

# Oral History Kosovo

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## INTERVIEW WITH AGIM RUDI

Pristina | Date: August 25, 2017

Duration: 156 minutes

### Present:

1. Agim Rudi (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Donjetë Berisha (Camera)
4. Nevryze Rudi (Agim Rudi's spouse)

*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

**Agim Rudi:** I was born on June 10, 1947. I was born in Gjakova. Even though my family were from Gjakova, they lived in Mitrovica, my father had a store. Earlier in Mitrovica there weren't two stores that sold nails and dye, henna, fabrics. There was one store, and it was my father's store. And... '44, it was very problematic in Mitrovica, a very problematic time, chetniks<sup>1</sup> existed but near Mitrovica, very near. They always lived in a part of Mitrovica, there were a lot, a few in Mitrovica and a few who went away from Mitrovica, they were always near Mitrovica, the chetniks.

In '44, my father and his whole family fled to Gjakova, there were two, there were one brother, two brothers, actually one was born then, there was one brother. There were one brother and two sisters, we fled to Gjakova, my house was in Gjakova because Gjakova people go to work somewhere, either in Ferizaj or in Gjilan, or somewhere, they leave their family in Gjakova but this is how they lived, this is how they lived in Gjakova... people of Gjakova in Mitrovica...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When did you come back to Mitrovica?

**Agim Rudi:** Then we came back slowly, slowly... I'll tell you how. My father was scared that the communist will declare him a *ratni bogataš*<sup>2</sup> because when you had a store at that time you were observed closely by communists. He was not very fond of communists but apparently he did not tell anyone, I suppose, and it was, it was a hard time in Gjakova. People did not have bread to eat, in Gjakova where the good... they lived well in Gjakova, the people mainly lived well, mainly (coughs).

And... but we were good, our family was good, we had something to eat and then sometime in '49, '48 or '49, I don't know exactly but sometime around then we came back. He somehow found a job because it was very hard for him to find one, to get a state job. It was a really big problem for Albanians, it was considered quite a failure to work for the state.

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<sup>1</sup> *Četniks*, Chetniks; Qetniks; *Çetnikët* - Serbian movement born in the beginning of the Second World War, under the leadership of Draža Mihailović. Its name derives from *četa*, anti-Ottoman guerrilla bands. This movement adopted a Greater Serbia program and was for a limited period an anti-occupation guerrilla force, but mostly engaged in collaboration with Nazi Germany, its major goal remaining the unification of all Serbs. It was responsible for a strategy of terror against non-Serbs during the Second World War and was banned after 1945. Mihailović was captured, tried and executed in 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Serb.: *ratni bogataš*, describes people who acquired wealth during the war.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you explain?

**Agim Rudi:** [The documentary] shows how Albanians work, they do not work for the state, they run private businesses because they never trusted the state and they were never close with the state, that was absurd, absurd. They're all under Macedonia, under the same flag, they work under the same constitution... This seem to characterize them, you know. And he had the whole store, he knew how to run it, he knew how to manage it, my father.

My mother had a problem, she often told me, very often. In the evening after all the chores, having four children means there are a lot of clothes to be washed, there were no washing machines back then and to be clean and stuff... In the evening when they went to sleep it was big responsibility to count the money. That was my mother's biggest problem, apparently, I don't know how much money there was, there weren't much. But it was a problem for my mother, she counted it in the evening {explains with his hands} the green ones, the red ones, all that was there. It was one of the biggest problems for my mother {laughs}. And, good this story is over, and my father continued alone, he was employed by the state, in the Granap Enterprise, in Serbian it is Granap, the whole world worked in Granap at the time.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What sort of company was this?

**Agim Rudi:** I do not know, they sold flour and he was *hesapçi*,<sup>3</sup> he knew how to write, he knew how to write in Arabic, Serbian Cyrillic. I saw his writing, I did not understand Arabic but he wrote everything in Cyrillic. At the time, knowing to write in '47 was a huge privilege, that's why my father was employed there.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did he know, did he get an education or what kind of education existed at that time?

**Agim Rudi:** He did go, he did go... in Gjakova he attended that school, just do not ask me which education. I do not know exactly, it was an education where they were taught to write. The small Madrasas,<sup>4</sup> Madrasas were those high schools, I do not know how to call them. That is a story on its own you know, I'm not going to go there. But that was the beginning of when he died, his last words to my mother, he died early, I was six years old when he died, my brother was four years old, he did not know, he was playing, stopping him from playing was a problem. So when he died his *amanet*<sup>5</sup> to my mother was that, "All the gold, everything has to go towards... just finish school, finish school because only school brings out the good," he said to my mother. Then my mother brought up five children, she was very young, it was hard.

I know this as well, that at that time you couldn't study without a scholarship, if you did not have a scholarship. And they could not get a scholarship because you could not get a scholarship if you had land, we had shares, the brothers had shares of land, they had land and stores and everything. She [my mother] sold everything, she signed with the municipality, someone bought the land, someone bought the store, someone. And then you could get it, my mother was obsessed, "We have to sell everything, sell everything. You should study, without a scholarship you cannot study." And we all

<sup>3</sup> Turkish: *Hesapçi*, the term refers to people who know accounting.

<sup>4</sup> Muslim religious school, the only school where teaching could be conducted in Albanian until 1945.

<sup>5</sup> *Amanet* literally means the last will, but in the Albanian oral tradition it has a sacred value.

studied.

I definitely know now how the story went. For example it happened to me, I went... there was a movie, *Era dhe Lisi*<sup>6</sup> and we went to ask for permission, when he [a man there] said, "Who are you?" "I work in television." "What's your name?" "Agim Rudi." "This was your father's store." Imagine what value it had... I would say to myself, "Oh God... Good!" maybe this is not relevant. But I just want to show how the desire for education, how it started, it started through my father and passed to my mother and then to all three of us, the sons, two sons, actually the three sons and the two sisters, we were all educated, we were the family in which everybody was in school.

At that time it was very... today you can not understand what I am saying, you will understand, and you believe me and everything, it was... to go to school, to have everybody go to school [was difficult]. Then do you know what sort of problem my sisters had, my sister, to get married, my sister with mathematics, with a mathematics degree, finished in Belgrade, '53 - '54. At that time, who to marry, who? She could not marry a cobbler and so on. Hard, she hardly got married. These were very evident problems you know, strange things. And then slowly I finished primary school, I had problems at home since primary school.

My brother played the violin, I did not play the violin or any instrument, every time guests came they made Rafet play the violin {explains with his hands}. Rafet does not like talking about this, does not like it at all. I envied him, because I did not know. We read a lot for the sake of our brothers and sisters, we read a lot, I read more as a 15-16-17 year old than when I became a professor. No, no then I read a lot because my brother, my sisters were students in Belgrade, they read... this was very, very important, I had to read. I was registered in the library, the library was very big in Mitrovica, Trepça improved the whole economic situation, we had a different life in Mitrovica, which was not the case in Gjakova, nor Ferizaj, nor anywhere else.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you tell us about Mitrovica and your primary education, how was it then?

**Agim Rudi:** It was good but the part that I experienced at home was really good. And they did not always want me to read novels, I read, 17 years old, novels, I read Tolstoy. I did not fully understand them but I read all of them, I read all of Dostoyevsky. The Serbian language, Mitrovica should not know Serbian, I had Serbian neighbors, I had them like this {explains with his hands} today people are surprised you know... Then there were a lot of sports, we went to the pool when I was ten years old with my brother, people in Kosovo did not know what a pool was. Do you understand that Trepça brought all these schools, all these... libraries, I remember, that woman was called Sadie, I had to take books, because I could not be without books. You know when this book was being read, this book, they read a lot in my house. Oh... God, oh God, we were crazy, very ambitious.

Then, because this really had an impact on being able to have energy. My father died early and my uncles thought that my sister should veil, put that {explains touching his face} and hide... the one in Belgrade, mathematics, mathematics in Belgrade. She used to take eggs with her, a box of eggs {explains with his hands}, sausage, in Belgrade. The train was there, the train was a big advantage, scholarship, because my mother had worked on it, because for a woman who did not go to school it was difficult to know that you should sell everything, to sell the land, to sell the stores, you know to sell them like this. She did not pretend to sell it and take the money formally, "I sold it for this much

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<sup>6</sup> *Era dhe Lisi* is a Kosovo Albanian movie directed by Besim Sahatçiu and produced by Kosova Films in 1979.

money.” And moved on, she did not just sign as if to get a sum of money. So many things, it was a very big sacrifice so that we could study and fulfill my father’s *amanet*, it was a very, a very good thing. I went back a little but these were... things that...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** It is fine...

**Agim Rudi:** And I slowly started reading comics, there were many comics. They were drawings, comics were drawings...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Where did they come from?

**Agim Rudi:** From Belgrade, in Serbian, *Kekec*,<sup>7</sup> [*Politikin*] *Zabavnik*,<sup>8</sup> on Tuesday *Zabavnik* was published and on Thursday *Kekec*. Albanians did not read such things, no Albanians did not read such things, Albanians did not read anything. The friends that I had, I feel bad and I love them, my childhood friends never read, they did not even know who Dostoyevsky was or anything. I was influenced by my brothers and sisters, my brother. I was lucky, this was luck, great luck, my brother was an economist, my sister a mathematician, they were all something, Rafet [Rudi]<sup>9</sup> played the violin, the piano, the other sister also played the piano and stuff, she was very weird, we were a strange bunch, in which she [my sister] only worked and read, worked and read, worked and read. They did not work, the kids hung out in the *mahalla*,<sup>10</sup> they did not read, we stayed in the *mahalla*, hung out in the streets and told tales to one-another, I was ashamed to tell them... what I read, because I read important things, I did not understand them much but I was, I was...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Good thing that you had each other at home.

**Agim Rudi:** We had each other. I started slowly copying those... I used to copy the comics in the window {explains with his hands}. I would copy them in the window, to show how I drew, I could not draw, I really wanted to know how to draw, I would go crazy, I wanted to be the best in something. Because when guests would come he [Rafet] played the violin and I did nothing, this was my childhood. Very, very weird...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Is that how you started drawing?

**Agim Rudi:** I started drawing, also in school, in school. The school was strange at that time, elementary.

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

**Agim Rudi:** They taught us to draw, to paint perfectly... that was the pedagogy...

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<sup>7</sup>*Kekec* was a Serbian comic magazine, which was first published in 1957. *Kekec* lasted for 1532 issues and ended in 1990.

<sup>8</sup>*Politikin Zabavnik* was a popular magazine in Serbia, published by *Politika* Newspapers and Magazines. The first issue came out on 28 February 1939.

<sup>9</sup> Rafet Rudi (1949) was born in Mitrovica, Kosovo. He graduated in Conducting and Composition from the Academy of Music in Belgrade. He specialized under the mentorship of the composer Claude Ballif at the National Conservatory of Paris. He is also the speaker’s brother.

<sup>10</sup> Word of Arabic origin that means neighborhood.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What, realism?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes realism, spring, summer these things. I was not the best, always the second best. There was this one guy, a stupid guy, he drew really well (laughs). Good, so it went slowly, but the increasing reading, because reading only brings good things because let this generation speak today, you talk however you want all day long with a computer, all day long with that, they know a lot of things but they get informed in another way. Reading is irreplaceable, not that I am old-fashioned, I am not, I support new things, I only support new things but it is not about not reading books, I know how they live in America. I was in America many times, I know how life is there, people read books, they also have computers, headphones, laptops and everything, everything, but they read books, without reading you cannot develop, you partially develop with some information, in my opinion.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you go to the *Shkolla e Mesme e Artit* in Peja?<sup>11</sup>

**Agim Rudi:** No, no, no I was a good student and I went to high school in the best high school in Yugoslavia, each province had its own technical school. The technical school was a technical school, Boris Kidrič was the best technical school in Yugoslavia. There were professors from all over Yugoslavia, engineers, everything, everything, everything. And I, because I could draw and nobody wanted to enroll me to art school, nobody because they had no money, it was hard to go to art school someplace else. We barely took Rafet, the whole family went bankrupt, because he went to high school in Pristina oh God (laughs). And I did not go, I went to technical high school, a very good student, art in my heart, art, art, art, art. I finished technical high school; what I had to do, I had to go to Technical University then, in our family whoever finished school went immediately to University. To which University? I went to Technical University, I passed all the exams in the Technical University that nobody passed. On the other side I would only paint, I bought the colors...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did you do with those exams then?

