

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH FATMIR KRYPA

Pristina | Date: March 3, 2020

Duration: 305 minutes

Present:

1. Fatmir Krypa (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Renea Begolli (Camera)

Symbols in transcription, nonverbal communication:

() - emotional communication

{ } - the interlocutor explains some gestures.

Other rules of transcription:

[] - addition to the text to help understand

Footnotes are add-ons that provide information about places, names or expressions.

Part One

Fatmir Krypa: So, let's start... I was born in 1942, in Gjakova, into a family of craftsmen. I was lucky to have a father who fed me with knowledge and education and work ethics, which I have followed to this day every step of the way... I even have him in my studio. I continuously reminisce and evoke events that have taken place in my life, and he was an example that I have followed throughout my life. When I introduced myself as a child, when I was asked on different occasions, "Whose son are you?" When I told them that I was Halil Krypa's son, "Respect." They didn't know the word "respect," they would say *afërim*. "A very good man, a very honest man..." words, different epithets of all sorts, all the best.

And as a child back then, I didn't think about that, what does that mean. But as time passed by, I started to understand the situation that I really am part of a family where I am fortunately being educated by a man whose education is dear to my heart today, even though I went to school for 20 years. But the education my father gave me isn't a master's degree, or a doctorate, but it's a special education, parental, life lessons, which every person needs. Family education is very important for every creature that grows and develops. School can perfect it, give it a different direction, but family education is very important.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of person was your father and what kind of experience did he have?

Fatmir Krypa: He... his experience was that he traveled out of Gjakova often, very often. He was a trader, a tailor by profession. He traded with textiles in... for his store, he went to Zagreb, Maribor, in Celje, Kranj... where textile factories were. And like this he also imported new textiles, he imported and had affordable prices to compete in the market back then. And he was special because there weren't such textiles in the market, his colleagues didn't have the textiles he had. And having traveled across Yugoslavia, he had brought with him a wide range of cultural influences from Zagreb, Ljubljana, Slovenia... and that inevitably brought... it was reflected in the family, in our behavior... He was so approachable that he made people for himself.

So, as a child of his, I benefited from what he represented and I appropriated it for myself and passed it on to my children. Aside from the pedagogical side, what I learned in pedagogy and in psychology during my studies and my reading, during my experience in life and with my students, during my 50

years of experience, I have integrated the past with the present and have harmonized the two, and gave an adequate interpretation fitting for every child.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How many children were you in the family?

Fatmir Krypa: Even as children, we had very special life experiences, when I look at it from the point of view of a 78-year-old. For the first time in the neighborhood where we lived, maybe it was even the first ball in the neighborhood... yes, yes, in Gjakova, it was one of the first plastic balls {moves his hands as if he's playing with a ball} that was bought for me in Zagreb. We didn't know how to play with it, it bounced a lot... we were used to having balls made of wool, we would take leather and we would make a ball. We would make balls from textile leftovers, and would play with it. When my father brought that ball to me, it was a surprise because it would bounce high, we didn't know... we couldn't control it... we didn't know how the plastic ball worked. You know, to that point [we were unfamiliar].

When I went to elementary school, when I explained it to others, they asked, "What is that?" We called it *tafte* [board]. *Tafte*. What is *tafte*? It was an A4 plaque with a wooden frame, thin like a blackboard. On one side, it had no lines, on the other, it had lines to guide your handwriting. It had wide and narrow lines, wide and narrow. One side was empty, it was black entirely, and, on that side, we would do our in-class work and continue at home, written with white chalk that would scratch the surface, leaving white or gray marks. And that was our school notebook, that was all we had, that was all that we owned. Even though *abetare*¹ existed for teachers. But for us in the first half of the school-year, *abetare* didn't exist. They gave us *abetare* in the second half. But because of my father's resourcefulness, he... he brought me and some of my friends notebooks, notebooks which later became common for all students.

But this, when I tell someone that we did our math homework, penmanship, drew, calculated on *tafte*. The worst that could happen to you, while you were going to school, a friend, well, a malicious friend, would come from behind and erase your homework and you would have to go to school without homework.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: So, you would do all the homework on the same *tafte*?

Fatmir Krypa: On the same *tafte*. Yes, yes. We would wipe it with a rag. Sponges did not exist back then, they didn't. And this was the life of a child in the first grade. Before this, I remember when airplanes flew over Gjakova, which withdrew army forces of the Second World War from Greece, and they passed over Gjakova. I just went out, I was three years old. It was the end of the war and the sky was covered with planes. I had never seen something like that. Airplanes, you couldn't even count how many there were, maybe eighty to one hundred. The sky was covered with them.

A man around 30, 40 years old grabbed me by the hand and told me, "Run, find a shelter." I didn't know why. Before I got an explanation, he grabbed me by the hand and put me in a shelter and told me that

¹ The Albanian primer.

the airplanes could kill me. Little did I know that an airplane could kill, what did I do to them? But it was war, they knew. I didn't know what they were for, what the airplanes were for, it was the first time I saw them. And the sky was covered with them. He put me in a shelter, the shelter was around 70 [centimeters] or a meter long, he dragged me to the shelter and we waited there until the planes left in the direction of Peja.

Then we heard from the elderly that Peja was bombed. It was mistakenly bombed according to some data, Peja was mistakenly bombed. It was in a way a mistake, or was it a mistake encouraged by spies, someone purposely did that, we don't know the answer, to this day we don't know. There were many victims in Peja, people and infrastructure. I remember this when I visited Peja and I saw in reality Peja as a city. When I went to the *Shkolla e Mesme e Artit*,² I noticed traces of where it was bombed, the locations where it was bombed and other more detailed data of this case. But, let's move past this, let's continue with the story of how I received my education...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Mister Krypa, what kind of family did you have? How big was it?

Fatmir Krypa: Well this was my family, I was the oldest son in the family from my six siblings. I had two sisters and three brothers. I was the oldest, and out of all of us, two of my brothers and I got master's degrees. There's no doctorate in fine art because I would have pursued it, but there's no doctorate in fine art. The brother who was younger than me was more interested in the profession that my father had. My sisters completed high school, both of them got married. And that's how...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you help your father as a child?

Fatmir Krypa: Well, listen. I will answer this question with a motto I use constantly, "Do not waste time." This is my motto. This is also used in my family, I also use it in my work today. I plan my day in the morning, I plan what I will do before noon, in the afternoon, and at night. I plan my day. I make an overall plan. There are cases when the plan changes because someone calls you and invites you somewhere, or another request and it changes. But 80 percent of the time I follow the plan until nighttime. My younger brother who took over my father's trade changed his profession because he got bored, he realized that it would be better to work something else. He became a supervisor at the Agimi Enterprise, a boss, then at Agimi Shopping Mall in Gjakova, that's where his career ended because war began and it closed down. Then he had other jobs.

So, my other brothers, one of them studied cybernetics in Belgrade, the other studied machinery in Zagreb. I tried to push them towards a different profession. And I... they found financial support and everything... educational, and I pushed them towards that direction. Both of them successfully finished it, one of them in Belgrade and the other in Zagreb.

² *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 the arts. The historical building of the Art High School in Peja was destroyed in August, 2017.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I meant when you were a child, did you help your father?

Fatmir Krypa: Now I'll return to myself. As I said, it was my father's request to not waste time. I hold on to that principle even today. My school was very far from my house, on the other side of Gjakova. He would always talk to me in the evenings, I had to report to him every evening. I had to report to him every evening of what I did that day, what I will do tomorrow, and what my plans are for tomorrow. When I say this, I thank my father. He left a corner for me to play reasonable games, but not lose myself in games. "After school, if you have to study, do your homework. If you don't have to study, come to the store." I had to pick one or the other. To go out with friends, "Play, play and play until forever? No, no."

In the seventh and eighth grade, the Children's Theater was created in Gjakova and me and some friends were selected to put on *Snow White*, then *Little Red Riding Hood*, and then some others like this. With 20 premieres each, I mean repeats. We did the play in Peja, in Gjakova. So, I also gave my contribution to society through amateur artistic activities. So I would tell my father, "I have rehearsals today." "Okay, go to rehearsals."

I would also sing, I had to go to the school's choir also. I went to the school's choir when we rehearsed and the end-of-the-year celebrations... then theater rehearsals. And I would do all these within a day. And the store... and now I got the machine, I brought it from home yesterday, the sewing machine, it's here, we can take a picture of it later. I brought it, because I have to hem some sweatpants for my daughter.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: So he also...

Fatmir Krypa: I learned how to sew. I know how to do it. I was committed to learning the craft. School, of course, yes, but also the craft. If you know a craft wherever you go... even if you go to Africa, even if they throw you somewhere with a parachute, you can live off craft. And that motivated me to also learn photography in Peja. I became an apprentice for a photographer's studio, and I would take pictures with a camera that I had, Altix IV, an old camera. I would take pictures, I would develop them there. And I even started developing them by myself using his photographic emulsion.

I started helping him because he had a visual impairment. I was in *Shkolla e Artit* then. But, before I get to this, when I said I will not catwalk through a situation, but I will revisit it... I learned the craft of photography there. From photography retouching, which was very difficult, but I was very sharp-eyed because I was an art student. I would do the retouch and it wasn't detectable, because I had to do it on film with a pencil. On film. I learned to take photographs in the studio, in nature, interior, exterior... with light, without lights and so on. To develop photographs, retouch, I learned everything. I already knew the craft of tailoring.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you sew for yourself?

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, yes. I would sew my own shirts in twelve minutes. I would sew a shirt in twelve minutes. Because we would compete, my father had three other workers in the store. So, we would compete with the workers who sew faster. Twelve was the fastest I could do it. And like that I could also sew pants. But, this was just to learn the craft because I didn't know what was going to happen with me. I learned how to draw early on, instinctually. In the fourth grade, I drew Skanderbeg's portrait that was in history books, I did his profile. We would learn about Skanderbeg, but very shortly, just to learn who Skanderbeg is. The picture was on the page of a... the page of a book. And I took that as a reference and I enlarged his portrait and drew it on a sketchpad 4, that was the largest format. Upon completing it, I showed it to my art teacher and I asked him, "Did I do a good job?" I was a little concerned that it did not share resemblances with Skanderbeg, though I could see it did.

I showed all my work to my father. I had a very... child-parent relationship, how do I say it, I thought he knew everything. How would he know how to draw, you know? But he said it was good, "It's good, yes." He would sometimes maybe say things just to please me, he would say it was good and I would believe him. And I took it to my teacher, Mazllom Hoxha, a very mature teacher, just like all the other teachers of that time, they were an example for students, parents and the culture of that time. They were an example for everything. Teachers were people who corrected society at every step. If they noticed you were taking on bad habits, "Look, son, you're wrong." You know, they would give advice on the street, let alone in the classroom. Such was the role of the teacher everywhere. There was also a lot of respect for teachers by students. When teachers said something, it was a done deal. It was true, it was sincere and well-intended what they were saying. They did not just say it for the sake of saying something.

And the teacher asked me, "Who helped you?" You know, the teacher said, right? "Did someone help you?" I was the oldest, there was no one to help me, no! I said to him, "No, I did it myself." You know. "Very nice," he said, "Very nice. Give it to me." And he hangs it with some pointy and rounded clippers that were at the time. With four clippers he hangs it on the classroom wall that sheet of paper size four, the Skanderbeg. And to me it seemed like *uhaa* {onomatopoeic} the teacher chose it, and students were excited to see how well I could draw... Now I was, you know, among the [best] students, now I'm doing away with modesty, but we were 40 students in the classroom.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were there girls at that time?

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, yes, yes, of course. There were girls. And there was a number... and in that instant when my drawing got chosen, I started thinking that perhaps I can draw. Perhaps, I can draw, you know, yes. And the next day, at one point during the week, my teacher said to me, "Fatmir, you have to draw the geographical maps." We were learning about Yugoslav rivers. I can draw the map of Yugoslavia by heart even now. I know the rivers, lakes, mountains, everything. Those maps were drawn on a sketch pad. And he had ordered two poles and he hung the maps there in the classroom.

All the lessons in geography that we learned, he made me do visuals. In the fourth grade I felt like this is something only I could do, you know, like... but I was very modest, very modest, very modest. I

couldn't even tell myself that I know something. I didn't know why I was doing it, because young people didn't pride themselves on something they did, I... lying was impossible, let alone telling the truth, telling someone you did yourself, to present it as yours, to have it confirmed by someone older than you. Even though I wanted to be able to do the same for other courses. I have two books here...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And all... the whole class learned geography through your drawings?

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, yes, the maps were there. The borders, the mountains... Triglav, here's the peak of Triglav {points} in Slovenia, 2,700 and how many meters, 2,800, or how high it is. Here is that {points}, this Pannonia, this is the biggest field, here it is, here it is... Dalmatia was here, all of these. There was history, geography. And now I started to mirror this knowledge on other subjects, because I was good at mathematics. There was a boy who worked in the store and he made me solve math problems in my free time. When there wasn't any work at the store he would give me math problems. Mathematics was something, apart from the drawing, mathematics was my second favorite subject. And there was the moment when I had to decide if I should study architecture or art? There was a dilemma, but I decided to study art, because I loved mathematics...

And the... one day the professor called me in class... It was mathematics class, he wanted to grade me. And he called on another classmate who was very good at math... excellent students were very few, there were four... three of four students. It's not like today that the whole class has excellent grades, or 80 percent. Back then...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Not all of them could follow or...

Fatmir Krypa: What?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: The school system was not very inclusive...

Fatmir Krypa: No, no, no, but now look, it was hard to raise the bar. As I am telling you, out of 40 students only four or five were good, every tenth student... 40 students... It would have been a moment of pride if 40 students were excellent. And they would gift us each a book, I have it here, I'll show it to you after. "As an excellent student, this book is given to this person." I got a book in the first and second half of the school year. *Si u bë njeriu vigan?* [How did people become giants?] The first book that was translated into Albanian, and *Tregim për bukën e bardhë* [A story about white bread.] And this was the beginning of translations from Serbian literature because there weren't any [Albanian] writers who... later there was Esad Mekuli³ with his poetry and so on.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What about books?

Fatmir Krypa: Excuse me? There were no books. Later *Rrushë ka nisë me u pjekë* [The grapes started to ripen] by Sinan Hasani was published, but this was later. That is the first Albanian novel, *Rrushë ka nisë*

³ Esad Mekuli (1916-1993) was an Albanian poet and translator. He was the first chair of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo.

me u pjekë by Sinan Hasani. Unfortunately from a person who later devalued himself politically, where his work, maybe the first novel isn't mentioned. No one knows. No one mentions it. No one appreciates it, because he stained himself, he stained the art of writing with the work he did in the sphere of politics. I say, I was never a politician and I'm not now, but his literary work was ignored.

And so, with... in the second half of the school year, because it is, I'm focused on the fourth year because it is a springboard that sets me apart from others, I sprung out of myself, and I connect that moment to my art. And in the second half of the year, Teacher Mazllon left and Salih Canhasi came, an older man. We were used to the young teacher. He was more allegro, more approachable. The new one was more experienced, he had more experience and... but somehow we, we were just like my second daughter when we wanted to enroll her in the first grade, "I want a beautiful teacher dad, I want a beautiful teacher mom."

We also wanted our teacher to be handsome. Salih wasn't but he made up for his physical appearance with his work, his behavior, and his values. He made himself handsome. Maybe even more handsome than Teacher Mazllom, for whom I have great respect. And whenever I saw him we reminisced [old days], those drawings I used to make. We would evoke these memories together. When my mother died, he expressed his condolences, he said, "Fatmir was one of the best students I've had." In a room full of men, which wasn't the right moment, but he said it, "He was my best student."

And one day, we had drawing class with the teacher Salih, this is very important for me, vital. It was drawing class, it was a long break, 15 minutes, we had all gone outside. Teacher Salih had found a perspective, a way to study perspective, he lined up the bigger building, the smaller and the even smaller building, and [showed it to us] how it got smaller in the book. And he wanted to draw on the blackboard so we could learn about perspective, what perspective is, to teach us how the same house can look big, but it looks smaller from far away. But in reality it always has the same size. And he started to draw but the buildings were tilted, he couldn't draw them [as he wished].

How did I find out? The headteacher called me, because Teacher Salih also made me draw later. All the leaders of the Republics, because he saw them too, "Who drew these maps?" "Who did this?" "Fatmir." You know? He made me draw all the leaders of the Republics of Yugoslavia at that time. Lazar Koliševski from Macedonia, Đuro Pucar "Stari" from Vojvodina, Ivan Gošnjak from Croatia, Petar Stambolić from Serbia and so on. From six republics, I had to draw all the leaders of the Republics. We had learned about them and now we had to draw them.

Drawing them and preserving their character wasn't a small feat. Because one little thing can change, one eye has an arch above, the other under. None of our eyes are the same. We have two arches, no one has the same eyes. Making it a bit wider, slopier, the character changes. A wider nose, a long nose, fuller lips, thinner lips, a narrow forehead, the character changes. You have to measure the proportions well. And I didn't know I had... instinctively, as a kid, I had done it.

And now I'm talking about Teacher Salih. He couldn't draw it, so he erased it with the sponge. But, the sponge was dry. He wiped it a few times on the surface. But my eyes were so sharp that I could tell that

there were houses which seemed as if they were falling down. They weren't [lined up to create] perspective, they were down. He couldn't. "Head teacher, where is Fatmir? Call Fatmir." I went running. He asked, "Can you draw this?" I looked at it, there was a road with three houses on one side, three three-story houses on one side shown in perspective. And I had never drawn in perspective. I said, "Yes." Even today I don't know where I got the courage to say yes, I often ask myself today, "Where did I get the courage to say yes?" And I said, "Yes." And I drew it as it was in the book.

When I went near the blackboard, I noticed that the teacher had tried to draw them before but he couldn't, he erased it. And I kind of felt bad for him, but I also felt proud that I can draw better than the teacher. *Uaa* {onomatopoeic} who am I? I was in the fourth grade, he was an experienced teacher, a person who... a pedagogue. Then as I said, he made himself handsome, beautiful and smart as if he was everything above me. He didn't even tell me not to say that I was the one who drew it. But I have never said it until he passed away, Salih Canhasi, may he rest in peace. But why shouldn't I say it? Pedagogues aren't supposed to be able to draw. But he was a great pedagogue in all the courses he taught in the second half of the school year. The level of commitment in the schoolwork was as high as in other courses as in the drawing course.

