

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH HYSNI KRASNIQI

Prishtinë | Date: March 14, 2020

Duration: 122 minutes

Present:

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

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

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

Part One

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you introduce...

Hysni Krasniqi: What?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you introduce yourself and start where you think it's your beginning, whether it is family history, or your personal beginning.

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes. Let's begin? I am Hysni Krasniqi, born in Llukar, on 03.10.1942. I am a professor, I was a professor at the Faculty of Arts, regular professor, ordinary. I started from being an assistant, to a lecturer, to professor, up to the highest rank, though there weren't any higher ranks. Our family, as the family of my father, Idriz, who was a really good parent, he was smart. He worked the ground a little, he actually just reconciled blood feuds, these things, he mostly did these things.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: He was the *pleqnar*¹ of the village...

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, he was a *pleqnar* and the head of the village. But, look, let's call it a village, Llukar is an older place than Prishtina, older than Prishtina, I mean as a settlement. Prishtina was built during the Turkish regime. We were a big family, ten members, I mean ten children, ten children, eight brothers, I never met one of my brothers because he died long ago. He was a baby, from what they've told me, I don't know, while the seven of us were alive until during the war. We lost two during the war, but also a sister. So, the five of us are alive to this day, but scattered like all Albanian people, in France, England, and so on. But, we were a family, we were very harmonious, our family.

My mother was very hardworking, not only hardworking but also very moral, hardworking like a bee, clean like the snow in mountains, she was strict (laughs), yes, yes, she was very strict. She was very... we weren't rich, we were middle-class poor, but it's interesting, because then and now Americans helped us. Americans started helping us since then, I don't know what it was, but Americans helped us a lot, all of Kosova. Kosova was, it actually was, it couldn't cover feeding people, but they went to

¹ *Pleqnar* has the same roots as *pleq*, elderly, traditionally the mediators in a blood feud reconciliation. In the wider context, also the elderly of the village that had decision-making position.

Vojvodina, they went to Vojvodina for a bite of food. They worked then, but Vojvodina was the salvage of ex-Yugoslavia, yes, a lot of people worked there.

Llukar is a narrow village, it's a valley surrounded by mountains on the right and left, the land is little, there isn't more fertile soil, but the vegetation is very rich, there is fresh air, in general, it is a mountainous place, not very mountainous, but the outskirts of the city like Gërmia, there it connects to Gërmia completely. So, we didn't have much land, and when they worked the ground then they didn't even have *pllug*,² let alone a tractor, tractor was (laughs)... they worked with *parmenda*³. You know what *parmenda* is? First with that, after the *pllug* was invented. Then the economy developed and came the tractor and many other things.

So, one of my brothers, he studied, actually he went to the medical high school in Prizren, but he didn't have the means to continue it, he came back and went to *Normale*,⁴ then he went to Mramor to work as a teacher to help our parents, and so on.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You mentioned that day that you remember a little from the Second World War, the end.

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, the Second World War, I remember it as a dream, because look, I was born in '41, I was registered in '42, now if I say (laughs)... the documents say '42. There, I remember it like it was today, our yard was surrounded by a fence. I was there with my grandmother, I stayed with my grandmother, my father's mother, and she said, "Don't be scared!" Because they knocked, "Open the doors!" She said, "Don't open them, I will open them." She opened them. The Bulgarians came in, because the Germans left. They left some stuff for us, but they took them... we told Germans to leave some stuff, "No," they said, "Because when Bulgarians find them, they will destroy them." They said, "We'll take them, we don't need them, but we have no other choice because they will destroy them."

When the Bulgarians came, when the Bulgarians came into our yard, I remember it as if it were today, they came in and took the cheese. Not only did they take the cheese, they covered them with sheets and they took them. They took everything we had and left. He said, "Why are you taking them? I work with these." They had a bomb with them, hand grenade, the ones shaped like pears, they rubbed their cheeks like this, to signal asking for money or what do I know. I remember these things a little

So, the Germans didn't touch anything. Especially in our yard, Germans had their kitchen there, they had biscuits, canned food, chocolates, we didn't have chocolates then (laughs). To tell you the truth, they gave us chocolates, they stayed there, many had bicycles, they had motorcycles, they had horses, they had all of these. Why did they have them there? Because my birthplace was at the beginning of the mountain and they were very easily accommodated there, I know this, nothing more. I remember

² Agricultural tool made from iron, with large and wide plows, pulled by tractor, horse or ox to plow the land or to open drainage lines.

³ Similar to *pllug*.

⁴ 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.

that the Germans, my mother and grandmother told me, when my grandfather died, because my grandfather was a soldier for the Turks for twelve years, he went there for his three brothers and for himself. So, military service lasted three years, he went for twelve years. When my grandfather died, my grandmother told me, many soldiers fired their guns, in sign of honor for the dead, but they do it even today. And it was like this, I know this.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where did you start school?

Hysni Krasniqi: I finished primary school in my birthplace, the school was called Ganimete Tërbeshi back then, it wasn't called so until late, it wasn't called Ganimete Tërbeshi. First, I learned at the mosque, where the mosque is today. There were no tables, no chairs, nothing, each took a stool from home and we sat there. My first teacher was from Albania, his name was Zeqir Zeka. And we had blackboards as big as notebooks, we had chalk like pens. He would lecture, we wrote it down, it would get full, we would erase it, how could we remember all those, we didn't have notebooks or anything, so we went and got an education like that. At some point, we noticed, people are patriarchal, families are patriarchal, Kosova was so in general. They started to complain, "We don't have a place to pray..." And they got us out of there. A cousin of mine opened his *oda*⁵ as a school, his name was Nu.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Catholic?

Hysni Krasniqi: No, no, Nuhi, Albanian Muslim. So, he opened it and we went there. The school was small, the air was stuffy, we couldn't. They came from Prishtina, the government noticed that it isn't okay to fit all those students in that place, so they built a school. They didn't know where to build the school, that cousin of mine had his land, very fertile land, and to this day, the school is there. I don't know if they paid for it, but we finished primary school there. The school was finished, a Serb was my head teacher, Serbian, she taught us Serbian, my head teacher was Zorka Kalašević.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was there a mixed community, were there more Albanians?

Hysni Krasniqi: No, no, we were all Albanians, there was a Montenegrin family in Makovc, to tell the truth there was only that family, I don't how they got there. Then the king put them on the most fertile lands that existed. So, I was a student and my head teacher was Serbian (laughs). Imagine, her name was Zorka Kalašević. Then, I finished primary school. When I finished primary school, I had to register in high school. What did I do, I went there. I was good at it, I was a very zealous kid, because, actually I was my mother's right arm, I helped my mother.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of work did you have then?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of domestic work did you do at that time, since you had a lot of work?

⁵ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

Hysni Krasniqi: Well... well look, my mother mostly cooked and took care of dairy products, I helped her, sifted the flour, can you believe it? I took the bread, my mother would put the *saq* over it because she was scared I would get burned and she has special tools, I still have them, tools to grab it with, I still have those tools. So I helped my mother clean, wash dishes, I washed dishes. This luck followed me, I did the same when I got married (laughs)... because we both, my wife worked, I worked. Look, I had to do it, she also worked eight hours a day. She worked eight hours, I worked four hours a week, she worked at the post office, before and after war. So, I had to work, I helped my mother a lot, I hope God rewards me (laughs). So I helped my mother a lot, I chopped wood and everything.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was it like living with your siblings?

Hysni Krasniqi: Well, look (laughs), have you noticed? None of them are the same, some went to take care of the livestock, some worked the yard and so on. We had a brother, he was very hardworking, he took after my mother, he was clean, hardworking, fair. He was very hardworking, very very. And I feel so sad that he had to stay in the woods for three months, got cancer, he went there during the war, that's why he didn't dare come home and sleep there. We had huge issues. Then after I finished, I actually went to the Technical High School...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In Prishtina?

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, in Prishtina, at 18 Nëntori. There I finished high school in Serbian, I only went to elementary school in Albanian. After high school in Serbian, I went to faculty in Serbian, we did it all in Serbo-Croatian. But, that generation who went to university in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, opened the university.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, let's go back, what was Prishtina like when you came in the '50s?

Hysni Krasniqi: I remember the '50's like it was today. That place, the road where you go Prishtina-Llukar-Makovc-Grashtica, then you go through Loskovc in Serbia. That road was all muddy. I don't know if you know, there were train rails there, one went to Serbia, Podujeva, to Serbia. When we got to the railroad we said, "Uff, finally," because there was no mud there. We oftentimes we took our socks and wore them, that's what we did. There, back then, there were no shoes, we had *opinga*,⁶ *opinga* made out of leather.