**Agim Rudi:** Nothing...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you work?

**Agim Rudi:** No, I came home like a man and I said, “I will not go to the Technical University”. You know why I passed all those exams, to show them that I do not mind studying and I am a good student but I don’t want to go, I want to study art. The family was a mess, oh God, oh God and yes... I had an understanding with my brother and sister, they were older, my father was not there, my mother did not understand, she did not know, she knew everything but she did not know. So to get me away from that, they sent me, they sent me to the military, they wanted to send me away because do you know how tragic that was for my family, to drop out of University? We were the best students, our family, there was no failing, no....

And I was sent to the military, when I was sent there, I came back from the military, I was definitely not going to go back to the Technical University, but somehow I knew that, I understood that I was not prepared for Art School, I was not prepared. I knew that... I said, “You know what? I will go to the

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<sup>11</sup> *Shkolla e Mesme e Artit*, the Arts High School in Peja was built in 1926 and opened in 1949. The first generations of visual artists in Kosovo received their education in figurative and applicative arts from this institution. This education enabled the artists to continue higher education in arts. The historical building of the Art High School in Peja was destroyed in August, 2017.

*Shkolla e Lartë Pedagogjike.*<sup>12</sup> I had another problem somewhere within me: [my siblings] they all studied in Belgrade, I did not want to study in Belgrade. I did not want to study in Belgrade. It was not that, I was not that friendly with Serbs, I was nobody, a zero, but it was a problem, I did not want to live with Serbs, that was how I felt at that age. I did not want to study in Belgrade, all of them, “But we studied there,” “You studied there, big deal, I do not want to study there.” I did not have anyone abroad so how was I supposed to study there? At that time you could go abroad. But I had no connections, a paternal uncle or someone, no one. I went to the *Shkolla e Lartë Pedagogjike* in...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In Pristina.

**Agim Rudi:** In Pristina. And there I was illuminated, it was the best school, I have worked at the Academy for many years, the best pedagogy, the best school, it was as it should be, the teachers were as they should be. Today’s Academy where I worked, not even close, it cannot compare to the pedagogy of the *Shkolla e Lartë*. I mean it.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In which years?

**Agim Rudi:** ‘72-‘73, ‘71, 2, 3... to be honest, I do not know exactly...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How many years did it have, five?

**Agim Rudi:** What?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The *Shkolla e Lartë Pedagogjike*?

**Agim Rudi:** Two. I just wanted to prepare myself for the Academy. My dreams, everybody has dreams, you have dreams too. My dream was, Agim Rudi, student of the Academy of Arts. This was my dream, but not in Belgrade, somewhere abroad, I could not go abroad so I went to the *Shkolla e Lartë Pedagogjike* to get prepared. You could not just go like that, I encountered something extraordinary there. You know here, throughout our lives we did not have a good quality life, for example I finished the Technical School in Serbian, in Serbo-Croatian, I only had Albanian in the Albanian Language course, nothing else.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What sort of preparation did you get from the *Shkolla e Lartë Pedagogjike*?

**Agim Rudi:** Very good, very good. For me basic knowledge and then great knowledge as well, with which I could freely go to any Academy in the world, anywhere in the world with the people who were there. Who were they? Muslim Mulliqi,<sup>13</sup> Tahir Emra,<sup>14</sup> Rexhep Ferri,<sup>15</sup> etc., etc., etc.

<sup>12</sup> *Shkolla e Lartë Pedagogjike*, The High Pedagogical School, was founded in Pristina in 1958 as the first institution of higher education in Kosovo. In 1974, the academic staff of the Figurative Arts department of the High Pedagogical School founded the Academy of Fine Arts within the newly established University of Pristina.

<sup>13</sup> Muslim Mulliqi (1934-1998) was born in Gjakova, Kosovo. He 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 postgraduate studies.

<sup>14</sup> Tahir Emra (1938) was born in Gjakova, Kosovo. He is an Albanian modernist painter. Emra is a member of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo.

<sup>15</sup> Rexhep Ferri (1937) was born in Kukës, Albania. He is a renowned Kosovo painter. Ferri attended the Academy

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** So you went to the Figurative Art *Shkolla e Lartë Pedagogjike* where there were...

**Agim Rudi:** Yes... yes...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** So you're talking about that school, okay I know.

**Agim Rudi:** It is not very well known, it was outside of...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** This was before the University was established?

**Agim Rudi:** Before... the University was not...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Yes, yes, I understand... What did you learn there?

**Agim Rudi:** Just like in the Academy, drawing, painting, sculpture. Eh, something else that's very important for me is that I knew I was going to study sculpture. Just do not ask me why. I do not know. Was I influenced by this, or that? I always had a dream, Michelangelo, everything I read was about Michelangelo. These were some beginnings for me, construction left you with a discipline of its own, maybe drawing, the drawing was technical. This is why I accepted the Technical School, I accepted art and there was some drawing in the school, if nothing else it was called drawing.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Where did you read these, I mean this was also probably literature in Serbian language for Michelangelo.

**Agim Rudi:** I always, always knew Serbian perfectly...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** They were more developed...

**Agim Rudi:** Much, much, much, much, Serbs were much more developed. There was nothing here, and... so I came to the *Shkolla e Lartë*. Besides all of the good things that I found in the *Shkolla e Lartë*, it was a pedagogical framework, it prepared intellectuals very well, very, very. I was their colleague, I did not know their worth then, I now know how valuable those people were, as professors. They helped develop a whole country, you cannot develop without art, nothing, without art, without arts.

I found something very important there, I contacted, I started, the professor of sculpture was Agim Çavdarbasha<sup>16</sup> and I became his friend, actually he became my friend, because I was the student. But he allowed, I was more mature, the Technical School and these things took me a year, two years in the military and I somehow got older. I got older because I was not all that young anymore. And... he liked serious people who set goals, I said, "Agim, professor Agim, I am going to study sculpture, I am going to study sculpture somewhere abroad, I do not know anything, I do not know anything, nothing, nothing."

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of Fine Arts in Belgrade. In 1999 he was elected secretary of the Art Section of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo and in 2000 he was elected as a regular member.

<sup>16</sup> Agim Çavdarbasha (1944-1999) was born in Pejë, Kosovo. He was a Kosovo Albanian sculptor who 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.

People with an art middle school education came to that *Shkolla e Lartë*. Do you know how they drew, like God, like God draws, God. They were very good, but something happened there that Albanians never, never say that they do not know. I happened to that guy who tells people, “I do not know, I do not know, I came to learn. I came to learn *bre*.” What have I come to learn? I did not know the great method {explains with his hands}, [change perspectives] to see the big wallet. Now I know how to do those [techniques]. I looked at them, op, op, op, op {onomatopoeic}.

I became the best student in the first year of *Shkolla e Lartë Pedagogjike*. The best, I took my mother, because I was living with my mother, because they all were, Rafeti was studying, my other brother got married and had another house, I was alone with my mother. I took my mother, I rented a house and left the house in Mitrovica and went to study at *Shkolla e Lartë*. I could not explain it to people because they would not understand, they thought something else had happened. And I was focused on school because I had set my mind to go somewhere. Then I became friends with Agim Çavdarbasha, I went to his atelier, I learned how to do portraits. There was professor Tahir, he would teach us painting, oh God, oh God *bre!* I would tell him, “Professor, I am going to study sculpture.” He would not even ask me if I would study sculpture, I was scared somebody would take it away from me... not let me study sculpture.

It was very crucial, it is a small detail, one time me and Agim Çavdarbasha and Svetomir Arsić,<sup>17</sup> who was a professor of sculpture, very good at sculpture. Very huge nationally, when Milošević came, he spoke in Niš in the world’s biggest meeting, the biggest that Serbia had, Milošević. That, that professor of sculpture. And I do not know how with him, because I was friends with Agim and he said, “Come on Arsić.” Arsić said, “Agim will you come to Mitrovica?” “Why?” “Come,” he said, “we are going to see Hasan Prishtina.” A Serb did the sculpture of Hasan Prishtina...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The sculpture? The statue?

**Agim Rudi:** The Hasan Pristina statue. I almost had a heart attack, almost went mad. I dreamt of how I will be a sculptor, how I will do the sculptures, not Arsić. Arsić was a great sculptor, but also a great nationalist and I had reached, I had reached the point when I understood that sculpture has nothing to do with those trivial things. Art cannot be mixed up with those small things, it has nothing to do with them and this is what I tried to show in those days.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was it true for everyone that art and politics did not mix?

**Agim Rudi:** Not me, not me.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The rest?

**Agim Rudi:** If Arsić was good, Arsić is good, that is it! There’s no one, but I could see a lot of stuff, I tried to be fair with myself you know, pure, at peace, and... I learned a lot from these professors, but the theoretical part was learned in *Shkolla e Lartë* as well, then the pedagogical part was learned more, more time is spent on the pedagogical part and on art techniques, than on aesthetics; I knew I was lacking something. It seems that they lacked that, but not for me because I knew exactly what

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<sup>17</sup> Svetomir Arsić - Basara (1928) was born in the village of Sevce, Kosovo. He is a Serbian sculptor and storyteller. In 1958, he graduated from the Academy of Applied Arts in Belgrade, under Rade Stanković. Arsić was a member of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo, and was widely known in Yugoslavia for his war monuments.

that was; I didn't know how to name it. I saw a lot, I looked at a lot, but I still hadn't decided what that abstract thing was, what was real, I still hadn't viewed things black and white, I still didn't know the answers. I could tell I needed school, I could tell but no one explained it to me. They knew, to some degree they knew, to some degree because this too was a generation that barely went to Belgrade, barely got in, barely that. It was a problem to study in Belgrade, really.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you define your aesthetics, how did you define them for yourself?

**Agim Rudi:** Instinctively, like a cow (laughs). I'm sorry I'm saying this, I don't have the answer. I don't know! I knew there was something beyond this. During the construction of an artistic work there are layers, there are... but now I know, I didn't know them back then, I just knew there is something else, there is something else that I should know as a sculptor, that the artist should know in order to create good work. It cannot be done by God. I was spunky as a child, the artist expects from God, he comes up with nothing {explains with hands} and.... I see here, I go mad when I watch television, X singer comes on, a low X that knows nothing, aesthetically of course not, doesn't know anything about music, and says, "I have a project and may it be God's will to finish my project as I plan to." A bad song, stupid. It is not based on anything, but that is not how music works, rap music doesn't work like that, no artistic work, nothing, is built up like that.

In *Shkolla e Lartë* I listened to them a lot, because I got many answers, they were really good professors, really good, but not all of them, they left a gap. The professors kept a distance, they taught you a lot, they taught you a lot. It was really good but they maintained that distance between them and the students, and students should not be exposed to that distance, not in art, you need more than.... Like, Agimi did not, Agimi did not, he created friendships. And so I tried, I tried to do the same thing when I became a professor, whomever that wanted to talk to me could have done so, they could have called me whenever, even in the middle of the night and say, "I have a dilemma." But you know what that means, you save someone's life, you do, they don't know, they don't know. They don't know, you can't just read, you can't learn art by reading it. Other things you can learn, but I don't know how to explain a painting, they don't know, they don't know where its secret is, not that you're good at it, I know it all today. Today, I know everything, there is nothing to which I don't have an answer, not that like...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did your exhibitions help you receive some sort of feedback or support related to your work?

**Agim Rudi:** But I couldn't, I couldn't understand the exhibitions, students don't understand the exhibitions a lot today, they read into the exhibition, but they don't know.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** No, no, when you would do exhibitions, did you do exhibitions while you were in *Shkolla e Lartë* and would you receive any comments or something to help you understand what you were doing?

**Agim Rudi:** Not many, not many, not many.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Not many...

**Agim Rudi:** They were decent pedagogues... but did not give the finishing touches to help you accomplish yourself. I have the impression that aesthetically, aesthetic learning isn't done much, not

done much, there, there, I think after years of learning, that was the problem.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you come in contact with art, I am interested to know, were there any exhibitions, were there, how was cultural life organised?

**Agim Rudi:** Later on, I will tell you about that later on when I get to Ljubljana Academy, it's where I finished my *Shkolla e Lartë*.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** And for Pristina, would you be able to tell us what kind of cultural life it had back then...

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, I know, when I come back from Ljubljana I will tell you.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Okay.

**Agim Rudi:** Because I know back then, now I don't know, I wasn't the one who knew how to explain. I am just telling you how I went through phases. Here I learned, I learned, learned, drawing, I learned how to make a portrait. I learned everything that was needed to prepare to be accepted into the Academy, and someone secretly... this Agim had received his masters from [the University of] Ljubljana. Naturally... In the academy, this one in Belgrade was finished at this a academy, got the master's degree in Ljubljana. And I was a soldier in '68- '69 in Kranj, Slovenia. Connections with Slovenia began somehow, I was there shortly, I had no idea, I wasn't aware. Agim would explain he was there with his wife, his wife was Slovenian, I would stay there with friends from my *Shkolla e Lartë*, I hung out with them a lot, I learned a lot from Agim.

