money or something. But they damaged a lot of my paintings, that is why I only have a few left.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you recover after the war, I mean, how did you rethink your whole role as an artist?

**Sokol Beqiri:** First, I made the decision not to deal with arts long ago. But just like everything else, I made the decision and then it needed time. There is a text of Shkëlzen, there is poetry in this catalogue, I feel honored because it is the first published poetry. He writes poetry but doesn't publish them, but he published this one that he dedicated to my family. There he mentions my sisters, mother, father, myself, And when he mentions me, a sequence when I am mentioned, he says, "Where did he find that *raki*<sup>16</sup> which he served cold." And he constantly repeated that, "Art doesn't make sense." I mean, that was the time... this definitely doesn't make sense, what am I, what do I want to do...

But then, as I told you, I didn't realize my projects, the ones that I had in my head, and there were enough... after the war we became like a banana, people from all around came to see who these people are, what these people are. Of course, people also came to see whether there were people engaged in art, and simply, there were demands, I already had, I needed to go for a shooting, to edit, everything was ready, and I started liking that job because I travelled for three weeks to some places, France for example. It seemed more...

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<sup>15</sup> Literally small market.

<sup>16</sup> *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

But I was constantly followed by another frustration, what I expected, what I thought would make art. For example, when I looked at a work, I thought that it was a reflection of the character of the artist. Let's say a work of the artists that I liked, not to say the works that I liked. Not only I liked them, but I loved them. When I got the chance to meet with those people, with those works and I saw the difference between the real character of that human and the moralization they reflect in their work and the way that I got the chance to work with people whom I could only dream of, made me not to like all this, exhibitions and so on...

I mean, especially the part where you spend more energy on how to promote yourself than the work that you do... or at least, the criteria that I have set for myself doesn't... I mean, I saw exhibitions that... I simply thought I shouldn't be there. But I continued with, I pushed my decision forward, but then in 2006 I continued because I still had projects that I hadn't realized.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You were at Documenta in 2002, right?

**Sokol Beqiri:** I was at Documenta now in 2017.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Weren't you there in 2002 as well?

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, the first time that I...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What about René Block?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Rene Block was in 2002. I was there with [Harald] Szeemann... then together with Szeemann I worked the *Beauty of the Failure, Failure of the Beauty* [English] in Barcelona. It was from Kandinsky and Malević and he did the exhibition. Then the Sevilla Biennale, Locarno Film Festival. There was a part where they played the videos...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Why did I think that all...

**Sokol Beqiri:** 2002, the Block... you know why you made the connection? Because Block's interview took place in the Documenta's building. In 2002, Documenta was now, the first time that I worked after ten years... I worked especially for it. When they invited me for a meeting, I went and met, first I had to meet Charles [Esche] and Galit [Eliat] and didn't want to do a presentation, but Erzen [Shkolli] insisted and gave them the catalogue. And then when I went there, there was Adam [Szymczyk], the director and we spent some time, I didn't even dream about it, and nobody sent me any signals that Adam liked the work and so on...

And at that moment I told him, "What now, what will I do after ten years?" And anyway, I thought about it, it wasn't much of a problem. But when Adam asked me, I went there the same day I rejected an exhibition about the Balkans when the Pera Museum was opened in Istanbul, I didn't want to be

part of it. As well as one in the Modern Art Museum in Budapest, Albanian Contemporary Art, I didn't want to be part of it. I simply said, I will no longer be part of anything.

And Adam asked me, "Why are you not rejecting me down?" And I explained it to him very beautifully, I was prepared for this question, I said, "You know what?" I connected it with the religion, I said, "For a Muslim who has been practicing the religion with the greatest love for thirty years, their dream is to go to Makkah, and for someone who has been practicing art for thirty years, I did it with the greatest love," I said, "Their dream is to leave it in Documenta, not everywhere." And I said, "That is why I am not rejecting you."

Then until I chose them because I didn't know what it was going to be, in the second meeting he told Erzen, "It would be better if I spoke to Sokol about work not only about food and wine." Now they were imposing that topic to me. And I said, "Okay, what will be my contribution?" And in the beginning, it was unreal, almost a mini retrospective, to put the graphics, a kind of... but it was unreal, also in the sense of the space and he said, "What I would like mostly," because he read it in the catalogue, he read the conversation with Shkëlzen and said, "I like how you react towards different situations, especially..." He said, "I would like to have some new works."

I already had works, because when a friend of mine told me that she was working with Adam and he likes my work a lot... and he said, "I like how you... and I would like you to have new works." And when he told me that, I said, "What am I going to do now?" It was problematic, because ten years later you have to do some work, for ten years you have been all over the place, you have been saying that there is no art, art doesn't make sense. Now this complicates the situation, because now you can, you do something and they say he is lying to us every day, the next day... you know, you could, but I wanted to stay between the attitude that I had developed for those ten years, and I needed to prove it, I said, "If an artist has a mission, their mission is to prove that there is no art." Which is not an easy job. And I wanted to at least give one proof of that, and I told Adam, I told him my idea and that's what I did.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did you do in those ten years?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Ah?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did you do in those ten years of no activity? How did you articulate that? (laughs)

**Sokol Beqiri:** Nothing, I chilled. (laugh) I chilled for ten years in the coffee shop here. I followed through few generations, now Era and her friends are the youngest generation.... Nothing, I took walks, sometimes I asked, I want to tell you two stories. One day, when my older daughter Toska was little, my father asked her, "What does your father do?" And she was wondering what her father does, "What does your father do?" He was trying to help her, you know, to say a *piktor* [painter], and he said, "Pi - pi - p..." She said, "*Pijanec!*" [A drunk] (laugh) and the other one, I am telling you what my second

daughter told her teacher, that's what I did ten years ago. When her teacher asked her, "What does your father do?" She said, "He has fun." (laugh)

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** It is difficult...