My mother, may she rest in peace, made *opinga*, simple, she knitted them, she knitted them so well, it was unbelievable. I told you, my mother was very hardworking, she also sewed, art was born in me from my mother. My mother made me separate the feathers in red, white, black, green, they were all in small boxes, and I would separate them, and my art was born there. Then Llukar was a place with many flowers, God gave us that. I took, we didn't have paint colors, so I took a flower, I pressed it into the paper and painted it, I swear to God.

⁶ Similar to moccasins, made out of rubber or bovine leather, mainly used by the villagers.

Trust me that until late, I had oil paint colors, when the Americans came, they gave them to me, they gave us things, but now we're giving to them, can you see? Our children give to other schools, very good. You know my soul hurts, but I say to my wife, "Give them good things, because this is how people helped us." Honestly, we do it too.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you remember Prishtina in the '50s, when you came?

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, because we went from topic to topic, it's a very good memory. I remember the road to Leskovc, there was some kind of *xhymryk* we had to pay, if you had a basket of eggs, you had to pay a *xhymryk*.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Tax?

Hysni Krasniqi: Tax, some kind of tax, but it was called *xhymryk*. We paid the tax there and they took their cows there or what do I know, but they paid a tax to come to the city to sell their goods, fruits, vegetables, they all had to pay a tax there. Prishtina was very simple, for example, the road to Llap. Until lately, there were cattle there, there were stacks of hay, they had cattle. Until lately, Prishtina cleansed. Now there is Shefki Gashi, he is the last one to get the cattle out of there, the last one (laughs). Now I've heard that Marmor has also done that.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was there, can you explain it to us?

Hysni Krasniqi: Oriental houses were made out of hay, wood, *pallzina*, do you know what it is? It's grained wood. Rarely any of them were covered in gypsy tiles, there was hay, until lately, they were covered in hay. There was no city center. You know what, the main city centre was, you know where the main mosque is... ?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Which one, *Xhamia e Çarshisë* [The City Mosque]⁷ or *Xhamia e Madhe* [The Big Mosque]⁸?

Hysni Krasniqi: *Xhamia e Çarshisë*, not the other one, it still is... they've been renovating it for years, it's embarrassing, it is the oldest mosque. The city center was there, there was a public bath, then the carriages were parked there. Whoever had money went to Gërmia or Tokbahçe to freshen up, then when they circumcised children, they took them there and walked around the city. While in the city centre, where Hotel Union is, when you go down there, on the left side. On the right side, there was a huge wall and there was Uzori, it was called so, a store which had everything from needles to t-shirts, earrings and everything, it had everything.

⁷ The Bazaar Mosque, the Stone Mosque or the Sultan Murat Mosque (1393) is a cultural heritage monument in Prishtina, Kosovo.

⁸ The King's Mosque, also known as the Big Mosque or the Mosque of Sultan Mehmet Fatih II, is located on Nazim Gafurri Street in Prishtina, Kosovo. It was built by order of Sultan Mehmed II in the year 865 AH (1460/61).

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was *Xhamia e Llokaçit* [Llokaç's Mosque]⁹ still there or...

Hysni Krasniqi: Which one do you mean?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Llokaç, the one where Božur¹⁰ is, it was right there.

Hysni Krasniqi: Božur, no, no, it was torn down.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, they built the hotel there, do you remember now?

Hysni Krasniqi: There was a mosque and a church.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: The church was further down.

Hysni Krasniqi: There was also a church. Good, you know it. So, it was a huge wall, all the movie plaques were there. The gypsies were there as loader people and waited if anyone needed anything. My late professor, Muslim Mulliqi, had made an artist work with loaders, it was amazing. It was like a knife with two blades, which meant that this nation were only loaders, I remember it as a student, our Albanians were working with arm saws in Belgrade, cutting wood, unloading coal and so on.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where was the Technical School, the high school you went to?

Hysni Krasniqi: The Technical school was where it is today.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, yes, did you go to the Technical High School?

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, I went to the Technical High School. Where it is today, now it's a gymnasium, Sami Frashëri, there are two gymnasiums there. Eh, it was there, the old school was there, it was the first one. Do you know what it was? Residence for students of Normale, dormitory.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Aha, where the City Archive is today?

Hysni Krasniqi: It was a dormitory.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What were those high school years like, were there many educated people then, or what was the situation like?

Hysni Krasniqi: Look, I remember it as if it were today, there were educated and uneducated people.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, but what was it...

⁹ Llokac's Mosque was built during the period 1455-1551, and since it was located in a part of the city that was full of mud and dust, the citizens used an expression, "Lokac, tükür de kaç", which in translation means, "Llokac, spit and flee".

¹⁰ Hotel Božur, a landmark in Prishtina, was the first hotel in the city. Today, it has been transformed into the Swiss Diamond Hotel on Mother Teresa Boulevard.

Hysni Krasniqi: In general, they were educated.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was it the beginning of education then?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was it the beginning of the education of people...

Hysni Krasniqi: No, no, it was so even before, not just my generation. But I said, my first teacher was Zeqir Zeka from Albania, it was him. But then a lot of people got educated, but the first agronomist in Kosovo was my cousin, my [paternal] uncle's son, Shemsi Krasniqi, he was killed during the war, I know this. Then there was Ibush, a person who knew a lot of things. Fejzë Krasniqi was a mathematician and a great physicist, Fejzë Krasniqi. Zeqir Krasniqi, he taught French, but he didn't know French, I know that, but he taught it.

After I finished it, actually after I finished high school, I thought that something isn't okay with me, this isn't much. Then I went to Technical High School exercises, I even have the painting here, when I made the tool for an engineer to see, I drew on planks.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where did you work?

Hysni Krasniqi: I was at Ramiz Sadik.¹¹ And someone said to me, "What are you doing here, why don't you go where you belong?" And I went to the High School of Pedagogy to apply. But, I said, before this, Xhemail Xhema discovered me first, he was, he was, I don't know if he was a professor, he taught art, he also taught basics of technical education. He was the first to discover me.

Then, as I said, I went to the Technical High School, from there to Ramiz Sadik as a worker, I was qualified, that's how it worked then. That engineer told me, "Go, get out of here, you don't belong here." I went straight there... when I entered the exam, I passed the exam successfully, I successfully passed the exam, because then it was both four years and three years, but you had to take the entrance exam. I was accepted, I started, I graduated from the High School of Pedagogy.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Art?

Hysni Krasniqi: Art, yes. Fine arts, yes. The late Muslim Mulliqi taught me painting, Gjelosh Gjokaj taught me graphics. I chose graphics. Then, at that time, '63, '64, I finished it in '65. I finished those, but I began to go to my village, after I finished in '65, in '66, I went to teach in my village. Of course, I taught art, but also the basics of technical education, I was content. The professors and students were also content, they learned a lot, I knew many things and to tell you the truth, polytechnics gives you a range of life. Oftentimes, I rarely call workmen, I do things myself, I just don't deal with electricity, there's no noise, no color, it can kill you (laughs). That's how it is. After I finished it, I paused for a while.

¹¹State-owned construction company.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: For how long did you teach there?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How...

Hysni Krasniqi: Only a year, only a year. Then the government announced that they would make a sports field for the Faculty of Physical Education, “Who wants action?” I said, “I will come for Kosovo, not any other place,” I never went. When I went there, I stayed there for a month and they declared me an offensive player, they gave us rewards and stuff, but...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where was it held?

Hysni Krasniqi: In Prishtina, in Prishtina, the sports field there, we worked as brigadiers, we stayed, there was also Vjosa Nimani. Maybe you’ve heard of her, she was a woman, she is a lawyer now, we were there with her and many others. And since then, I noticed that I wasn’t content with myself. I prepared my work and went to Belgrade. But staff from Belgrade often taught in Prishtina, and they noticed who was talented, who could continue, who couldn’t.

And they appointed me, “You just have to get the ticket and go.” I took my work, because there first you have to prepare your portfolio, no name, no last name, just a code. My code was “Teuta,” Albanian, “Teuta.” They accept my portfolio, they say “Teuta” can take the exam. I took the exam, I passed it, it was done.

I came to Prishtina, I said, “Father, I passed the exam, what do I do?” He said, “I don’t know.” Because he didn’t have any income. We went to the Municipality to ask for a scholarship, there was a Xheladin Topxhiu, I will never forget it. I said, “Sir, this and that...” I went with my father, “They accepted me into the Academy of Arts,” I said, “to continue my education.” “You know what?” He said, “We don’t need people for the Academy.” This was the level we were at. I didn’t have anything else to say. When I went, I had two brothers in France then, one of my brothers helped me a lot, he helped me a lot.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did your brothers go to France, or was it common?

Hysni Krasniqi: Then?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: To move, yes.