And, so, I have mentioned him throughout all my life and in my biography, in my monograph I will have his portrait. I will have his picture, because we took a picture as students in elementary school, with a shaved head, because it was my father's principle, I had noticed this about him, but I could never ask him why. When we were supposed to take the picture at the end of the year, he always gave me the money to shave my head. Almost all of the students did that. And I am in the fourth grade picture with a shaved head. All good, the facial features are there, it's there. However, it's a truth, a biography, something I will hold dear to my heart.

And with this knowledge that I had acquired, because I also have his signature, that I will include... in my monograph that I have here. He gave me that book, his signature... Every time I see it, I see his picture in front of me. I have a special respect for him. This, the fourth grade was the base that I built myself upon, and became good at other courses and had excellent grades, and with knowledge I had acquired from drawing and then I continued with fifth, sixth grade...

Part Two

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you decide to go to *Shkolla e Artit*, I mean high school...

Fatmir Krypa: We'll proceed... in the seventh grade, during painting class we heard that a teacher came from Peja, his name was Shahin Kryeziu.⁴ *Uaa* {onomatopoeic}, we didn't know who he was, they

⁴Shahin Kryeziu enrolled at the High School of Arts in Tirana in 1938 in the class of Professor Odhise Paskali. During the years 1940-1943 he stayed in Turin (Italy), then continued his studies at the Academy of Arts in Florence (Italy). From 1945 he started teaching at the High School of Peja as a drawing professor. He was one of the initiators for the establishment of the High Degree of Arts in Peja during 1949.

said he was tough. Oh, what does tough mean, he demanded a lot. I wasn't worried about my painting skills but I did think about it. The professor came to painting class, Shahin Kyreziu, and this was in seventh grade in elementary school. And when he gave us the assignment, he took one of his drawings, a painting actually, a still life with fruits, with flowers he had painted it, he brought it and hung it on the blackboard, he said, "Paint it, be careful with this and that." It was so hard for the other students but I drew it and he said, "Next week you have to paint it at home." Well good, I painted it with tempera paint in Gjakova...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: There was tempera paint...

Fatmir Krypa: There was no tempera paint in Gjakova. He came from Peja, he was stuck there, he studied in Venice for two years, and when he came here during the Second World War, he was stuck here and couldn't go back to Italy. He stayed in Peja as a painting professor, but luckily he moved to Gjakova and worked as a teacher at my school. And I, I got the tempera paint from my father, he bought them for me in Celje, where they were produced. He bought them there, because I asked him to buy me paint. He explained to them what type of paint he wanted, but they gave him tempera thinking that we use paints just like in Celje and Zagreb, of course. Just because we are a province doesn't mean that we don't know what tempera paint is, though the truth was that we had no idea. When he brought them to me, they looked like toothpaste. We painted with watercolor paint, at school we called it watercolor paint, because most of the people paint with water. It requires a lot of water and watercolor paint.

And I painted it with tempera paint. I remembered the colors, I wrote it down, the apple, it was red here, yellow here, a little green, used my imagination a little, it was orange, I painted it orange with a little bit of brown where it seemed more dark, a little back, mixing the colors and it was done. Still life, and I was curious if I had done a good job. It seemed like I had to wait a long time for the painting class so Professor Shahin could correct it, because, at that time, he was the most professional of all Albanians in Kosovo. There was no one who was more educated with two years of university. And I waited for him in the hallway with my painting and I said, "Professor, can you tell me if I did a good job?" He took it, looked at it. He said, "Get inside." He took out the registry, wrote the date of the class, and finished his procedures.

And now he said to the students, "Bring out your painting, let's see if you did your homework." And almost none of them, only two or three people tried to paint it because they didn't know how to paint it by heart. Around three people had started painting it, one almost finished it and I was the only one who had finished it using tempera paint which was... and then he said to me, "Stand up, boy! Where did you get this paint? What kind of paint did you use?" Because it was written on top of the paint tube "*Temperne boje*" [Srb.: Tempera paint]. I said, "I painted with tempera paint, those that look like toothpaste." He knew there weren't any in Peja, Gjakova, anywhere in Kosovo, "Where did you get that paint?" I said, "My father bought it in Zagreb, or Maribor, I don't know where he bought it." "Aha, what

does your father do?” I told him, it isn’t important. “Very good.” And from that we started some kind of correspondence, a closeness, I was very devoted to all the work and then I finished seventh grade with a mutual respect.

We changed schools, we went to a new school, because there was a lack of school facilities in Gjakova. The seventh grade classes were held in *beg’s*⁵ houses, in a private house, in private houses. There were schools, Komoni’s school was taken over by partisans, it was the school where I finished the first four, three grades. *Mejtep’s*⁶ school, it was called *Ryzhdije*⁷ in Turkish, where I finished fourth grade, where I was with the teachers. I had finished fifth and sixth grade at the gymnasium.⁸ The seventh grade in a private house. They were called like this, Mullashabani’s School, Beg’s School, Komoni’s School, now I don’t remember the names of the schools, of the owner’s of the houses that were bigger, they turned them into schools. Then, then this became a new school in the eighth grade where the majority focused on private houses and this became a huge school called Vojo [Vojislav] Lakičević, and there were probably thousands of students, it was a huge school, thousands of students. It started in the morning until nighttime, there were three shifts, that’s where I finished eighth grade.

I mean Shahin, Professor Shahin, respect, maybe in front of the TV [camera] I could tell him that I’m sorry. When I met him once accidentally, because I became the editor of the Kosovo Monograph for the Gallery of Kosovo, we outlined who should be part of it, the painters, the sculptors, graphic artists, and the painters had forgotten Shahin. We said, “Where is Shahin Kryeziu?” “We didn’t include him.” I said, “You didn’t include him? He is the basis, he taught at the *Shkolla e Artit*, he taught generations.” I said, “He was an educated man, with two years of university education.” I said, “How can we not include him?” Then we decided that I should visit him since his work wasn’t among the artworks of the new generation, so I visited him.

I took it upon myself to visit and consult him on which of his works we should include in the monograph. I visited him but unfortunately he was a little sick. He got up from bed and told me which of his work I should include. I said, “I have taken it upon myself to include you in the Kosovo Monograph as the first initiator of the visual art of painting in Kosovo.” He said, “Thank you very much, Fatmir.” I said, “We dismiss the importance of visual arts if we ignore Shahin Kryeziu, you have given a lot to the scenography, you have conceived so many projects as a scenographer at the Theater of Gjakova, you have contributed so much in our education, you have produced works of art as much as

⁵ *Beg*, *Spahia* and *Aga* are Ottoman titles. *Beg* or *Bey* (great), Ottoman provincial ruler but also, when included in the last name, a sort of honorary title.

⁶ *Mejtep*, *Maktab* (Arabic transliterations include *maktab*, *mekteb*, *mektep*, *meqteb*, *maqtab*), also called a *Kuttab* or school, is an elementary school. Though it was primarily used for teaching children how to read, write, grammar and Islamic studies such as Qira’at (Quranic recitation), other practical and theoretical subjects were also often taught.

⁷ The speaker means the secondary school *Ryzhdije* (*rüşdiyye*), a religious secondary school that was opened in Prizren in 1874.

⁸ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

you could, and as much as your art was misunderstood at the time, you worked to make art accessible and to exhibit.” Who would exhibit there? Who would understand art there? Who would open an exhibition? They didn’t even know what an exhibition was. Why should I paint? There was no purpose.

So, he was withdrawn and so the works he did, some landscapes of Rugova, some motifs from Peja, some figures from the Dukagjin plane, those were his means of self-expression, he needed to have a subject matter, a loved person or a motif to paint, nothing more. But he had no motivation to exhibit; there were no exhibition spaces. So, I, thanks to that request to visit him, today his work is in the Kosovo Monograph. And after we finished that conversation, we drank coffee, he said, “Fatmir,” I remember what he said in his exhausted voice to this day, “this time, you came for work, next time you’ll come to spend time.” He meant that it would be great to evoke memories, because I also helped him with his scenographies where we did those [plays] with *Little Red Riding Hood*, I drew Little Red Riding Hood’s house, those wooden planks. I drew those houses, those wooden planks, the grandmother’s cabin.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Those school plays...

Fatmir Krypa: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Those plays for school?

Fatmir Krypa: I was... the play was performed by the members of the Children’s Theater of Gjakova, I mentioned this earlier, I was an actor there. Shahini put me to work in scenography and... I was young and had a lot of responsibilities... I would always say to myself that I will visit him today, I will visit him tomorrow, I will visit him the day after that. Until one day I heard he had passed away and I regretted it so much, I got so sad that I didn’t get to have that conversation with him, he had said, “Let’s have a talk because now you came for work, let’s evoke those memories a little.” He wanted to talk because our relationship wasn’t student-teacher anymore, we were colleagues. He wanted us to talk about art, about the time we were in school, I helped him while I was in eighth grade, gave additional drawing courses, and taught students how to draw.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was he from Albania who came during Great Albania, Italy, or from here?

Fatmir Krypa: No, no, he was from here.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did they invite people from Kosovo to study in Italy?

Fatmir Krypa: No, no, he went to study in Italy on his own, but in the meantime he came on holiday and the Second World War broke, because the Second World War suddenly started in Italy when Germany attacked Italy and it spread out in Europe. So, he couldn’t continue his education, but he

contributed with the education he had received. And he, now that we are returning to the eighth grade, but I think we should give importance to my further development. In the eighth grade I came to a point that I could speak more directly to Professor Shahini, and in addition to schoolwork, I drew, since I had drawn the portrait of Skanderbeg, the portraits of the leaders of the republics then. I gained experience and pleasure from drawing portraits, so I would draw all kinds of portraits, I would draw nonsense, it wasn't interesting, I thought of drawing artists' portraits.

Ali Podrimja⁹ was my friend, he was my neighbor. He would pass by my house to get to his house. He would pass by my door at least twice a day, and Ali Podrimja knew the workers that distributed the films at the Hysni Zajmi Cinema in Gjakova. In their repertoire they had all the films that were translated in Serbo-Croatian; they were translated from English, French to Serbo-Croatian. People who did speak it, most of the people did, but not the children, the rest spoke Serbo-Croatian. The repertoire was translated into four pages, two sheets. The first page consisted of the title, the main actor and inside were some scenes from the movie and in the last page was the content, now how would you understand it in English, French or German, you know. But you would watch the movie and understand it according to what was happening.

Ali took those two-page leaflets, hundreds of them, from someone he knew and sold them. He took them, the owner of the cinema gave some money to Ali since he sold them and he kept the rest for himself. I had money because I sewed in my father's store and I respected his rules, school, theater, home, when I didn't go to the theater, I went to the store, homework, school, everything was okay. When he went to parent-teacher meetings, everything was okay, and even when I asked for money, I didn't want to be too much, so I asked my father, "Two *dinar*."¹⁰ He never gave me two *dinar*, he gave me five. I would spend two and save three. And like this, what did I do with those three *dinar*, I would buy the leaflets from Ali Podrimja. He had the content of every film, and I had made a collection of around 370-80 film leaflets. I was one of the people who had the biggest collection. Ali would come, "Do you have this movie content?" It was called *Sadržaj* [Content] in Serbian, "Do you have it?" "Yes, I do." "Give me two." I would exchange it with one I didn't have and so on.

I would use these film leaflets to draw the artists. So I wouldn't draw random people, I would take the picture from the leaflet and draw it. They weren't important drawings, so I would show them to Shahin, because it became boring. Each of them was interesting, but I had fun. I remember a woman in a movie called *Bagdadski Prosjak* [in Serbian], *The Beggar of Baghdad*, it was like that. A woman had a scarf, she was beautiful, a scarf that resembled Gjakova scarves, but it was a beautiful woman with a beautiful scarf, and I had drawn it very beautifully. I was interested in artists that I adored, not random people. I drew Kirk Douglas, almost by heart, Burt Lancaster with his eyebrows {raises his eyebrows} by heart.

⁹ Ali Podrimja (1942 – 2012) was an Albanian poet. He was born in Gjakova, Kosovo. In the early '80s, he published the masterful collection *Lum Lumi* (1982), which marked a turning point not only in his own work but also in contemporary Kosovo verse as a whole.

¹⁰ Yugoslav currency.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Would you add the content, or how did you save them?

Fatmir Krypa: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you add the portraits...

Fatmir Krypa: No, no, I would draw them in a sketching pad size 5, the leaflet content was written in a smaller sheet A5, the drawings were larger in a sketching pad size 5, they were large and I have submitted them, I made many drawings and I used them to apply to art school. I got information about what is needed in art school, when I went there, they said, “You have to draw.” I went there. At first I had a problem, I was the oldest son in the family, my father worked in the store with people outside of the family circle. I felt bad as the oldest son about leaving and going to Peja, it took one hour to go to Peja by bus, one hour and twenty minutes, that’s how long it takes today to go from Pristina to Gjakova.

As I said, I couldn’t go there without asking my father, there was a teacher in my school, in Voja Lakičević, I said, “Sali Ballata, can you tell my father that I want to go to art school, that Shahin advised him so, the school advised him so...” Because on the last day of school they gathered us, all of us who finished eighth grade, the school principal invited us to a meeting with all the teachers that taught core courses. “You’re good at math, you should go there. You should go there. You’re good at drawing, you should go to art school. You’re good at music, you should go to the music school in Prizren. You should go to Peja.” They gave us suggestions and they told me to go to Peja.

Where to get the courage to tell my father, I did not have the courage, but also my own conscience, conscience too. My conscience wouldn’t allow the thought to leave my father alone, this was first, and the other issues, leaving him to work with strangers was the worst. He went on travels for weeks, I would think, he was away for a week from the store and he would leave the store to strangers... you can imagine what can happen when you leave strangers in charge. And I told Sali Ballata, he was our *akraba* [cousin] as they say in Turkish, he was our relative. I said, “How do I tell my father?” “Don’t worry, I will tell him.” I said, “Thank you for stepping in for me.”

One day, I would go to the store at least once a day, it would happen that I would go there every other day, work for an hour or two. He came, he was a teacher in that school, he came to his father’s store, it was in front of our store. He noticed I was leaving the store and called me, “Fatmir, come here!” I went and said, “What’s up?” He said, “I talked to Uncle Halil.”

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Your father?

Fatmir Krypa: “I talked...” yes, “I talked to Uncle Halil about your dilemma.” I said, “What did he say?” He said, “At first he was curious to know, he said, ‘Sali, when he finishes school, what will he become?’” Because he had no examples, there wasn’t anyone who had finished art school yet. Muslim Mulliqi¹¹ who was before me, he had just enrolled at the University of Arts in Belgrade, Tahir Emra¹² was in the third year, Esat Meka was in the second year... there were other people from Gjakova in the art school, but there wasn’t anyone who finished it that he could say, “This is what he is doing.” “Uncle Halil, he will be an art teacher, no worries.” “Sali, you know better, he can go.” Even though someone else asked him, I took it as a yes. I said, “There’s an entrance exam for art school that lasts a week. We have to rent a house.” I had a friend from Gjakova, but he failed, he didn’t pass, and we found a house in Kale. We rented that house for a week, I don’t remember how much we paid for it, and we stayed there for a week. We drew every day.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: The whole week?

Fatmir Krypa: The whole week, and on the last day we had to write an essay in Serbian. People from Gjakova didn’t know Serbian, rarely, because even Serbs in Gjakova spoke Albanian. They spoke great Albanian, they didn’t speak Serbo-Croatian, they spoke Albanian. Now writing that essay was a problem, but I don’t know where I got the courage, the topic was “An event from your life” in Serbian *Jedan doživljaj u tvom životu*. When I started writing, what would I write? My grandmother had died two years ago, we loved her very much, and I still felt that pain. I didn’t know what to write, so I wrote about the pain for my grandmother that died.

Today I ask myself, “Okay, you didn’t know Serbian, why didn’t you write at least a little? Write a little.” Because they gave us two large pieces of paper. I wrote a page and a half in Albanian, and half of it in Serbian, and there was a Serbian chauvinist who taught Serbian, he died laughing when he read the essay. On the other hand, the other teacher who assessed my drawing suggested that I pass in the second year in the second half of the year, just like Muslim Mulliqi. I didn’t know that. I got very close with one of my drawing professors in the third year because we would make New Year’s ornaments together, we would write banners and posters together. There was a law for all trucks to have the name of the company on their doors, in Albanian and Serbian, so we also did that.

We would work together with that drawing professor, and one day while conversing, he trusted me a lot, he could see I was trustworthy, and that trustworthiness was traceable in my comportment and how I conducted myself, and one day he said, “Go to Vida to my house, there under the cabinet, under the bedsheets take this much money.” He told me, his student, to go to his house and get his money because he needed it, he trusted me. We talked about a lot of things and I had heard about it, but I

¹¹ Muslim Mulliqi (1934-1998) was an impressionist and expressionist painter from Kosovo. Born into a family of artists, Mulliqi attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade under Zoran Petrović’s mentorship, where he also continued with his postgraduate studies.

¹² 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.

wanted to know from him, I said, “Professor Kamenović,”¹³ I said, “I want to ask you something.” He said, “Yes, Krypa!” I said, “I know I made mistakes when I wrote the essay, I don’t even know what I wrote. I want, I would pay to see that essay just to see what I wrote, I would save it just out of curiosity.”

They proposed to advance me to the second year and he said, “Who? Do you want to advance him to the second year? Look at his essay.” And they didn’t. He said, “When Brane Nikić showed us the essay, we decided that it’s better for you to come regularly and learn the language, of course, you had talent and you showed it. That was the reason we didn’t advance you to the second year.” And this gave me courage that I had talent and I found freedom in doing my work...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What were the professors like? What profile did they have? Where did they come from? What were the students like?

Fatmir Krypa: The professors were from Serbia, there weren’t any Albanian professors, we were the first, Muslim was in the first year, Tahir was in the fourth year. Then others finished later, and so on. Most of the professors were from Serbia, from Montenegro, we didn’t notice any dismissive attitude towards us, to be correct professors of applied arts were not dismissive, no not at all, they were not dismissive, because art tames people. For example, Professor Svetozar Kamenović liked me, he, my wife [Hyrije Krypa]¹⁴ was two years younger, when I finished school she was in the third year and I was a student in Belgrade, she wrote a letter to me, she said, “Professor Kamenović is talking very highly of you in class, he is saying that there was a student here, his name was Fatmir Krypa, he made great paintings.”