## Part Two

**Agim Rudi:** And, I had a chance to get admitted in those... In Slovenia it was impossible; I knew the situation, they don't accept 150 Albanians *bre*, they had schools only for Slovenians and eventually they accepted Macedonians. Because Macedonians in former Yugoslavia weren't really problematic, they lowered their heads and had it well. Even when they became a state they had no problems, they didn't win it with war, those are Macedonians but I am connecting different topics, but this is how it was. And I had a chance, Agim could help me there for a new degree... therefore... since he was there he knew the situation better to help me a little but I said no, forget about it {claps}. And I left and got those, I got what I needed for the entrance exam, four portraits were needed, ten drawings, and I began drawing portraits... now I knew how to do portraits. Do you have any idea what I used to draw? Decan and a house and one of those {explains with hands}, I didn't know anything, before I knew nothing, before but now I was in a totally different situation.

I did four portraits of the level... a few classes were for sculpture, Agim Çavdarbasha had just come to the Academy, and I did those portraits. I bought a nylon sponge, a huge sponge and I did two here, two there {explains with hands}, two sculptures with you know, two sculptures with you know, I got the drawings, I got in. It was the train that goes to Ljubljana, in Fushë Kosova at 11AM, I went there like that, I hopped on the bus and went to Fushë Kosova, and hopped on you know, and went to Ljubljana. A good thing was that I had money, the situation in my family was perfect, everything, Rafeti had come back from...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Belgrade...

**Agim Rudi:** From Belgrade, I started working at the Academy immediately, his salary was 1000 euros, 1000 marks, the salary was 1000 marks, do you even know what 1000 marks were, 1000 marks were a lot 40 years ago. Before 40 years and more, before 44 years, it was long ago, we had money at home... I said I wanted to study, we didn't always have money, we all had our material problems. With no problem I went there, all my sisters, all of them sent me money, *džeparac*,<sup>18</sup> I went but didn't know where, I didn't know, I was in Ljubljana, I didn't know anything. I went, God...

I entered the exam, five days of entrance exams then, seriously, a lot of people, a lot of people, and I was wrongly informed, Slovenian wasn't similar to Albanian [he means Serbian]. Slovenian was a different language, not, not even people know that, today people don't know and think that Slovenian is the same, no Slovenian is not the same, Slovenian is a totally different language, I had no clue. I would brag that I knew Serbian, that was a limitation, in Slovenia you're limited if you speak Serbian, and it's true...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was the five day exam like... I mean...

**Agim Rudi:** Five days...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The first day was?

**Agim Rudi:** During the day... we would draw, and then make portraits and discuss, commission, a commission and where, at the end there was a commission with a lot of people and we were asked, "Why are you studying, what do you want to study this, why this..." I had made a big mistake. I had my *Shkolla e Lartë* diploma, I sent it, but they didn't understand why I sent it. I went there for the first year and now they said, "We have a problem, you finished *Shkolla e Lartë*" and they told me, "You can if you want, you should have told us. You want to enroll in the second or third year?" "No" I told them, "I don't want to enroll neither in the second year, nor... I don't know sculpture. I am here to enroll in the first year." He was, he was, they had never heard these words before in their lives, what a fool, I was there to learn about sculpture, I didn't care about anything, I cared about nothing at all.

I went there, this was very important, it was very, very, very important. At the time that seemed pointless to me, big deal, as if... I only cared about how to get into the academy. I got in, perfect. They sent a telegraph, a friend, a guy because there were some Albanian students there, one from Gjakova, all the students, not many in Ljubljana, a hundred students. So this guy, Fahri Xharra is, he is constantly on Facebook, Fahri Xharra there, he studied textil. He sent it, wrote it, I told him, he sent the telegraph, "You got in." I went crazy, I went crazy, I went crazy and then I told Agim Çavdarbasha, oh my God he was so happy, he was so happy that I didn't ask for help. You know why? Because he said, "I would have helped you, but you would be left a cripple." You understand? These were the little things, but very, in my life very important. And I went to Ljubljana...

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<sup>18</sup> Serb: *džeparac*, literally means pocket money.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In which year?

**Agim Rudi:** I graduated in '77, minus four...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** '73

**Agim Rudi:** Like that. Ljubljana exhausted me. I meant to never leave Yugoslavia, but Slovenia wasn't Yugoslavia, it was only in name. It was a different world, on one side Italy, on the other Germany [shows two sides with his hands], very different cultures. But I didn't know. I could see that it was something else entirely, people lived differently around here, differently here, and there in Slovenia differently. I was in a good financial situation, I mention it again. So I had no problems, just to study and that was it. I had a problem with Slovenian, I was, was, was learning it. I learned, I learned nothing, I spoke Slovenian, I spoke and improved.

And I started a routine, not in the Albanian style, I would put up a big piece of paper in my room and I would do 30 of those and on that paper I would draw a square and write what I did that day, what I learned that day, what... as an overachiever you know I wanted to really... and I started learning there, I improved, I began to understand other art as art, I lacked manners, I... our pedagogy was very behind here, here pedagogy was very underdeveloped. And slowly, slowly I'd hear some names, some new things, I heard... mostly it would get on my nerves and this was crucial (laughs), when they would mention Wassily Kandinsky...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Why so?

**Agim Rudi:** Well he was a mix between abstract art and realistic art, and I didn't know those differences, I didn't know yet, I knew and I didn't know. I lacked in Slovenian, I lacked, I didn't lack in books because I read them in Serbian, I couldn't read in Slovenian. I was really famous because I could read Cyrillic, and Slovenians, no one knew (laughs), I was very famous. So I had no problems because they would come to you, students would offer, "I offer help with English, I offer help with French, I offer help with this..." I did the same, I had so many requests for Cyrillic as an exchange...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Why, where did you encounter it, where was Cyrillic used, in what? Documents?

**Agim Rudi:** In books...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Oh books...

**Agim Rudi:** Yes in books, books on aesthetics, art books, everything in Belgrade...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** They wrote them in Cyrillic?

**Agim Rudi:** They wrote in Cyrillic, they never wrote in Latin alphabet only in Cyrillic.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Oh, yes?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes (laughs) when you asked me again I said am I in the right mind, they wrote in Cyrillic.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I did not... I thought they wrote in Latin alphabet...

**Agim Rudi:** No, they did not use Latin alphabet at all, it was only used in Zagreb.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did you do, did you transliterate it to the Latin alphabet?

**Agim Rudi:** No, I just translated.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Okay.

**Agim Rudi:** translated, it had a page, two pages, three pages or something, I translated. Someone had the texts in Serbian and the students there had this good habit, this was very good. I didn't have any problems, everyone translated into English, one page, two pages, biographies. Especially biographies, because biographies you didn't have to know, where Martins is, where this one is, and where this one was, and where he was born and stuff. You know, I understood a bit of Slovenian, partly, I couldn't read Slovenian, my Serbian was perfect and so on.... And I read *Politika*, *Subotnja Politika* [Saturday's Politics], the newspaper *Subotnja Politika*, it had critical perspectives on art, at the top. I transcribed this one.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** For art in Yugoslavia right...

**Agim Rudi:** For figurative art in Yugoslavia...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Okay.

**Agim Rudi:** And views abroad. Yes but Yugoslavia was so big, it had a lot of big people, a lot of big people. It is a big sin that you can't look up these things at all. For example sculpture, the biggest man of former Yugoslavia, the biggest in art, the biggest of all time, I think is Ivan Meštrović.<sup>19</sup> Ivan the sculptor. The sculptor, I'll just explain this and then I'll come back again. This sculptor was crazy, cheated, he cheated himself with some kind of Yugoslavism, with some sort of slavism and then he made all of Belgrade's memorials, Ivan Meštrović made all Belgrade's memorials, all the assembly, Meštrović made all the horses and all those things. Montenegro's assembly, Njgeoš's grave and everything was by Me... Meštrović. Meštrović did in Slovenia.

He was really big, then he left, during this time he left for America. Even in America, in the center of Chicago he had... there are Meštrović's sculptures, he won a worldwide competition with [a sculpture of] Indians throwing, and he really, a really big sculpture, the horse this way... So I am telling how big he is you know, America doesn't know who you are, if you are Croatian or what you are.... He was Croatian Meštrović, but he was confused with the Yugoslavism, he was crazy... you should read that too, you should learn that, you should learn that artist. People of a high category, no matter what they are, you should know them, you should know who they are, you should know who Nikola Tesla is. He is a hero in America. It is a big name.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did he have any sculptures here before, Meštrovići?

**Agim Rudi:** Where?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In Kosovo so we can contact...

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<sup>19</sup> Ivan Meštrović (1883-1962) was born in Vrpolje, Croatia. He was a renowned 20th century Croatian sculptor and architect. Meštrović particularly defined his practice through religious artistic production, mostly made of wood. He was influenced mainly by Byzantine and Gothic architecture. The most renowned works from his early period are *Crucifix* and *Madonna*.

**Agim Rudi:** No, we didn't have those here, Kosovo was nothing, thankfully there are some in Belgrade, in Croatia, all of them are there. So he was really big, not even they knew how big he was, how big... what a big artist, you know? I do not know where this came from...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** We were talking about the reviews that you read in *Politika* at the time.

**Agim Rudi:** And yes, hmm, hmm, hmm... and *Subotnja Politika* [The Saturday's Politics], I woke up in the middle of Ljubljana, I didn't want to, I didn't want Belgrade [to occupy my mind] there, imagine *Politika*, a newspaper on politics that had great art reviews. One day I was reading, one day I was reading how in Munich Wassily Kandinsky Retrospective exhibition was about to open. I believed, that I didn't know anything at all, they kept talking and I didn't understand what they were saying, I didn't understand at all what they were saying. I didn't know what abstract art was, in *Shkolla e Lartë* no one taught us that, they worked abstractly, but abstract naturalism, you know, half abstract somehow half... do not mess around, say it directly not this ways because I don't know, break it down for me, open my eyes. I didn't say a word, I was frustrated, Slovenians knew all the world, Slovenian students, colleagues, they knew, they had seen, I hadn't seen. I didn't know, I didn't know what the Louvre was, I didn't know, I didn't know anything, it was then that I saw, I thought that I knew. I didn't know anything.

I woke up one night, Thursday evening and I took, I bought one rucksack {explains with hands} to go like, like... that time they went... it was like hippie, you know like this with a sack and everything, everything, everything... without speaking German nor English, nothing at all, I left, I went to Munich. I went to Munich, I took this [sleeping bag] so I could sleep somewhere in the park, I knew that if there is a museum then there is a park, in Austria... and... I mean Munich... and I had to learn the routine of these trips, how to know? You know without speaking the language, without knowing anyone... then many years, many years, ten years I went like this, I traveled without knowing anything. I learned the system without speaking the language, you know? You don't know the struggle when you travel and you don't speak the language.

And I wanted to sleep in the park but the police wouldn't let me, you had sleep at night and you had to go into museums during the day, we left our thing in the station those [boxes], somehow you left them {explains with hands}, you learned these things without speaking the language, it was hard to learn them (laughs)... I entered the Kandinsky museum, my God so many floors Kandinsky. I wanted to go crazy with how much didn't I know, but I read a lot, I read a lot about Kandinsky, who he is and what he is but I didn't understand. You know... the beginnings of abstract art and everything... there, there I, there while reading, because I wanted to be the best student, I didn't want to be mediocre I wanted to be the best, the best out of the Slovenians, they were all Slovenians.

I looked at the blue period, the green period this way, I started mechanically to learn what they were... I went, I couldn't stay from the morning, I couldn't stay from 9AM to, to 5PM in the afternoon. I paid two tickets, first I went out and slept in the grass for an hour because like that, and then the second ticket, nonsense but this way... I came, I went, I stayed for two days, two days in the museums

that for me were like, like discovering America. I saw Kandinsky, they drove me mad with this Kandinsky, I didn't understand it. I followed that, I didn't tell anyone that I was in Munchen, at all, at all, at all...

Read, read at night like crazy, read that one... about his life and about his views, I still didn't know, I still didn't know them aesthetically, but I understood them before the time. I started, I couldn't help myself when they talked, I said, "But no, this is the blue period, it has... it's a short period..." Kandinsky was crazy with music, he wanted to make painting by obeying the principles of music. But you can't with the principles of music, he saw it himself that he couldn't but I spoke highly (laughs) in front of the students, "What happened with Agim, God, God?" I changed, I started to change. And then it didn't have a stopping point, it didn't stop. Then in the evening I didn't go home, at 7PM I was in the library, the Academy's library, the Academy had seven... from Monday to Friday.