Hysni Krasniqi: The only place we couldn’t go to was America, listen to me, with an ex-Yugoslavia passport, we could go anywhere we wanted, except America.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I mean migrating, was it usual?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was it common to migrate at that time?

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, of course. Listen, girl, you couldn't get a job here, only those in function were hired, you know who they are. Let's not mention their name, let's not go there... only them, none of them were unemployed, they were all employed. The most profitable factories, they were all there, they were all there, you can see it, in the Textile Factory, the Wood Factory, the Factory... Electric Motors, all of them. In Prishtina, the Textile Factory, what was it called...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Vartex?

Hysni Krasniqi: No, not Vartex, another... The Textile Factory Predionica, in Kosova, but they took the raw material, cotton, somewhere in Arabia. Among other things, let's not go there because I don't know... so, this is how it worked.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Your brother was in France, he helped you?

Hysni Krasniqi: My brother was in France, he helped me a lot. I went and read in the notice of the Academy of Arts, it said the students could apply for a loan, *Republički Krediti* it said, *Republički Krediti*, Republic's Credit, I said, why not? I'll tell you the conditions, it was written, "If you pass all exams in time, you don't have to pay it back, if you don't, you have to pay it back." And I learned day and night to pass all my exams. I would pass them in time, sometimes I couldn't pass them the first time, but more importantly I finished them all within the year.

Then, I started, I started doing graphics. I received the first prize for New Year Greetings at the Academy of Arts, the first prize for May 4 for students, I started selling graphics and putting money on the side, I also started saving money in the bank. Yes, yes, I learned that as a student, I didn't smoke, I didn't drink alcohol, I never smoked, I still don't. And so, things like this.

Part Two

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was Belgrade like for you? Was it a big change?

Hysni Krasniqi: Well, look, Belgrade was a big city, going from a province, if you don't have a strong character, it absorbs you. But I had a goal, I knew why I was going there, I adapted fast. I adapted to all the rules of studying, I had to wake up early in the morning, take a pastry, a hot dog with mustard, my drawing notebook under my arm, get on the train, and go. It was called Puškinova, the atelier was in the middle of the mountain, I swear. We went there, we worked, until the guard came and said, "It's enough, can you leave?" We sometimes would buy him chocolates, or beer, so he would let us work longer (laughs). What can you do, bribe works everywhere.

I worked a lot then, I did all the techniques of graphics, woodcarving, linocut, linogravure, copper smelting, aquatint, mezzotint, also stereography and lithography. Lito on stone is the most difficult

technique, it is worked on stone, it is drawn, but the stone must be well prepared to draw. That's how it was at the Academy of Arts at the time, we had no problems. I had a problem once with a student, he was problematic, he started, I said, "Look, I don't have anything to do with you. You don't have to talk to me. Go away, go away!" I told my professor, Boško Karanović,¹² he was a very good man. He called him, he said, "Don't you dare even look at him. Do you understand?" I never had a problem again, I never had a problem with anyone, *tak* {onomatopoeic}.

The professors were nice, seriously. We had a professor who could speak seven languages. He taught history of arts. When he began to teach us the history of nations, because there was the question of which nation is the oldest, "Albanians," he said, "*Albanski narod je najstariji narod*" ["*Albanians are the oldest nation*"]. All the students turned to look at me, I was cold blooded, I knew. This is how it was, we passed the exams, we learned.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you go to exhibits? Did you take advantage of the cultural life there?

Hysni Krasniqi: Well , look, there's the Contemporary Museum¹³ there, in Sava. There's art, there's everything there. There is the People's Museum in Belgrade, near Puškinova, I went there often. Why did I go there often? Because I saw many Illyrian things, they stole the main ones from us. They can't do anything because they're not capable. Look, a tree that was planted in the ground should come here, here, it was built here, those people were created here. We are ancient people.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of a collection did that museum have?

Hysni Krasniqi: Rings, small sculptures, everything, there was everything, amber, all from our ground, all. I looked at them, there's nothing else you can do but look. In the museum, listen, in the Contemporary People's Museum were creations from Altamira,¹⁴ Picasso,¹⁵ Van Gogh,¹⁶ Rembrandt,¹⁷ all the most eminent painters in the world, all original creations. But do you know how much security there was when they arrived? They were surrounded by armed forces until they were inside. I saw everything, even though in the Louvre, I was in the Louvre in Paris often, I was in London, I saw everything, I saw the originals.

So, I want to say, in the Balkans was the Mecca of Culture was Belgrade, now it is the Mecca of chauvinism is Belgrade, I'm very sorry to say that. Why? The culture there, I went to ballet, I went to

¹² Boško Karanović (1924 - 2009) was one of the founders of modern graphics in Yugoslavia in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

¹³The Museum of Contemporary Art is located in Belgrade, Serbia. It was founded in 1958 as the Modern Gallery.

¹⁴Altamira Cave is located near the historic city of Santillana del Mar in Cantabria, Spain. It is known for its prehistoric cave art featuring charcoal drawings and polychrome paintings of contemporary local fauna and human hands.

¹⁵Pablo Ruiz Picasso (1881-1973) was a Spanish painter, sculptor, printer, ceramicist, stylist, poet and playwright who spent most of his adult life in France.

¹⁶Vincent Willem Van Gogh (1853-1890) was a Dutch post-Impressionist painter who is among the most famous and influential figures in the history of Western art.

¹⁷Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669) was a playwright, painter and one of the greatest Dutch visual creators.

dance shows, in different concerts, in opera with friends, we didn't pay for anything, in theaters, we would just show them we're students of the Academy, so we saw everything.

There was Bekim Fehmiu, Faruk Begolli, both very famous Albanian artists in Belgrade. We were proud of them, I swear. This was what Belgrade was like. We had food, there was the canteen, it was called... Knez Mihajlova, yes. When I finished the Academy, I finished the Academy of Arts in '69.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did the protest of '68 find you there?

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes. I wrote in Albanian with my own brush in Knez Mihajlova, *trak trak trak* {onomatopoeic}...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you write?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you write?

Hysni Krasniqi: We write...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was the slogan?

Hysni Krasniqi: "We want freedom," we said, "Independence" (laughs), they read it, there were many people, a mess, I swear, this is how it was.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did it last?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did the protests last?

Hysni Krasniqi: They lasted for about a week. I, they left me and some friends in the Secretariat of the Academy to answer the phone {coughs}. We stayed there. They each brought us a sandwich to keep us alive, this is how it was. There was Halil Muhaxheri, Esat Valla, Bashkim Paloja. I have pictures, you can see, I have them all (laughs). This is how it was.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When you came back in '69...

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When you graduated and came back to Kosova...

Hysni Krasniqi: We came back in '69, but when the protests happened in '68, do you remember?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I am much younger (laughs).

Hysni Krasniqi: In '68, we knew that protests were about to happen.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: There were also protests here, yes.

Hysni Krasniqi: Here in '68, listen to me, from Belgrade we came here in front of the Theatre, Pushkolli talked about... he said, "Freedom, democracy, republic," we were asking for our flag. It was a mess. In front of Avalla, do you know where Avalla is? My brother was injured in front of Avalla by Serbs, they were up there, do you remember? They shot my brother there, "Hysni, your brother was injured." We took him, we didn't have anywhere to go, but we knew it was serious. To this day, he has the bullet in his thigh {shows with his hand}.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Why did you go to the protest? Was it clear to you?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you politically clear why you are protesting?

Hysni Krasniqi: Of course, we did. We were very clear. They talked about everything, Russians have organized this, but it wasn't true, we asked for what we have today. We took our brother to the doctor, an Albanian, they checked him, and everything. They said, "It isn't dangerous, cover it with grease, because it's deep, we can't cut it." They left him like that. This is...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did they last? So, you came...

Hysni Krasniqi: Again, listen. Since '68, we have never been comfortable. Can you believe that since '88...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: '68.

Hysni Krasniqi: Actually, since '68, sorry. Since '68, Prishtina, Kosova was tense, we were always tense. We would have party meetings, look, you had no choice but to be part of a party. They kept us there, they talked, they repeated everything, they demoralized us until morning. I got mad in one of the meetings, I said, "Look, can you bring us some beds here? At least we can sleep." They started laughing, there were people from the Committee, all kinds of people. That's how it was.

After I finished that, I was hired, it's a very long story to tell you when I got hired at the Academy of Arts...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Why not, tell us because it probably also is the beginning of the University...

Hysni Krasniqi: I first worked in high school from '70 to '74.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: At which high school?