So, he was, you can make people like you with your art. But, we didn’t know how much they hated us, luckily we didn’t know how much Serbs hated us. When I went to Peja, I learned Serbian language during the first half of the school year. After the first year, I was equal to the other students, because people from Peja also spoke it. Their vocabulary, in their vocabulary, they had so many Serbian words incorporated. When they said, “Why are you getting mad?” Or, “Why are you showing off? “Wow, his ego is inflated.”¹⁵

¹³ Svetozar Kamenović (1921–1979) was born in Pirot, Serbia. He was a Kosovo Serb painter who finished his training at the Belgrade Academy of Fine Arts in 1953. After graduating, he began teaching at the Arts School in Peja, where he remained until his death in 1979. His paintings were widely exhibited in Kosovo, in particular in the 1970s.

¹⁴Hyrije Krypa (1945) was born in Peja, Kosovo. In 1979, Krypa graduated from the Academy of Figurative Arts at the University of Prishtina. Since 1980, she has been a member of the Association of Figurative Arts of Kosovo.

¹⁵ The speaker identifies terms in the Serbian language adopted by Albanians living in Peja. The Serbian term is conjugated in Albanian, and they describe these three conditions: for going mad they use *zbunitesh* (Srb. original: *zbuniš*), to pretend they use *pravitesh* (Srb. original: *praviš*), to describe someone with an inflated ego they use *plivatke* (Srb. original: *plivaš*).

In the first half of the year I didn't understand their vocabulary, it was a different world from Gjakova. I didn't even understand my Albanian classmates. There were around twenty people in the classroom. Out of twenty students, there were only five Albanians who were accepted that year. Compared to the population, how many were Albanian and how many were Serbian, it was discrimination, but anyway the year when five Albanians were accepted was the year when the most Albanians were ever accepted. And so with that number, I think that number of admitted students was the norm throughout my education.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you paint? Still life or...

Fatmir Krypa: We did schoolwork, we worked according to the gypsum object, it was the least abstract of subject matters I drew on paper. Then a human-size gypsum sculpture would be placed in front of us, their heads were as big as real ones, we had to draw figures of antiquity and then the portrait. In the second year we did the living portrait. Different sitters would come, and they would stay there for a week until we drew them, a week, five hours a day. We had drawing classes three, four days a week. During the week we would have five hours a day, for three days, 15 hours of drawing classes. And we also drew nature, still life in class, and they gave us different topics to do at home just to use our imagination, but mostly they were drawings of concrete objects.

The eye can examine exactly what you're seeing in front of you, what chapped lips looked like, a little swollen, slightly raised or shrunken, cheekbones, what they're like, you observed it all by eye, as the most meticulous camera. When you achieved this, you would get a higher grade, because precision, you didn't have to know who the sitter was, to know if he was precise, and you would know that even if you were an amateur or a professional, and whether they had gotten the character right or not.

So, we were graded objectively by professors, with the highest grade. And we, the art school in Peja, we were the best school in Yugoslavia, out of Ljubljana, Zagreb, Belgrade, Niš, Skopje, Montenegro, Montenegro and Skopje didn't have an academy, neither did Pristina. There were high schools in Niš and Novi Sad, Serbia had three, one in Belgrade, one in Sarajevo, Novi Sad, and one in Niš, Serbia had three because it was big. The art school in Peja was one of the best out of all of these high schools. When we went to the entrance exam in Belgrade they would ask, "At which school were you?" "In Peja." "*Pećka škola.*" "Peja's school," but they were very strict in Belgrade.

Part Three

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Mister Krypa, how did you know from the beginning that you would continue your education in Belgrade? Was it something like part of the high school culture to prepare you for university?

Fatmir Krypa: Well, since some of our colleagues were already in Belgrade, Muslim Mulliqi, Rexhep Ferri,¹⁶ Tahir Emra. Back then there was a great need for qualified professors in Kosovo and we all had to work to fill in the gap, one, two, three professors were not enough. So, I thought that there would be a place for me somewhere and I would be needed for the art of Kosovo in the future. I decided and drew pleasure out of my work while in high school, with the feedback I received from my older colleagues, professors who had a good opinion of me and my desire to achieve a higher level of knowledge, because knowledge in art is never reached fully, you have to perfect it as much as possible with education. But, there was still a dilemma, can I even consider not helping my father. The thoughts of my father kept returning. How could I possibly ask for more, instead of becoming a teacher at a school, and help my father financially to educate my brothers and sisters, and take off some of that burden from my father.

“No,” my father told me to continue my studies and that was it. You know, a very big sacrifice, he sacrificed. He had that satisfaction in his life to know he had an educated generation after him. I noticed then, he had a very diverse group of friends, because he was the first footballer on the Vllaznimi team in Gjakova. The first team started with him, he was a right defender, I have pictures of him. They gathered in the yard of our house and then they went to the football field. So, he was multifaceted, he liked these things... and without a doubt or hesitation he could have said to me, “Look, I sent you to art school for five years, now you’re done. Start working and give me a hand.” But, he thought that I should continue further with my education.

And with his approval I felt empowered, in addition to what I had absorbed from the practical side of the work, I also had the potential to help and give love to my parents, and of course the society in the future. Of this I didn’t think about, to society, we weren’t capable of thinking that we could contribute to society. We would contribute somehow financially, today financial matters are secondary, having an exhibition abroad is primary, being recognized as a Kosovar, as an Albanian from Kosovo. So, then I decided to go to Belgrade and continue my studies. It was before the fall of Raković.¹⁷

Erëmirë Krasniqi: ‘66?

Fatmir Krypa: It was the years, no, ‘63, and I thought that I would have problems when I go to Belgrade, I was prepared for problems. Oh well, they appeared and disappeared, and I was focused on the work and the art I was going to produce while in university. I didn’t bother with the conversations that happened around me. During the entrance exam in the first year, something unexpected

¹⁶ Rexhep Ferri (1937) was born in Kukës, Albania. He is a renowned Kosovo painter. Ferri attended the Academy 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 the year 2000 he was elected as a regular member.

¹⁷ Aleksandar Ranković was a Yugoslav politician, considered the third most powerful man in Yugoslavia after Josip Broz Tito and Edward Kardelj. Between 1945 and 1966, Ranković supported the control of Kosovo Serb minorities, mostly Albanians, through repressive anti-Albanian policies by the secret police. In Kosovo, the period 1947-1966 is collectively known as the “Ranković Era.”

happened. There was a colleague of mine in front of me who was entering the exam. We had out easels like this one {points to the easel behind him} and we were drawing a sitter up to here {touches his knees}, in this position and we drew it.

He was on my right side, with a *mašne* [Srb.: *bow*], with ironed pants, with shoes that you could easily use as a mirror to comb your hair, he was from Belgrade, yes. I was too plain, a boy from Kosovo, with modest clothes, but not so poor looking. My father took care of my clothes, and all of it, but I never asked for high-end clothes since it wasn't my money, I did everything to spare my father, simple clothes.

I drew the sitter, the guy from Belgrade was drawing it. I drew it fast, I had experience, he was in a two-year course, like a high school, it was called *šumatovačka škola*.¹⁸ A two-year school. And I took a break during the exam, we all took a break and came back. The professor told us to write our names in the right corner of the drawing sheet, so we know which one belongs to whom. I wrote my name, "Fatmir Kripa," so they would know because they read it as a "u", "Krupa," so I wrote it "Kripa," and that's how I graduated.

When we came back I saw an arm saw drawn under my name and I asked, "Darko," I said, "who drew this? Did you see?" He said, "Why?" I said, "Why the saw, what is this?" (laughs) He said, "This is your symbol. *Zaštitni znak* [Symbol of protection]. Your symbol." At first I didn't understand what *Zaštitni znak* meant in Serbian? I would have understood, but we didn't do these things in high school, I didn't know what it was, but I knew it wasn't a good sign. "But it's your symbol, you're a workman. Why are you doing art, workman?" He said, "I drew it there." And I erased it, it seemed like we argued before the entrance exam. We finished the exam, he had passed, he had passed in the first round, and I would follow up with him, he was in the painting department, sometimes he would come, sometimes he wouldn't.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you choose painting as well?

Fatmir Krypa: No, sorry, another friend passed the exam, Darko didn't. Monday came and we got the results, so we worked for a whole week, until Saturday, five days, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, five days. We got the results on Monday at 8:00 am. I went there at 8:30 because I was curious to see the results as soon as possible. I saw the list, there were many people, I found my name, Fatmir Kripa, it was done. Then I searched for Darko Glišić, his name was not on the list, I took a look at the other list, his name was not on the list! I looked at other lists and there's no Darko Glišić. I said, "I wish I could see his face right now, that pretentious chauvinist."

¹⁸ Center for visual arts education. Located at Šumatovačka Street in Belgrade, Serbia.

I left the building optimistic and happy. Around 50 meters from the university, no, around 30 meters, there's a coffee shop where Branislav Nušić,¹⁹ Dositej Obradović,²⁰ the Serbian writers hung out, they sat around, they talked, they wrote, they contemplated, they got inspired there, and they preserved it the way it was 200, 300 years ago. It still looks the same to this day, I noticed there's a ten-story building next to it, but the coffee shop didn't change. Every time I went there, before the war, and now I looked it up on the internet, a tall building was built next to it, while the coffee shop is still the same color.

We went out, Darko with three or four of his friends had drunk, and were wondering whether they passed the exam or not, they drank a glass or two, or three, they got brave, they were laughing with each other *ha ha ha - hi hi hi* {onomatopoetic}. When I saw Darko I said, "This is good, this is good." I heard them as they were climbing up to look at the results, he came closer to me, he was seven or eight meters away, and I said loudly, "Darko, you passed the exam." In Serbian, he said, "Really?" He came with a huge smile to hug me.

They're hypocrites, he entirely forgot what he had said to me. He came to hug me and to thank me, and as he was approaching to hug me, I said, "*Položio si...*" [You passed] I was really banal, I said something very banal to him in Serbian. I said to him, "The saw," I said, "that you drew for me, go get it to saw wood with it, because Belgrade is waiting for you to saw wood, while I will go study." I said, "I will study, I will enroll on Monday, while you," I said, "go get the saw." I never saw him in Belgrade during those five years I stayed there.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was this the first time you went to Belgrade from a small city?

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, yes it was, we were on excursions, we went on excursion twice. I had some knowledge, we visited museums, galleries, we visited the museum in Kalemegdan,²¹ the city, Terazije,²² and we went out, but to live there, to see people from up close and talk to them was something else. This experience was a bitter one for me, but fortunately it served as a guiding principle for me at that stage of my life. I always had to have in mind that there are other Darkos, not with the same first and last time, but there will be other people like that.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did something similar happen to you again?

¹⁹ Branislav Nušić (1864-1983) was a playwright, satirist, essayist, novelist and founder of modern rhetoric in Serbia. He also worked as a journalist and civil servant.

²⁰ Dimitrije "Dositej" Obradović (1739-1811) was a writer, philosopher, playwright, librettist, Serbian, translator, linguist, traveler, polyglot and the first Minister of Education of Serbia.

²¹ Kalemegdan is the biggest park and among the most important heritage sites in Belgrade.

²² Terazije is the main square of the city of Belgrade, and it is located in the Stari Grad.

Fatmir Krypa: I was there with the late Agim Çavdarbasha,²³ he was my friend in high school also, we both passed the exam, three others from Kosovo failed. We both passed the exam, Agim couldn't get a scholarship, he didn't have the financial means to continue his studies so I started the first year alone. When I started the second year, Agim started the first-year classes. I started the second year of studies, Agim got the scholarship and enrolled. So, I was alone in that generation. There was only one of us in each generation, in one generation there was only [Shyqri Nimani](#),²⁴ in one generation Rexhep Ferri, in one generation Agim Çavdarbasha and so on. To tell you the truth, you had to be diplomatic back then, to be good at what you do, to be good with people, not to brag about your art because they couldn't stand that, but when you did good work, the professor would say so.

I remember, during the first year, the professor who taught the course [Compositional] Elements, would grade us weekly, he said, "I will grade you for every work." And we would show him our work every day in the beginning of class and he would grade us, but he didn't tell us the grades. At the end of the month, he said, "I will tell you the result of the first month, from the first week until now. This person got a six,²⁵ the other got a seven and so on." Then I started freaking out, "Damn it, why didn't he tell us weekly, we would have gotten used to this." I looked at the colleagues around me, it has been a month together in the class, we knew each other more or less, we knew where they were from, you gave feedback to each other about the work. And now we tried to prove ourselves through our work, to get attention because of our work, because whether you are good-looking or not [it did not matter], Belgrade was big.

He said, "Fatmir Kripa," with an "i" and then he said, "Why?" He said, "Why Kripa? Why don't you write your last name as you have it written?" He had studied in France at the Academy and he was refined, he was quite... he acquired an admirable degree of refinement, he wasn't like other professors who had a different approach. He was open-minded and cultured, he had a communication style, he kept a civilized and professional exchange with students, and his course was mandatory. He said, "What is your name? Your full name? I told him, "Fatmir Krypa, but if I wrote it like that," I said, "with a 'y' you would read it 'u' and in Albanian is a *pogrdna reč* [a derogatory term], bit charged, it isn't good."

I said, "In Albanian we call it 'krip' and 'kryp' [salt]," I said, "It doesn't matter." He said, "Okay, that's your decision, I asked out of curiosity. Now let's see. I graded you with a nine, you have a grade ten." He looked up, "A grade ten and a grade ten, so one grade nine and three grades ten." And up to that moment, no one had gotten such high grades. He was in the middle of communicating our grades, he

²³ Agim Çavdarbasha (1944-1999) was born in Pejë, Kosovo. He was a Kosovo Albanian sculptor, he graduated from the Academy of Applied Arts of Belgrade and the Academy of Arts of Ljubljana. Çavdarbasha was a major influence on contemporary sculpture in Kosovo. He was a member of the Academy of Figurative of Arts of Kosovo and later of the Academy of Science and Arts.

²⁴ Shyqri Nimani (1941) was born in Shkodër, Albania. He is a Kosovo based graphic designer and professor, graduated from the Academy of Applied Arts in Belgrade. Nimani is known as one of the first professional Albanian graphic designers, he is also one of the founders of the Graphic Design department at the Faculty of Arts, University of Pristina and one of the first directors of the National Gallery of Kosovo.

²⁵ Grade D on an A-F scale (A-ten)

had more grades to communicate, I was not the last one, and since he announced them alphabetically, he said, “You are the pillar. Do you see that pillar in the classroom?” And I turned around and looked at it, I thought he was trying to say I’m head-strong or something, who knows how he decided to go about it indirectly. He said, “You are like that pillar,” he paused amid communicating the grades, “that holds this class.” Then I realized that it wasn’t what I thought, he said, “You are the pillar of this generation up to now.” And I felt feathers on my back, I got wings (laughs) there was no other way.

You could not push things forward by force, there were always those spoiled boys everywhere. Some would tease us, some would say indirect things, but we had to be careful, we had to be diplomats, without actually being a diplomat by profession. We had to be an amateur diplomat and study a lot to be able to survive in a social circle. You could brag around and pretend to be something, but there was no one who could protect you there, who would protect you? You had to help your peers, “I’ll help you with this.” Or tell them when they’re wrong, “*Hvala!*” Thank you. Or give them some sort of feedback.

This is what was expected from you as a colleague. Of course we would gain a dose of, a small dose of respect, there was no other way. The Corinthians said you have to be a gentleman, this and that, but to no avail. At some point I even tried to copy one of my peers’ hairstyles, because I had a lot of hair and I started to cut my hair {touches his head} like this. Then they said, “He is copying Tasa, Tasa cuts his hair like this.” They said, “You’re copying him. You little Tasa.” Because he was older than me, he was around ten years older than me. The next day I changed my hairstyle. I wanted to blend in, I didn’t copy him anymore, I wanted to be myself.

I finished the first year and got close to my colleagues and professors. My older colleagues told me, “Look out, things can happen to you. People here observe you a lot, they evaluate and grade you, they grade every work you do, and study a lot and show yourself.” And I took this recommendation to heart during the first days and finished the second year following this advice.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Which one of you teachers was your mentor?

Fatmir Krypa: No, they were from Belgrade, different professors. Each taught a different course. There were dozens of professors. There was another exam for the second degree. This got me very much involved and motivated. They came, apart from us in Belgrade, the Academy of Belgrade, students also came from the high vocational school in Niš, they came from other high vocational schools of Yugoslavia, they entered the entrance exam. Apart from the current students, the competition grew, and only seven people would be accepted to the Graphic Arts Department, and around 35-40 people had applied already.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did it happen around this time that you decided to study graphic arts?

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, yes. Because the first year was general. But nonetheless, it was still good, even though it was general, the program had a good standing, the subject matter gave you a lot, a lot, but however we learned more about graphic arts. I thought I learned and gained a lot there. Why? To my surprise, I gave a lot of thought to passing the exam. I came to Belgrade a week before to get used to Belgrade, the noise, the life dynamics, with the language and everything, I was absorbed by it. It was a big change to come from Peja or Gjakova where it was quiet, a car here and there, to the noise of a dynamic life there. You had to wait a few minutes to cross the road in Terazije [street in Belgrade].

I went there with some friends, they had exams. I said, "I'll come with you, we'll take a room at the dorm together. I'll be there, I'll go out, get used to it. You can study, I won't bother you." And that's how I decided. Since I was absorbed by the thought, I didn't not pay attention to the time when the exam would be held, because we started our lectures at 9 a.m., for two years, our lectures started at 9 a.m. Why? It had to be early in the morning, because we worked with natural light, we had to draw using natural light. I went two days before the exam to buy sheets of paper, choose the angle in the classroom where I can draw best, because the angle is important.

I didn't want to be in front nor see the subject's full profile; a half profile would be the right angle for me. I took the paper and I wanted to put it there but the janitor didn't let me in. I said to him, he knew me for two years, he didn't let me in, because I knew in which class the exam would be held. "I can't let you in." I told him I would give him money, "I can't let you in." "*More*,"²⁶ I said, "drop it. I'll give you this amount of money to let me in." I showed him a huge amount of money, "I can't." I took the paper and left, because he could not let in.

I went on Monday, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes, twenty minutes before due time [9:00 a.m.], but the exam started at 8:00 a.m. Everyone already got in and everyone placed their easels, and I looked around and said, "What is this?" The class was full. They had thrown my easel into the corner somewhere, I was pressed against the wall and had no space to touch my nose because the drawing paper was on my face, there wasn't enough space to even stretch my hand. I asked my colleagues, "Can you make some space, move over a bit?" Some came from Niš, some from Novi Sad, and they didn't know me, "No, why are you late?" My colleagues from Belgrade did the same, I was their competition, and they wanted to narrow down the competition. I started and completed my studies with excellent grades. And now, they couldn't wait for me to make a mistake and fail the exam.

