

# Oral History Kosovo

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## INTERVIEW WITH LIRIJE BULIQI

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Duration: 78 minutes

Present:

1. Lirije Buliqi (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Fitim Shala (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

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you tell me when were you born, your surroundings, the city?

**Lirije Buliqi:** I was born in 1955, in Peja, in the Puhovac neighborhood. Back then Puhovac was one of the most forward-thinking neighborhoods, even though our economic standing was a disaster. For example, there were six children in my family, and life was such that all the children of the neighborhood hung out together. At home we did not have toys. Back then we used to play with broken car wheels, we played with spheres. You know, a very healthy childhood, we had wonderful times together. I was very sociable, in my circle of friends I hung out with boys, because there weren't many girls at the time when I was born.

So, you know, it was an unforgettable time. Those toys that we had, the dolls, we used to try to make them by ourselves, we made them out of clay. We either painted our dolls or made them with the loom, because most women did weave with the loom, they used the loom to make carpets, rugs, and others. You know, we tried to make toys out of the leftovers, create figurines. In that time, all of us had the same economic standing, you know there was this kind of poverty.

The streets were not paved with asphalt, you know, so while we were out in the street, we got so dirty that we had to take a shower when we went back home. We had great friendships, a very crowded neighborhood, very lively, we were very happy. [...]

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You mentioned the loom, did your mother weave with the loom?

**Lirije Buliqi:** My mother did weave with the loom, and I always stood next to her learning the craft and helping her here and there. This is what most of the women did: weaved carpets and rugs.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** They weaved them for personal use, or how was it?

**Lirije Buliqi:** No, actually weaving was done as a means of survival, because the majority did not work for state-run companies, there was no employment at the time. This helped us get by, and Mother had to work because we were six children, six children in school. So, yeah, it was a means of survival.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did your father do?

**Lirije Buliqi:** My father died young. I was five years old... I remember very little of him. So, my mother was taking care of us at all times. She even supported us through higher education.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What else can you tell me about education at the time?

**Lirije Buliqi:** I finished elementary school in... Back then it was called Boris Vukmirović, so that's where I started and finished elementary school.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How was it?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Our school was very old, the school desks were really old. I was an excellent pupil until the fourth grade, then from the fourth, actually the fifth you had to learn Serbian, it was called Serbo-Croatian at the time, and another foreign language, and that was Russian. So, we had two Slavic languages, which were very difficult to learn. We had... for example when we had Serbo-Croatian, we had to learn the Cyrillic alphabet and we had no books. It was not like today that they have all the course books. We did not have books, we had old books, the first graders, upon completing their courses, would pass the books to us. So, yeah, old books were passed down.

When we had Serbian, for example, the teacher would dictate, but we did not understand a word but we kept writing down. For example, something that left an impression on me that I will never forget, during dictation, she says, "Full stop - *tačka*" and we write it letter by letter *t-a-č-k-a*. You know, we didn't even know what we were writing, we didn't understand. But with time, in two-three years' time, we also learned the Russian language, and the teacher that taught us was also Serbian. At first, we did not understand Serbian or Russian, but we learned it, of course.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What kind of community was the one in Peja, was it mixed?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, it was mixed. We grew up in such an environment, we had neighbors from Montenegro that grew up with us, we knew each other's language more or less, we had our ways of communicating. It was a different society, we played together all sorts of games. All our free time that we had we spent it outside playing together, it did not make any difference if they were Serbs or something else. No, we were one and the same.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you go Patriarchate [Patriarchal Monastery of Peja]?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, we also went to Patriarchate, we gathered there, but when we went, all the children from the neighborhood would go together. We made a lot of noise there, as children do, we played. Sometimes they even threw us out (laughs) from the church.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Do you remember the frescoes that were there?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Frescoes, we didn't go inside much, we mostly played, there was a blackberry tree here, we used to go behind the blackberry tree, that's why they threw us out. It wasn't that we didn't have anything, because back then every house had trees because it was the part around Bistrica, every house had a garden, we were just drawn to go there. We started after... When I enrolled in the gymnasium, as students, we went there and we went... professors would take us there. For example, when we had figurative art classes, we went to the church, we would draw either the bells, or the house where they slept, or the tree, so some part that we found more interesting.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The environment was that picturesque?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, it was. The area was very big, a big yard.