Hysni Krasniqi: Ivo Lola Ibar, Sami Frashëri now. I'm talking about how it was... how it was, that was its name. I worked there for four years. After four years, the department I was part of opened in the Academy of Arts here in Prishtina, I applied, I was admitted. First I was admitted as a lecturer, but I wasn't in the group... Syria Pupovci was a representative in the establishment of the Academy of Arts and canceled the vacancy. Now they were looking for an assistant once again, so I applied again. They took two people, one from Peja, one from Gjakova (laughs) and they took them to Sarajevo to take the test. They tested them for the units in lithography, it was as if they would say to a beginner, "Fly the plane," none of them passed. None of them passed, they returned, they returned to Prishtina. They had power, they started working either way, they worked as lecturers, I was an assistant. I wasn't anyone's assistant, I just signed things, I graded them, no one's assistant. I had the salary of an assistant, but did the work of a lecturer. It was like this. I have the documents, I can show you... there's nothing I could do. Look, you have to fight, when you see that the wall is strong, you just look at the wall, and one day, it will fall. This is how it was, I swear.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did you work as an assistant for?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did you work as an assistant for?

Hysni Krasniqi: I worked, because every three years you're supposed to... around seven-eight years. I have all the documents there, you can see it.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Then how did you...

Hysni Krasniqi: Then, Fadil Hysa started working as dean. Have you ever heard of him? A very good director.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes.

Hysni Krasniqi: He became dean and took my file. He took it, looked at it. He was my student, I taught him in Ferizaj. He said, "What happened, Hysni?" I said, "Ask them." And immediately he announces me as docent. From there, from docent, the titles continued. You can't get titles if you don't have exhibits, merits, or writing. Now no one writes or exhibits.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you exhibit at that time?

Hysni Krasni: Excuse me, well...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you have the chance to exhibit, because the Gallery happened in '79. Can you tell me what kind of exhibition spaces...

Hysni Krasniqi: In '79?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, the Art Gallery in Boro Ramiz was opened in '79, but before this, what happened?

Hysni Krasniqi: Before Boro Ramizi? We had exhibits, of course.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where?

Hysni Krasniqi: In other cities...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were there galleries in other cities?

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, there were. In Ferizaj, in Peja, in Gjakova, Gjilan, but also here, pirate galleries. There was a small gallery, I remember where Armata is today, at the Ministry of Culture downwards.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: BVI.¹⁸

Hysni Krasniqi: BVI, yes, it has changed now. I opened an independent exhibit there. This was in '65, '65-'66 if I'm not mistaken. There I had, a writer actually wrote, a very good writer, but I forgot his name, I don't remember his name. He was the first to write about me, yes. Vehap or I don't know what his name was.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Vehap Shita?

Hysni Krasniqi: No, no, I know Vehap Shita. He also wrote about me, he translated a catalog of mine, he was a very good translator. His son was a student at the Technical Faculty of Civil Engineering. I thought there for a few years, I realized I couldn't afford to anymore, the pay wasn't good.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you paint? How did you conceive your work?

Hysni Krasniqi: Where?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: At that time, I am interested to know when you painted, when you did your first graphics...

Hysni Krasniqi: Look...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of topics did you address?

Hysni Krasniqi: There was the Association of Figurative Artists. We had a secretary who was really just. The association, the head of the association was Kadrush Rama, there was Hivzi Muharremi, they invited us to open exhibits. We took our work, they decided however many works we could show, two, three, five, ten, depending. That's how we took them all over the world, we exhibited in every country, collectively. Some wanted to work individually, individual exhibits. I had exhibits in Paris, in London,

¹⁸Bureau of Self-Government Interests, now Public Housing Enterprise in Prishtina.

three in Paris, one in Niš, in Zagreb, Ljubljana, I had individual exhibits in many countries. I have my biography here.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Tell me in more detail because biographies are quite... What was cultural life in Kosovo like?

Hysni Krasniqi: Cultural life, look, you could not, for example, enroll in the Academy, in the Association without first having the Academy and without having works, but there were also cases when they didn't go to the Academy of Arts, but they were talented, many of them. They were talented, the commission was formed, the commission of experts accepted them and they enrolled. There were many cases like that.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: They were active...

Hysni Krasniqi: Active and talented, they had merits, they could be independent artists. To tell you the truth, at the time of the former Yugoslavia, it was good for artists, it was very good. Why did we have it good? We had a resort in Deçan, we had a resort in Batllava, we had a resort in Paris, we had our, a room of our own. Actually, the last time I received the Moša Piada Award, I and Kadrushi and Muslim Mulliqi went there. We worked there, we stayed, we had everything, we had the benefits they gave us. So, their negligence, the other took everything from us. It was in Grožnjan, in the Municipality of Buja, do you know where it is? In Istra, Istra on the border with Italy, twelve kilometers away from Italy. We went to Italy to get the material. We went there with an identification document, there was never any problem.

So, there was a lot of money. Whoever wanted to work there had the opportunity to progress a lot and we worked a lot, we worked there. When we went to Grožnjan, we took our works, we opened an exhibition, it was a special place only for exhibitions. I swear we came back from there with a thick pocket, we sold our work and had fun. It was great for artists, they gave ateliers to some, we knew how it went there, they gave whoever they were closer to ateliers. They didn't give them to whoever deserved it most, but still, it wasn't bad. So at that time, culture was at its peak, the Theater worked.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Here, or in Yugoslavia?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Here, or in Yugoslavia in general?

Hysni Krasniqi: Here and all over Yugoslavia. Here and all over Yugoslavia.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was happening here?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was happening? Can you give us more detail about what was happening, can you describe it?

Hysni Krasniqi: Of course. There were concerts, Okarina Art [Ocarina Art], there was ballet, there was everything when it came to culture, sport. You can see even in sports, we could never achieve what we're achieving now. Why? The moment they noticed someone was good, they reduced their talent. Now? If you're capable, you can present yourself anywhere. You see what Majlinda is doing. Majlinda Kelmendi is the most powerful ambassador in Kosova. Kosova is more recognized because of Majlinda rather than our leaders. Can you see that even those who recognized us are taking it back?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was happening at that time?

Hysni Krasniqi: At that time?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes.

Hysni Krasniqi: Football, football was important. Karate wasn't that important. There was football, basketball, handball. These were at their peak, but also boxing. Boxing was, there was a trainer called Lah Nimani, he was amazing. I don't think there will ever be a better trainer in Kosova. We won wherever we went, he knew how to train. When he saw boxers were losing, he called them to come and rest, on the chair, he would do some and do something to their ear, then he would bite their ear *xik* {onomatopoeic} and made them crazy. Then he (laughs) won, this is what Lah did.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you remember the sports in the city...

Hysni Krasniqi: There were, there were foot races. There was Hashim Kolovica, sadly, if he was Italian or something, he would have achieved a lot. He was the best runner to ever exist, he was amazing, he was born that way.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did he win any awards?

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, he did. Now look, he was poor. If he lived elsewhere, who knows what he would have done. Hashim Kolovica, he was from Kolovica. His last name was also Krasniqi. There were bike races. I was a cyclist myself, I raced, sports kept me like that. I raced around Kosovo and a part of Serbia. We went to Kragujevac, Niš, we came to Prishtina, then through Prizren, actually in Peja, in Prizren up the mountains there and we came back to Prishtina by bicycle.

Part Three

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How were the departments constituted?

Hysni Krasniqi: The main base, the main man of fine arts, the one who formed art was Muslim Mulliqi. Muslim Mulliqi was a wonderful painter. He was the first, then there was Gjelosh Gjokaj. Gjelosh Gjokaj

was also a painter and a graphic artist. Gjelosh was a very good person, very democratic, and very close to students, very close to students, but he didn't know the language because he was from Montenegro, from Vuthaj. He had lived somewhere on Vojvodina, he lived there, because his brother was a pilot or something. I can say that it was very, only sleep separated us, he was my professor. I learned a lot from him. I am very thankful to that man, very, very thankful, I swear, I hope his bones don't rot. He was a very good man. He was able to hang out with the students, to study, to work, to talk about everything, Gjelosh Gjokaj. Muslim was a little more stiff (laughs). Muslim was more stiff. He worked in his atelier, when the students came, he said "Have a good day!" It was done, like in the Academy of Belgrade.

This is how it was in Belgrade. There were cases when we didn't see our professors for weeks and then they came and checked our work, critiqued us, "This is good, this is bad, fix this." Boško Karanović was my professor in Belgrade and Milo Milunović, he was more strict. Boško Karanović was a very good pedagogue, very professional and a very good person. He was from Bosnia. Like this...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In Belgrade, you also did graphics, did you decide there?

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes. I only did graphics and paintings. I studied painting in Mladen Srbinović's class. He was from Macedonia, but he lived in Belgrade. So, in general. we organized with other students when we came to the Academy of Arts. We organized joint exhibits with students to elevate students.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where did you open them? In what spaces?