I moved their easels by millimeters to each and everyone so that I could just put my head and extend my hand through. I drew it. This story is even hard to listen to, it is a difficult experience for anyone, let alone for the person that experienced it. I went there with such ambition ahead of time [to Belgrade] and now I was 40 minutes late, but by my account, twenty minutes earlier according to my calculations. I didn't start drawing immediately, but I decided to do a trick. I had heard that apples

²⁶ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

ease stress, how true that was I have no idea but have read that as a student in *Večernje Novosti*.²⁷ And since apples ease stress, I went under the Sava Bridge, there was a fruit seller there, and I bought two apples.

They would sell one or two apples, and place them on a scale as many apples as you wanted, even three apples, depending how many you want. And I get two apples and without even washing them I eat them near the Sava river where it meets with the Danube. There Danube and Sava met, I ate one apple, then the other apple. I went to a coffee shop and I sat there, I got a coffee with a spoon of sugar, and drank it. After drinking the coffee, I was so motivated I felt like I started all my engines, like a Boeing. I did all I could. Now all I had to do was get the best out of this situation. They had already been in the exam for an hour and a half.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did it last?

Fatmir Krypa: It lasted until 12:30, until 12:00 o'clock, but I knew I could draw it for an hour, an hour and a half I would draw it perfectly. But, I couldn't see the sitter because I was in the back of the classroom, I was very far away and could not focus and see clearly. That was the problem, because I had no other problem. And I went there, I started all my engines and I managed to draw it in the end. Maybe I could have done better, maybe I could have, but compared to what the others drew, mine was excellent, but I could have done better. I say that I could have done better, I don't know, I couldn't even judge if I could have done better because I couldn't see straight from the stress. I calmed myself down, I brought myself to a more balanced state, but you can imagine how I felt, I had a huge responsibility to myself, what responsibility I felt towards my father who encouraged me to go. What responsibility? Today I create my art and contribute to society, I exhibit it all over the world. But what I experienced then was quite stressful.

But when the entrance exam was over and the results were satisfactory, I passed. Then I gave myself room to forgive myself, but I demanded of myself more quality. I went there two days before the exam but the janitor didn't let me put the easel in the classroom. This was very ambitious of me, quite so, but as much as it was ambitious, it was also not allowed for anyone to enter prior to the exam. So, the janitor would not allow it, "I just wanted to place..." I didn't say anything and left, "the drawing paper." "No, no, no, you can't." This is what kept me motivated, I was the only one in the generation that had that experience, and I finished it with such high success, I expected that, but I always thought I could contribute more to my wellbeing. People can still say I'm modest, but I never thought I could contribute to my nation.

²⁷ Evening News in translation, it was a daily newspaper in Serbian language, published for the first time in Serbia in 1953.

At that time, I had tens of books that I illustrated for the printing house *Rilindja*,²⁸ sorry, the publication edition of *Rilindja*. [Ramiz Kelmendi](#) was the editor-in-chief and I can show you many of those books from the edition that I illustrated while I was a student.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You did them during your studies?

Fatmir Krypa: During my studies, they assigned me to do it, and at that time I thanked them because they motivated me to work in this profession, and of course I gained from it, I gained well. Ramiz Kelmendi, every semester break that I came, I would work with them, so I had great respect for the edition of *Rilindja*. Then other directors came, I have many books, tens of books for children, for grown-ups, libraries, today they're in archives, it's unlikely for random people to have them.

Many people tell me that they've heard my name from somewhere, I tell them, "You've probably seen it in some book I illustrated." "Ah yes, I've read this book. I remember Fatmir Krypa illustrated it." So, it was helpful. Before I started this, the first book I illustrated and which motivated me to illustrate was Agim Ibrani's book, a funny book, maybe you've heard of it *Quo vadis, djalosh!* [*Quo vadis, boy!*] *Quo vadis, djalosh!* Agimi wrote many books, at that time on the radio it was, that book is very, I have it here somewhere, it was very current, very good. He also did satire for the radio, and I illustrated his first book while I was in the fifth grade of the Art High School. So for that half school year I got a decent honorarium, and that gave me a great start in my studies. It was very good.

So, they had great respect for me. The people that prepared the edition called me on the phone, and I continually did work for them. So, someone had to become an illustrator in Kosovo, so I chose to do illustration graphics. But, graphic design, book cover illustrations, layout, the books were being read and they were being sold, and so on. But I, during my studies, figurative graphic design was under B [it wasn't as important then], and after I finished my studies, figurative graphic design was gaining momentum, it was becoming important. The book covers with figurative illustrations couldn't be exhibited. I did a lot of posters in Pristina at that time, my posters appeared all over Pristina in different events. But it only took walking from the beginning to the end of *korzo*²⁹ for the posters to be torn down, that's how long they lasted. This was kind of demoralizing for me because I worked hard for those posters.

I won awards, awards were won, and you won international awards in the former Yugoslavia, it was a big deal then. I had won a few awards already and it didn't feel good to see my posters torn down, it seemed very... or they would skim through a book, like I said before, "Ah, yes, yes, I remember you I read this book, you illustrated it." Then I started to realize that the longest life of an artist is through works in figurative graphics.

²⁸ *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in the Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

²⁹ Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

Part Four

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you go to exhibitions in Belgrade where graphic arts were exhibited?

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, of course. It was a time where the food in the canteen was physical, while soul food was found in museums, galleries, daily, that was daily. I didn't miss any of the exhibitions that came there. I remember when Van Gogh's exhibit came to Belgrade, in '67, '68-67, I think in '68, and the line to get in was infinite. My knees shook while I waited to get in, I almost fainted when I saw Van Gogh's work. I learned about him in high school, I learned about Van Gogh in Belgrade, I had written an essay for one of my friends, for her high school thesis, I wrote about twenty pages, I had learned a lot about Van Gogh.

At some point I got close to the door and I saw a part, a fragment of the painting, my heart started beating faster. I was wondering, "What is about to happen to me?" It was a huge impression, I don't know how to explain it. I approached Van Gogh's work, I shivered when I saw every brush stroke, the roughness, and I stayed for as long as I was able to stay on my feet, I was the last visitor (laughs) who went to see them. They brought them with police, with protection, it had high security, even Tito didn't have as much security as they did when they took them from the train station, because they were transported by train.

So, these events were, you couldn't ignore it because they were food for the soul. Aside from the practical knowledge that we acquired in university, we had to seek inspiration from experiences of the world of art, because internationally recognized artists exhibited in Belgrade, so while at school we got to have knowledge on how famous artists exhibited. So, in the last year of university, I had a dilemma, I didn't know whether to continue my postgraduate studies in Zagreb or come back to my family and continue my studies later when possible? It was a dilemma that was resolved easily, at that point, I was a father, I was a parent. I had my daughter that you saw earlier, Ardiana. And now I had to make sure that my parents were not taking care of my wife and daughter also, so I had to get a job, and then continue with my postgraduate studies.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did you get married?

Fatmir Krypa: In '67, in '68 I finished my studies and came back to Gjakova. I started working at Hysni Zajmi High Vocational School. I found very good friends there, new school, well-behaved students, they also started working hard. I showed them my work, they liked what I asked of them and they were successful. They were satisfied with their work, I was satisfied with their work, so the satisfaction was mutual. So I stayed there for around four years and I also had my second daughter.

One day during my break I got the newspaper *Rilindja*, the guy who sold it came, his name was Islam, we called him Lam. He comes into the teacher's hall, "*Rilindja, Rilindja, Rilindja!*" I said, "Lam, give me a copy." Back then it was the only newspaper, I was looking through it and at the end pages I saw a job vacancy. I had never seen a page-long job vacancy, it was for Radio Television of Kosovo, yes, Kosovo, a job vacancy. *Au bllaj, bllaj bllaj* {onomatopoeic} so many job vacancies, what are they about to do here? I read...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did the television broadcasting start?

Fatmir Krypa: It was about to start then, yes. I read everything there, what they were doing, cameraman, director, all these. Then I read they needed a painter - illustrator, Art Academy. *Ueee* {onomatopoeic} I'm here. It was winter time, late autumn, standing near the wood stove. I said, "Should I apply?" I went home and told my wife. I knew she wouldn't say no to going to Pristina, and I said, "Hyrije, this and that, there's a job vacancy in Pristina Radio Television, they have these open positions, among other things they are seeking painters and illustrators. Maybe my experience as an illustrator will come handy for the television job." Okay. The late Petrit Dushi was there and the next day I went to the television, to the director of productions, Petrit Dushi.

I said this and that, I am Filan Fisteku,³⁰ I studied at the Academy, this and that, I work, if you want more information you can contact Fahredin Gunga, the Publishing Office, the know, or Ramiz Kelmendi, I said, "They're not random people, they can tell you. I've illustrated," I said. There was another young guy from Peja who applied, he studied in Belgium in a private academy. Petrit said, "You have to take a test. Come next Monday." I went the next Monday, he also comes. I said, "Why do I need to take a test? Here is my work. Look at the books, the library, how many books I have illustrated, look at the samples, and look at the other candidate." He said, "I don't have an office to put you in, but we will work together. Me in one corner and you in the other. Congratulations!" And he said, "You can start work next Monday, starting the first day of the month."

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did you work here for?

Fatmir Krypa: I worked here for a year and in the meantime the Academy of Arts opened in 1974, the job at the Television was good, I made amazing friends.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What were the beginnings of Television broadcasting like? How did you all manage around television technology?

Fatmir Krypa: It wasn't a problem, I could go to Belgrade and receive training for the technical things, I observed how they did their work, and I would stay there for about two weeks. A day, two, once I

³⁰ An equivalent to John Doe. But also, if you don't want to delve into details during the conversation, you say I am X person, I do this and that.

stayed for two weeks to see all they do. Stuff that concerned my work, not other things. Editing and the rest did not concern me. I was receiving training for my line of work...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you do, did you write...

Fatmir Krypa: I wrote, I drew, it wasn't just one job. And there I realized this job was not for me, it didn't allow me to showcase all my knowledge, I knew a lot. And my director, Riza Hala heard that I wanted to quit, I talked to some coworkers of mine, and, "Fatmir wants to leave?" "No, who said that?" Riza Hala called me, "Why do you want to leave?" I said, "Well," I said, "I don't have an apartment. I might leave." "Don't! We'll see what we can do, we'll see about the apartment." "If you give me an apartment, I'll stay, if not I will apply to the Academy of Arts. I will work with students there for three days, give my contribution to art, and give my best." I said, "I can't give my best here, that's what's bothering me. Where can I find people like you, like him, like him..." I mentioned some, "Xhevat Juniku, I've never had such great friends." I said, "Okay, however you want." Anyway, there was a job vacancy, the Graphic Arts Department was being founded at the Academy. I applied, as did three other colleagues, Shyqri Nimani, [Xhevdet Xhafa](#), and [Hysni Krasniqi](#).

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In the exhibit?

Fatmir Krypa: Excuse?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: All for the exhibit...

Fatmir Krypa: For the job vacancy. So, there was a job vacancy for a graphic arts professor, and there were four candidates. To be honest, I didn't know from whom to seek [an evaluation], so I sought it in Belgrade. There was no one who could write an evaluation here, there was no one who had similar qualifications like us. By law, a simple lawyer couldn't write it, they had to have knowledge in art and the discipline we were applying for. It had to be a professor of that discipline. Since three of us had studied in Belgrade, me, Shyqri and Hysni Krasniqi, and Xhevdet Xhafa studied in Ljubljana, we decided to seek them in Zagreb.

They sought an evaluation in Zagreb, and I got a positive response for myself. But one of the candidates who was close to, I won't tell which one because he's my friend, was close to people in high political positions and he managed to cancel the vacancy, and so it happened. It was canceled and reopened but with few modifications. We reapplied, and now there are three candidates. Xhevdet Xhafa, Hysni Krasniqi, and I applied. Now we didn't send them to Zagreb, because Zagreb had already spoken, "We have nothing else to add anymore, we gave our opinion. Our opinion was that." But, now we sought the evaluations in Sarajevo. Sarajevo was what was left, so we sought it in Sarajevo. Sarajevo invited us there personally to see how we conduct our work as pedagogues, what presence

we have, what kind of professors we would make, you know you had to present your work, your attitude and how you teach the course.

They said, “Do you want to improvise the class in front of students or the commission?” I said, “The commission is asking for this, the members of the commission? For me it’s all the same, but I think that I would benefit more if I did it in front of you. I would personally benefit, because you would ask questions. While pupils, students what can they ask? You can ask me more professional questions, and get to know more in-depth about my methodology.” They said, “Okay, you’ll teach a class in front of us.” I didn’t ask what my other colleagues did, I didn’t ask them how they did it.

Anyway, I gave my opinion and passed. It was over and a member of the commission said, “I like you as a person, the deed is done, we made our decision. But let’s be honest, we’re colleagues. The moment we communicate the decision to your Faculty and they let you know who got the job, but I can’t tell you who got the job. Look,” the member of the commission said to me, “we will go out together in Sarajevo for a coffee, we’ll walk around” he said, “but I can’t tell you who got the job, they will know.” I was the last one to present, two before me already presented, and I left an impression on him.

I noticed that it was a good sign that he was showing interest in me. Something good should come out of this, I thought it was something positive. He said, “We will hear from each other again, we will write to each other. We will be in touch, we will see each other again.” He was also a graphic arts professor. I didn’t spend time with the other two members of the commission, they were more strict, Xhevat Hozo, Mersad Berberi. Well-known people, and they didn’t want to discuss this matter at all. I waited for the official decision, as it was sent to everyone. The official results came from the Faculty of Sarajevo that Fatmir Krypa was chosen for the graphic arts professor vacancy.

Then I understood why my colleague trusted me enough to go for a walk with him, but he didn’t... he was discreet until the end. Though he could have told me, he could have said, “Don’t say anything but you got it.” But at that time that was the pedagogical level and he made sure to keep his pedagogical attitude towards professors and students. So, there I got the status of professor, actually it was called lecturer then.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Just to clarify this, so to get accepted in Pristina, your application was reviewed in Sarajevo?

Fatmir Krypa: First in Zagreb, then in Sarajevo, there was no academic staff in Kosovo, no academic staff. I started working at the Faculty of Arts with a group of students who had just started, and have just been admitted.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: They came from *Shkolla e Lartë*³¹ in Pristina?

Fatmir Krypa: No, they came from high school.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: There was also a two-year high vocational school.

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, yes, but not *Shkolla e Lartë*, but the first year after finishing gymnasium or art school.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I assume, back then you preferred students from the *Shkolla e Mesme e Artit*?

Fatmir Krypa: Mostly students who came from the *Shkolla e Mesme e Artit* in Peja, mostly them because there wasn't one in Gjilan. There were, now there is one in Gjilan, but back then it was only *Shkolla e Artit* in Peja. But they could pass the first year with the credits they got from *Shkolla e Lartë*, but you had to do it while in the first year, and if your course credit was legit. *Shkolla e Lartë* had a different rank, while the Academy had another. So, even those who came from *Shkolla e Lartë* had to apply to enroll in the first year, but we would accept those exams that they passed in *Shkolla e Lartë*.

And so like that I gained the status of a pedagogue there and then I opened a job vacancy for an assistant and accepted a colleague who had applied, Hysni Krasniqi. And after a while I advised him to apply for an advanced position, I said, "Colleague, advance to a higher calling." I mean, to have the right to lecture, have access to the academic staff as a pedagogue, not just an assistant, but to lecture. It was a different status as an assistant and a different status as a lecturer, lecturers were more privileged among colleagues and had a different track and could advance to other ranks. So, that time passed with a... we were enabled to, we had two different classes of graphic arts and then we became competition to one another, and so on.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What were the conditions like at that time?

Fatmir Krypa: The Faculty was growing constantly, but we somewhat met the conditions to work and our contribution was huge, to do the work we did with students in barracks. The building we were in after the war, where it was... Do you know where the Academy of Arts is? It was for churches, we improvised classrooms there.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where were you in the beginning?

³¹ *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.

Fatmir Krypa: In *Fehrstudent*³² barracks.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What is *Fehrstudent*?

Fatmir Krypa: It was for students, next to...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Architecture?

Fatmir Krypa: No, next to the Teacher Faculty [Faculty of Education], next to the church.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In front of the military barracks...

Fatmir Krypa: No, no, it was those military barracks, yes, yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: So, in front of the Gallery?

Fatmir Krypa: Later, those barracks were for students to live in, the students left and we used them as classrooms. The conditions were very hard, it was very cold. You could light the wood stove, but it didn't heat up the barracks. The conditions were very hard, but our will was enormous, it was enormous. And practically we managed, I managed to become a dean and I made a request, back then there was no Ministry, but Secretariat of Education, Science and Culture, a request to have a special building for the Academy of Arts. In the meantime, we developed, got stronger, and we twinned with the Academy of Music, and we became the Academy of Arts and the Academy of Music. In the meantime, with Fadil Hysa's initiative, I took it very seriously, I pushed that initiative forward. You can ask Fadil, who was the initiator, and he was the initiator, and pushed for the job to get done, to build and establish the Department of Drama.

One day a student was asked in the elevator, we were at the RTV, Radio Prishtina, it was Fadil with one of his students, "Do you know who was the founder of the Department of Drama?" He said, "No, I don't." He said, "One of the founders is in front of you." And that's how it started. I went to Belgrade, I took all the elaborations needed to establish the department and they said they would help with reviews and instructions on teaching and we achieved an understanding and the Academy approved it and we opened the Department of Drama. When these three...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: This was together with applied arts?

Fatmir Krypa: No, no fine arts, arts weren't divided, fine, applied, but it was visual arts, fine arts was called music, fine arts were graphics, sculpture, painting and graphic design, then we got music, then

³² German: literally, special students. The speaker refers to a special education unit connected to the Department of Education.

drama, and it was three disciplines. I was the dean and I made a request to build a new building because of the work conditions... I have gone to every office in the Assembly of Kosovo, to all politicians to try and find an understanding to have the art departments, to build a new building for them.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Now we are in '74 to...

Fatmir Krypa: And finally with the help of a colleague, Agush Beqiri, his brother was an architect, Qemail, we drafted a request as professors, "Each group," I said, "should take responsibility to assess the needs of sculpture, painting, drama, music department. List the specificities of each, so that I can put it on paper and show it to the architect, and he can take them into consideration when planning the classrooms, the size, the light."

"Sculpture [department] doesn't need natural light, I want the classroom facing the north. A constant light, that does not bother, but it is the same in the morning and in the afternoon," said Agim [Çavdarbasha]. "Because now it's light, later on I will have too much shadow, and it will ruin my angle." And so like this, with the input we have received, we designed the new building. After we did this, we requested the financial means. It was approved.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Which year, tell us the years?