**Sokol Beqiri:** It is very difficult. These ten years, when I decided to stop, the EXIT project was over, the gallery project, the only opportunity for me was to go abroad, my father died, there was no more money. I didn't want to come to Pristina and look for funds again, I could never do that. And the most logical thing to me, I spent my life in the coffee shop, I wanted to have a gallery in the coffee shop, and I did it. The artists did art, but I did it's *ongoing, ongoing*, [English] yes...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was the Exit project, it is pretty important for the contemporary art...

**Sokol Beqiri:** I think, without modesty it was the best project that ever happened. It is as a kind of result, at that time, that was the time of the Rene Bloch generation, the avant guard, those were the years, that sadness, they are all those of today. I don't believe it was all coming out of EXIT but it had a big contribution. Because they got the chance to meet people who were actual in the international scene, to meet, to talk and see the exhibitions here. It was a project of Bundes Kulturstiftung, they made a kind of project relation. And they went out, practically they came to us, they met Erzen and I, we met them many times, they came and said, "Can you make a project which we..." I mean, they had it in Croatia, in Croatia, I don't know whether they had it in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Moldava and here. But I remember these, I don't know whether it was also organized somewhere else.

They sponsored a project which we called Missing Identity. *Missing* because for example with the idea that people here cannot travel to go and see things. I mean, if we can bring them, then Erzen and I used our connections which we had made with artists at various exhibitions and they were ready to come here not only because of friendship but also to see Kosovo, because it was attractive. They did it more because of friendship... and that's how we started, we came here, we said alright, we organized ours. I had my dilemmas back then as well, but when they all came together there, I didn't want to ruin the game and say that I didn't want...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was it an educative program which had an exhibition...

**Sokol Beqiri:** There was the exhibition but there were also the courses being held. There was also a library, we brought quite some books to the library which they could take and return, then there was the student exchange with Städelschule. Städelschule, because it was my dream. And I mean, that was missing, What is Missing Doesn't Hurt. That was it, because when you miss something, you don't know about it. It doesn't hurt, you know? And that is where... then the students came here. When they came here, they got to choose to have a change of the approach. And then they all went to Frankfurt, that was an opportunity for many students to maybe go outside Kosovo for the first time, to get the visa, go to Germany and have an exhibition. You know, it was a motivation...

**Rozafa Imami:** Who were they, do you remember?

**Sokol Beqiri:** The students?

**Rozafa Imami:** Yes, those who went from Kosovo?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Who came to us? All of them.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** No, no. People from Kosovo who were involved in the project, among the students...

**Sokol Beqiri:** I don't know who was from the students. There was, I know that there was Jakup [Ferri], who later was hired as a teaching assistant, you know Jakup? Then there was Flaka Haliti, hen Lulzim [Zeqiri], Alban Muja, all those who are active nowadays. Some tried to be active, but their place wasn't there, you know, this is not something that happens to everyone, you know.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you feel about yourself at that time, in the role of the professor, were you a professor?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Ah, no, no. You know what? I did everything spontaneously. I only talked to...In principle, I played the role of the professor all the time, because I constantly practiced, many young people came to my coffee shop whom I helped to prepare for the academy. "I want to enroll, can you help me?" And I helped them. They came to the coffee shop, they had a coffee and I corrected their drawings, I told them, I gave them homework. Then, I had a little experience because I had held workshops and so on, in the late 2000s when they invited me abroad with the students. More or less, it became a routine for me just like for professors, even though I was never a professor. I mean, first I showed them my work and they usually invited me to deal with a certain topic or something. Spontaneously, not as a professor... I am the authority and you... I couldn't teach that way...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Now I am gonna ask you, did you do that job any different from others?

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, but in principle I got to work with each one of them because most of those who were the first, brought their works to me and I gave them my opinion. Sometimes I liked all of it immediately, sometimes I had comments. I mean, I feel so bad about this because be it that they accepted it or not, you know, I always had this kind of communication with my colleagues. I did the same thing and I still do, but I was never a bad person who mocked them and so on...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I mean, it must've been easier, not easier, but I am just saying since you moved from one medium to another, it must've been easier for you to give them... you had a more interdisciplinary perspective to help others, because you tried it. You tested those...