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

**Lirije Buliqi:** No, not to Rugova, it was far. It was very far, we didn't have cars like today back then. Then we played with horse-drawn carriages, as children we would run after them, as every other child who is attracted to things they don't have at home. .

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** There were no cars at that time.

**Lirije Buliqi:** There were a few. Mostly when tourists came, because in general there were no cars.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were there tourists in Peja?

**Lirije Buliqi:** They mostly came for the Patriarchate.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** So, that was also some sort of exposure?

**Lirije Buliqi:** It was, yes. Or when we went to Montenegro, but the roads were horrible.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Okay, you mentioned that you finished high school Peja.

**Lirije Buliqi:** I finished *11 Maji High School* in Peja, yes.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was that period of your life like, can you tell us more?

**Lirije Buliqi:** It was, we enrolled by the results in elementary school. In the enrolling exam...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did you learn? What... what were those lessons that somehow prepared you for the future?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Back then, there wasn't preparation like now, but it depended on how intelligent you were (laughs). I mean, even parents couldn't teach you because they didn't have an education. At that

time, my mother and other women like my mother didn't get an education. We... I learned, my brothers were older so they finished school so they helped me. They finished high school, one of them finished in Kragujevac.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was Peja like during the time you were in high school, what kind of city, did it progress, did anything happen?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Actually, there was no progress in that period of time. Only the city center of Peja changed, the streets... I mean, while I was in high school they started to pave the part where we lived.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Which year?

**Lirije Buliqi:** The years... I don't remember, '68, I remember as a child the police would come to my neighbors. So, a politically convicted man who was... the flag...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Raised it.

**Lirije Buliqi:** He raised it, yes. So, he was in prison for a few years, then they let him go, but they would come and mistreat him every year, so in Bistrica. I remember as a child when they came, they went to Bistrica and mistreated him. His hands were tied, the temperatures were low, winter, they would mistreat him.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was it November, around Flag Day?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, around Flag Day, but also whenever they remembered, he was continuously mistreated.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did this also happen to other people?

**Lirije Buliqi:** I don't know about others, where I grew up we all knew this case.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You mentioned that, in the '60s, the development of the city began, what was it like until then, was it more like an oriental city?

**Lirije Buliqi:** The city, for example, we didn't have water at home, there was a water spring in the neighborhood. The whole neighborhood took water there, and we had Bistrica for other things.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What were the houses like?

**Lirije Buliqi:** The houses were low, small. They had a room or two. The houses were very small, and built with not very good material, very soft, I mean not right for buildings, to live in. But, how do I say,

we were happy, regardless of the situation, we still were happy despite the conditions we grew up in. So, healthy friendships, we helped each other with lessons, whatever we needed we were ready to help each other.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When the city began constructing, urbanism...

**Lirije Buliqi:** Not this part, because back then they started, as I said before, we had a lot of Montenegrin neighbors. Then, they began to go to Montenegro or Serbia. So, most of them, the structure of the residents in that part where I grew up changed. Then they came, Albanian people from different villages came there, so a part of the street there got paved and some new houses began to be built. So, in the part where I grew up, that part didn't develop more, just a part of the street was added, it got narrowed and they built houses.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you decide to come study in Prishtina?

**Lirije Buliqi:** I was... there weren't many... For Prishtina, when I finished the gymnasium, I came to study law. I started... I mean I finished two years and...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** First tell me how you decided?

**Lirije Buliqi:** I decided because my brother studied in Zagreb, I wanted to study psychology, I liked the subject in high school, but the conditions weren't very good and my brother influenced my decision. He said that he had felt very undervalued in Zagreb. So I decided to go to Prishtina, and I enrolled in the Law Faculty with an entrance exam. Students who were in gymnasium had an advantage getting enrolled there.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Lirije Buliqi:** We enrolled as students of the gymnasium, I mean people from the gymnasium were more special, we had an advantage in the entrance exam. The criteria were completely different in the gymnasium, it was... students were more disciplined, we used to have uniforms, you couldn't get into school without the uniform. Students who missed school or... the parents were called to come, otherwise they would be expelled.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you like this discipline?

**Lirije Buliqi:** It didn't bother me, I was a child.... Then when I grew up, I was more introverted, I was interested in learning, so I successfully finished the gymnasium, now I was going to study, where? I wanted to go to Zagreb, but it didn't happen. So, I studied law.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was it completely your decision?