I sculpted all day long, I worked on my sculpture all day long with or without a schedule I didn't care, I didn't care about the time, I was in the studio. And in the evening I went to the library, Saturday and Sunday, Sunday I was with Albanians. I made myself stay an hour with the Albanians, two hours because... I did not (laughs)... to hang out with Albanians, they all hung out together, ten people, twelve people in one place. They talked about life, politics and it got in my nerves. In Slovenia... in Slovenia, you can't stay for long, twelve people how they stayed, God (laughs). Sometimes they even made beans and I don't know what, it was good one hour or two hours...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did it influence your work...

**Agim Rudi:** A lot...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** This information and...

**Agim Rudi:** A lot, a lot...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** This exposure...

**Agim Rudi:** A lot and... they came, but everything needs reciprocating. Students from Santa Cruz came, I have the poster, from America, I have the poster because I keep forgetting where they were from, from California something... They came to exhibit with Ljubljana's students in the town's gallery and I don't know... I don't know what that deal was, on that poster was written who they were and everything... And they selected us from the students, it didn't matter, they selected us from the first year and second and stuff, but, I was in the second year. Three of my works were in the town's gallery in Ljubljana, I thought that I had become the best, the best in the world. For me that was the best in the world because three, three of my works only, oh God, I was so happy, I was about to go crazy, I was about to go crazy...

It was necessary to face these problems also, with these problems too, these are artist's problems, a lot especially in the beginning, because it looks like, you become snobbish. You think highly of

yourself but it should be rational “the thinking highly of yourself” and it should be in accordance with reality (laughs). Then I found out that they were good works, that they wouldn’t expose them if they weren’t good works because it doesn’t work like that there in Ljubljana, knowing someone, I didn’t know anyone (laughs). This was a big part... however the biggest thing in Ljubljana was that different cultures, the culture got to you, you went to Vienna once, you went crazy. You went to Venice, you went crazy, the world lived, Slovenia’s world, it was a vibrant cultural life, the cultural life was well developed. In Slovenia there were strange exhibitions, Germans, from everywhere.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was this your first exhibit, this in Slovenia?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, in the Gallery?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Yes.

**Agim Rudi:** Yes in the gallery I always mark that one, I always write that in my biography, it was... it wasn’t who knows what really, but for me it was so important really, a lot... so big, hey... students exhibition, however, but three of my works, they didn’t take that from everyone, they took only one from everyone. Slow down, think of it, where, how three of my works, everything is, I am good. I came to that conclusion that I was not bad, I knew of Kandinsky, I knew abstract art, realist art, it was nothing, it was nothing.

And this, this is it, it... we were nurtured by different cultures. Then it was so important to see big people, for example, Slovenia’s assembly, the assembly is done in a relief, here you can look somewhere in the... it is a relief, with silver sculptures, all, hundreds, hundreds of sculptures. Do you know who made them? My professor, professor Zdenko Kalin.<sup>20</sup> Zdenko Kalin is a unique professor, he was a really big man, he gave the beginnings of... But he studied in Zagreb when Ivan Meštrović was there, you know I am slowly linking things. Ivan Meštrović was not his professor but he was a professor in the academy. Someone had a class, someone a class...

Do you know what it means to have Meštrović, you know you grow, you become big, you become big. Then when he finished the Academy, after he went to Karare, in Karare there is a stone, a stone... where they take out rocks, marble. That stone, the plates of them all in Saudi Arabia are made from Karar, Michelangelo's best sculptures... all Michelangelo’s sculptures are made from Karar stone. Families live there, 500-600 families have lived there for thousands of years, they have their homes, they sleep and they make.... My professor went there, sick, and he was not how it should be, he went (laughs), he stayed four years, he lived in Karare to learn the stone-carving profession and he had a problem because these Slovenians are so good, a good nation, they are nationalists. But they don’t say this, we say this, we do immediately and we don’t understand the word nationalism that much but even when we begin understanding something about ourselves we mention that we are nationalists,

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<sup>20</sup> Zdenko Kalin (1911 - 1990) was born in Solkan, Slovenia. He was a renowned sculptor in former Yugoslavia. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb. Kalin became a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb in 1948. Later, in 1965, he became the rector of the same arts institution.

we show off.

But no the nationalist is he who, he wanted to make sculpture, Slovenian sculpture. He lived in Titoja, Tito, Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia's president, he had one place, Brione in Croatia, it was there he took all the artists. Even the big artists had their studios, this Zdenko Kalin had his studio there, whenever he wanted he went there. He was a big man, I've learned a lot, he was, now I know, Neoclassic, old Neoclassic with old standards. When I went there he, he went, he started to get ready for retirement, he was in that age, he smoked *Yugoslavia* cigarettes, he smoked *Yugoslavia* cigarettes, it was there that he took out {explains with his hands} he he took out his match.

I've learned a lot from him, I've learned things you can't learn in art, you can't learn some things, there are some things that are not written in a book. Some things are written, in art they don't write, you have to see it. You had to see him when he went to make a sculpture, Zdenko Kalin, when he was immersed in his work. I've learned more from that minute, I've learned more than from other things, more than from books I've read and art is... it has its secrets. It's not God's work, it is man's work, man, man that has worked a lot, that knows so much, that has worked a lot and he knows. Not something that God brought to him, no, it's not God's work, God has Its place for other things, not to teach you to do sculpture. Not to teach you to make music. "I have this project, God gave it to me." Singer, rapper, stupid, nonsense, not any... not stupid, rap also is good and stuff but drop it...

So I was with Zdenko Kalin for two years he was my professor, I've learned everything in Slovenia that there was, it was with Zdenko Kalin. For example, RTV Ljubljana, you know they had one, he had a guy naked with these {explains with hands}... with, with, with straw, with this he made music, naked, and that was an icon of Ljubljana's television, it was a work of this Zdenko Kalin. I wanna tell you a lot, a lot, a lot.... And I've gained a lot from him, he too dealt with art, he didn't deal with those.... After I was told some details, that I can talk for details too.... One time early in the morning, since I used to go, 15 to 7AM all my life I've been going to the Academy, I've never been there at 10 to 7AM, I went there at 15 to 7AM, 15 to 7AM I went to the Academy and at 7PM I went to the library.

You should be sick, it eats you the big place eats you, you know how? You can't become the best, you can't become the best, you should fight it with other things (laughs) with other premises. And I used to go early in the morning and when I went one day in the morning I used the time from 7AM to 9AM, no one used to come in the Academy, never ever, students of the Academy didn't come to the Academy from seven, eight in the morning. I came, I didn't care for anyone, me and the sculpture. And when the professor came I was sculpting, "What professor..." I loved him so much, so much, and he said, "Do you have any problems?" The professor said to me, "Do you have any financial problems?" You know, I said, "I don't have any material problems," I said "Except that they sent me from home and I have found the job here, in these museums." During summer I earned a lot of money, a lot, I worked in the museum's restoration department, this way I also had a lot of money, I traveled by plane *bre*. Though, traveling by plane my wife taught me that when she came to visit there...

And I said, "I don't have problems, and etc..." "What are the worries that you have that make you do this, what are your sorrows?" I said, "Listen professor, I feel bad to tell you a lot of things you know

this but I said now we don't have this... we are annexed from Serbia, Yugoslavia's state took us from Albania and we are in Yugo..." "And how aren't you, isn't part, Kosovo isn't part of, of Serbia?" "No, it is part of Albania, don't you know this?" He said, "I didn't know." Then I said, "We, I only dare to listen to 10 to 15 percent of Albanian songs on Radio Pristina, 80 percent, 90 percent I don't dare to listen to." "Where do you listen to them?" "I secretly listen to them on Radio Tirana." I said, "I've read Dostoyevsky all in Serbian, because there isn't... doesn't have..." It wasn't translated in, in Albanian, everything basic is in Serbian, I finished high school in Serbian. I had Albanian, just in the Albanian language course. I said, "I can't sing my song, this is a song, he sings," I said, "he doesn't moan or shout, he sings."

Those songs... I connected them with *Këngë e Pakëndueme*,<sup>21</sup> I made this connection, my idea, the idea of this sculpture, the idea of this sculpture was *Këngë e Pakëndueme*. He said, "For real? Why didn't you ever tell me about these things?" And I then told him, he tried to understand but he couldn't, he who is full cannot understand the hungry. And he was kind of a communist, a good sculptor but a communist. Communist, you know, he was part of the party, which made it possible for him to live as a king, the king of kings and if now... I don't know, I haven't tried it, no one asked me to live as a king because maybe I'd give in (laughs), do you understand because life like this is beautiful, this was with...

Then I... something else happened in the third year I, another professor came at me, Slavko Tihec.<sup>22</sup> Slavko Tihec was... the monuments in Slovenia were made by no one besides Slavko Tihec in that period, you know he had a great reputation, very modern. He worked a lot in France, he did his Master's degree there in France under the mentorship of César [Baldaccini], he is a very well known sculptor, César. Sculpture is, it has its characteristics. Until I learned from Kalin how to work with the chisel, then I didn't need anything else here unfortunately (laughs). Then until the principles of the material and form, principles, rules, the good side of sculpture is not only the sculpting part, you know...

From him I learned other things, at all times you have to be in tune with time, also in art you have to be in tune with time, everything is okay as long as you are in tune with the time. If you're not in tune with the time, imagine yourself wearing a blouse that was worn in the 18th century, imagine how stupid that is, or if you eat 18th century food. And us... things, things should be with the time, sculpture also and music and all arts should be in tune with the time, they should be in tune with the time.

Now he brought me to this other time but I was ready, I was ready, I knew the difference... I knew what Picasso did, what Henry Moore did, what he did... who Michelangelo was. I knew the truth, not one truth of, of... told like in comic books, but now I knew the truth how it should be known. How it

<sup>21</sup> Millosh Gjergj Nikolla (1911-1938) was an Albanian poet and writer, known under his nom de plume Migjeni. *Këngë e Pakëndueme* [The Unsung Songs] is one of his most well-known poems.

<sup>22</sup> Slavko Tihec (1928-1993) was born in Maribor, Slovenia. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana. He was a well-known sculptor in former Yugoslavia, especially for his World War Two Memorials dedicated to fallen soldiers.

lived with the time, how it corresponded with time, what was the level at the time, if you don't know those things then don't do sculpture, don't paint, you should know what time you are living in. That is important now, it is another art, 18th century art is different, 19th century art is different. Impressionists are beautiful, beautiful, now it has ended, I just look at them and I feel sorry for them, okay. It has ended.

It's a different time, it is the 21st century, you should find what it is coming next, what is for the 21st century, you should be a smart artist, well established, you cannot be poorly established. It has passed, it ended, "God, God will you bring me the song, God will bring me a song, it will tell me what to do." No, no, you have to follow the laws and rules of the world, you should know where, from where your art derives, where? What is the source of your art? And I learned a lot of things from this Tihec, I learned from this Tihec and my eyes were opened widely, another window opened up. I am not underestimating this, he was big but he would become big, because to become big, time should pass a little, you know, you can't just become big immediately...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** And he taught you to respond in a more immediate way to what was happening in the art world?

**Agim Rudi:** He taught us, taught us a lot, but I observed his work, he didn't need to explain much to us.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How were they, what, what was his style?

**Agim Rudi:** His work, the point was something else, he grabbed a thing, a, a movement a thing and from that he would create a story, from that he created the idea and began the sculpture. He, he made the partisans, he, he made the partisans he, he, naked people and partisans he... but that isn't enough, I know it isn't (laughs) that isn't enough, just to make partisans you know, you need something else, you know, you need a little more of course.

I had this student of... I'm going to go ahead and tell you. In the beginning [of the academic year] a student came, just after the war, here, the war had just ended. The student took the entrance exam, he was one of the best, so good and I told him, "You know what? Tell me all your struggles, tell me your struggles don't keep them for yourself, you have your professor here and you can confess everything to him. Like, like, like one does with the rabbi... like to him, like to him, like to the one you go to for confession, confess to me your struggles. Of course what falls in the field of sculpture, if you have any struggles, tell me, I'll help you." He said, "Yes professor, I'll tell you," he said, "I will immediately start to sculpt Adem Jashari."<sup>23</sup> He was young, charming, good, useful. Well I said, "You know what, I won't stop you from doing Adem Jashari, but you still haven't learned enough to do Adem Jashari, you should do some other steps in the first, second, third year and then when you do Adem Jashari it will reflect, it will show, you can't now..." "But no, I have done it once." In his way he

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<sup>23</sup> Adem Jashari (1955-1998), also known as the "legendary commander," was a founder of the KLA and is celebrated as its foremost leader and symbol of Kosovo's independence. He died in March 1998, together with his family of twenty - half of them underage girls and boys - in a shootout with Serb troops during a three-day siege of his home in Prekaz.

told me he had done it once, but leave it at that (laughs), I mean you did it once...