Hysni Krasniqi: In classrooms, in corridors, in theater, mostly in theaters, in the foyer of the theater, the one that was in the Gallery. I remember once in '77, we gave the awards with these joint commissions, so they once said, "Let's take a commission from abroad." "Okay!" They took it from Ljubljana, from Zagreb, from Belgrade, we took Zoran Kržnik, the most popular critic in the Balkans and I started that cycle Grunaja [Grainfield] and I put them out there. Albanians got in there, three things will destroy Albanian people: nepotism, localism, and jealousy. Zoran Kržnik said, "This one will get the award," for my graphics. He didn't know who I was, he had never seen me, he just saw my work. Now what did they do, "No," they said, "He got the award last year." "What?" He said in Serbian, do you speak Serbian? "*Svake godine ima da dobije ako je dobar.*" "He will get it every year if he is good." And they didn't dare say anything anymore. He was a good critic. This is how it was.

In Slovenia, I opened an exhibit with 80 small graphics, I bought a Renault 4 from Slovenia, I just got the key in, with 80 graphics. So, Slovenians and Germans appreciate the work of an artist, here they don't. They don't know... they don't know what art is.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did the salons exist back then?

Hysni Krasniqi: What kind of salons do you mean?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Spring, autumn...

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, there was the spring salon, autumn salon, before there was even a painting salon, there were awards there, and so on. We made catalogs and everything {coughs}. When we had exhibits, we also had invitations from abroad, we had catalogs of our own. Now there isn't any order, now they try to...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Let's not go there because we all get sad.

Hysni Krasniqi: You can continue.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I mean you worked in the Academy, what did you call it then, Faculty of Arts...

Hysni Krasniqi: Listen, it was called Academy until late...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In the meantime, you were creating new generations of artists. Did the cultural life become more dynamic after this art scene...

Hysni Krasniqi: It is true.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was life happening at that time when you already had the university in Kosovo, there weren't just people coming from Belgrade, Zagreb...

Hysni Krasniqi: It's true, it's true.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was something happening locally? What was the situation like then?

Hysni Krasniqi: Back then, we had the Association... we didn't have an Association of Figurative Artists, but the Association of Figurative Artists was Serbian, it was in Belgrade. We separated, me, Engjëll [Berisha], what was his name, Anton...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Gllasniqi?

Hysni Krasniqi: Anton Gllasniqi, bravo, Anton Gllasniqi, yes. Anton Gllasniqi and we were in that meeting and we separated from the rest of them. We said, "We are from the autonomy, we want our own association, we want to have our own gallery, we want everything." Since then everything started to go well for us. We had a gallery, association, the head of the association, everything. The gallery in Boro Ramiz, in the Youth Palace, because we still call it (laughs) Boro Ramiz. The Gallery was formed in the Youth Palace, then from there, they opened the Gallery where it is today.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: That happens in '95.

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, '95. I don't know the dates, I just know how it went.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I mean there was a period of time when we didn't have access to the Gallery.

Hysni Krasniqi: No, we didn't.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What happens before that? You were part of the...

Hysni Krasniqi: Of what?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Of the first exhibit when the Gallery opened. Do you remember how they linked you, how they took your work...

Hysni Krasniqi: Look, at first, when the Gallery opened, it was massive, it was great. All creators came there and were part of the opening, everyone, journalists, they came to record, talk. All of them came, all art critics that we had. So. Since then there was some kind of order, when you wanted to open an exhibit, you first had to present it, the commission had to see your work, the commission came to your atelier, saw your work and so on. They said, "You can come on this date." The date would be appointed by the artist or the Gallery, sometimes the appointments would be full and you couldn't grant everyone's wishes. This is how it was.

Erëmirë Kasniqi: And...

Hysni Krasniqi: Every artist, sorry, how exhibited had benefits. From 50 to one hundred euros, marks, dinar. They were already paid, at least it paid for the materials you used, color, paper, oils. At least it paid for the material, because no one can pay for an artist's time, an artist can work for weeks and months in a graphic. So, it also happens with paintings, graphics, sculptures, everything, yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did the associations organize...

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, the associations organized those. .

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Here and abroad.

Hysni Krasniqi: Association, yes, here and abroad. We had some in Germany, Metalip Qosaj was like a representative at the Embassy of Kosova. He told us how many artistic works there should be, and how many artists. We prepared them, we didn't need to go, those who sold the works would get the money, yes. They opened the account, bank account, we took them there. I said, the association was well coordinated.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was it connected to other associations in Yugoslavia?

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, yes, there were also internationals. Then at some point, we started connecting to the Association in Albania, I have the documents there.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you part of the exchanges with Albanian in the '70s?

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, I was in Albania for the first time in '73 as a gymnasium teacher, because I started working at the gymnasium in '70, I was in military service before that, the moment I came back, I was accepted to the gymnasium. They welcomed us greatly in Albania.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Why gymnasium teacher? What kind of collaboration was it?

Hysni Krasniqi: There was collaboration back then. Collaborations with galleries, culture and education began. They brought teachers and professors here to the University of Prishtina. I went, a group of professors went to Albania. They welcomed us, we stayed and had a good time. We went to see the factories, the universities, and schools. There was a lot of work.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you remember what Albania looked like then?

Hysni Krasniqi: Then (laughs) it's not good to say it. In the beginning, I had a brother, we all loved Albania, but there should be a limit. When I watched an action movie once, I was 15 or 16 years old, those red handkerchieves, working in the field and in the railroad. I saw women working in the fields.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What were they doing?

Hysni Krasniqi: I saw them working in the fields. We don't put women to work here. Men there would just stay in cafes, while women worked.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: The city, what did the city look like then?

Hysni Krasniqi: The city was clean. We lived in Hotel Dajti,¹⁹ in front of Hotel Dajti, there was Stalin,²⁰ Stalin's statue, but further on, there was Skenderbeu's statue. It was very clean, there were many small huts around Tirana. So, Tirana had wide, clean streets.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did anyone accompany you?

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, of course. They accompanied us. Bicycles, old buses that took us to different factories. People were all dressed in blue. You didn't see something like this, rarely we went out in the evening and saw these. But, we... I noticed how they looked at us. We were dressed well, I felt bad to be honest. But what can you do, that's how Albania was, only those who were there back then can see how much Albania, Tirana, Shkodra and all of them have advanced, Durrës. You can't, you can't imagine how much Durrës has developed as a city, it's unbelievable.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did you stay there?

¹⁹Hotel Dajti was a hotel in the center of Tirana, Albania. It bore the name of nearby Dajti Mountain, was the main center for international visitors and diplomats during the socialist period of Albania, was purchased by the Bank of Albania and currently does not function as a hotel.

²⁰Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin (1878-1953) led the Soviet Union from the mid-1920s to 1953 as general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and prime minister of the Soviet Union.

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did you stay there?

Hysni Krasniqi: What?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did you stay there in the '70s?

Hysni Krasniqi: In the 70s, listen, in 2007 we bought an apartment. Where we bought there were no other buildings, there were just pine trees. Do you know what pine trees are? It was all in pine trees, they said that no one could pluck even a leaf there from the regime. You can't see pine trees anywhere now, it's all buildings. This is how Albania is.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did you stay for back then?

Hysni Krasniqi: Then we stayed for a week or two, a week I think. We stayed for a week and we came back. They took us to the factory where they made spoons and umbrellas and so on. They made spoons with... what can you do, those were their conditions. The good thing about Enver is that he never owed money to anyone, you know that? He had enemies around him, Greece, Italy, Serbia. They say, "Why all those bunkers?" He didn't have a choice but to build them, to protect his country.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was Albania the way you expected it to be?

Hysni Krasniqi: What?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was it, did Albania look the way you expected it to? Was it worse, better?

Hysni Krasniqi: No (laughs), we didn't expect it so to tell you the truth. One of my brothers asked me, "What was Albania like?" "Do you want me to tell you the truth, or to lie to you?" "No," he said, "Tell me the truth." I told him, he said, "You are Belgrade's spy." (laughs). I said, "You are wrong," I said, "You will be able to, because you're young," I said, "You will go and be conceived." He went and came back, "What was it like?" "Come on, brother." (laughs) And I said, "What did I tell you, I asked you if you wanted the truth." "No," he said, "Tell me the truth." And I told him (laughs). This is how Albania was. To tell you the truth, Albania has all the resources to develop, to be better than Switzerland. Why? It has the sea, many kilometers, it has mountains, ore, it has the roads. It has developed a lot. But people need to be more civilized, they need to be civilised like here.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: (laughs) Let's go back to...

Hysni Krasniqi: Do you see? Like this... in associations the artist was always privileged at that time, I mean before the war. Now they're not privileged at all.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell me about these privileges you had before '99? What was that life for artists like?