**Lirije Buliqi:** My brother influenced me a little. Maybe because we weren't very good financially, but it was because as a student in Croatia, he was undervalued by his friends, colleagues, so he convinced me to go to Prishtina and study whatever I want. And I decided to study law, we were very good friends with people in my class, and we all decided to study law. Some finished it, some didn't. In the meantime, I started working at the Gallery, the moment I started working there I began to like art. Even though I was talented in high school, especially in collages, I had a grade of five.<sup>1</sup> But I wasn't interested, I never thought I would study art.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were there artists at that time in your city?

**Lirije Buliqi:** There were...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** That you understood what is..

**Lirije Buliqi:** There was the arts high school, but I never thought about it.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was there... Did the arts high school had a great reputation, did it affect the city?

**Lirije Buliqi:** No, really. Not that much in Peja. People from other cities, Gjakova, Prishtina, Prizren came to school in Peja, but not many people from Peja. I didn't even dream that I would work at the Gallery.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did it happen that you decided to apply for a job at the Gallery?

**Lirije Buliqi:** It happened so that I completed my second year of college, and I registered for the third, and decided to get a job. I saw a job opening published in the newspaper *Rilindja*,<sup>2</sup> I applied, I got accepted and started working there in the beginning of the 1980.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Who was at that time at the Gallery?

**Lirije Buliqi:** When I went to the Gallery, the first person I contacted was the late Engjëll Berisha.<sup>3</sup>

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was his role at that time in the Gallery?

**Lirije Buliqi:** He was a collaborator.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** External?

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<sup>1</sup> Grade A on an A-F scale (Five-0)

<sup>2</sup> *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

**Lirije Buliqi:** No, internal. At the time, they had different job titles, he was a curator, and I spoke to him, he was the first person I met. Then there was an entrance exam, evaluation exam, and I was... there were too many candidates, there was an exam. At the time, it was important to be bilingual, you had to know Serbo-Croatian, it was one of the preconditions to get the job. We had to translate a document from Albanian to Serbian and vice-a-versa. On April 1st, I started working for the Gallery.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you know anything about the Gallery?

**Lirije Buliqi:** I didn't know what the Gallery does, I didn't know their annual program and what kind of institution the Gallery was, because we did not have a gallery before this one that you went to visit exhibitions. As a student, besides the theater, I don't recall going to another cultural institution.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Lirije Buliqi:** As a student I settled in the *dom* [Serbian - *dormitory*], so in the student center, with three friends, roommates. The first day when we went out, so the city was completely unknown to me. From the bus station to the student canteen (laughs) we met there, Dardania was just a field. So, to the center, we walked a lot to get to the center.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Where was the center then, at Grand, or in the old city?

**Lirije Buliqi:** At Grand. We met there and we went to the *korzo*,<sup>4</sup> so it was kind of obligatory to go there at night, get ready fast and go to the *korzo*. We just walked around there (laughs). As for activities, I know I went to the cinema for the first time.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When you came Prishtina?

**Lirije Buliqi:** In Prishtina, yes. I don't remember what I watched the first time, but I felt a pleasure, a, a, that I came to a bigger city than where I grew up.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** With your friends from high school or...

**Lirije Buliqi:** All my friends were from high school, but in the meantime, we met other friends, our friend group grew. I had a lot of friends from Gjakova, from Prizren, my roommate was also from Prizren, we had a good time, we found a common language, even learning... learning was a little problematic, some learned more, some less. But whoever wanted to learn had to wake up early and go to the library. The library was then where the National Gallery is today. We studied for two or three hours, lectures were obligatory, even though we had some classes in the big amphitheater of the faculty, there were around 300 people probably.

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<sup>4</sup> Main street, reserved for pedestrians.



Us, now I'm talking about myself, me and my friends, we were around five-six people. Those who learned more sat in the first rows so they would hear better. We went to the last row, we were the first to sit in the last row (laughs). It was... so... I mean you learned as much as you could, lectures were an experience to prepare what the class was about, even though there was a lack of books, so we didn't have much literature, but didn't want to learn even what we had.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were the professors from here or from Belgrade, where were they from?

**Lirije Buliqi:** No, the professors were from Macedonia and from here mostly.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** And the literature...