And as it happens, he was in the fourth year, somehow I didn't stop him because to make a large-scale figure, technically the skeleton needs a lot of things, and is it worth trying if you're still not, if you don't have extensive experience? And I couldn't take him out of it and stuff but the fourth year came, the third year, also in the third year I told him, "Do you want to do this, we have to sculpt this figure, to make a figure of a really important person, a man of war, a man of letters... where is your commitment to, your commitment from three years ago, can you do it?" (laughs) Not only did he not do it but he spent all his time finding excuses. He started to get into another world of art, he was [caught up] in other secrets, secrets that were concerning him, and now that he finished the Academy he works for money, he makes memorials and...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was your relation with Tihec similar to this?

**Agim Rudi:** With?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Tihec. Slavko Tihec, your professor that...

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, it was, it was, it was... from each and every one you got something, from each and every one. From him I've learned love towards the material, art is made with material. Art isn't made with wind, it isn't a tone, a tone in music, but it is the material, he knew the mercifulness of the material {explains with his hands} he appreciated, he appreciated stone, he appreciated the act in stone, do you understand, he appreciated it, I learned that appreciation from him. But from him, from him, no, I learned other things, construction, I've learned how, how... dimension, what dimensions mean, and then dimension is, art is dimension, the size and some other things, some other things entirely different which when I registered them, they became a lot for me. Another advantage I had, the advantage of the Academy of Ljubljana, now I am enumerating what was good about the Academy of Ljubljana, we had aesthetics and theory and a lot of these courses... we had anatomy, these were taken, the Academy would buy these, these corpses and it was our task for the anatomy course to...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** For real?

**Agim Rudi:** Nonsense, muscles, a muscle...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Michelangelo and Da Vinci used to do this.

**Agim Rudi:** That way, that way Michelangelo learned anatomy... personally I think it is unnecessary, but they liked the old ways also, the older generations liked to be like Leonardo, to be like Michelangelo, to be... And now the professors were like, they knew that I was Albanian, they were like, "Agim... so good we have Agim so he can assist us." And I fainted once from that... I fainted, I barely got on my feet (laughs). I said, "You know what, leave it alone that I, I don't know if I'll come to the class, to assist you, no way..." You know, Albanians are like that you know, carnal ...

### Part Three

**Agim Rudi:** I had this well-known professor, Milan Butina,<sup>24</sup> he had a lot of books, he had. Now he is dead, all of them are dead. So old, and he taught us the course and there were three of us, in the school year, three of us. Only a few of us, so little, not like here, 20 people, I have 20 of them, fourth year 20 people, third year 17. Nonsense, no one does that, even in Paris it is like that, three to four people. And he taught, his lectures were often personal, with one at a time.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You mean, one on one.

**Agim Rudi:** I had so much fun with him and learned a lot. And he told me at the beginning, “Agim, you have a problem, you’re a good guy and everything, but you have this problem that you don’t listen, you just think about how you’re going to answer, you’re a lot like that, you are ready with how you’re gonna answer not how to listen to me, you should use all your strength to listen to me then answer, you should gain skills.” It pissed me off so much at the beginning then I understood it well, he said, “Understand it well, we’re talking eye to eye.” I learned how to listen to him, I begun listening to him, it’s so important to listen, us as a nation we don’t listen, what we’ve got to say, let’s listen. Then he was my mentor, we had four years diploma and we chose our mentor.

My thesis concerned the shape, the shape, *o formi* [in Serbian] I did my thesis, and we had to do it within the framework of sculpture. And it lasted, all the fourth year was a question, the thesis, the written part, and... that hasn’t happened anywhere else, they didn’t have diploma work like this. So my Master’s degree was less written, because diploma work of a diploma there that I have done you know, I finished my Master’s degree there. And good, I gained a lot from him, I began reading aesthetics, about a more refined aesthetics, I defended the thesis, because one knows a lot about how to defend oneself, I defended the thesis, I know how to make sculptures but I am not an aesthetic. Okay, but fine you make sculptures until you know what you’re doing, and who teaches you what you’re doing, it’s the aesthetics that teach you. I don’t wanna become an aesthetic, but a sculptor, yes, and this was the war, but it was a good fight, what level it was, all, all different.

I still have that problem, here I have this problem with the students, they think they can be good sculptors, you can’t be that without good aesthetics, without groundwork, without knowing the road. I tell them, “Do you know who I am? The professor. Who am I? The one who shows you the path for how a work of art is created. Do you know how many paths there are? If there are 5000 million artists there are 5000 million paths. I’m showing you one, I only know my path.” But only by seeing some roads, you see that art has the road, you should know, there are some roads, to understand this better I’ll take the most common example there is. You wanna go to Podujeva and you leave for Fushe Kosove and the professor tells you, “Come, do you wanna go to Podujeva, what are you going there, I’ll make the road shorter.”

The professor is the one who makes your road shorter, he knows a bit more, a bit more, and he makes the road shorter, do you understand what making your road shorter means? This is the professor, not to make a myth out of the professor, to create distance {explains with hands}, “Anything I can help you with? I know it best of all in the world.” No, *more*.<sup>25</sup> I don’t know the best out of everyone in the world, I

<sup>24</sup> Milan Butina (1926-1999) was born in Kočevje, Slovenia. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana, where he graduated from the Painting Department in 1951. He was a painter, scenographer and art theoretician.

<sup>25</sup> Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English bro, brother.

know a lot of things, of course I am 70 I know, you are 25 you still don't know. Do you understand, these kind of relations you know, sometimes banal not academic, these were my answers, but so true, I think they are so true. Age gives you some luxury, age lets you to know something a bit more. Okay, the professor is over, schools are done.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When did you come back then, '77?

**Agim Rudi:** In the '77 I came back loaded [with knowledge]. I knew so much, so so much, I knew only how to do sculpture and nothing else. Where to go, here the academy had just opened, things were... Agimi said, "Come, come, come to my department to teach." I had all of mine, they were professors, I know the responsibility of teachers I know it very well, education is a lot of responsibility. I never wanted [to work in] education, never because... I always wanted, but I respected it so much that I didn't dare to go into education, because in these circumstances, because there are a lot of strange circumstances that happen (coughs) and a lot of strange circumstances, and you are the teacher. I would have taught at a good school of sculpture, here there aren't good conditions for sculpture, and I said to myself that I won't get into art academy's world and not be able to be at the top. Here the people are different also, it's different, I got used to a different world, five years left a big influence on me.

I slowly started, it was the Venice Biennial, that has taken place for a hundred years, I always went to the Venice Biennial, what it is, it is a preview of all the world. You what happens in the world, what happens in the world, you see all the things ahead of what happens, here people see things later. Here, here people in that time saw things later, I saw them ahead, not for anything, but you went to Venice Biennial, you went to Rome, you went to Vienna. You saw exhibitions, you chased the exhibitions, you were, you lived in an artistic world, an artistic world, you lived in an artistic world in Ljubljana. Here there wasn't an artistic world, there was only a Association of Figurative Artists.<sup>26</sup>

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were you part of the Association?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes always, right when I came back I became part of the Association, I won a prize right away, such a good prize with a good sculpture. All right, all good, I exhibited all over Yugoslavia, in a lot of places abroad also through the Association, "Good job, good job Agim." I was the president of the Association, but don't ask me at what year, I have no idea.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** No, no at what year. But would you tell me how the Association functioned?

**Agim Rudi:** The Association worked very well.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How?

**Agim Rudi:** When I became a president we were, we functioned by ourselves as Kosovo's, we always had struggles with the Serbians. Because we once were with them as an Association, and then we separated, and then it was Yugoslav Association of Figurative Artists. It functioned perfectly,

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<sup>26</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.

everything was good really.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I am just interested to know, I am not asking how it worked. I am not asking if it was good or bad, but how, what sort of facilities did it offer for the artists because I do not know how it works.

**Agim Rudi:** It is very surprising when I tell this now, for example in Grožnjan, it is near Umag in Croatia, we had a house, with nine rooms, three floors, with everything, it was Kosovo's property, all the figurative artists went there. In Paris, we always got rewards, in different exhibits, SIG<sup>27</sup> paid for us to go to Paris for three months. Those were great conditions, but the one in Grožnjan that I mentioned earlier, it is weird, we lost it after the war. I do not know what happened. Our country does not take care of things like this.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did the Association organize cultural life and exhibitions, I am interested in this because you will explain it then, I am hoping that through this the system will be explained in the best way?

**Agim Rudi:** They had their halls. We were able, the Association, to pay 50 marks for each artist who participated in the exhibition. For example, I remember paying 50 marks, just for participation. And then we gave rewards, it means it was the autumn hall, hall, if... if I am wrong. There were different colonies, it was Dečan's colony.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** This was sponsored by Kosovo, too?!

**Agim Rudi:** SIG of culture. Kosovo sponsored them. You took the money and went to Grožnjan. You would stay there, you would have fun, you would eat with their money, perfect. You would see exhibits, you would see so many exhibits, all, on the road and like this. They paid for travel too. You would go there every year. Those were weird things. Even those that we had after the war, we refused them, we did not want them anymore. The Association... perfect, it was perfect. It had its own houses, its own things, its own channels. It was intertwined with all the other Associations. Now it is good too, it is still interesting, they mixed these things together. It was very, very, very, the work of this Association was very good, but then slowly it created confrontation between the young and the old. The old ones would say that it was good that the Association existed, the young ones would stay silent and would say that it was something that the old ones invented, with old methods, ideas of communism. It is a little banal, but it was something like this.

I think they were really good. It was like a model of communism. It was a model of communism, because this new era, asked for new forms. I agree, the new era asks for new forms. But the good model that you have, do not ruin it. Yes, make new forms, but do not ruin the good. This is my answer about this, about the Association.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were you divided like sculptors or all visual arts...

**Agim Rudi:** All the visual arts, it was very good.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did the Association organize exhibitions in other Yugoslav centers?

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<sup>27</sup>Bureau of Self-Governing Interests, now the Public Housing Enterprise in Pristina.

**Agim Rudi:** Exhibitions in all of Yugoslavia, and outside of it. They had exhibitions abroad too.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** It had the role of networking meaning...

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, then it organized exhibitions itself.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did they organize exhibitions even before the gallery existed?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes!

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Where, in what spaces, in the theatre?

**Agim Rudi:** In the theatre, I did, an exhibition in the theatre. Just do not ask me in which year (smiles).

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** (Laughs) No, I am just interested to know what spaces were used then?

**Agim Rudi:** In the theatre. (incomp 14:08) I exhibited.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Others?

**Agim Rudi:** That was the best exhibition, the... I do not know, it depends on what stage you know.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I am just interested...

**Agim Rudi:** The Gallery was enough for us. I then was in periods in which the gallery functioned. And the gallery functioned especially with Shyqri Nimani<sup>28</sup> perfect, perfect with Shyqri Nimani. A lot of people envied Shyqri, not everybody loved him. But I, now I am speaking, after so many years, I kept it as a gentleman, had relations with the world, with Yugoslavia, with everyone. With him you entered in the world channels, the thing is... I forgot to tell you something, although I am going back. It is not that I studied in Ljubljana. At the Academy of Ljubljana and any other academy in a small country, Ljubljana is small, as much as Kosovo. But the cultural life is there, the cultural life there opened big exhibitions, exhibitions of great people, you can even see many people, whenever you go to a gallery you see a lot people, a lot of well-known people.

I remember like it was today, I said to, I said to this professor, I return to this consciously because I don't want to leave it out. I said to this professor, "May I..." He was going to Zagreb, he was working on a very big monument, he was melting [the wax] in Zagreb. And I thought, I could not directly say it to him, "You are going to see Dušan Džamonja..."<sup>29</sup> He is the sculptor who did all the Sutjeska Monuments of Yugoslavia's great wars, ex-Yugoslavia. He did them, Dušan Džamonja. And he was his

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<sup>28</sup> Shyqri Nimani (1941) was born in Shkodër, Albania. He is a Kosovo-based graphic designer and professor who 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>29</sup> Dušan Džamonja (1928-2009) was a contemporary Croatian sculptor of Macedonian ancestry. He designed a number of monuments to the Partisans and victims of concentration camps, most notably the Memorial Ossuary at Barletta, near Ban (completed 1970) and the Monument to the Battle of Kozara (completed 1972).

friend, I knew that he was going to see him and he said, “Come along!” He could not say do not come, the professor felt bad. He was old and good but he felt bad to say no. “Come” he said, “Rudi, do come,” I went and just stayed there and watched how he spoke to the people in the foundry. He said to me, “Now come we are going to that friend of mine, we are going to drink a glass of wine. Come you will see.” He took me to Džamonja, but do you know I went to Džamonja’s atelier, you know what that was. It was the biggest thing in my life, to go to Džamonja’s atelier, do you know what I experienced? It was a big experience to see great people, it was a big experience (laughs), we did not see many great people.