Hysni Krasniqi: Well, artists had the right to open exhibits in the Gallery, to have a catalog prepared, an invitation and then the Municipality bought one or two works. The Gallery kept in their collection one or two, the Ministry of Culture also. So, this is a privilege. It was also a privilege that we went to associations for free. We had food, drinks, accommodation and material to work with, drawing, painting, sculpting, anything, these were the privileges. You could go wherever you wanted, you had the Yugoslav passport, except America, you could go to any country.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you go? Did you travel...

Hysni Krasniqi: I went, I only went to France, I went to France...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Because of you brother, or what?

Hysni Krasniqi: Because of my brothers, I wanted to see them, but also because of the material. Because I didn't do my graphics on paper. What's that, on a 20-cent paper. I made them on woodlock, and it is expensive. I buy *La grange*, or *Fabriano* colors. So when I print graphics, it's art, not nonsense. This is how it is, because the moment it is in the sun, it takes another color.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can we go back to that, when the first exhibit happened, I'm interested to know about that.

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You have some works exhibited there. How did it come...

Hysni Krasniqi: In the Gallery?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: No, the first exhibit that was opened in Boro Ramiz.

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, yes...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Some of your works are exhibited. Do you remember how they communicated with you? How did they let you know it was being opened?

Hysni Krasniqi: The news, it happens like this, for example, you want to open an exhibit in the Gallery of Arts in Prishtina, when it was in the Youth Palace.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You don't understand. When the Gallery first opened...

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When the first exhibit ever was opened and there were no individual exhibits, but there was a collective exhibit and they invited you because your works are there.

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you remember what was it like? Can you tell us about the first announcement that the Gallery was opening?

Hysni Krasniqi: The first announcement, before the gallery opened?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes.

Hysni Krasniqi: Before the Gallery opened, first, either with a vacancy or they call you on the phone, they tell you how many works to bring and you tell them the date when the work was done, a year or two, it can't be older, and you submit it. The commission gets it, another commission evaluates it and the exhibit opens, they put them...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you remember the first exhibit in the Gallery?

Hysni Krasniqi: Of course, as if it was today.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How many works did you have there?

Hysni Krasniqi: Look...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: One, two?

Hysni Krasniqi: No, in the collective one? Or individually?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you remember the day when the Gallery opened?

Hysni Krasniqi: Two, three, I don't remember the day exactly, but I know how it happened. There came...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: It was opened with an exhibit.

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, with an exhibit. They send the invitations, or they notify us, now there are many newspapers, back then it was *Rilindja*²¹, and nothing else. We knew when they opened, what time and we all went. The director of the Gallery first opens...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you remember Pajazit Nushi's speech when the Gallery opened?

Hysni Krasniqi: I don't remember. Pajazit Nushi was a very good professor, a wonderful lecturer, a very good lecturer, there was no better person than him, at all, because I worked with him in the gymnasium. He taught in the gymnasium, Pajazit Nushi. I don't remember to tell you the truth because it's a long time ago, and I was traumatized during the war.

²¹*Rilindja*, the first newspaper in Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

I mean, when that exhibition opened for the first time it was very festive, with pieces of flute music, recitations, everything. Yes, yes, they were organised {cough}, we organized them. Now, they rarely practice it, because back then there was always a flute, piano, someone would recite. Now exhibits are opening without any of it, but the simpler, the better. Look, they're not doing concert there, but they are presenting works of art, let the work speak, not you. I was in Paris, at the opening of a very famous painter Francis Bacon²². Have you heard of him? When he opened the exhibit I saw a ten meter long table with a white tablecloth, some drinks. No one talked, they just looked at the work. I have the prospectus, his catalog, which he signed for me with his own hand. He gave me the catalog, that person, because someone told him where I am from, but he wanted to and signed it from me. Only here it gets boring, they lecture. Why are they lecturing? The work is there, the work speaks for itself, not... people get bored, standing and I have often noticed them coming out, coming out of the exhibition, coming out. Did you notice?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes.

Hysni Krasniqi: There's nothing you can say, you came to see the exhibit. Everyone sees the exhibition.

Part Four

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you remember '89 or '90, when you were fired?

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, I remember very well.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell us how it happened?

Hysni Krasniqi: I was fired on the date 13, 1989, this is how I wrote it down. When they fired me, I didn't want to, "Why would I leave, you didn't hire me," I said, "You didn't hire me, we know who hired me." Me and Kadrush Rama stayed there and they brought a cleaning lady, she cleaned the rooms of professors, students, and she said, "Professor, sign here," I said, "Sign what?" And I said in Serbian, "*Idi uzmi metlu i čisti.*" Take the broom and get out of there. And she left. I went to the professor's classroom and a postman came, he was Albanian, "Professor?" "Yes?" He said, "You have to sign." I said, "Sign what?" I said, "Go deliver mails, this doesn't concern you sir. I will not sign it."

Now another one comes, he used to be my student, sculptor, Zoran Karalejić. I called him Kërle, meaning "stump." He said, "*Profesore, treba da potpišete*" ["Professor, you have to sign"]. I said, "I will never sign it. Is it clear? Firstly, I don't understand what it is." "You don't understand?" "Yes." They take our secretary, Ballata. They write it in Albanian, they translate it. I said, "Ballata, look at the state you're in. You're selling yourself for 5 marks. I will not sign it!" I said, "Do you not know me at all?" I will not sign it." I went home, then come back there with Kadrush, the police came, five or six men and

²²Francis Bacon (1909-1992) was a British painter of Irish descent known for his emotionally raw images.

they get us out by force. We left, what would we do, I didn't sign it. They brought it to my apartment to sign, I still have it, without a signature. This is how it was, I swear.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was the beginning of the Faculty of Arts like, if you can tell us...

Hysni Krasniqi: Then the Faculty was organized, we had the rector Ejup Statovci, the only one in the university, our faculty, the only one in the university that worked with the Republic of Kosovo, with the rule of the Republic of Kosovo. Enver Statovci, I mean...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Ejup.

Hysni Krasniqi: Ejup Statovci, Ejup Statovci said that we have to solve it. Each of us worked in ateliers. I had my atelier in my apartment, in a corner. I worked there, we took our students there. With my own material, with my colors, with my oil, my own heating, my own lighting, no one gave me any money, I didn't even ask. I worked there for four years. I have three certificates of achievement, a secretary didn't give one to me, he was arrogant, but it's no problem. When the students came, I, first when they came, I talked to them, "Don't come too many at once, not in groups like that, but come one by one and don't tell people where you're going. We're going to my brother's, two or three people. that is how they came.

There was a huge hallway there, so I made a big desk. So those who came early wouldn't be cold, it was warm, they all sat there. They all got together, closed the door, came in and worked like there were in the Academy. They worked, I gave them everything, materials, literature, I feel bad saying this but the students also go the literature from me (laughs). They didn't take anything else, they liked literature. Anyay. So, we worked there all the time. I worked twice a day, in the morning and evening. Why? Because there were too many groups, they didn't fit. Actually Ibrahim Kadriu, journalist, writer, he came and wrote a very nice article, I have it all there. This is how it was.

Sometimes I had problems, there were all kinds of students. There was a student from Gjilan, I forgot his name. I went to, I left my students working, I went to get a coffee my wife made for me, "I'm working, no coffee." When I went in I heard a noise, "Hysni, I've never heard such noise," said my wife. I went there, when I saw a student had grabbed a female student by the throat like this {puts his hand on his throat}, he wanted to choke her. Fuad, his name was Fuad Islami, I remember now. "Fuad?" I stopped it, the girl's name was Teuta. I said, "Why are you doing this, Teuta?" She said, "Eh, Professor." I left it. When we finished, I told Teuta and two other students to stay, "Tell me what happened?" She said, "Well, Professor, I slapped him. "I said, "Why did you..." who knows what happened, "But you shouldn't have slapped him," then he grabbed her by her throat. This was the only problem I had, I never had problems with them again.

Then I said, "Look, I have the right to never let you in my lecture again." She said, "Professor, it won't happen again." I said, "Be careful how you behave," I said, "Can you see the issues we have? We are in danger from our enemies, how do I know what your issue is. My family is here." This is how it was. I worked there for four years. I have all the work, all of them. I will open an exhibit one day and if the

Academy of Arts forms a graphic cabinet, I will give them back, if not, I will take them to the museum. I won't leave them to them, they sell them, give them to people and so on.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Why four years, when the crisis lasted for nine years?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Why only four years?

Hysni Krasniqi: This is why, you're right. We went to Pejton, do you know where it is? There was a space for music there, we used it for lectures. We held most of the lectures there, then slowly we came to where the army used to be, UÇK [KLA], we worked there for a long time. Then they got us out of there, then we came back to our jobs, because we were liberated.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did it come to the war? How did your family experience it?