**Lirije Buliqi:** Albanian, we learned in Albanian. I mean those classes where we had to learn more, in other classes, we would read books in Serbian, someone would find a book then it would be shared. Whoever wanted to learn, they could achieve something, I mean finished it on time, even though I had a friend who didn't learn much in high school but he got good grades here (laughs). You know, for us, it was somehow.., Those who knew him... he graduated on time, I got a job, so some finished it, some didn't.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was Elida pastry shop open back then?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, it was, yes.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Next to the Gallery?

**Lirije Buliqi:** What I recall is that I was sitting in Elida when I first saw the job opening. It was at Elida that I filled in the job application, and when I got out, I wondered who should I ask to give me some directions to find the Gallery, because it had just opened and no one knew where it was. The moment I got out of Elida, by chance, I looked at the store next door, because back then the Gallery was in the mall section of the Boro Ramiz Youth Palace, and that's when I noticed the Gallery. I got in and it was then that I first met Engjëll Berisha and handed over my application and was notified that I will have to undergo an exam. I was among the best and started working.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How was your first day at the Gallery?

**Lirije:** The first day was... the exhibition space was really big. At the time, on the right side of the entrance, I remember this great hall, I wondered, "What takes place here?" There was an exhibit there, the artwork was placed, because for me...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Which exhibit was open when you started working there?

**Lirije Buliqi:** E... {puts on her glasses looks at something} it was the pre-Ottoman Padua exhibit {removes her glasses}.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What kind of objects were there, did you find it interesting?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Now at first, I was working more in the office, so all my work was in the office. For example, when we received the artworks for the exhibition, we would prepare the documents to ship them. Of course, they went through the customs, but we used to have the customs service that would bring the artwork to the Gallery. So the customs procedures were simpler. Then, of course, we installed the works. We were a very small team of six, and all of us would get involved in the exhibition production.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What professional profiles did they have?

**Lirije Buliqi:** There was the director Shyqri Nimani,<sup>5</sup> Engjëll Berisha was the curator, we had an accountant, it was I, we had Rrahman the technician, and a cleaner. So, this was the core team with which we started. The Gallery was positioned so that, you know, we always had many visitors because the environment was such that it imposed on you, people that went to the mall would drop by. Behind Boro Ramiz Youth Palace was the marketplace, and people that went to the market would come with their grocery bags directly to the Gallery. You know, we had a lot of visitors from all walks of life, not only artists. It was quite pleasurable, a great experience, something different for me. I liked meeting artists, I was young at the time and they were older and I didn't even know most of them. They had to introduce them to me who is who, and for a long period of time, I worked hard to know everyone.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You got to meet the most important artists of the time.

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Each of them had a solo show at the Gallery. What did it mean to be a part of the most important moment in the development of visual arts?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Every artist who came was... was with... because usually a year before was done...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The program.

**Lirije Buliqi:** The program. They would come and express interest either in slots or bring materials for the catalog. You know, at the time, we would type everything with a typewriter, that was considered physical labor. If you wanted more copies, for example, if you needed two copies, it was way easier, if three were needed, you had to have a lot of strength to type the letters on the page. If you made an error, you had to tear down the entire page and repeat it, because there was no other way to make it

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<sup>5</sup> Shyqri Nimani (1941) was born in Shkodër, Albania. He is a Kosovo based graphic designer and professor, graduated from the Academy of Applied Arts in Belgrade. Nimani is known as one of the first professional Albanian graphic designers, he is also one of the founders of the Graphic Design department at the Faculty of Arts, University of Pristina and one of the first directors of the National Gallery of Kosovo.

right (laughs).

So, it was hard work that took a lot of time.

They had to bring their biographies, we had to photograph all the artwork, and all the work that needed to be done to prepare the catalogue. The director worked closely with the printhouse, he would do it all by himself, he would send the content, did the page layout of the catalogue, supervise it. So, this is how we started, but we worked a lot. It was my first job ever, I did not know how things worked, but very soon I got a handle. We gathered the material, prepared it for print, and the director would take care of the rest.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What other internal procedures did you have?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Excuse me?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you have meetings?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Meetings. We had the Council of Elders, back then, it was the Council of Elders of the Gallery. Once a year, the Elders would gather and agree upon the annual program. They were Gallery affiliates and the director was present in every meeting, and the curator Engjëll Berisha. The exhibition dates were set, in fact, not dates exactly, but only the names were set of those who were going to exhibit that year. Depending who was more prepared, they exhibited first. The budget was defined for the entire year and the Ministry of Culture, at the time Bureau for Culture, supported it. Back then, the entire budget requested for the Gallery was deposited into the Gallery's bank account. If, for an exhibition, we had requested insufficient financial means, then the Gallery was able to support it through other budget lines, because, in a way, we had to spend the yearly budget during the year.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did the Gallery staff start growing?