For example, I experienced the same thing when Odhise Paskali<sup>30</sup> was here, I stayed with him, I stayed with him a lot. I hate his way of sculpting. I hate it, his sculpture of Skanderbeg<sup>31</sup> was good, anything else he did was not good. It was a sort of competition worldwide, it was in Germany, it was to send one sculpture against Nazism, you understand, he did the biggest sculpture, the biggest, two meters and a half. He did a German and a Partisan. This Partisan from above with a rifle shooting the German {explains with hands}. Hey, that was... Odhise Paskali did it, this one that did Skanderbeg, not this Skanderbeg, somebody else did this one [in Pristina], the other Skanderbeg that is in the center of Tirana.

Now I could not say to him, he was a really old person, I could not say, “Hey man... I do not respect you, you are from Albania and all, but you did this sculpture, you are out of your mind.” Think about it, he did the Partisan shooting the German with the butt of the rifle. But art is not in the service of that, it does not do these kinds of services, art is human, what are you trying to show? I could not see it, oh my God, *kuku*,<sup>32</sup> it felt like it was written here [on my forehead]. That is what happened with Odhise.

I mean it is... okay... I got off topic. I mean it is very important to see great people, but I also saw the one that did Skanderbeg. You know how Skanderbeg, one more time, nobody should do Skanderbeg, I mean Skanderbeg’s face. Nobody can work with that, it should be forbidden for people, say, “Goodbye. End of the story.” These kinds of things I could not say, I myself as a 30 year old, now when I have reached 70, now I can say them, now I can say that. The sculpture of Odhise Paskali in the middle of Tirana is nothing, the other one is better.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you tell us when you started working at the university?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, in ‘92. Finally he said in ‘92, Agim said, “You cannot not come now, period.”

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What happened meanwhile because I did not know it was this late?

**Agim Rudi:** I worked in television.

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<sup>30</sup> Odhise Paskali (1903 – 1985) was born in Kozani, Greece. He is one of the most acclaimed Albanian sculptors. He was awarded the Artist of the People of Albania Award for his contributions. Paskali has finished around 600 sculptures; his masterpiece is the Skanderbeg's monument in Tirana, Albania.

<sup>31</sup> Gjergj Kastriot – Skanderbeg (1405-1468) was an Albanian nobleman and leader. Taken hostage as a boy by the Ottomans, he served the Empire until 1443 when he became the Chief of the League of Albanian People in the League of Lezhë. He led a resistance to the Ottoman Empire for the next 25 years until his death, and is considered a model of Christian resistance against Ottoman Islam throughout Europe. He is the greatest Albanian national hero.

<sup>32</sup> Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Aaaaa all of the '70s, '80s?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, yes. You know why I worked in television? Because I had two big ateliers about 200 meters, without money, they were mine. I sculpted like crazy, sometimes I built scenography for them and nothing else. This is the truth, it is the truth I am not sugar coating it, these were my ateliers, nobody dared come inside, this is where I worked, but that was, television eats you up, it kills you. I had to do scenography, sometimes I started doing it, I started being known for festival scenography, I started doing great festivals, dumb stuff, but you had to do it, to get the salary.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What kind of festivals were there at that time, I mean the '80s, can you tell us how that period was and that time in television because it was a beginning for Albanians, to have Albanian television.

**Agim Rudi:** All kinds. I did the festival "Chords of Kosovo". I do not think this it is a good thing to tell this part you know, but I had no choice (laughs). I did not want to work at the Academy, I did not want to. Everyone begged me to, because I was friends with everyone at the Academy and very good. But I did not want to, I was not interested and there I found the bread, two ateliers man, perfect, I got my salary, I did something in exchange.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were you exhibiting your work?

**Agim Rudi:** I did exhibit all the time with the Associations, with the Associations, a communist country, I was becoming well-known, *Rilindja*<sup>33</sup> sometimes wrote about me. I have everything that was written about me in *Rilindja*, everybody wrote "He is good, he is good," Good, me? Good, but I was not earning anything, not even a *dinar*<sup>34</sup> (laughs). I am laughing, laughing with the time, I am not laughing with anyone, I am not ridiculing anyone, the time was backwards, the biggest thing you gained was an article about you in *Rilindja*.

I do not want to mention his name. When I exhibited, when I won the award in America, they sent 1000 dollars, critics, just to show them to you [addresses the interviewer], and very good. Without knowing anything I told a colleague of mine, I do not want to mention his [name]. He said, "Agim bre, Agim bre, why are you not announcing this in the newspaper." I said, "I see no point, I see no point to put it in the newspaper." Why do I need to announce it in the newspaper, do you understand? (laughs) We are not talking about a person here, a population, a population that still lives with these [conceptions], to be in *Rilindja*, he went and won the first prize in *Rilindja*, you know. "Why don't I announce it in the newspaper?" This was that logic, you know why would I want to be in the newspaper, no it was a different logic, a different logic.

They said, "Will you sell me this drawing?" "Yes." "How much?" I said, "The drawing?" "Good, good, good." Because I went to Chicago with my wife (laughs). My son comes and says, "Are you selling them?" "Yes of course, 1500 euro." "Make it cheaper, I feel sorry for them." "No, why?" When he came and brought me the cheque, he brought a 1500 cheque, 1500 dollars, not 1500 euros but 1500 dollars. So amazing, so amazing, you know because you were educated to think that when you sell a thing for

<sup>33</sup> *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

<sup>34</sup> *Dinar* was the Yugoslav currency. Now it is the basic monetary unit of Serbia.

money you say you are without honor.

That was a backwards generation that mostly wanted to be in *Rilindja*... and I feel bad there were so many artists, and there were artists that were, great ones. Great ones here in Kosovo, they are still alive, you still see them with Tahir Emra with Rexhep Ferri, they are still alive. You know what they do, they are miracles, you see art around the world. But their way of living, Kosovo was difficult to live in, Kosovo was not good for this... Now it is free, now you can do anything, but still they are old school.

My friend still thinks, "Come on I want to be exhibit now it is time to exhibit." "Why exhibit? Why be exposed Sabedin, for what?" I tell my friend, "Why exhibit?" Well this is how we get exhibit, we are used to exhibit, let's exhibit. Now those are stopped, the salons, nobody does them anymore because there is no interest whatsoever anymore. But the new generation came, which dares not to say so. Usually not the best of them say, "Let's do it..." you know, it is bad.

Let me tell you something else that made me the way that I am, travelling helped me a lot. I was in Paris about five times, I was there not with the Association but with my own money. I put it in my pocket and I went to Paris for 25 days once, 25 days another time. And I knew how to look and I was prepared to go and look and I opened my eyes very well. I went and I saw, I saw everything, from Picasso there is nothing, from Michelangelo there is nothing, I know everything from the world. Why, why do I know it? Because I studied it, because you cannot be an artist and not know what is happening around the world, what happened during the centuries. You cannot. You have to understand what happened.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were there any sort of dynamics among the generation of sculptors at the time, I mean when you came back, were there other sculptors that you were in conversation with?

**Agim Rudi:** No, no I think that we had no sculptures, it was always painting, especially the older, Muslim and others, when they talked about figurative art they said painting.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The top of the pyramid.

**Agim Rudi:** (Laughs) The top of the pyramid, people knew very little about sculpture. However sculpture I am explaining because people do not know, random people for whom it is not their profession. Abstract sculpture, modern abstract sculpture was born in Russia, from there it started, nobody knows this only a few people only the professionals and even this they sometimes forget.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were you influenced by that school?

**Agim Rudi:** No, there was even Kandinsky, he sculpted there but not only do I want to tell you where to find the fountain where it was, you understand. I have not left a thing without touching and learning sculpting. A man cannot achieve anything, I only went and opened my eyes. I went to Rodin [Musée Rodin] I saw what Rodin did, what he breathed, I knew some small barracks at the atelier, at the atelier in Rodin's Palace in Paris there were some small barracks. I went and I saw a lot, I tried hard to analyse, to read them, because now I knew how to read, before I did not know how to read, I looked at them, but I did not know.

I went to Frankfurt one day after the war with Nevryze and everybody I went to see art, I was thirsty I

was going crazy. 50 marks, the ticket to make it four floors. Yeah, yeah I said 50 marks, 50 marks was a lot of money. Because we were a lot of people, now it was Nevryze and everybody, girls everybody. When I went there I almost went crazy, I almost fainted. The security was looking like this man is not okay, I wanted to go crazy seeing beautiful things. Because we were incomplete here, even though in Frankfurt I wanted to say something extra but I forgot. It does not matter, after the war we were thirsty to see a lot of good things. Also something else because I keep jumping for there to here when I had been given Mother Teresa [sculpture], in Novoselo.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What year?

**Agim Rudi:** I have the complete show recorded with Enver...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Gashi?

**Agim Rudi:** No, the Enver that the Serbs killed.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Ah Maloku?<sup>35</sup>

**Agim Rudi:** Maloku, with him I have an hour-long show.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The '90s?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Okay.

**Agim Rudi:** I have an hour-long show with him, when those from the village of Novoselo came and collected the money. The church would not let them do Mother Teresa. The church did not let them do it, because without the person being...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Because she was not beatified yet?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes it was forbidden to do a sculpture of her. They came to commission me to do it, oh I was happy and all, there were a lot of people interested. I did Mother Teresa. I worked for four months. I did not get all the money to tell you the truth (laughs). But I paid that man in Macedonia, I had practical problems, you had to hide the sculpture. For example, [Dom] Lush Gjergji<sup>36</sup> was already there, but he pretended like he was just coming. Because the church did not supervise it well. The money was collected at the church, a lot of money because I did it very cheaply, we are talking about 35.000 franks. And I did it, it was something very important to me. You know, I went... when I did the model, I went to Gjakova's Novoselo because it was the birthplace of Mother Teresa's mother.

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<sup>35</sup> Enver Maloku (1954 – 1999) was born in Bradash, Kosovo. He studied Albanian Literature at the University of Pristina. Maloku was a journalist, writer and the head of the Kosovo Information Centre. He was killed in 1999 by Yugoslav forces during the Kosovo war.

<sup>36</sup> Don Lush Gjergji (1949) was born in Viti, Kosovo. He is an Albanian Catholic priest from Kosovo. He graduated from La Sapienza University in Rome, where he also earned his PhD in Psychology in 1975. He is currently the Vicar General of the Kosovo Diocese.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Ah, okay.

**Agim Rudi:** This one is like this, and I went I sent the model, the people looked at it, criticized it, people are like this, I gave answers as much as I knew and I started working on it. I brought it. She was Mother Teresa, the first sculpture in the world and it was. And you know who did it? I, Agim Rudi. I am so proud, such a good sculpture. Good? Good has no limit, good has no limit but I did it, I did it at that time.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You did it with bronze?

**Agim Rudi:** We did it with bronze in Skopje, with bronze, I called that person he did it with plaster piece by piece.

**Nevryze Rudi:** Zana was two years old when you did it...

**Agim Rudi:** I took her. She was with three guys can you see {explains with hands}, all three of my boys posing in underwear, they were older, smaller and I like it when I see that sculpture you know. Nobody appreciates it enough because of the war, nobody. I didn't even get the money because they started building the church. Those big believers looked more at the church than the sculpture and they did not know its value, I am telling you the truth. But the sculpture is there and I did it. And then they caused problems about who did it first, was it the one from India or? No, no I did it during the '90s barely, barely in secret with the UÇK,<sup>37</sup> in the '90s. With some people from another world who helped me bring it to Ferizaj because how to bring it in bronze. You would not dare to bring Mother Teresa because if the police caught you, they would throw you in jail. This I wanted to emphasise, it was very important for me.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you talk about the materials?

**Agim Rudi:** What?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Materials, what materials do you prefer to use? What is your relation to the material itself?

**Agim Rudi:** There, I am not quite, quite, quite, it's a fundamental relation you know. I think that anyone who thinks of sculpture as a profession, anyone that does not think that it does not give importance, then they do not know what sculpture is. You have to follow the material, to follow the form of the material. They go together, how the sculptor ranks them, that is on the sculptor, depending on how much culture they have, sculptural culture, I mean how much sculptural abilities they have.