Hysni Krasniqi: Very badly, our family experienced very badly. Why? First, my brother and cousins were executed in Kolovica. There were five people, four of them were executed, one probably was a young man, and he jumped the fence and ran. This is how it was and it was very hard for us.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You were at home in Prishtina or...

Hysni Krasniqi: We were in our apartment. We couldn't go anywhere. No, not then, because we left Prishtina in April, I think. They beat me and one of my friends on March 16, in front of the District Court, there was a tan there, there were soldiers and civilians. They checked to see what we have, "What would I have?" I said. I had around a hundred, fifty dinar, my friend had 120 marks. They took it from him, they said, "You have no right to have marks." Everyone had marks then.

They took it from him, he said, "Give it back! Why are you taking my money?" He had it in his pocket, he was a great designer, his name is Osman Cakiqi, he also had the KLA emblems in his pocket which he made. He had his own private printing house. Thank God they didn't search us. He told me, "Put this," so they could see my visitor's card, Professor at the Faculty of Arts, he said "Are you a professor?" I said, "Yes, I am. Why?" I taught in both languages, Albanian and Serbian. "Ah, let's see. You" he said "You are against the state." I said, "No, you are wrong."

They beat him up, broke his teeth and ribs. They beat me up until they got tired. They wanted to break my arm {touches his left arm}, I still have the scars here, you can see in the pictures. They broke it, they wanted to break my leg, I have pictures, I took the pictures after twelve days, because we couldn't go outside, we were inside. Then I barely got to my apartment. Two of my neighbors saw me near the building, I couldn't walk, they grabbed me by my arm and took me to my apartment.

There I noticed that I was in a bad condition. My whole body was black, blue and red. They took some salt and onions and covered my wounds, I don't know for how long I stayed like that. The ones who took me were named Mybera and Magribe, Magribe, if I'm not mistaken. Her husband wasn't here at

all, he was in Germany. They took and covered me with onions. I told my wife after a few days, “It smells. I can’t take it anymore.” I removed them and I cleaned up. We stayed for a few days like that. After two, three, or four days came the head of the police, Dragan.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: A neighbor or...

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was he your neighbor?

Hysni Krasniqi: He was my neighbor. He said, “I don’t want to see anyone here after six in the morning.” All the people from the building gathered and we left {coughs}. We went to the train station, you know, the small one in Prishtina. We got on the train, my wife grabbed me on one side, my son on the other, only one of my sons was here, two of them were in London. I didn’t see one of them for six years.

Then we went, we got onto the train, there were many people with disabilities, on wheelchairs on the train. When we got on the train, they came, the controllers, what do I know, searching the train. “What do you have here?” I said, “What would I have?” They searched me, I had a hundred dinars, they took 50 from me, they left 50, that was it. When we got off the train, there were mines on both sides of the train, so we had to walk on the railroad. I got out there, we went to Bllaca. In Bllaca, it was all muddy, rain, the river flowed there. What could we do? I told my son, “You are in better conditions than me, find some long sticks. Me and my brother took them and made like a kennel, we closed it with plastic to protect us from the rain.

We got in there, I saw my [maternal] uncles, they’re from Gllavnik, they were there. “What’s wrong, Hysni?” I told them. They took me to a team of French doctors. They checked up on me and gave me some pills. We stayed there for a night. That day Fatmir Sejdiu came. When he saw me, he said, “You too, Hysni?” I said, “Yes.” “Don’t worry,” he said, “It will be okay.”

After a while, a commission from Geneva came, they saw what kind of life we had there. Buses came from Skopje and they got us in there like animals, the windows were closed, the temperature was probably up to 30, 40 degrees. The children vomited, I told the driver, “Open the windows.” He said, “No, no, I can’t open the windows.” They took us to a place called Mojane, it was called *Kodrat e Gjarpinjëve* [*The Snake Hills*]. The former English KFOR²³ was there with their tent. We went down there. Some wide but short tents. They gave us chocolates, biscuits and milk and water, nothing else and canned bread. The people started to get constipated.

Now let’s see, what do I know, European Union. A team from Turkey came, he was called Demir Eli, the leader of the Turks, Demir Eli, came down to our camp by helicopter. He went down there, he saw the situation as it was. After two days, they made a kitchen. We had breakfast, soup and meat and

²³The Kosovo Force is a NATO-led international peacekeeping force in Kosovo. KFOR entered Kosovo on 11 June 1999, two days after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

everything, as well as lunch and dinner. Then, {cough} sorry, then it was done, it was very well done, but we didn't have a place to shower.

What could I do, I went to the city. My wife told me, "Where are you going? They can imprison you." "Let them do it." I got dressed, I shaved, I went to an Albanian neighbor there, "Can I take a shower?" "Yes, of course." I cleaned up, went to the city, Arbër Xhaferi was my friend while studying in Belgrade. I went to his residence. When I went there, I went to Skopje there, I went inside. The guard said, "What are you looking for?" I said, "I want to talk to Arbër Xhaferi." "Look," he said, "Arbër went somewhere to the Arab States. What do you need him for?" I said, this is what's happening, "Oh, okay!" He said, "How many people are you?" It was me, my wife and my son, my brother was with his wife and his daughter-in-law, without children, six people. "Hysni," he said. "I could find you a place in the city, but just you." I said, "No, no, I'm with my brother. It does not make sense." "Okay."

They took us to a village called Sfillare. We stayed there for about a month. The house owner welcomed us, but he was poor. He said, "Look, I have flour." I said, "Don't worry. You know what we need? Water and shelter. Nothing else." He gave us a room, we all slept there. We stayed there for a month. After a month, we got the papers from London and... I'm a little emotional (cries).

We got the suitcases ready with clothes, we didn't have much. We had a lot that the Red Cross gave us, but we didn't take them. We left them to the house owner, we didn't take anything. We got our suitcases and got on a bus. The bus took us to the airport, in the airport they asked, "Is someone sick?" My wife told me, "Don't say you're sick, they might not let us leave." I said, "We're all good."

We got on the bus and went to Lic. We went to Lic and they welcomed us, they only hadn't laid the red carpet for us. When we got into a huge hall, elderly women, 70-80 years old were serving us, I felt bad. They brought us soup, bread, cigarettes, stuff, they gave me a pack of cigarettes. I said, "I don't smoke." They were surprised. "You don't?" Everybody smoked. I said, "I never did." We waited there until they found us rooms to sleep in. The moment we got in, there was a bag with women's stuff there. She said, "This is your room." My wife said, "This is occupied." "No, no," she said, "It's not occupied, this bag is for you." Then we stayed there, within two days our children came, yes. (cries)

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Your eldest went to Greece.

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, to Greece.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did he get the letter to go to the military, or what?

Hysni Krasniqi: No, it didn't, he finished it. But look, I'll tell you, he finished the Special Unit against the planes, they asked him to be a soldier, but he did not go. I said, "Son, you can't go as a soldier." He finished military service in Ljubljana. My Serbian neighbor said, "How could you send your child to Ljubljana?" I said, "I didn't send him, the state did." I found a person I know there, Xhehal Qehaja, he was an acquaintance and he went there and finished it. And I told him, "Son, you have to leave." He

went to Greece, went to Greece, back then it was. From Greece he went to France, he stayed with my brother for a long time.

They both spoke English. He stayed there for a few days and he took him to the English Channel. He got in there, he took a bag, he got to the other side. When he came out, he said, "I want political asylum." He was granted asylum and started his life. He spoke English, he didn't want to take the aid they gave, he said, "I want a job, I speak English." He found a job as a translator for those who came as refugees, what do I know. He still does that job to this day. Now he works from home, he fosters children. He has four children there. He had a house, he bought a house, he has six rooms, yes. That's right.

My second son went to Germany, we had a good friend in Germany, very good friend. He got on the bus here, we found a travel agency that took him to Germany easily. He went there. He was a very close friend of ours, our children always stayed together, he took him to the English Channel from Germany. He spoke great English, he still does. An English newspaper hired him...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Which year was this?

Hysni Krasniqi: Well, I swear, before...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Before the war?

Hysni Krasniqi: Before war, way before war.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Not the war of Kosovo, I mean before the war in Croatia or Bosnia...

Hysni Krasniqi: No, Bosnia, before Bosnia, I knew that war would also happen here, he took a small bag, he was very young. You know how old he was? He was 16 years old, not 17 yet. I felt very bad when he had to leave. I took him to the bus station and all his classmates came to tell him goodbye. He got in, then my friend put him on the train to the English Channel. No one asked anything from him, just the ticket because he could speak English. He gave them the ticket but at the border he had to show the passport. They said, "The passport is fake." "It is, true." "Why?" He said, "I've fled from war."