**Sokol Beqiri:** With those from my generation, colleagues who have finished their studies, I was constantly in touch with them while they were working, but a friendly communication, not like a professor, I don't want to mention names but most of the good artists always invited me, asked me for advice whenever they worked on something, or they asked, "What do you think?" And I gave my

opinion, sometimes I agreed, sometimes not, but this is the kind of communication we had for a long time until...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What kind of references did you give them, for example, who are the artists for whom you would say, "Look at the work they did in that time period"

**Sokol Beqiri:** It depends on the type of material they bring, I never give a...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Template...

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, no, I never give a template that I work or that I like. I can say that there are only few people that I like, but I never do that... first you tell me what you have and according to that, I say one of the things that I think that I know. You cannot ask everyone to look at Filip Gaston. I would ask everyone to look at Gaston, I wouldn't let anyone paint after him, but what am I to do... why paint, what he did was...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Do you want to exhibit again?

**Sokol Beqiri:** No.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Are you sure? (laughs)

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, because I had one later, maybe you can still see it in Kosovo 2.0...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** No, I haven't seen it...

**Sokol Beqiri:** And in the end there was a similar question. I don't know why at Documenta, but I simply told them, "This is a craft, this is a craft that I do." You asked me, "Are you sure?" I am not sure, but in order to exhibit, I have to asses that I have a big interest from it, as the case with Documenta. Or there, I simply used this example, I said, "I am like a prostitute. You want to have fun, I will do it for you, this is the price," same goes for the exhibition, yes, this is how much it costs.

I don't want, I don't have, this is a fight, you know, you invite those from England to exhibit, to tell something, to do something, and are treated very badly in most of the cases. I don't have ambitions for anything else, if somebody likes my work and wants to show it because it fits their context, it can happen that I exhibit, but I ask for money.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you...

**Sokol Beqiri:** I do business, real business...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Clear...(laughs)

**Sokol Beqiri:** I don't do anything for myself and...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I am thinking, what do you do in those cases when you really find it important to react towards something, be it political or social, something you have a clear position, something you can challenge through your art practice? What do you do in such cases, or you just don't do your work

at all?

**Sokol Beqiri:** To be honest, I no longer have ambitions to react towards...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Not as an ambition, but to be personally involved in something. How do you articulate that?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Involved in what sense?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** If not through art...

**Sokol Beqiri:** I don't get involved...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Ah, you don't get involved...

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, I still do. This is what I do through art now...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I am not saying through art, but I mean, what do you do?

**Sokol Beqiri:** For example, I analyze, now I want to tell those in my apartment who throw garbage. I pay, I clean the stairs because nobody does. I don't ask anyone to participate. And the guy living upstairs doesn't dare to smoke inside because of his wife, so he throws his cigarette on the stairs. The next day I took a crayon and drew a circle with a number one in the wall, just like they do for crime scenes. You use a sense that you have used for things before and that has proven to be practical. And people see that they should not throw things because I am ashamed to tell them not to do so, so I find a way when I want to react but I don't have many ambitions to react towards phenomena. At least not for now...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** No, that is why I asked, how you articulate that which preoccupies you?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Look, it is definitely something that's within you, you can never stop thinking that way. You cannot stop and think, you will still think that way. I think with my eye, more visually than orally... That is what I am saying, it is a craft, it is a craft, listen, for me it was a pleasure that after ten years, there was a kind of documentation of the fact that it is simply a craft. For ten years I didn't work, then I just sat and worked on another project.

It is a craft, everybody can learn it, everybody can do it, you only need to want to do it and be sure that you want to do it. It is nothing more, that is why artists always bothered me, it is nothing extraordinary, different, art is like every other craft in the world and everything else. That is why I don't like them because they believe they are talented and different. I mean, later I read something that says, "Art can only survive if it is liberated from the idea that it is different. And only if it joins the powerful profane kingdom, the ordinary."

It is nothing more than just another thing, it is nothing more than a status that we try to achieve, a status. I have mentioned it hundred times, that making a painting and a hamburger is the same thing. I swear to God. You take the cloth, I am speaking from my experience, because the hamburger is made



like that as well, you take the cloth, you take the color, and here you have red color, the meat, onion is white, you can also find red ones, then there is green salad, yellow mayonnaise, red ketchup. There are colors here as well...

And now when you start reacting here, you put an amount of red color, some shape and here you put meat. And the better you mix the colors, the better the result, the more tasty it will be. It is the same energy, the same process, the same mindset there. It is only that you eat the hamburger and don't think much, or you just don't think whether it was tasty or not because you haven't seen it in a museum. But when you are precise, slowly, maybe there is something... you know, the confusion that we get from something is more than... the way you think about everything is just like boiling kidney beans, and editing... there is a lot of that, wait, this is dominating in relation to that, this is ruining the story... the same ways...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Are you thinking about adding anything?

**Sokol Beqiri:** Whenever you want, it is not a problem at all...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** No, no. If you think there is something that would complement...

**Sokol Beqiri:** Ah, if I want to add? You know what, maybe there are things, because in this kind of conversation when you are not focused on a typical question, questions and answers, even if you get prepared to say something, you start something else on the way and... I don't know what I didn't finish and what I did...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** No, only if you feel like...

**Sokol Beqiri:** No, no...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Because otherwise it is done. Thank you very much!

**Sokol Beqiri:** Thank you!