To tell you the truth through all this time that I have been a professor, because Agim [Çavdarbasha] died and that was a setback, the main setback, I could run the entire department of sculpture. But then a few of my students graduated and started slowly becoming me. They became those who did

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<sup>37</sup> *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* - Kosovo Liberation Army, was the an Albanian guerrilla paramilitary organisation that sought the separation of Kosovo from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia during the 1990s.

not say, they said, “The department of sculpture is the best among the departments.” I would say, “No.” Because now I had all the responsibility. Many things concerning sculpture were not valid anymore, but I could not. I could not share all the good things I learned in Ljubljana. I could not because of many conditions, we worked in a basement<sup>38</sup> in Velania<sup>39</sup> in places... It was not, how many times I carried stuff with my car, carried the atelier with the car. Stuff that cannot be used to show the period and tell how much they did and how much they knew, because that period demanded of you like that. And this was the job.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Let’s go back to materials?

**Agim Rudi:** What?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** May we go back to the materials?

**Agim Rudi:** Okay.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** It interests me as a process, what was your approach?

**Agim Rudi:** To tell you the truth, first I have to consider all the new materials. Does not matter how old I get, I have to consider the new materials. I have to, the new achievements. And so, but you should also know the old materials, how they function, how does wood work, how thinking of wood works it is a complete thought. The thinking about stone, it is completely different. The thinking about the other light things, polyester and others, as you can see from my face what those other things are.

## Part Four

**Agim Rudi:** You should keep up. I hate this problem here, I adore old materials for which you need time, you need to ask for help, because you can not [do it] alone. I worked on a stone sculpture in front of the rectorate in the year ‘90, Gazmend Zajmi was the rector, within the framework of a symposium... the alarm, for medicine...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Do you have to take it?

**Agim Rudi:** No it is okay, I’ll take it later.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What kind of symposium?

**Agim Rudi:** A symposium of Sculpture, participants were from all over Yugoslavia. Together with Gazmend Zajmi we put that sculpture in front of the Rectorate, in front of the Rectorate that is there. I

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<sup>38</sup> By 1991, after Slobodan Milošević’s legislation that made Serbian the official language of Kosovo and the removal of all Albanians from public service, Albanians were excluded from schools as well. The Albanian reaction was to create a parallel system of education hosted mostly by private homes, basements included were used as classrooms.

<sup>39</sup> Velania is one of the Pristina’s neighborhoods, mainly inhabited by the Albanian population, where the Albanian parallel education system was accommodated during the ‘90s occupation in Kosovo.

was happy because my sculpture was there, two meters of cube, stone, I am talking about the material...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The white ones?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, the white ones. Those stones are still there unused. The Academy puts out students non-stop, every year it puts out students, and I worked in the Academy (laughs), and... when the Serbs came they removed that sculpture and took it somewhere, they took it...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you ever find it?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, yes I found it, it is here. The Serbs were fair they placed Dositej Obradović. When the Albanians came, it was the property of the Rectorate, it is not my property, they put it someone else, they put in Hasan Prishtina. My sculpture was thrown at the University of Architecture, was thrown {explains with his hands}, (laughs) I am laughing and it is not a laughing matter, it is very sad, it makes you want to cry.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** This is what I wanted to ask, there is another important question here. These works that were commissioned by the Association that ended up in state enterprises, which are now being privatized, what happened to them?

**Agim Rudi:** Nothing.

**EK** Do you have any rights over them?

**Agim Rudi:** No, no one. It was not even discussed. Just how many arts ministries have? How many arts Kosovo's ministries have? That could be another art collection for the gallery.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Do you have the right to claim them?

**Agim Rudi:** There are no rights, there's nothing written, you cannot know what is whose property. You cannot know, it is not written, what is whose property. Nothing is defined, it is horrible, we should discuss this problem, we should... This country we formed, that we got so happy, "Long live Kosovo," and stuff, they cannot, they do not know how to solve these problems.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Do you have works that have ended up in these places?

**Agim Rudi:** Not me.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** That are in undefined circumstances?

**Agim Rudi:** Not me, it the other generation a lot, a lot. They got some money, some...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** There in Grand...

**Agim Rudi:** In Grand, they sold those and got the money.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Yes, yes I know, but in Grand [Hotel] there are the tapestries by Matej Rodiqi<sup>40</sup> which are very good.

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, very good.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Then there are some sculptures that I think are Agim's.

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, Agim Çavdarbasha's, they're his, he got the money...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Gjelosh's<sup>41</sup> painting.

**Agim Rudi:** They got the money.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I know, I know but now...

**Agim Rudi:** What is whose, who they belong to (laughs). Do not ask...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** They do not belong to the Gallery, nor to Grand.

**Agim Rudi:** It is horrible, it is. In the Ministry of Culture there are some drawings, some paintings, I tried to look for them, I was on the board of the Gallery and the moment came for me to be able to do something, when they asked me what is to be done, they asked me something like this (laughs). I started investigating, where it was registered, where is it, how and when was it given, whether it was given temporarily. When I would find a certificate that it said it was given temporarily, I would say, "Temporarily. Why won't you return it, this was twelve years ago, this was this many years ago." "We do not know how..." We do not know how to solve these problems. They cannot solve these problems in our country, we cannot even solve whom Grand belongs to, they cannot solve it through court for ten years now. They cannot do anything.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Yes, these are more cultural heritage...

**Agim Rudi:** Very important heritage...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** They cannot belong to the buyer of Grand.

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, that is how it is. I am under the impression that there is, there is no force here. There is not, I just saw my sculpture dropped on the ground...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you get it?

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<sup>40</sup> Matej Rodiqi was born in 1929 in Prizren, Kosovo. He graduated from the Academy of Applied Arts in Belgrade. He specialized in industrial design at the Venice State Institute. He is a well-known Kosovo artist, especially known for his large-scale tapestries that cover one of the interior walls of the Grand Hotel in Pristina, Kosovo.

<sup>41</sup> Gjelosh Gjokaj (1933-2016) was an Albanian painter and graphic artist. He was born in the village of Miles in Tuzi, Yugoslavia. After receiving his fine art degree from the Art Academy in Belgrade in 1963 he started teaching in Pristina, Kosovo until 1969.

**Agim Rudi:** No, I cannot get it... it is Rectorate's property, said the secretary of the Rectorate.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Even if it has been taken down?

**Agim Rudi:** Well he said, "We can throw it, we did buy it Agim, you remember we gave you some money," something I do not know... "Yes, yes but it is mine. How come?" It was a stone sculpture, it was a two meter cube, I worked on it, all night long I kept my hands {explains with gestures} etcetera, etcetera. My hand would hurt. And for the history, I left history to fix these things (laugh). History never fixes things.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Are we also talking about the '90s, about the '90s?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When did you start at the University and the political and cultural situation if you can. What happened to you in a way?

**Agim Rudi:** To tell you the truth in some way I encountered... In the University I encountered another configuration of educators. The configuration that was in the *Shkolla e Lartë* I found in the University. Those with lots of experience, a lot, but they started retiring slowly. It is a little weird, I mention it kiddingly but it is not a joke but... before... our Academy of Arts, earlier I talked highly of the *Shkolla e Lartë Pedagogjike*, the same people were here too and established the Academy, but the Academy was not as good as the *Shkolla e Lartë Pedagogjike*. Plus I was a professor here, a professor, not an assistant imagine. And slowly they started going, then the war happened.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How was the education at homes in the '90s, can you tell us how it was?

**Agim Rudi:** It was horrible, I do not know if we can compensate for all the bad things that came from those times. Each of us completed our duties perfectly, you know. I think that I completed them perfectly, I went to class, I taught. The students had, they made you come to class. This is not just a slogan, seeing their sacrifices to come to class, often times they would come beaten up, "Professor that policeman hit me," {explains with his hand}. That was horrible, or for example there were times we had classes and we said, when the protest is over because we all went to the protest, and when we came back to class we continued learning and they worked all night long sculpting.

Or when I had some professors from America and they asked me, they asked me this exactly. One person came I remember his name and last name, from some village in Podujeva he would say, "*Bre*"<sup>42</sup> professor, all night long I opened a *rov*."<sup>43</sup> "So what? Do you know what *rov* is? The one like a camp {explains with his hand}, "All night long I opened *rova* to fight"....

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What is the name, the term? What is it?

**Agim Rudi:** *Rov*...

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<sup>42</sup> Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

<sup>43</sup> Serb.: *rov*, means trench, ditch.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** *Rov...*

**Agim Rudi:** They're called *rov* in Serbian, *rov* you know... For the soldiers to get it, to be protected, and I would tell him...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** And then they would come to school?

**Agim Rudi:** I would say, here we will talk about sculpture we're only here for sculpture, I was in charge of teaching. I'm here, this is it... when I would see those who would come beaten up and often times they gave me their *indeks*<sup>44</sup> as they wanted to put it somewhere because they couldn't travel with it on the bus because the police would ask for the *indeks*. Horrible things you know things we forget, I'm afraid we will forget everything, enough is enough... there was an incredible enthusiasm especially amongst students.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What pushed them?

**Agim Rudi:** I don't know, I don't know, this is related to other things, things, this is related to God, I don't know what things... when I would see people, I would teach, we would have lectures in the Department of Technical Engineering, I would have lectures there legally, Serbians allowed us... the guy from Italy fixed it... Ibrahim Rugova<sup>45</sup> fixed I don't know what. And we would have lectures, they hid there in the Faculty of Technics because it was warm there, and they would stay there, "May we sleep here?" They would sleep there.

We would work in Velani in a house full of mold and we would make green sculptures, from wood. And I would be an inventor and I would invent things, I would say that the making of a sculpture is a very important process, you should know how to make an old sculpture new and imitate it, and I would say this making process is priceless. What a [kind of] making from the green color of mold. I remember the entire first road on the left it was the one with no ending, it doesn't have an end, I mean it is endless, it has an end, we worked there a few years, a year, two years.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Would they do exhibitions or what would motivate these students.

**Agim Rudi:** No, no, no, no, no, no we would try to improvise with exhibitions, we would improvise some exhibitions but they weren't sculptures at all. I was under the impression that students would learn one way and not the way it should be about artistic life. They knew that us professors, we were responsible and we would lecture as we should and all but, it wasn't the atmosphere you know because we would improvise. Often times I... I was part of raki purchases just to have fun at the Academy, we would do that and buy wood to make sculptures and we would use the leftovers to fuel the fire. We put them in the fireplace and come on, come on who is buying raki. I would improvise I remember like it was yesterday I would tell them whoever makes a hole in their sculpture has to buy

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<sup>44</sup> *Indeks* were personal booklets issued to students under the old university system. It was used both as a student ID and grade register. *Indeks* issued in the '90s had "Kosovo Republic" written on them. Very often Albanian students were mistreated by Serbian police if found with *indeks*.

<sup>45</sup> Ibrahim Rugova (1944-2006) a writer and journalist, founder and leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo, and President of Kosovo during the war and after until his death.

one liter of raki. Stupid stupid, stupid stuff, impossible stuff I don't even know what kind of stuff, we would have the exhibition at the end of the year and have a good one, we would clean it well.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In those same classrooms?

**AR** There, exactly there we would make one and clean, I know we would get vacuum cleaners from the nearby apartments, with the vacuum cleaner we would clean and... I could not give that which I knew, it wasn't that which I knew, it was something else, what it was I don't know, I would explain that this is me the one who would explain in this way and this manner and... this artist and this artist and this and this and, wasn't...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were you ever censored or have you felt censorship?

**Agim Rudi:** Nooo, we began to not be afraid anymore, to tell you the truth I was no longer scared. Because I'm a coward, really, I began not feeling scare and we would go every day to protests and protests. But what would haunt me was to those... that those kids... due to the circumstances I would not teach them much. And they would motivate me to be there, they were the student motivation and this isn't a communist saying, but they were, they would come, the students.

I organized... aaah I forgot about it completely, I had organized it with Besnik Nikqi, he is someone with a big insurance company, he is still alive Besnik, and stuff, and me as his friend organized a symposium in Shtupeq.<sup>46</sup> I took all the pictures of that time and ten students joined me, the eleventh one, and each one made a big sculpture. We organized a wood [sculpture] symposium and those spies would come to Shtupeq, the Albanian spies would look at what we did. We would work, that person would bring food and everything and we would make sculptures everyone would do big sculptures. The sketches we did before were taken.