His brother was there, the older one. He said, "We ask," actually, he hired a lawyer, a political asylum. And he went to England. He didn't want aid either, he also started working immediately. He found a job at a cafe. To his day, he still is a manager, manager of a really important cafe. It's a big cafe, he is responsible for everything, material, wages, everything. They work, they're both good, they're both married, my three sons are married, they have children. This is how it is, they're good, they're very good. They help us a lot.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: So, during the war, you met with your youngest and oldest son.

Hysni Krasniqi: During the war, true. During the war, we met in Lic.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes.

Hysni Krasniqi: From Lic, we wanted, we said, “You have to get a house and stay there.” I said, “I want to stay with my children.” The children came to visit us, but it was many kilometers away, they didn’t eat there. They said, “Look, from today, you have one more room, and the children can sleep and eat here. They will stay with their parents.” We didn’t want to be a burden, I said, “We want to go with our children to London.” We took a bus, they took us to London to their apartment. We stayed there, I stayed for a month, but I couldn't stay longer. My wife and son stayed, then it started...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: To normalize...

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, normalize. Students asked me to go back, I don’t know how they got the address.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did you come back?

Hysni Krasniqi: I came back in ‘99, actually in ‘99, end of September. As soon as I returned, I asked the education community there. I said that I wanted to go back, they said “Where do you want to go? The war isn’t over yet, you have nowhere to sleep, you have nothing to eat, you have nothing to drink, there are mines.” They said, “We have held you for a year. You can apply for five years and continue to stay here. We will give you a house. I said, “Thank you very much, you have given us enough shelter.” They allowed me. They said, “The first plane that goes to Kosovo, you prepare the suitcase.” And so it happened.

When I came here, they said, “Your building was destroyed.” What do I know.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In what conditions did you find your house?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In what conditions did you find your house?

Hysni Krasniqi: The apartment was in perfect condition, meaning it wasn’t destroyed, but when I went inside, you can see it in the pictures. They stole everything, televisions, radios, gramophones, cameras, graphics, work tools. I stole all my working tools. You can even see the shots in the picture, they stole everything. They took my clothes. But they didn’t steal them, the Serb didn’t take tea cups, nor did they take the coffee cups. They had broken into the apartment four times. They broke into my apartment four times.

I came back, I went inside, what do I see? Ruined. I was scared to go inside, to be honest. I called KFOR and they checked it, seven in the toilet. “Don’t be afraid that there is nothing here, work freely, put things in their places,” but I didn’t know where to start first, clothes, or put the atelier in order? Slowly. They gave me 720 marks.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Pounds...

Hysni Krasniqi: Pounds. No, no, marks, not pounds. They said, “Why pounds? You use marks there.” And a pack of food for the road. I came here, I started to make a living. First I fixed everything. After a while, a month or so, my wife and son came.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you get the news about your brother?

Hysni Krasniqi: We got the news, my neighbors...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, while you were here...

Hysni Krasniqi: They were here, but they were originally from Macedonia, they said, “Your brother was killed.” My sister running away from the people at Sharra, do you know where Sharra is? While she was running away, she had a heart attack and they put her there, there was a pool, you might know. Do you know where the pool used to be? There. When we came from London, we came and got him out of the grave, two of my sister’s sons and a cousin, it was the four of us, we took and buried him in Mramor, because her sons were in Mramor. This is how it was. They said he is Tetova, we looked on the computer there, the name wasn’t there, it isn’t true then later we found out where he was. It was hard to find him, only his bones, we found them somewhere in Velania...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Are you talking about finding your brother...

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Who did you find?

Hysni Krasniqi: My brother, we found his bones, nothing else. A French group then, we weren’t even allowed to open it, it was only wrapped in a bag. They said, “How do you know he is your brother?” I said, “I know him even as a corpse.” He said, “How do you know?” “His left leg was broken while skiing and he has gold teeth.” I said. “Yes,” he said. Even they let us go. This is how it was.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Then your wife and son came back?

Hysni Krasniqi: Then my wife came back, we started life again. My wife started working where she used to, she worked in the Post Office, she started working and I started working in the University, that’s how we started life. Gradually we did everything, again we did everything.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did you start creating again?

Hysni Krasniqi: Creating began later, because I have trauma, when I get those, I start working something to forget it. All of these, this is how it was. Look, I hope we never forget it and it never gets repeated. I swear! Do you see what kind of a government we have? You see. I hope he can do something.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you remember Independence Day?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Independence day...

Hysni Krasniqi: I remember, it was very, it was...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you start that day?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you start that day?

Hysni Krasniqi: For me, it was a great burden being lifted, a great joy, it seemed that we were flourishing, we were renewing, a new life was coming for us. This is how I felt, to tell you the truth, but you can see that we didn't go the right path, one here, one there...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you do that day?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you do that day, did you go out or...

Hysni Krasniqi: Yes, we did, we celebrated like everyone else. But look, I'm not a person who loves celebrating, I'm distant in every occasion, the good and the bad, I handle them the same. I'm distant with everything. I know what happiness is, what sadness is, but I stay cool, it's better. For example, I don't go crazy, get out of human frames. One should always be aware of what one does, both on the street and at home, as one should be aware everywhere.

Some, why are you firing guns? Why are you firing guns? You had a time when you had to use guns, but not in freedom, not in weddings. Celebrate with your voice, not guns. What primitivism is it to shoot with a gun, *bim bim bim* {onomatopoeia}. What is it, tell me? It is, to tell you the truth, somehow it comes out of the human psyche, it comes out completely.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I don't have any other questions, but...

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I don't have any other questions, but if you have any questions, not questions, but anything to add about your work. Something I haven't asked you, a moment you could speak in more detail about.

Hysni Krasniqi: I have the pictures.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: We will look at them after the interview, it's something we can see...

Hysni Krasniqi: Look, to tell you the truth I could have created a lot, but I was part of a society that didn't understand me. I had so much energy and I had positive energy, not negative, but people didn't. Back then, the number-one athletes were never allowed to progress, they stopped them. First of all, they gave my student an atelier, but they didn't give me an atelier. Why didn't they give me the atelier? Because I wasn't in their hands. I'm not in anyone's hand, I'm the hand of myself and my people, not the hand of any bad dogma that works against society, against the people. I'm never in the dogma of anyone seeking anything, because I saw that this is not okay, this is not okay.

I hate selfishness. I hate three aspects of life: lies, theft, and betrayal, for me, these are the worst things that exist, yes. Lies are told, we know when they're told, for the country, for the country, lies are made and not for everything, for the rich, not to become rich for yourself, lying.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Something about you, something about your work I didn't ask?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Something about your work that I didn't ask about.

Hysni Krasniqi: My work, look, to tell you the truth I connect to nature, I love nature, I love ecologic nature, not with waste. When I see, when I see on the television, when they show that waste, look, that is the greatest catastrophe of our people.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where did you find your inspiration?

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Inspiration...

Hysni Krasniqi: I mostly find inspiration in nature. I take fragments from nature and try to live through them, live it with my heart and soul, and draw it on paper or paint it on canvas. For me, that's what's important. I'm not the kind of person who makes many images, I make portraits of sufferings, I have some portraits during the war with injured heads. I had the opportunity to do a lot, but they stopped my burst. That's what matters.

For example, I have the *Crops Cycle*. Why crops? Crops because our people suffered from malnutrition, suffered from malnutrition. Then I have the *Twig Bundles*. What are the twig bundles? It's a tool which our farmers always used, they used it to even the land, to dry trees, that's what bundles are, like protecting the country, the yard, that's what they are. I had those.

Then I have *The Fireflies*. What are the fireflies? The fireflies are the messengers of spring, the first sign that the crops are ready to harvest. Then this is how we knew that it's the time of the harvest, and that's what fireflies are to us. Like a phoenix *cik cik* {onomatopoetic} sending out the message that somewhere the time has come to harvest. Like that. Then I have *The Memory Flowers*, the place I was born in, Llukar, though I spent more time in Prishtina. The place I was born in is covered in flowers,

snowdrops, violets. What wonderful smell violets have, it's incredible, as if it were a perfume, I don't use them ever, only when I shave. Then there is some weed called Elmetum, maybe you've heard of it? If you put two leaves under a child's head, they sleep immediately, they rest. It has a nice smell. These things inspire me, ground, greenery, leaves, these are my inspiration, yes...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Thank you very much.

Hysni Krasniqi: You're welcome.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Let's end the interview here.

Hysni Krasniqi: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Let's end the interview here.

Hysni Krasniqi: However you want, I can tell you whatever I know...