Fatmir Krypa: Let me think, let me rewind.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How many years after it was established?

Fatmir Krypa: '79, '78-'79, sorry, sorry, it was '88-'89, '88-'89, sorry '87-'88, '87-'88.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was it supposed to be built?

Fatmir Krypa: It was supposed to be built...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In what location?

Fatmir Krypa: Where the [Orthodox] Church is, somewhat twenty meters in front, somewhat twenty meters in front, in front of the Academy, close to *Shkolla e Lartë*, twenty meters further away. That's how it was foreseen to be built, in two stages. They approved 500 million for the Radio Television and 500 million for the cornerstone of the Academy of Arts. Muhamet Bicaj, I remember it as if it were today, if he listens to this story, he made me so happy that day. He called me that day at 8:00 a.m., Muhamet Bicaj was the Vice rector, you know? Anyway, he was the Vice rector, he said, "Good morning, Dean, and congratulations!" I said, "For what?" "Good morning, congratulations," he said, "The new

Academy is being built, comrade professor, comrade Dean.” I said, “How, *bre?*”³³ He said, “Last night a meeting was held in the Rectorate, the last meeting point concerned your request.”

And I said to him, “Muhamet, I cannot give you one nor two hugs right now, but I will come to your office, or you come to mine, but the Vice rector should not go to the Dean. No, I’ll come to you and we’ll drink coffee together, and what comes next we’ll see.” I went there, we drank coffee, we congratulated each other, I thanked him for the effort. This joy didn’t last long. That money that they approved for the Faculty of Arts went to Ismail Bajra, also the money to the Radio Television. And not even 20-25 days went by and Milošević³⁴ [regime] was incorporated in all our banking affairs.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: This happened when Milošević’s speech took place here?

Fatmir Krypa: That happened and he took everything, there was nothing there the next day. Everything was overturned, everything fell apart, every decision, everything that happened until 00:00. Everything was different the next day, nothing applied anymore, there were new rules. The war started, the oppressive measures, the political speeches started, everything started and those were left as just dreams. They called me twice, a girl from the Radio Television, she said that she would come to talk, but she never did, she said that she had found the right person to talk about the new building project, that the Academy was supposed to be built instead of the Church. If it had happened it would have come handy. Although they would have built it here where the Faculty of Education is, after... if that building existed, it would have been further away or it would have been torn down.

Part Five

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Let's go back to you professional development...

Fatmir Krypa: Work.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Work, yes. What was happening?

Fatmir Krypa: Since my studies, apart from the pedagogical work, which was my first calling. But apart from the pedagogical work, work which I did when I first finished my studies, I was also concerned with my self-growth in art and other ways, so I don’t remain... although I live in a province, I can call it that, and where graphic art was not developed before in Kosovo. I traveled a lot, to France,

³³ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *Bre*, is similar to the English *bro*, brother.

³⁴ Slobodan Milošević (1941-2006) was a Yugoslav and Serbian politician who served as President of Serbia from 1989 to 1991 and within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1997, and President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1997 to 2000.

Germany, Italy, England, Hungary, Greece, I researched, took notes, and enriched myself and my artistic practice.

But, I always wanted to be that artist from Kosovo, from this region, who contributes to true artistic values, who would be embraced by Albanians from Kosovo or Albania, or any other artist from anywhere, so that art has its value. Even when confronted with a representation of a highlander, to recognize artistic values, even that work of art, not only the motivation itself, but the artistic values too. So, this was my intention, to study it well, very well, because the studies of graphic arts are endless. Technically speaking it doesn't have an end.

A month ago today, I discovered new things, a month ago. Now that I'm settling into my new studio I can't wait to move my inventory from the other studio on one of these days and start working. I have a lot of new ideas. I have ideas bursting in my head. I don't know how I can wait for next week to start, to wait for another week to start. This is what I'm talking about, when something is accumulated, it will burst.

The art scene in Kosovo had a dream to open exhibitions. That was our dream. When we worked in the Academy, we didn't know how to illustrate to the students the work that they have to do. You would explain it with words, but there were no museums, not galleries for the students to visit, go there and see. The professors in Belgrade would tell us, "Go to the museum, go to this gallery, to the second floor, look at this artist's practice, look at how they work." As I said before about Van Gogh, when I saw his brush strokes, I got goosebumps, it seemed as if Van Gogh's hand was moving then.

This was lacking and we had to work hard to empower the arts. And I did what I needed to do and while I was teaching in Gjakova in *Shkolla Normale*,³⁵ I bought the *presse*³⁶ print machine, because graphic arts cannot do without it, I bought it in Novi Sad because here we could not purchase it. We worked with it and in Gjakova I started producing my graphic art, and I have some reproductions, you have it too, the National Gallery has it, *Variola Vera*,³⁷ which was happening in Gjakova. I had taken mental notes of that happenstance and it was reflected in my works in two graphics, and from then I started to rework this theme, to do exhibitions, to exhibit for the first time in *Salloni Pranveror i Kosovës* [Kosovo's Spring Saloon], which we did with Engjëll Berisha,³⁸ the painter Engjëll Berisha. He

³⁵ The *Shkolla Normale* opened in Gjakova in 1948 to train the teachers needed for the newly opened schools. With the exception of a brief interlude during the Italian Fascist occupation of Kosovo during WWII, these were the first schools in the Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.

³⁶ German: *die presse*, print machine for graphic arts.

³⁷ *Variola Vera* was an infectious disease caused by one of two variants of viruses, *Variola major* and *Variola minor*. Often those who survived had severe skin pain and some remained blind. The last outbreak in Yugoslavia was in 1972 when a Muslim pilgrim contracted the virus in the Middle East. Upon returning to his home in Kosovo, he caused an epidemic in which 175 people got infected, killing 35.

³⁸ Engjëll Berisha (1926-2010), also known as Befre, was an Albanian painter from Kosovo. Berisha was born in 1926 in Pejë, Kosovo. He graduated from the University of Belgrade in 1954. He was a member of the Academy of Figurative Arts of Kosovo.

was the head of the Kosovo Artists Association and I took the initiative to design the poster, the catalog, and do the exhibition in the foyer of the Theater of Kosovo. Two years in a row we opened the exhibition, for three years regularly.

We opened the call for painters, for those who had already obtained their degree in fine arts, not students. To include the students we opened a different call for them, but in another time slot, and we called it *Ekspozita Vjeshore* [Autumn Exhibition]. Aside from pedagogues, professors and other established artists, students in their last year of study could also take part there with their work. There were members of the Kosovo Artists Association and people who weren't members of the Association. So, we created a diverse group of artists, who were affiliated with the Association and were not, and students were taking part in exhibitions and having their works in different catalogs, and everything got more lively. We started having exhibitions, we also got exhibitions from abroad.

So the opening of the Gallery was a huge help because we solved some infrastructural issues. Our problem was the artists not only had to take the financial burden to make the catalog, to print the catalog, but had to worry about the venue of the exhibition. When the Gallery was founded it had its staff, it would also create a selection committee, who would do the evaluation of who was to exhibit, because it had to be the most deserving artists. Not anyone could exhibit, "I'll just open an exhibition in the Gallery," but when the exhibition opened in the Gallery, it had a curatorial treatment. Artists used to have solo shows in some sort of foyer, but without any criteria. They exhibited in coffee shops, and so on, but without any criteria. There was no criteria. While in the Gallery, there was a committee who decided. The artists would undergo an evaluation, whether their artworks were worthy of being exhibited or not. Then if the level of quality was not up to the standard, then the opportunity was not given to them to exhibit.

So, then started a... apart from the diversity and a rank of well established artists, the rank of professors and more advanced students started also having exhibitions out of Kosovo. To promote the work we did in Kosovo and as a Gallery of Art, because I was also a member of the Artistic Council and the Purchasing Council, the work that were bought for the collection, we decided to do exhibitions first in Yugoslavia's region, in former Yugoslav republics, in Romania during Culture Week, in Slovenia. There were exhibitions during Culture Week, so apart from drama, concerts, there were also exhibitions. So to present culture in all its features, not just a concert, not just drama, but also visual arts. There were fine arts, applied arts, it was some sort of... and gradually the entire Yugoslavia started to know of our art scene, so there were invitations, we also started having solo shows.

I had a solo show in Dubrovnik. Dubrovnik had another, so to say a vice director in Varaždin [a city in Croatia]. He told me, "Since you had your show here, you have to have it in Varaždin also." So I had it in Varaždin also. So, a connection with a gallery was created and we started to be known as individual

artists and in general Kosovo's art started to develop. We started developing the practice of publishing catalogs, and the catalogs would remain in the Gallery. Someone would take the catalog, someone would invite you to have an exhibition. They had seen your work, they had the address, the phone number. Like this I got invited to do exhibitions abroad, in many exhibits in the Modern Gallery of Ljubljana. I had exhibitions in over twenty European states, over twenty European states.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did these happen through the Association?

Fatmir Krypa: The Gallery, the Gallery, they had the curator and they made the selection, "From Kosovo I want Fatmir Krypa." Done, "From Macedonia I want this Filan Fistek, one, two, three." Done. Someone else from Serbia, from Macedonia, from Montenegro, from Slovenia and so on. They would gather 25, 30 painters and graphists.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you promote the art of Kosovo, through the Association of Artists or through the Gallery?

Fatmir Krypa: It was more through the Gallery, because the Gallery had better managerial staff, and they kept their correspondence with phones and directly with addresses and names of directors of different galleries. We got to know them and they would promote their art and the art of Kosovo. They would send out invites notifying us that they would exhibit Slovenia's art here and there, and ask us whether we would be willing to participate with paintings or graphic arts from Kosovo. So, the invitations were coming and we would accept them. So, the Gallery was like a connecting bridge, we didn't have those connections as an association.

We had an office, Engjëll Berisha, he was in that office for a long time. We would hold meetings, "*Blla, blla blla.*" {onomatope} We gathered works for the Salon exhibition, decided who would be the head of the selecting committee of the Salon, who would do this, who would arrange them and so on. The Association did amateur volunteer work, amateur work, while in the Gallery it was more professional. There were the staff who arranged everything, it was the staff that linked us directly, wrote the messages, telexes that were similar to postmail, telegrams and so on. The technology was developed to this point, there was nothing beyond this.

Then we would receive news, because it would take one or two days to receive a letter from Yugoslavia and through phones we received news faster. So, we had fruitful exchanges with Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Belgrade. When the Museum of Visual Arts opened in Macedonia, they sent us invitations, "Who are those charitable artists who want to give their works to enrich our culture in the Museum that we're opening." A lot of our artists did, I remember I sent a print {points at the work behind him} and that was *Hasjanja*,³⁹ that one there. I gave them *Hasjanja*.

³⁹ Women from the region of Has, Kosovo.

Also when the museum in Titograd [Podgorica, Montenegro] opened, they invited me to send them a print, I sent one to the Museum of Belgrade. So, we started having our own contacts to institutions. These group shows were organized in agreement, they were sent as an introduction of Kosovo art abroad, and they were curious to know what is happening with art in Kosovo, if there is art and what are the standards of art in Kosovo. And so I told you before when we had an exhibition in London in a gallery, they invited us to five other galleries after that, who saw Kosovo art there and invited to other shows.

So, I told you earlier since we had an exhibition in London, they invited us to a gallery, then they invited us to five other galleries who saw Kosovo's art there. There were many painters who did graphic arts and some of the graphic artists, we are quite a few and a considerable number of students we have invited who had just graduated and we formed a nice group who presented in London, an exhibition of a culture that had been going on for years and we were just amateurs, in our beginnings.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: This happened in '85?

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, we were amateurs. Art needs knowledge. I somewhat believed in myself, but not enough to know what they value, but then we started believing in ourselves more when we opened four, five exhibits, and then we got invited to Germany in two galleries in Munich. Then we were invited to Italy, also in Turkey. Art started to develop here, to breathe. There was no judgment about art in Kosovo anymore, it wasn't...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was there judgment about art in Kosovo, can you tell us?

Fatmir Krypa: Of course there was, it was a taboo, no one wrote about it, about art, no, no. In Yugoslavia there was nothing written about art, only what we have achieved individually in the faculties, proclaiming a bit, there was nothing. There were judgments, do Albanians know anything? A student of mine applied to the Academy of Zagreb, I advised him to go there because the conditions are good. And that student developed well in those conditions, one of the best students of that time.

In the meantime, they came from the Academy of Zagreb, they had a collaboration with the Academy of Rome. So, the Academy of Rome's professors and students visited the Academy of Arts in Zagreb and they exchanged visits to Zagreb and Rome. When one of the professors went to class, my student was painting in the studio, and this student of mine while he was working, the professor approached him with curiosity to see what the student was working on.

Yugoslavia had 22 million, there were six Academies. And he asked the student, he saw he had done a very good job, a very good print, and he asked, "From which Yugoslav Academy did you come?" Meaning from Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Skopje, or Sarajevo. He said, "I thought about it first. I wondered why he asked me that? Is it good or bad? If I said I was from Pristina, he might not like it. And

at some point I said, "From the Academy of Pristina." "Huh?" He said, "Very good," he patted my arm. "Very good, bravo." I recollected myself, and felt more confident and started talking to him more relaxingly.

So, what our students had learned, what we gave them was very sincere and the students researched it further. So, we didn't hold back on our knowledge, we gave all we had so they would get to this level. We would say, I said to myself, "If I have a good female student, if I have a good male student, I become even better. When I am in a good company, I am better, we become even better, in printmaking we will become better." And that's how it turned out to be. Whatever I had in my mind I shared with my students.

The colleague I was working with, he was Serbian, we worked in the barracks in difficult conditions as I told you, but apart from working in the barracks, you can imagine what it was like to work together in a classroom, in a barrack, an Albanian and a Serbian professor with their students. This was... there's nothing worse. But, the will to do something good was strong. You couldn't expect to have great work conditions, "I want the building, I was this." What do you want? Who would give it to you? Where? We asked for more, but these were the conditions back then.

As I was leaving the classroom, my Serbian colleague saw me with the student I mentioned now. As a student, he wanted to print his work. He had worked on it for about two, three weeks, but he wasn't sure how it was going to come out {points to the prints in background}, the difference it makes. And I said, "It has turned out great, it's ready to be printed. Print it, I'll wait for you." It was a fifteen-minute procedure. My colleague said to me, "Let's go Fatmir, class is finished." I said, "I'll just wait for him to print it, he has worked on it for two weeks and I want to see the end result." We had discussed that idea and its design.

The student printed it out, got out the copy and placed it on the table, and I gave my evaluation and told him that it was very good. Now, it was very good, but what is good has endless possibilities, and I wasn't satisfied with very good, I wanted to see them do even better. And told my students, "It's very good, but improve it here, explore it further and it will become even better." "Yes, Professor." "Don't print it out like this, work on this more, and it will come out great." "Okay."

We left the classroom and went to the teacher's room. It was the road filled with black locusts, I don't know if you remember? [addresses the interviewer] While walking there, he leaned into a tree and put his hands like this {crosses his hands} and in Serbian he said, well I will not quote him in Serbian, he said, "Colleague, you tell all that you explore in your studio to your students?" I said, "What's wrong with that, Zoran?" "Guard yourself a bit." He said, "Don't tell them everything. What is interior to your art practice, you keep to yourself. You acquired this by working hard, with your intellect. Telling them everything..."

I said, “Zoran, this student came to learn printmaking from Fatmir Krypa, can he learn it in these conditions? Do you see our library? There’s nothing on graphic arts, there’s Rubens, there’s Rembrandt, classical graphic art but not contemporary art. Are there museums here? Are there galleries here?” Back then there were no museums and galleries. I said, “Where is he going to learn, knowledge doesn’t come from the sky, if I won’t teach him, if you won’t” He said, “You’ll see, he will never be thankful to you.” I said, “Okay, so what? Someone will be thankful and see all I do.” Like that professor in Zagreb that told him he was from Kosovo, he knew. My conscience, he wrote the request, “I want to learn printmaking with Fatmir Krypa.”

I know how this is done, I know how that is done and I decide not to teach him, but I hold back knowledge. Now when you look at it, art is discrete and has its secrets, it’s true. In art, you can’t know exactly how it’s done *bre*. Muslim Mulliqi asked me about the tin can in *Malësorja*⁴⁰ {points to the print} in the exhibition, “Please tell me *bre*, how did you do it for God’s sake? It’s very interesting.” I said, “Professor please *bre*, you are doing your paintings, when you start doing prints I’ll tell you.” We ended this jokingly.

Not disclosing the secrets of the craft to the student would have been petty, a great sin, they had nowhere to go to get information. Kosovo was closed, there were no traveling exhibitions. Where would they see anything? So... there are many, I don’t want to mention names, but there are many students who come to visit me during their vacations, they want to evoke past experiences, professor to student relationships, and professor to professor, because now as artists we’re equals and we want to take art to another level.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What were your relations to Serbs during those years, on the professional level, how did it work?

Fatmir Krypa: Well, the relations were more flexible.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you have common exhibits?

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, of course the exhibitions were jointly organized. Without a serb participating there, their participation was proportionately with the number of the population, one in four, one in three. When there weren’t any, there were Turks, Fevzi Tüfekçi⁴¹ from Prizren. So, there were also a

⁴⁰ Literally mountain people but it can also be used to refer to people from *Malësia*, or *Malësi e Madhe* (literally Great Highlands), a region largely inhabited by Albanian speaking people, which lies to the East of Podgorica in modern day Montenegro, along the Lake of Shkodra in modern day Albania, next to Kosovo. The speaker refers to a work he titled Highlander Woman.

⁴¹ Fevzi Tüfekçi (1948) was born in Prizren, Kosovo. In 1975 he graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul, Turkey. In 1976, he returned to Kosovo and became part of the Kosovo Association of Figurative Arts and worked on different restoration projects. In 1992, he began working as a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Mimar Sinan, Istanbul.

considerable number of people from Prizren participating in the exhibitions, there were painters, sculptors, graphics and so... It doesn't mean that there were all paintings, but in general we never were strict about how many paintings or prints we selected for the exhibition. We couldn't represent all disciplines evenly, but in general we never did an exhibition anywhere without three, four Serbs.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What about these cultural exchanges?

Fatmir Krypa: This is how it was here and we had tolerance among each other, for example when it came down to awards, we would award an artist no matter their ethnicity, because it was merit-based. There was no clannish prejudice, this one is in favor of this or that, and due to that be bitter to someone of this nationality or that nationality. We had moved past that, politics had moved us past that, politics had moved us past that. The Communist League was back then and they did not let you go into murky notions and we couldn't say anything. We were all in one party back then, and that party had one voice. When you worked in higher education, we were all in the party, we all had one goal in mind: to increase the level of culture, education, civilization, and so on. So, out of spite to not award someone, we were not divided, we had no disunity.