There I paid three people, I want to share this because it is very important, these three people I paid the guys with saws to work with saws, so we don't waste time on the basics. The huge parts would be taken off by saws and I was worried that my students might get hurt there were some students and some students.... Sculptures in Rugova, huge sculptures, after the war some were burned down and some survived. My sculpture survived, it was a *plis*,<sup>47</sup> ten meters, eleven meters, eleven meters like and this and 60 centimeters and I did it. He [The sponsor] would bring food, we would work from the morning till the evening.

From the morning till the evening, in the evening they would have no choice but to drink raki, no choice everyone would drink, they had no choice. Just no one dared get drunk because we had to get up early and work, this was the symposium in Shtupeq. It was a huge sacrifice. Oh God, oh God I wanted to, I wanted to give them my life, I wanted not just me but I will be honest with you all the professors wanted to give their lives for those students. But the students would pay back for it nicely because in that stress, one of them was a UÇK<sup>48</sup> soldier, I don't know from the forests he called me I

<sup>46</sup> Shtupeq [i Madh] is a village near Rugova Mountains, located to the north-west of the city of Peja, Kosovo.

<sup>47</sup> Traditional white felt conic cap, differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.

<sup>48</sup> The acronym UÇK stands for *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*, the Kosovo Liberation Army. UÇK first came out in an open conflict against Serbian security forces in March 1998, in the rural region of Drenica, 35 kilometers north of

remember that time.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How was war for you? Your family? How did it find you?

**Agim Rudi:** War is interesting, after the war you begin anew. And me you know what I went through the war, after three days we went to Gostivar, I had a friend, he was a Master's student here.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** After three days of bombing?

**Agim Rudi:** No, no three days after we went after seven days of bombing, after seven days of bombing I went to Bllaca, I stayed in Bllaca for seven days, with my entire family and, with my entire family. I didn't have, I had two sons and a daughter there, Petrit [speaker's son] was in America... and we went to Gostivar to Xhelil Rufati, he is a sculptor. The best sculptor in Macedonia, the best professor in the Art Academy teaching sculpture. I was always his second reader, and he simply said, he got each and every one of us a room, one for my wife and myself, and everyone else. My son at that time got married at the time, he got married and his wife was there as well. He got the rooms and said to me, "Professor you have this mobile phone with you." And took me to his atelier. In a restaurant near where the atelier was, he said, "Go to him every half an hour." I bought drawing, a lot of drawing paper, I bought a lot, I still have those drawings. Most of those were sold in America, those of war, I wasn't okay I drew like a madman. For three months I drew, every day, every day. At night I would drink *raki*<sup>49</sup> like a crazy person, at night *raki*, in the morning I'd go, he'd drop me off with his car, he would pick me up at around 3 or 4PM. This is what it was like, this was the war, an awful experience, awful, awful, awful, but I worked hard and didn't know that much. I didn't know two things about how to work when there is war bombing still going on, bombing was happening. I would work. I didn't know we were capable of that, but we were, we were.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When you retired, or will you tell us about the last period until retirement, after the war, how was it?

**Agim Rudi:** Sure, I retired five years ago and then we have five extra at the university, they give us some kind of honorary, out of mercy, very good, good.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How were the generations after the war, the students I mean?

**Agim Rudi:** There were professors, the professors were bad, after the war there was a lot of pressure between professors, it was scary to be in the university, I will say it now. Before I wouldn't say it, not I'm not scared at all. It was great pressure, [they] took everything piece by piece they usurped the university physically. The structure, listen the structure, I would say this back then too, now I will say it, the structure for example ten years ago, ten years before I retired. That structure dates back to long ago, 97 percent were Gjakova people. When I came, I was born in Gjakova you know. The last, no other person from Gjakova is a teacher anymore. The structure you know how it is, Llap<sup>50</sup> region and so, I

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the capital city of Kosovo, Pristina.

<sup>49</sup> *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

<sup>50</sup> Llap is a small basin in northeastern Kosovo. Malo Kosovo is about 16 kilometers long and five kilometers wide. It is bordered by the mountain ranges of Kopaonik in the north and west, and Goljak in the east. Its main

have nothing against it. But, I think countries should be urban with urban people. In these kind of cultural places there should be an urban structure, this may be my own flaw but that's not it. I had a friend, a Dervish he was, from a place that when you go there with a jeep... what was its...

**Nevryze Rudi:** Kostërrc...

**Agim Rudi:** Kostërrc, eh, he was from Kostërrc. When we got there by jeep and walking for 20 more minutes, we would leave the jeep behind because you couldn't go up in the hills, and he would say, "Beqir, how did you even find this..." this marvelous place but you couldn't go there. He would say, "Agim," because he was a musician and Beqiri would say, "it's the devil's work being a musician in Kostërrc." Do you understand, I am saying, I am taking my friend as an example you know. Now he works as a musician in Germany. And very not urban, the structure changed entirely. It cannot change entirely, do you understand... to monopolize it like this.

Let me tell another story maybe from the Academy that... I think wonderful students are getting out of there, how they're going why they're going I don't know, maybe I don't know. The higher education is not what it should be, it is not of the level it used to be, the level it used to be, I think everything pedagogical has begun to decrease here. We are still facing the consequences of those ten years, I say ten years but it was horrible it wasn't ten years, they were huge consequences. I was a teacher at the time, only I know what I talked about, I was in a trance, I wasn't okay, I wasn't okay I wasn't. I had to work so I could feed my children. I worked hard, I worked in scenography, in shops and interiors so I could bring food to the table, because children don't ask whether the enemy is here or not, they ask for milk. And there's a period that I like to mention, why don't you eat your watermelon (laughs)...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** We are listening attentively.

**Agim Rudi:** Ah, there's a period that I like to mention that is very good, very good. In 2006 I went to America, my son married an American and I named her Butterfly. I didn't know what else, I knew this name so whatever, and then slowly, slowly... and before I'd gone to them to their wedding I told him, "I will send you a CD to show to the gallery". I sent everything it wasn't much trouble, if your work is good, if your work is good it wasn't a problem to have them [my works] shown in America. If you're bad, not only that, but they would mix in the police, they would mix in the police. If you're good... as it seemed I was good, I remember they sent word immediately. Nashville he lived in Nashville, Petrit, he went to them and said, "My father has these and these kind of works." They said, "Okay."

Drawings, everything was a drawing nothing else and yes I sent them, I sent even more drawings... I showed them in America and got rid of that, of that unlucky person. There in America, I had my work in Nashville, this much and this much {explains with hands} how many of my works they bought, oh God, oh God. Plenty, plenty, plenty, 15,000 euros. I was really happy and saw that it's not a big deal to be good. And I didn't stop I just worked. Then I had an exhibition in a small town Grand Rapids, Michigan, it's a place. And there was a café, {explains with hand} with a tape and there my drawings were sold, oh God rich people bought from me, there's a rich woman that always sends me those {explains with hands} "Oooh Agim, oooh," a lot, I knew that wealthy woman, in what place she put up

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river is the Lab River. Its largest city is Podujevo.

my work, very good. And then I really liked it I had other exhibitions simultaneously, exhibitions, I had those exhibitions proper to publish in *Rilindja* (all laugh).

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Exhibitions?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes of course (laughs), here at all, at all, at all. “Ah Agim, ah Agim,” I don’t show them I don’t have to, I have no interest at all you know I can’t deal with this anymore... I was part of a very important symposium. I went there to my son’s mother-in-law, a garage a huge garage 150 square meters. I fixed the garage and put up lights and turned it into an atelier.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How long did you stay in America?

**Agim Rudi:** Three and a half months. They almost went crazy they would make fun of my son. No one would go there for even a month or a day. Three and a half months, hey (laughs). They would make fun of him, I couldn’t speak English, they would make fun of him, three and a half months like a fool. I wanted to make a sculpture there, I wanted to make it there, a work done there, it seemed like an interesting story, really, I did this exclusively for fun. This is the work {shows a card} that I did there. You too, you too (laughs). See you know what this is, it’s without relief. Do you know what it means, without relief? A relief that is big like this {explains with hands}. And listen this is one twenty, three, three... it’s one twenty, one twenty, one twenty, so it means three sixty with two ten, three meters and sixty centimeters with two meters and ten.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Uhm, two meters and ten, really huge.

**Agim Rudi:** And I did it, this man right here, I wasn’t scared at all I did, it was put up in a place. America is something else, you should know what I’m trying to say, I mean you should know what... they showed my work in a worldwide exhibition, worldwide. My work was there, without any money any money, was... the work that should be seen, the work that should be seen, this was it. But I had an iPad, an iPad and I recorded myself explaining it like...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You made a video to explain your work?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, because in America the author should be, should be there during weekends. I didn’t know anything they would ask me I would show what I said hop, hop, hop, on my iPad. So I prepared a piece and would show it. To be frank a good work, I liked it a lot, this is me, this is me, this is my art, this here. Quite modern and stuff but not of the 21st century, but we just got into the 21st century, like this. And, I gained a lot from America, a lot of money, no it’s not a lot of money but five thousand, two thousand, seven thousand, you can’t ever get it here, you can’t. But also motivation, I won that award, a great award, this Tribuna newspaper on the internet. What’s the name?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Is it Albanian?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes, here, an Albanian one.

**Donjetë Berisha:** Now everything is online.

**Agim Rudi:** Ah, yes but that one was from the very beginning two years ago or...

**Donjetë Berisha:** Perhaps Tribuna<sup>51</sup> then.

**Agim Rudi:** Ah, Tribuna, they posted it that's where I heard, imagine, hey. They heard about it in that they sent the, sent my son... a thousand dollars hey, for me a thousand dollars were one hundred thousand, I received three critiques, long, from Indiana... this, this. Without expecting, my work. Oh God, a scream, {explains his work with hands} an Albanian wearing a *plis* screaming, a great drawing. I function there very, very, very well. And now there's a lot I am not mentioning because I'm not counting everything.

Two years ago, two years ago, I had exhibition in Chicago at someone's palace. I say palace because it was, I am not saying so from Albania. A big palace, a huge house of this great lawyer from Chicago. With his connections they made this, there were 50 people I have it all taped, I recorded that exhibition. You know with what I {explains with hands} with tape so it wouldn't damage their furniture and all my works were on the computer, laptop, I had this {explains with hands} and I sold, I sold you know how.

In Chicago and these big places would have these kind of exhibitions of this level, 50 people were there, not random people, but very, very... very. And it was an exhibition you could buy from, really in America there are no other exhibitions they don't know about exhibitions. You're either history, you become Van Gogh, or a seller, they don't know these kind of exhibitions about anything you know, just like yeah. I mean I am telling this with a bit of humor but it's not funny the way of life there how they live, you know, how it works, I didn't forget about this...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you receive any critics in that time of Yugoslavia, was there any?

**Agim Rudi:** Yes of course, from Albanians, from Albanians.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Ah okay, and others?

**Agim Rudi:** No, no I wasn't great, you couldn't be great in Yugoslavia. No chances for an Albanian to be great (laughs). This was the truth and we weren't great but I wasn't so great that Yugoslavia would write about me. But here yes Nebih Muriqi,<sup>52</sup> Vesta Nura,<sup>53</sup> Mustafa Ferizi,<sup>54</sup> I have lots of stuff written, I also have television interviews so. I didn't gain much from those things. I repeat once again I am not one of those who expect benefits from their work but to receive praise. I received three critiques from America I swear to God, at that I went crazy... how pleased I was with myself. Without knowing, just my works, my only communication was through my work, back then I didn't have my website, I did, I

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<sup>51</sup> *Tribuna* is an online newspaper.

<sup>52</sup> Nebih Muriqi (1643) was born in Novoselo, Kosovo. He graduated from the Academy of Applied Arts in Belgrade. Muriqi taught art at the Academy of Art in Pristina. His work was exhibited in Kosovo and Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1999 Kosovo War a lot of his paintings were destroyed and burned.

<sup>53</sup> Vesta Nura is a Kosovo-born painter who was active in the 1980s art scene. Currently, she is the coordinator of Visual Arts in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

<sup>54</sup> Mustafa Ferizi (1941-2011) was born in Peja, Kosovo. Ferizi was a painter and art critic. He graduated from the Academy of Art in Pristina.

had, because without it you were nobody. I didn't know I thought I must show them the catalogue. No catalogue, you should show them the website. I was lucky (laughs) these websites, for website design he finished in Los Angeles, my son Petrit, Faculty of Arts, he made my website.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Should we close it off here, are we done here or do you want some more, do you have anything?

**Agim Rudi:** No, enough, enough, I followed your words to not refrain myself and stuff. All is well. I might have overdone it.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Is there anything left that needs adding?

**Agim Rudi:** Not really, if I remember, I will call you. (laughs)