Actually, I remember when this Zoran I mentioned got married, I was the only one he invited to his wedding out of his friends, out of all our colleagues, out of all relatives he had, he invited his sister, mother, father, and I were there. Even though I gave him a lot of criticism, I critiqued him, but he would take it, processed it as something good. I never gave him a malicious critique, a critique to undervalue his work, or undervalue his personality. I critiqued him to lead him to self-improvement, which a colleague does for a colleague and that was welcomed. Each time a good friend and family member criticize you it is to lead you to self-improvement, to move past the status quo, come to think of it, it's for your own good.

So, we had a mutual cooperation and during studies we didn't notice differences much, maybe such were the times that did not permit us to make differentiations. And, we did not make an effort to present ourselves as different. We went in, maybe we wouldn't like what someone said, but we didn't react against it or get offended by it. Now, put two Albanians together and with two sentences their discourse gets rougher, voices raise, and you wonder what happened, for nothing. We were diplomatic as students, diplomatic so that we avoid getting offended by one another, keep a level of culture, a level of art and gain as much as possible from this. So when we get to a position from where we can address this, we would have some sort of...

I saw a friend of mine who is a painter on Facebook, I saw his painting on Facebook. We are of the same generation, so a week ago I saw what he is working on. For sure I felt like he had changed, but seeing his art and seeing his soul, you can see the artist's soul in art. When you analyze every line, every detail if you have time, the psychiatrist may find many things. [Skender Boshnjaku](#) is a neuropsychiatrist, you know, do you know Doctor Skender? He used to review exhibitions, he was a

critic of exhibitions, he reviewed them, he used to do the opening remarks of exhibitions in the Gallery, yes, Skender was permanent. He would do a great analysis, as an artist and as a person, all of it, your overall culture, review all of it. He makes you understand that as an artist, he reads you as a text, as a form, as a line, as a color.

And so we thought that through art we were representing ourselves, and as an artist I took an initiative, that apart from these collective exhibitions we had, to have solo exhibitions and these solo exhibitions would largely represent my art practice. So we would for once not participate as a group that represents Kosovo's culture in art, but I wanted to participate as an individual and see how I would be received. I participated in graphic art open calls all over Europe and the world. I have participated in Japan, Europe, and Latin America. So, I have been part of many exhibitions, biennials, triennials across Europe... I have the catalogs, we can look at them, it's a considerable number.

Part Six

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Tell us about the exhibition you had in Albania and this cultural cooperation that happened in the '70s. How did you go? What did you see there? What kind of experience was it?

Fatmir Krypa: To tell you the truth, all we had was what the television and what the media offered us, the press, we didn't have access to the press. The newspaper only had two pages, *Zëri i Popullit* [The Voice of the People]. We didn't have information about art there, only what we could grasp visually, when the statue or the Monument of Independence was unveiled, when it was inaugurated, we saw it on television and that's what we all saw. I created an idea as much as I could through the television and when I went to see the Monument of Independence *oooo* {onomatopoeic} that was a masterpiece. You could see the muscle, that art power that had been put into by those sculptors, and was something you could experience on site. So, paintings were less promoted, but you had no other way around a statue of a hero, when there was some inauguration or something, you could see those [on television].

When we were in the Association and we were talking, "Let's have an exhibition. Let's open it in Tirana, *more*?⁴² Why not? We could call the Albanian Embassy in Belgrade and get the phone number of the Gallery of Arts in Tirana and we have an exhibition there." We called the Embassy, and they answered, "A very good idea, but you have to contact the Gallery of Arts in Tirana." In the meantime, they talked to the Minister of Culture in Tirana, the Gallery of Arts, within minutes they talked to them. "Look, the artists from Kosovo will call and ask about this possibility" and so we called the Gallery of Arts in Tirana.

⁴² *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English *bro*, brother.

The Gallery of Arts said, “Yes, the Gallery has nothing against it, a great idea for you to come to Tirana and have an exhibition opening. And the procedures, of course you’ll have to get the visas from the Embassy of Tirana. Tell us the day and we will schedule the hall.” We went there to get the visas, they all got it except me. My passport wasn’t valid. So, I stay and wait for the passport. They went by cars, vans, with the works of art, with the whole exhibition. There was Nuredin Loxha, Shyqri Nimani, Agim Çavdarbasha, [Rexhep Ferri](#), me, [Blerim Luzha](#). I don’t remember all the names, there was also Nuredin Loxha, yes, I mentioned him. They all went with vehicles, Nuredin Loxha had to leave his car in front of Dajt, Hotel Dajt⁴³ and not move it until the day we came back, he just had to fill the tank with gas and come back, he couldn’t move around with his car, no, no. They had a set agenda, they had cars, everything, I went crazy that I couldn’t go.

I was walking through the *korzo* and by chance I saw Rexhep Ferri’s sister, Besa. She said, “Fatmir, I’m sorry that you...” she found out through her brother Rexhep that I won’t be able to go because my passport wasn’t valid. I was supposed to reissue it and that took a day, and once I got it I was supposed to travel right away. Unfortunately, I didn’t check the validity of my passport before that, thinking everything was in order. Theirs were valid, they got in the car and went to Belgrade for visas and came back. She said, “Look,” she said, “there’s a way, go check with Putnik, they have flights through Belgrade and Tirana on Wednesday.” I was in the *korzo* near Hotel Božur,⁴⁴ Putnik’s offices were there, the Putnik travel agency.

I saw the guy who worked there closing the office, I said to him, “Wait, wait...” I asked him, he was Serbian, “I have something to ask you.” He said, “Yes?” I said, “Are there flights from Belgrade to Tirana?” He said, “Yes.” “When?” He said, “On Wednesday.” I said, “Great, on Wednesday. What about the ticket?” It was a small plane, it had around six or seven seats, a stewardess and the pilot. If the pilot had a headache, he could easily ask you, “Come, take my seat!” (laughs). There were very few of us. When I saw the plane (laughs), I was petrified. A small plane with ten people inside. Okay, I had my passport reissued. I went to Belgrade early in the morning and got the visa. I went there by train to be safer and avoid malfunctioning buses.

I arrived by train at 10:00 in the morning. I went there immediately, I got off the plane at 5:30 in the afternoon. I went and got the visa. The Embassy opened at 7:00 in the morning. I waited for the Embassy to open, at 7:00 I rang the door, someone came out, “Yes, what do you need?” They were informed by the Gallery of Arts in Tirana that I was coming by plane from Belgrade to Tirana airport, and someone would wait for me.

⁴³ Hotel Dajti was a hotel in the center of Tirana, Albania. It bore the name of Dajti Mountain nearby, it was the main center for international visitors and diplomats during the socialist period of Albania, it was purchased by the Bank of Albania and currently does not function as a hotel.

⁴⁴ Hotel Božur, a Pristina landmark, was the first hotel in the city. Today, it has been turned into the Swiss Diamond Hotel on Mother Teresa Boulevard.

So, I got through the procedures for the passport, I mean the visa. And the ambassador said to me what I just mentioned, “Don’t be surprised,” he said, “you will be surprised because *Rilindja* has 36 pages, while *Zëri i Popullit* has four pages.” I thought to myself, “Let me go because I have no time to explore such topics.” And I said to him, “It depends what’s written on the pages, not how many pages there are.” All I could think is, just hand me the visa that has a stamp on it, because I have a flight to catch. I said, “Mr. Ambassador, I’m going to miss my flight.” From there I went by taxi to Belgrade’s airport. I got on the plane. When my friends from Kosovo waited for me and we opened the exhibition in the Gallery of Arts.

The exhibition was so good, it was so well received, it broke the ice... It was, I don’t know, I’ve been excited for many group and solo shows but not like I was excited for that one. I wondered, what Albania looks like? What did the motherland look like? What did the Gallery look like? What did the people look like? What did the painters look like? What... Everything was at a high level, everything was welcomed, everything was civilized, we presented nicely, my colleagues and I tried to do our best.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Very different, it was very different from their art at that time. They did [socialist] realism, you did [socialist] modernism...

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, there was a comment about *Malsori* [*The Mountaineer*], another mountaineer had his back turned, “Why is his back turned?” They asked. Yes, that one over there {points at the print}, I said, for example, “Look,” I said, “he is taking note of posters, looking at the spot where posters are hung. He is taking note of things in front of him, he can’t do that if he is looking at you. He can’t turn towards you and look with his neck turned.” It was a little weird that I had to explain that, that seemed abstract to them. Even though it was realism, the scarf, the details, everything had a realistic approach. But why turn around? He can’t take note of things otherwise. How do you see it? How do you do it? You can’t show the profile of the subject and have him engage with what’s in front of him.

It was a bit odd... though I offered my support, but still it was like that. Things were a little elusive, even though as artists they knew that’s how it was supposed to be, but some were from higher politics, “Why do they create such things? Accept this kind of art?” One of them was Edi Rama’s⁴⁵ father, Kristaq Rama, was secretary for culture. Edi Rama’s father was even taller than Edi, Kristaq was.... And then we gave our explanations, those that we had. But, the exhibition was well-received by both sides. There were so many visitors during the opening but also during the whole month or so it stayed open. We stayed for about two weeks then half of us went back. Agim [Çavdarbasha] stayed, Rexhep Ferri stayed because his brother was also there, and I said, “I don’t want to go,” I said, “I want to stay one more week,” I said...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You could continue your stay?

⁴⁵ Edi Rama is an Albanian politician, painter, writer, publicist, former pedagogue, and former basketball player who is currently serving as the 33rd Prime Minister of Albania.

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, yes, Shyqyri also stayed because his mother was there. The rest came back with Nuredin Loxha because he had the car, and they went back. So, it was a somewhat different experience from other exhibitions we had. When Culture Week was happening in '96-'97, we went there. The Culture Week of Kosovo, there was music, concerts, theatre drama, we had exhibitions, solo and group shows, and a few people. Muslim Mulliqi and I had an exhibition, Agim Çavdarbasha had a solo show with his sculptures, Shyqri had a solo show and I joined a group of painters. There were five other painters and I. So, there was quite a big group of artists from Kosovo in all genres and that was a great event that words cannot describe. The barriers were removed, everything was removed. Everything uncensored was there. You know, everything became better and better.

Baton [Haxhiu] was the organizer, he said, "Please welcome him, as the oldest from the painter's group, please welcome Sali Berisha." Sali Berisha came, he was the president, he was the president of Albania at that time, and he came to the opening of the exhibition. And as the oldest among participating artists I welcomed Sali Berisha, where the big mosaic is in the National Gallery. I got in front of it, you had to, it wasn't possible otherwise to lead the tour. I welcomed him, then I explained those, I explained the purpose of the exhibition. Then together with Baton Haxhiu, with a group of painters, Sali Berisha was with a person from the Ministry of Culture. We talked about the work, how the process went, how it's going, the reasons why we did it. It was very good that he got acquainted there, because there was no politics. Everything was transparent about art and for the good of humanity, it was in favor of getting better acquainted with one another, of somehow getting closer to one another.

This was the exhibition, the second one was amazing for that time. And I believe that an exhibition of mine will be scheduled after the one I was going to have in Skopje, after the exhibition I had in Tetovo. The museum had scheduled me to open the exhibition in March, in April. But due to health reasons, I had eye surgery and postponed it. Now I have to make another request, even though I have received the financial means from the Ministry of Culture, I have to make a request with the Gallery of Arts in Tirana, to the museum, to schedule me this year to have an exhibition. I have many colleagues, many friends, and I have many admirers. I have Facebook admirers who can't wait to visit an exhibition of graphic arts.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did they fire you in the '90s? How did it come to that political climate? How did they make you leave?

Fatmir Krypa: Well, like elsewhere, also in the Faculty of Arts began repressions of the then regime. Indications were such that something better is to be done in their way, and insisted that we subordinate and align our work ideologically, both in terms of art and in terms of pedagogy. The same colleague with whom I have studied, who as I said before, hadn't invited anyone else but me to his wedding, a colleague with whom I collaborate, I shared a classroom with; I used it half the time and he

used it half of the time. The colleague whose classes I taught for a year, he still got paid and went to study, he went to explore his practice, we used to refer to it as preparation for a solo show.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Like artistic research?

Fatmir Krypa: Artistic research, something like that. One year, the Faculty gave him a year off with pay, but he had to find someone to replace him. He asked me, “Will you teach, teach my classes?” I said, “Yes, I’ll do this for you, you can do it for me and there’s nothing wrong with it. Go!” He made the request, it was approved, he left! He took a year off to do research, prepared for his solo show, and did study visits in different places. It was the day of the entrance exam, and he came to the professors’ hall to ask me how many students to accept.

We stayed in quarantine from eight to twelve thirty, as long as the classes were held, but we quarantined in the classroom. You could smoke, have conversations, eventually a lady would make you a coffee, she would bring coffee. If you went out of the building, they would bring the sign-in sheet sometime at eight, ten, eleven, or nine. You never knew when they will bring the sign-in sheet. We all had to stay there as if we were quarantined. Whether you had work or not, we didn’t have lectures, we hadn’t accepted the students yet. We had to go to show up because the academic year had started. But we had to be there from 8 a.m. until 12:30 p.m.

My colleague Zoran Jovanović came and opened the door... from shame that he couldn’t see his colleagues like that, stranded in that situation. Professors who had many years of experience and were just stranded. We would eventually play a game that required patience, we played chess or something to pass the time. He said to me, “How many students will we enroll this year in the graphic arts department?” I said, “As usual, three or four Albanians and a Serb.” I said, “You can enroll two Serbs.” He said, “You’re still following that {rolls his finger} old quota?” He said that to me. He said, “One in two, one in four.” I said, “Zoran, this is how we used to do it, this is how the population is,” I said, “the population structure.” I said, “You can enroll two for you, and three for me. You get two students and that’s it for the first year.” “What do you think?”

I said, “Why are you treating me like this, like you’re talking to,” I said, “a pig? I kept you alive” you know, “for a year? With my money you stayed in Belgrade. You roamed around Europe while I held your classes.” I said, “You got paid,” I said, “you traveled like a boss.” I said, “How are you not ashamed?” I grabbed him here {touches his throat} I just touched him, I said, “I fed this throat of yours for a year with my money.” {Raises his forefinger} “Uh,” he said, “why did you touch my hand? *Tappp* {onomatopoetic} You’ll see!” I said, “Wait, what happened?” “You’ll see!” He went to the room where the commission was.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Employee review commission...?

Fatmir Krypa: No, no, there was a group who monitored other professors whether they were coming or not, it was like a council of theirs.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: For violent measures?

Fatmir Krypa: Violent measures began, the Council of Violent Measures, he was a member of the Council of Violent Measures. He went to this Council and said, "Write this about Fatmir *rraaak, rraaak, rraaak* {onomatopoeic}" And right there I understood what was going to happen to me. I sat there with my colleagues and the cleaner who I had hired when I was the dean came in. She came with a file, in fact it was a book and asked me to sign a letter for suspension, she said, "Professor," she said, "excuse me, can you sign this?" I said, "What is this?" Pretending I didn't know, you know. She said, "You know, professor..." I said, "Okay, bring it here." I signed it and she left. I said, "Comrades, colleagues, you continue to be here today and tomorrow while you can, but I'm leaving." Musli Mulliqi was fired first, I was second.

So I continued my work and art practices. I had a studio on the 13th floor in Qafa, it was 24 square meters large, it was under the roof, roughly 20 square meters. How can you have a 20-square-meter studio? In the studio you had to have a small bathroom, you had to have a small kitchen. You had to work, work where? Where to place the print machine, the desk, I had to have a sofa if a friend would come to visit. But I managed somehow, it was okay. The new academic year had started.

I told the second-year students to come on Monday, third-year students, because it was only in the second year that they would have classes with us. In the first year they had general courses, there was one professor that mentored all groups in the first year, while I taught them in the second year graphic arts. The third-year students came on Wednesday, on Tuesday, third-year students on Wednesday and I said to them, "If you have something you want to develop further, you can continue working on Thursday also."

I wanted to give them these zinc plates because they didn't have any. All the materials, pigments, acids, I had to give them because they didn't have anything. I had to turn winter into summer. I had to heat up the studio with heaters during the winter so it would be warm for them. But who even asks you about that? All the knowledge I gave them was the least I could do, never sparing anything, I was invested in the very last cell. And that's how the first, second, third year ended, and so on.

And it was a surprise when one year they came, when the war was about to break out in '99, the U.S. Ambassador for Foreign Affairs to Europe and Asia came, they divided them by continents, there's a Minister of Foreign Affairs in general and also one for Europe and Asia, each have their continents that they cover and they all assist. He came to meet [Ibrahim] Rugova,⁴⁶ President Rugova, and they talked,

⁴⁶ 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.

ate dinner together and all went well. When he came the second time around, after two-three months, [Adnan \[Merovci\]](#) from LDK⁴⁷ called me, “Fatmir, how do you know the Ambassador?” I said, “Not really, I don’t, I’ve only seen him on television. I don’t know him at all.” “Well, he asked to come to your studio” he said, “to see him” he said, “to meet him.” He has written to us, “I want to visit Krypa’s studio, Professor Krypa’s art studio and meet him in person.”

I said, “No, I don’t know him.” Anyway, he said, “When can we come over?” I said, “Whenever you’re available.” He said, “We will eat at three, and around ten minutes past ten we will be there.” Restaurant Ora was around three hundred meters away from Qafa, so they walked to the studio. They came to the studio, Skender Hyseni... they sent three bodyguards beforehand. He said, “One has to stay here.” I said, “No problem.” He said, “The other one has to stay in the elevator downstairs and one at the elevator upstairs.” The other one said, “Where do I stay?” I said, “Stay by the window.” the print machine was next to the window, I said, “Stay next to the print machine, there’s no other place.” I said, “The rest can sit here, there’s not much space.” Anyhow.

When he came through the door he introduced himself the way Americans do it. He said, “I was given a gift, a print of yours by President Rugova in the previous visit before this one, three months ago, and I have framed it and I have it in my home, in my living room. My colleagues, my friends, my family like it, I also like it. I came here to meet you,” he said, “personally and see the place where that work of art was created. I thought to myself, “*Kuku*.”⁴⁸ This was that one {points to the print} the second one down, I said... I wanted something to say, Skender Hyseni was Rugova’s translator then.

I told Skender to tell him, “Ardit Gjebra says, ‘Here I am’ [his song’s title]” I said, “but there’s not enough space here, but *hajerli*⁴⁹ may it be, please welcome in.” There was also the secretary of the Embassy of Belgrade, Elizabeth Bonkowski, they were looking through, looking at the drawings, I also showed them the students’ works. I said, “If you have time, five minutes,” I said, “two or three minutes,” I said, “to look at the students’ works.” They looked at them one by one and they were talking to each other, and started discussing them, and I said, “Skender, can I speak to them in French?” I said, “Let’s not hold them for too long because it will be a lot of work to translate.” I said, “So that I don’t bother you.” “No, no worries,” he said, “they can talk and then I’ll translate.” “Okay.” I said.

When it was done he said, “They want you to have an exhibition in Belgrade, so that they can somehow compensate you for the expenditures you have around your students.” I said, “To Belgrade I can’t go, no” I said, “I can’t, I am too scared.” He said, “Where do you want to have the exhibition then?” He said, “In the Embassy, in the Library on Čika-Ljubina [street in Belgrade]”. I said, “I’ve passed that street every day as a student, I have your magazines,” I said, “*Pregled* [Review], culture magazine

⁴⁷ *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. First political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

⁴⁸ Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

⁴⁹ Turk.: *hajerli*, expresses hope and will for the better. In other contexts, a way to wish luck.

in Serbian,” It was about visual arts and all arts, it was called *Pregled*, The Review. “You got *Pregled*?” I said, “Here, I have it.” I took three copies that I had, “Here they are issues of *Pregled*!” I said, I put them on the table one by one *tak-tak-tak* {onomatopoeic}. “Ah, give me the address, we’ll publish them in Albanian, now we’re also publishing them in Albanian.” I said, “Oh, that’s great.”

Anyway, we agreed that I would go to Belgrade and he said, “What are your prices?” I said, “I know the prices in Belgrade, but I’ll come up with an average comparing it to Kosovo’s prices. In Belgrade they would cost 600, 700, 800 more, here I would sell them for 300, 350. So we’ll sell them for around 350, 400”. He said, “Okay, good.” We agreed that I would go. That happened, no... I asked to go with [Edita Tahiri](#), I said, “Edita, since you’re going, can I come also.” There were four people, we were going to go by car. It was President Rugova, Adnan, Edita and the driver. I said, “Can I drive with you there?” She said, “No, no, no, you will go there by plane.” The war started in Prekaz, it happened as it happened, and they fought for 24 hours. So, we didn’t have an exhibition opening there and, since then the relationship with Serbia had worsened, and the exhibition never happened.

I didn’t care much for it, because I had already opened an exhibit in Belgrade, I showed myself, I held a lecture at the museum, they invited me. They invited me to hold lectures on graphics during the ‘70s... ‘88. In the year ‘88, the situation was complicated before it became confusing. The museum invited me to hold a lecture. When I saw my name there Fatmir Krypa *aaa* {onomatopoeic} my heart grew, I said, “This is good.” They had written my name with an “y”, the way it is. “This is the hour the lecture starts, this is the topic.” God helped me, but I also had prepared everything. I had printed that graphic there {points to the wall} and the museum bought it. The museum has it, I took it on purpose so they would see how it is properly printed. The museum director told me, “Professor, are you stressed, because the professor from Slovenia last night,” she said, “his print failed because he was so stressed.” “No, I have many pedagogical years of experience.” She said, “He was older than you and it failed.”

You know it’s really hard to print it, you have to work for around an hour and 40 minutes, work while talking, think about what I’m talking about in the middle of Belgrade and have it come out great. I thought about it, I did some preparations in advance, I prepared the colors, I prepared everything so I don’t mess it up, so everything was ready. When I saw my professors in the audience, there were more than two hundred people. My emotions were high and that moment, I will never forget that moment. When you print the work and you take it from under, you take the sheet and lift it up, they can see how it was printed, but you don’t see it.

When I heard the applause *rra rra rra* {onomatopoeic} and they weren’t stopping, I turned it a little {pretends to hold the sheet with both hands} towards me and looked at it (laughs). I said, “God,” I said, “bravo.” I’ve never said that to myself, I said, “Bravo, and I’m thankful for the experience you’ve acquired and that it came out so well and other things.” It wasn’t for my name’s sake, there were other things weighing in. I wasn’t being perceived as a name and surname, but as a nation, as everything. It came out great and when I saw my name on two floors, six meters high, they had hung it down from

upthere. I said, “Thankfully, it is in the center of Belgrade,” But back then we didn’t have these kinds of cameras. If I had a photographer with me and had taken a photo in front of that, it would have been a masterpiece.

Part Seven

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Let’s go back, because we moved from ‘88 to the ‘90s, it’s okay. Let’s go back to ‘81 when you opened the exhibition in the Gallery of Art in Boro Ramiz and the two delegations were supposed to come, a little more specifically.

Fatmir Krypa: It was, it was a somewhat interesting event and politically inconceivable at that time. As I said, we were the members of Communist League, we all were, especially I at one point. When you work as a Vice-Dean and a Dean, director of post-university studies, of course they will appoint you Party Secretary, they give you all the work at once. He’s working, he’s working, he can do heavy lifting, let’s give him more. But, when the exhibition opened, Americans were planning to come, they had notified the Gallery that they would come to the opening. But in the meantime they were informed that another group from the Embassy of Russia would come to the exhibit opening. Now the Russian-American relations weren’t good, and to have them be in such proximity, we couldn’t have them meet there.

To fall victim to it all was not something I wanted. Somehow we found, they found it, the Russians found a solution, they will come later. Russians compromised to come later, “After the exhibition’s opening,” they said, “we will come.” It is noticeable in the opening, the American delegation is in the front line. It’s a pity that the photographer did not take a picture of me with them while I was describing the art of print, because they were very interested. I explained to them each how I got the idea, how I produced it, I told them all of that, yes.

That situation gave me anxiety, I thought something might happen to the Gallery or to me as a person, or there would be confusion, the relations weren’t good, something bad might come out. But overall it ended well. Both delegations were content, the American delegation was there, I was able to take pictures with all of them. We were thanked for welcoming them, that I gave them a tour, I also explained the works to them and everything ended well. So, these are things that happen to an artist. It’s good that you reminded me of it, it evoked that memory, these aren’t simple things, but this happened and such. Things like this in exhibitions will always happen.

And while in Belgrade I had *Grafički kolektiv* [Srb. Graphic arts collective] in front of the Hotel Palace in the center of Belgrade. It was planned that a professor of the Academy was going to open the exhibition. He said, “It would be my pleasure to open your exhibit.” As you said earlier [addresses the

interviewer] we kept our good relations, we did not drift apart entirely as we have today. You can't imagine, but we kept them. He said, "I will open the exhibition." I said, "Okay," I said, you know, "I want to." Unexpected things happen in exhibition openings, my professor Mihailo Petrov,⁵⁰ who founded the graphics department in Serbia, wasn't invited to the exhibition but had found out through television, radio that Fatmir Krypa's exhibition will open at this hour, "But Fatmir Krypa was my student and they didn't invite me."

He came shouting and had a conflict with the Gallery, while the exhibit was about to open. It was quite an unpleasant thing. They finally realized they were wrong, "We're sorry, Professor, it was unintentional." He said, "My student, you didn't send me an invitation for my best student's exhibition. I found out through the media." He did not hesitate, he was old, he was retired. He was somewhat agitated in the presence of other people. I was so scared my exhibition would be ruined, *kuku*⁵¹ in the center of Belgrade, my good God.

My wife [Hyrije Krypa] left me sleeping in the Hotel Palace. I woke up in the morning, and I sleep very soundly. I woke up, the Gallery was opposite the hotel, ten meters away, just across the street. And I looked at the Gallery, I realized there was no one there yet, and I thought alright we'll wait. "Let's have breakfast." I asked, "Did you sleep?" She said, "I didn't sleep at all." I asked, "Why?" "I don't know, I couldn't sleep." I said, "Hyrije, why couldn't you sleep?" She said, "*Kuku*, I was thinking..." I had with me the *Malësoret* [*Highlander women*] series, because I have many of these {points towards the wall}. I had the series *Malësoret* with me. She said, "When the Belgrade people see *Malësoret*, they're gonna go crazy, lose it." She said, "Who knows how they will feel about the exhibition." I said, "I have to worry about that. When the work is done well, the topic..." anyway. She stressed me out too. I was just standing still, waiting, and somehow I went to the Gallery.

To break away from what my wife said to me, when I chanced upon a colleague from Belgrade waiting at the Gallery.

"Good morning, good morning" he said in Serbian. "How are you?" He said, "I'm here to help you install the exhibition. I came because I was very glad when I saw the announcement that you're opening the exhibition. I came to surprise you. I want to help you install it, to help you around." Because they didn't have an exhibition technician like we do in the Gallery, but you would hire someone, do some of the work. You knew how big the gallery was approximately, you had to visit it in advance to know how much work can fit in there. I visited it daily, because I went to the gallery hundreds of times to see exhibitions. And he came and I felt better. I said, "Look, Hyrije, how gladly they come, they know what I do, they know my work."

⁵⁰ Mihailo S. Petrov (1902–1983, Belgrade) was a graphic artist, painter, illustrator, poet and critic, professor, compiler and printer of books and posters. He studied painting at the art school in Belgrade with professor Lj. Ivanović and M. Milovanović ((1919-21), and continued in Vienna (1922), Kraków (1923) and Paris (1924-25).

⁵¹ Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

Then I changed some things because you can't always work in the same way, your work can become monotonous. You can preserve your artistic practice, you can preserve your handwriting, you can preserve your visual language through which your art speaks, or the written aspect of it, but it doesn't necessarily mean you have to produce in the same way {points to his work}. It becomes monotonous no matter how beautiful it is, however good it is, it runs out, it runs out and becomes boring. They will go in and out of the gallery, "Yes, I saw it, this looks like the other, and the other one looks like this one." And that's it, the exhibition was visited, no.

When you have your own technique, when you cultivate the technique, now I'm not saying that you can't cultivate this one [refers to his own work]. I tried to offer lectures to the Faculty [of Arts] in Albanian, but they're envious, "No, only if you want to come to do a workshop." How so, there are many things to this, it's a problem, it's very problematic for a workshop. Do you know at what point you go to a workshop? You can go to a workshop only when you have prior knowledge and you want to enrich that knowledge with other, different things. Now when you hear about something for the first time, you can't have a workshop about it. Workshops require a base, prior knowledge. It doesn't matter how Fatmir does it, no, man no. Something has to stay with the student, there should be a takeaway. I offered to lecture in their institution, this and that, "We'll see, we'll see." While in '86, they invited me themselves to provide lectures on graphic arts, Shyqri [Nimani] for design.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In '96 or '86?

Fatmir Krypa: In '86, I was getting confused, in '86 to lecture. But the political situation was as it was and we didn't go. They would get our passports and not give them back, and it was left as a dream. I said, "I have come, I'm retired and I can contribute." But they said, "No, you can only do a workshop." That's a joke, it's...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Are you talking about after the '2000s, when you retired?

Fatmir Krypa: Who?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did you retire?

Fatmir Krypa: It's been...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: But it's after the year 2000, not in '96.

Fatmir Krypa: No, no, look, I was in Albania recently, I'm talking about after I retired. In '86, they invited me to lecture..

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When Enver Hoxha⁵² died.

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, then, back then they invited me, but we didn't dare go. What I'm talking about is very recent after I have retired. That they invited me, that was in '86, way before. I was still strong then, but I was under contractual obligations. But let's leave that aside, we wanted to sacrifice, but we didn't want to fall victims [of the regime]. They would take us, but they would cripple us with all those obstacles, because in education we were severely monitored. As the Party Secretary I was invited. There I realized that I can contribute, not only in art, but also in the professional and social sphere.

They invited me back then to the Municipal Committee, they conducted an informal informative talk, I was invited to give opinions about some friends, about some colleagues, "You, as the Party Secretary, can you provide an evaluation. You have been having some issues there." I talked back with a risky tone, but I thought, "I don't care if it turns into a garden or an abyss." I really thought of it in that way, because sometimes we don't have the right politics, that deals with things amateurishly, in an amateur way. I think that was the right approach. I said, "Wait, these exhibitions we did in Yugoslavia, in Romania during Culture Week, we exhibited in Slovenia's Culture Week, and in all of these galleries that we are exhibiting here and there. Who has been doing that work? These colleagues and their students. Those colleagues are making this structure, this country, Kosovo's art known. Now we want to put them down? They have erred so badly that we have to put them down?"

"No, but we have to find, think about it..." I said, "Look, I won't leave the office with the words, 'Think about it,' because this 'Think about it' means I have to come back and report to you. I will not come back here." And I ended my political engagement there. I said to myself that I will never engage in politics again, because that's all I could contribute to it. If you were a certain kind of person, you could have said bad things about someone and put them in a bad spot. The situation was complicated to be able to survive as an artist, as a pedagogue and as a person and take care of your colleagues as pedagogues and human beings. What would it mean if I talked poorly about my colleagues, that would automatically get them fired. This is how they fired Fehmi Agani⁵³ and many others, gradually.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Let's station ourselves at the war, that period in '99. How did the war start for you? I mean, it started the same for all of us, but how did that period find you?

Fatmir Krypa: To tell you the truth, it is twice as hard for artists because of the emotions, because people can survive with a mouthful of bread, with a nice stew, very little can suffice to survive. But artists cannot survive when they don't have the conditions to produce, it is very hard. And once you cannot produce, it is the same as not having what to eat, it's as if you haven't eaten, your soul is left

⁵² Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) was the leader of the Albanian Communist Party who ruled Albania as a dictator until his death.

⁵³ Fehmi Agani (1932-1999) was a philosopher, sociologist and politician, one of the founders of the Democratic League of Kosovo. He was assassinated by Serbian troops as he attempted to flee Pristina disguised as a woman to avoid detection.

unfed. You fill up your stomach, but feelings need... are in search of new things, new ideas fly through your head. You can't unload them, they have nowhere to unload. Art needs quietness. And, to tell you the truth, we had an ax over our heads twice, as a pedagogue and as an artist.

The building where I had my studio belonged to the Secretariat. First four floors belonged to the residents that had their apartments, and the rest up to the twelfth floor belonged to people who worked in the Secretariat. Either policemen or civilians who worked in administration, but regardless they worked in the Secretariat. They did their job whether they were wearing the blue uniform or not. They complete their mission by reporting everything they saw and heard.

I told my students, I would tell them, "Don't gather at the elevator! Come one by one. 'Where are you going?'" Let's say, "Number 36." So that someone wouldn't knock at my door. I had that fear they would bring the wolf in the den, I mean to me as a pedagogue. Then, where would I find inspiration? You had to keep up hope that things would get better, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, while at the same time protests were happening. I did a print, I have a painting I did inspired by the protests. I was inspired that day, I did a small sketch and now I painted it in a bigger format. I did it the day that the protests were held. I heard them, they were clamoring in the streets, called at the time "Maršal Tito," it is there at the National Theater, at the *korzo*, that's where they protested.

Where could I find inspiration? But sometimes it felt forced. Sometimes you thought that was the only way you could. No other options, there was this waiting for better days, there was rancor. Art needed, art was blooming, I produced many works. This gallery was inviting me to exhibits, that gallery was inviting me to exhibit. We could not be silenced, to stay quiet, no. I didn't want to be quiet, I would send them prints to this one, to the other one, I will go on. *Hop* {onomatopoetic} I got on the plane, I went to Switzerland, I opened an exhibition in Châtel, Lausanne, Zürich, I opened three exhibitions within a month and a half, 15 days here, 15 days there, and 15 days there. This Agim Ramadani was actually a Secretary of Culture [in exile] in Zürich. His wife had even opened my exhibition, Agim's wife did the opening of my exhibition.

While there you felt it, it was sad, something worse was going to happen. While you had to go do exhibition openings, spend money, spend material, give material to the students. But when I think about this, I think there's just some energy that overtakes you, and now listening to myself talk I wonder, "Is it me talking? Or someone else is saying that I did this? Or someone has closely observed my work and is saying them back to me." No, man no. I have the documentation, I have the photographs in Zürich when they came with drums to open the exhibit, with national clothing, I have the photographs. I took my nephew, my daughter's daughter here in my arms. He came to me, "Grandpa!" It's very emotional.

But, these were, there were also some good things, the promotion of our culture that I did there, the newspaper would write about it, and that was increasing visibility. I felt good, I felt good, I have those

newspapers, the quotes, Albanians felt good. “Albanians, *Albanien, Shqiptar, Kosova, Albanien, Shqiptar, Kosova, Albanien.*” They would look at the situation differently when they knew you were Albanian also. It would elevate our culture. They would say, “You cast that on us, how do I put it, “In their [the Swiss] eyes, our rating has gone up.” Many exhibits that I opened...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where were you when the bombing started?

Fatmir Krypa: Bombing, I was in the classroom, I was... yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In your studio?

Fatmir Krypa: No, no, in the Faculty.

[The interview cuts here]

Fatmir Krypa: It's a situation that everyone has experienced in their own way. It wasn't unexpected, it was expected, and we wanted it as soon as possible. But we didn't expect to happen [the deportation] what happened after the bombing, and in that way. But, I had secured my work in large slides more or less. I had photographed all my life's works and saved it as slides, they're there. All that I had done until then [1999]. And the worst happened, the exodus, and I couldn't take anything with me, only those slides, I could hide them somewhere. When the war came, the bombing happened, in the heat of the moment we had to leave Kosovo, we had to leave Pristina, our apartment. And the night before, we were ordered by the police to vacate our apartment by tomorrow morning at eight o'clock, 41 families, we had to leave our apartments.

The police force stationed under Bast Trade because the police station was bombed. They came down there at the Bast Trade, for them to be safer, we had to leave, because we lived next to Bast Trade, they expelled us from there. Okay, what could we do? I told my wife. “Let's pack our most essential things and leave.” Documents that were most essential, we took our documents. I made another layer of the bag, I reminded myself I was a tailor once, my tailoring skills came in handy here, I made an additional layer to the bottom of the bag. I put all our documents there, I put a paperboard over it which I made myself and then sewed it. I put in a plastic case all our original documents there, whatever copies, and I said, “Keep them in the bag and you hold it. If the police ask for documentation, we'll give them these.” I put all the property owning documents and whatever we had there. I had the property documents of a house in Gjakova, I put them all under that layer, I sewed it. You could not suspect it. Then we placed the clothes on top, you could take them out, and no one would suspect it.

The morning came, we started leaving, the building was emptied. My wife said, “Let's ask a friend,” of hers, “will she welcome us at the Third Local Community in Pristina.” It was also in Dardania. She said, “Yes, come.” I said, “We have everything.” I had gotten sausages I had stored for the winter, I took two

packs of eggs, flour, pasta, sugar, butter... I had packed everything. We had heard from Sarajevo that war lasted long and they had stored food. I took everything with me thinking we will be staying throughout the war. Outright we were told, "Get lost, no war!" I said, "We have everything, don't worry" I said, "that you have to feed us. We have everything." We stayed there for a night. The next day the police came, all the neighborhoods which had many tall buildings, all of them were expelled from their houses. At noon they had emptied the whole building and we got into cars and left for Macedonia, yes.

When we almost got to Macedonia, at the border with Macedonia I said to my wife, "I made a mistake," I said, "I forgot the slides," I said, "Now they'll ask who I am. I am a painter, a professor, and a graphic artist." "Where is your work? Based on what we know?" "I have nothing." I had prepared all the large slides, six to nine. For a week I almost went crazy there. But one has to take in, life is sweeter. When I saw people dying, there was nothing I could do, I had to accept it. A week passed in Macedonia, but then we stayed there for two months. When NATO intervened, the landlord looked at me, I was confused...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You mean when the troops entered on foot?

Fatmir Krypa: Yes, the troops got in and we were watching television. He was looking at me from the corner of his eye. Wanted to see my reaction, but I was cold, I didn't know what was happening to me. I lost my feelings, I was overwhelmed. I didn't know I was distracted, I wasn't *hooo* {onomatopoeic} to shout or something. I was totally lost, I don't know why that happened to me. He looked at me and said, "Uncle Fatmir, are you not happy that NATO entered the grounds?" "Yes, of course," I said, "how could I not be happy!" "Now they will move things around." I started gaining a real sense of the situation. He said, "If you want, tomorrow is Saturday," he worked in a bookshop, "Today is Friday, Saturday, we can go the day after tomorrow." He said, "We can go early in the morning to Pristina and you'll evaluate what's your situation. Don't worry about it." I said, "Yes, we can do that, who knows what they have done there." He said, "We'll go and see." And that's what we did.

On Sunday morning, we got into his car and we came to my apartment. When we got near the apartment, in the army we learned, because I was in the army (laughs), the army of that time, we learned that when the enemy leaves, they leave mines at the doors so they could explode when you open it. And Naser, the owner of the house where we stayed, had also been in the army and he knew that. I said, "Naser, don't be scared. If you're scared, go and stand after that pillar, I will go in but you don't have to come after me." I saw him stand behind me, he was scared. We got inside and even though we had closed the windows, because we were near the army barracks, the waves of detonations would be felt, we would feel it, it would shake the apartment.

The windows were all open, it was messy, all open. The dust, don't ask! You couldn't tell if you're in the street or at home. I said, "Naser, let's eat a bit here." We had taken food. Then I went down to the

basement. I had hid all my prints in the basement. I had made a thick door, a ten centimeters thick iron frame for the basement door. Not really a frame, but a square tube and a two centimeters thick batten, with three rounded spikes. So it doesn't bend. It was very strong, the only way to break the door was to mine it. There was no way to break it.

I was not worried that someone would break in there, but nonetheless knowing that the military has destroyed and such [I was worried]. When I went there I saw my prints there, I said, "Naser, now we can eat, we can hang out, chat." Now a few neighbors came out, we gave them the leftovers of our food, they didn't even have food. I gave them the bread, cheese, and half of the Coca-Cola we had. They were terrified, they were scared. They had stayed. The woman limped, she couldn't walk, and the man stayed with his wife. They stayed there all along and endured the bombings, and all that, they were terrified.

So, then we came back to Macedonia and got our families, we came back here, we reconstructed our lives. I modified my apartment, the terrace. I turned my terrace into a studio, I sold the studio I had. I turned this into a 60 meter studio, the previous one was 24 meters. I expanded quite a bit and it was there that I printed my work. I've worked there since liberation until a month ago. I haven't worked in a month because I was gradually bringing the prints, framing them, bringing the table, bringing *die presse* [German: the print machine]. This big handle, the wheel, was a recent addition, it did not have it before. So I'm buying stuff, doing things. I brought the table the other day, I brought the chair, trying to bring it together. For a month I haven't done any art, at all, at all, I just oversaw the process of moving.

Now I believe the weather will get better, I have central heating here. I can heat it up, but I haven't turned it on. I have two-three radiators, but I haven't started working yet, so I didn't want to make unnecessary expenditures. Now I have to think about a retrospective exhibition as a summary of this conversation.

Part Eight

Fatmir Krypa: I am thinking of doing the exhibition I couldn't do last year at the National Museum and participate in a few biennales during this year. Participate in a few of those with new works. And the latest plan, the last one that I have is, to get to eight zero, do reach my 80s and that's in two years. On that occasion, make a retrospective, a big catalog, give it national colors, because these graphics that I have all smell like war, they're burnt in the back. They smell like war, they're burnt. This one is *Ekzodi* [The Exodus] {points forward}. These are things that I've experienced and I've reflected in my work. So I plan on publishing a monograph which will encapsulate my work with all those vicissitudes, with all those ambitions, and all those, such as the time when my colleague drew a saw [refers to the story of the entrance exam at the Academy of Arts in Belgrade].

Now imagine if I had a camera to capture the saw under my name and I didn't even know what that symbol meant or that that symbol represented me, I had no clue. After three months, I went out with a friend and explored Belgrade, I was a first-year, I didn't know Belgrade, I didn't know life in Belgrade. And we went behind the National Theater of Belgrade, *Narodno Pozorište*, The People Theater, and there's a *baščarsi* [bazaar] there. We walked around, and we saw some Albanians talking *blla blla blla* {onomatopoeitic}. One of them had a saw in his hands, one had a pickaxe, and the other an ax. Albanians were offering their physical labor in the streets and that's when I understood what he meant when he drew the saw, you're supposed to do this, but you're supposed to do that.

You can imagine, you had to calm yourself down, because there was no one else to do it, you were alone at that. The only time was when the professor told me, "*Ti si ovaj stub*" [Srb. You're the pillar], what's that for this class? My self-esteem increased, as if I was that strong to hold everything together. No one had three grades ten⁵⁴ and a grade nine, no one. One of them had one grade ten and two grade nines, the others grades seven. I was the best. There was another student, she was from Novi Sad, she was also good. Another girl from Hungary also had good grades, she had two grade tens, a grade seven, and a grade nine. So, you needed to be liked there, to gain knowledge from professors and colleagues, you wanted to be like to secure a friendly study environment.

I forgot to tell you this incident that was drastic, quite drastic and it happened in the second year. The lithography technique is like this, there's a white stone, flat {rubs his hands} and you work on it until you entirely remove oils. And you draw with oil pencils, or with oil ink, with oil quill, with whatever you like {moves the hand as if he's drawing} with a brush, with whatever you want. That technique tolerates it and it does the work. After you're done with the drawing, you have to use chemicals to start the process of the print, chemical processes. When the professor saw my painting, he praised me "This is really good..." he liked it, this and that.

A Hungarian student, as the professor was leaving, the class was over and he was leaving, he said, "Professor, Professor," he said, "may I ask you something?" He said, "Yes?" "When I'm done, how do I do the chemical process?" He said, "What do you need me for? Here's Krypa." He said, "He can tell you." *Kuku*, he was pretentious and he told him, "What do you need me for? Here's Krypa. *On sve to zna*." He knows all of these so he said, "There he is, ask him." He was about to burst from anger, his ears turned red {touches his ears}. I could see his face, his ears turned red, he just went out. But when I came the next day, because I didn't print it, I mean I had gotten it ready but waited for the next day because the process took a long time. The professor said, "It's all good, just print it." I said, "OK, tomorrow morning."

⁵⁴ Grade A on an A-F scale (Ten-5).

What did he do? He got his hands oily with *burek*,⁵⁵ a very oily *burek*, because the *burek* store was in the Academy's doorstep, and with oil he touched it, you could not see the details in my drawing that I couldn't erase, that I couldn't intervene because I would ruin it. He touched it with his hands, they come out as stains, black stains that are imperceivable to the eye. But when you print it using the chemical procedure, the oil, the stone absorbs the oil. You could see the fingerprints there, *rraaak* {onomatopoeic} round smudges, he did not leave just fingerprints, but he intentionally smudged the finger to ruin it.

You couldn't tell beforehand because it was done with white stone and black ink, of course. But the oil in the details, when I put the chemicals to highlight the lines, to define them further with oil, his hand prints absorbed color. When I saw the fingerprints, I almost went crazy, crazy. Now it didn't take much intelligence to figure out what happened, I didn't need much intelligence to know who did it, I didn't need to raise doubts on others. I asked for the assistant and told him "Look, one of my colleagues did this." I said, "The other day when the professor told me it was all good, continue to print it." And I said, "As the professor was about to leave, a student asked him, 'How to do this?' and the professor told him, 'Why do you need me, when you have Krypa. He will tell you because he knows.'" The assistant said to me, he felt bad. If he had made a big fuss out of it, if he had told the professor he would have, he wouldn't even consider him a student, but expelled that student from the Faculty.

He advised me not to make the situation worse and, "You will produce another one, so that the professor doesn't take any action against your colleague's bad behavior. What he did is not OK. We know what happened, that was not OK, but you will do it again, and as a reward you'll get the grade you deserve." You can imagine the things I went through. The first [incident] was during the entrance exam. This happened in the second year, this was in the second year with my colleague from the Graphics department. You can imagine the day when I was late for the entrance exam, how he felt glad that I was not there, that I made a mistake, that I lacked concentration, that I was at the back of the classroom and couldn't see. And even in these difficult circumstances I made it, I sometimes tell myself *aferim* [Turk. well done], not just say it, but...

I have done enough for myself and I'm still trying. Because when I was on Facebook, when the Museum of China, the Central Museum of China acquired my prints. It's not a small feat to have your work continually exhibited in a big museum and many people felt proud. I have around four thousand fans on Facebook and they all felt proud that a colleague, a person, an artist from here managed to open an exhibition there, that my work was bought there, they will be exhibited there eternally.

This gives you encouragement. A relative of mine came and asked me, "What are the prices of your prints, and are you selling any?" As if we were in a market. I said, "One, or two," You know, how many I'm selling, "One, two." I said (laughs), what can I tell him? "Look," I said, "In the past I've sold more,

⁵⁵ Burek is a family of baked filled pastries made of a thin flaky dough such as phyllo or yufka, of Anatolian origins and also found in the cuisines of the Balkans.

the appreciation of art on another level. Lately, the level of appreciation is lower because I have increased the quality of my work, content-wise and its recognition, but there's no sales." In the past there was more poverty, but people bought them for their shops, for their homes, or as gifts from one city to another.

I can say that there were so many sales that I even got my wife involved to help me with the process of printing graphics because I couldn't meet the demand. I had offers from abroad and from here. LDK, everytime someone would come, because once President Rugova came with a delegation and by chance I had sold around ten graphics to a friend, they came to my studio. I don't know if you know where Restaurant Ora is, near the Assembly, I heard that it's now a hotel. President Rugova sat there with the delegation, he sent them there to eat. That was where he sat usually, it was a safe place.

The guy came to buy some graphics, that was Masar, he said, "Professor, I'm here to buy some graphics." I said, "I like the word 'some'. How many is that?" He said, "Around ten." I said, "Come in, Masar" He came and picked them and he said, "How much do they cost?" I told him the price which was... it's different when there's just one, and different when it's ten. I gave him a fair price. When he chose them, I packed them for him. As he was leaving, he gave me one hundred [Deutsche] marks, back then we used marks. I said, "Masar, what are these?" "I'll bring you the rest tomorrow or the day after tomorrow." I said, "Masar, I need to buy materials, I have to go to Turkey." I would buy the paper in France, "I import all my work materials, there's nothing here." He said, "I'll bring them tomorrow." I wondered why I gave them to him. I thought if he didn't bring me the money in one month or two, I would go to his restaurant and take them back. Why not? He won't go anywhere.

When I went home I told my wife, "Yhh {onomatopoetic} I did great business. I sold ten graphics today, so and so." "Auu {onomatopoetic}, nice, to who?" "To Masar for Restaurant Ora that he runs with his cousins." And she said, "Good," she said, "what about the money?" I told her that he gave me one hundred marks and will give me the rest later. "Puuh {onomatopoetic}, what a man?" She said, "All that effort, all that endeavor, and you just loaned it to him?" "Look," I said, "I am the son of a trader." I said, "Don't worry." I was trying to justify myself somehow. I said, "They will be exposed in the restaurant, it will be like a mini exhibition. Ten graphics take a lot of space." And at that time you couldn't have an exhibition anywhere, *shkije*⁵⁶ had taken over everything.

It was the year '96-'97, when they went to the restaurant [Ora] they saw my works there. When delegations came to Rugova, they would sit in that restaurant and these were people who had works of art in their homes. One said to Rugova, "Who did these works?" "Why?" he said, "Do you like them?" He said, "Yes, I like them a lot. They're very well done technically." He gets up and looks at them closely, because you have to look at graphics closely to see how they're done technically, because you can steal the etching technique of the details, how it is printed... "He looked at them", Adnan told me afterwards, "He looked at them" He said, you know. He told Edita [Tahiri], "Edita, go ask the professor

⁵⁶ *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkijet*, is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

to have two works ready.” “Fatmir isn’t at home, he has no [mobile] phone.” I was in Gjakova. She called someone, “Where is Fatmir?” “He is in Gjakova.”

Edita had called, I had just arrived in Gjakova. It was Friday, so I wanted to rest for two days. When Hyrije said, “Edita is calling you.” “Yes, Edita?” She said, “So and so...” she said, “President Rugova wants two of your works,” so and so. I said, “Edita, when do you need these graphics?” I said, “Right now I’m in Gjakova.” She said, “Can you have them by tomorrow night because they leave then?” “Yes,” I said, “I can.” I woke up in the morning and came back, what else could I do? I sacrificed myself, I went back and sent it to them, packed them all in rolls. They really liked my works, “What, graphic art here?” They considered it a very valuable gift, gifting artwork, “Who is this professor?” “He is from our Faculty, Faculty of Arts?” You know, they were saying “Aaa {onomatopoeic}.”

Then when the delegations like this came, Rugova wanted to bring them to my studio. Where in the studio? The studio was small, Edita knew that because she was there a couple of times. Adnan too, I had to send the art works to Adnan’s office... time after time I would go to Switzerland where my daughter lives, and I would tell Adnan, “Look, I left artworks there for you with my son, you can go pick them up, my son will give them to you.” I would write the titles on the lids of plastic tubes where I placed them. The tubes were made of solid plastic, even if you threw them out of a plane nothing would happen to them. They had a lid, I wrapped them in paper, packed them very professionally.

The next year I told Adnan, “Adnan, I’m going to Switzerland. I left the artwork with my son.” “Kuku, no.” I said, “Why, Adnan?” “It was so hard to get in touch with your son.” He was young, he would stay out late. He had called him all day long, “Hello, hello!” He had his phone in his pocket. “Hallo, hallo!” No answer. Adnan had called him until midnight. He said, “Please bring the artworks to me, I’ll keep them in my office, and whatever I can sell within a month.” And this was the life of an artist in those conditions in that small studio, in bad conditions and in not favorable political conditions. And thirdly, my role as an educator, equipping students with knowledge, soulfood, and information.

It was a mess that I hope never comes back, but I don’t even know how I got through it. When I look back to that time I produced *Trungu Ilir* [Illyrian Trunk], *Zogu i Lirë* [The Free Bird], *Mollën e Egër* [Wild Apple] {points to his work}. I thought if I were to do these artworks today in these conditions, I don’t think I would. Really, when I look at them, you know, because I would say this, I was differently inspired when the propaganda stopped, when television and radio had the right to say whatever they wanted. When the propaganda stopped, I produced *Zogu i Lirë*, so a free bird flying, you were free, you could do anything, yes. This one, *Molla në tokën e etur* [The Apple in the Dry Land], a burnt land, but still well preserved, you know. Well there were some other things, the NewBorn after the war. That artwork is really good {points to the graphic} the one with the pears, when I think of the conditions I worked in, in a situation of waiting.

And one day one of my students while cleaning the plaques had lost my *schaber*. *Schaber* is a scraper, it's a German word. When he prepared scraps of paper to throw in the trash he accidentally mixed it with newspapers, and the rest, and he lost my *schaber*. He didn't notice the hard edges of the scraper and it got mixed up with the pile of trash and it happened. He threw it. I used to say, "Don't leave your trash here. Take it on your way out, so the next day you come you'll find a clean, warm studio. Not even one minute you won't wait by the door." The student who lost my *schaber*, he felt so bad about it. When he came to the next class, I said, "Where did you leave the scraper you used yesterday all day? I needed it, where is it?" "Professor, I left it here on the desk it was here." I said, "More, no one was here, I came after you. You cleaned after everybody, did you throw it out with the trash?" "Kuku, I might have, Professor, I don't know." I said, "Okay, you did it accidentally but be more careful," And I said, "Where am I going to get" I said, "one now?"

There was... I asked my daughter in Switzerland to go to a particular shop, to buy me the same *schaber* that looked like this, because I couldn't work without it, nor could my students. It's like when you have a quill, like something you write with. It's a scraper. You could say, "This is what you suffered for? If I had known..." And after two years he has finished the Academy, he rang on my door *crrrr* {onomatopoeic}. "Good afternoon, Professor!" "Good afternoon!" He took it out of his pocket, he said, "Professor, two years ago I lost your *schaber*. I bought a new one for you in Germany and came to give it to you, because I felt so bad after you did so much for us and I lost it." I said, "It was unintentional," I said, "but you have to be careful, you know." He said, "No, Professor, I don't forgive myself, but thank you and sorry."

This was a story, as I said there were many things, how they were created, how life was, but my artistic practice develops, the work continues. I have samples of prints, I've saved a copy from each. I don't make many copies, maximum ten copies. Except for *Skenderbeu* [Scanderbeg] which I made more than one hundred copies, yes. This is one of the first copies {turns around to look at it}, that one remains the author's property, because I don't know what would happen if I sold all my works, I would be the poorest person in the world if I didn't have them for myself. Money comes and goes, but art remains to you, to your heirs, to the next generations, so they won't think that there was no graphic arts in Kosovo. I said, I will try to prove this with a monograph, and leave a layered trace for the generations that will come. Then, we will see. There will be art from the new generations, my students.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Thank you very much Mr. Krypa. I think this is a good place to wrap it.