**Lirije Buliqi:** During the first two years of the Gallery, the staff started growing, and we hired a curator of the collection, and an in-house expert, such were the job titles at the time. There was a library, many books were bought at the time, there used to be a budget line for...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was it part of the same space or how?

**Lirije Buliqi:** There was only one big office, and that's where the library was in fact, but in the library shelving, professional books were accessible only to the staff. At the time, the Gallery started buying works of art, with the budget that we had, we bought artworks, especially prints from artists of other republics, but... artworks were also given as gifts for the collection.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Okay, let's talk about this. In the beginning, when you started working, the Gallery already had an existing budget that was inherited from the Cultural Propaganda Center, what was its name...

**Lirije Buliqi:** Cultural, yes. They also had some from the Ministry of Culture, so that part...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What kind of collection was it, can you tell us about that, how it enriched?

**Lirije Buliqi:** When I went there, we found those that were done months ago, when I started working there, those were already, they were submitted with a verbal process, the origin of each artwork is mentioned.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Registered.

**Lirije Buliqi:** We have them all registered. There was this practice that, when artists had a solo show, the Gallery would buy two of their works. If the artists were willing, they would give one away as a gift. It was a very rich collection and it was getting enriched like that.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Who joined then, how did it start to grow?

**Lirije Buliqi:** This was the staff for many years.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** From '82 and on?

**Lirije Buliqi:** No, from... the staff grew, when I started we were six people, then we were eight. So, these eight people worked for a long time, until... ..

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Who was there, Blerim Luzha?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Blerim and Rexhep Goçi.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** And Rexhep Goçi, as curators?

**Lirije Buliqi:** As curators. One of them was in charge of the Gallery's collection, the other in charge of the collaborations, Engjëll also had the same job title. For a very long time, we worked with this staff and we had many big international exhibitions. At the time, we exhibited Picasso and Calder,<sup>6</sup> these works belonged to the Skopje Museum of Arts, and for this exhibition, we had to ask for additional security from police to secure the building. Though Boro and Ramiz had security for the entire mall, we asked for police forces to secure the building during the course of the exhibition...

**Erëmirë:** To secure the exhibition?

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<sup>6</sup> Alexander Calder (July 22, 1898 - November 11, 1976) was an American sculptor whose work was primarily devoted to kinetic art.

**Lirije:** To secure it, yes. During the day, when the exhibition was open to the public, the artwork was there, and the audience could see it from a certain distance, to not have them get too close, we placed a ribbon. At night, when Picasso's exhibit was closed, I would place the artwork into a metal safe (laughs) in my office.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were there other situations like this? When you had to... the space...

**Lirije Buliqi:** Situations... yes, no. Yes, there were... there was no need for police for the space we had, there was security, as I said before. And we had very big exhibits with... when we began collaboration with Albania. So, there was Odhise Paskali, Abdurrahim Buza, so at that time the number of visitors increased.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you tell us about this collaboration, how did these two places start communicating on a cultural level?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Back then, there was the Office for National Collaboration, so it was in the middle of the Ministry of Culture and the Gallery... I mean a collaboration with invitation from the Gallery for an exhibit, I mean Abdurrahim Buza and Odhise Paskali, So, then was the the biggest flow of visitors. When I wasn't working there, so in '97, when the Gallery opened and this, the 100th anniversary of League of Prizren, then was, as I've heard, the number of visitors was huge, they had to come in divided into groups.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you tell us why was it so important, I understand the element of identity...

**Lirije Buliqi:** There were borders back then, collaboration started for the first. So the borders were open for cultural collaboration, then it continued...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Even though it was important to see what was happening with visual arts in Albania...

**Lirije Buliqi:** Those were more individual, since they went... for example, I know that I had the chance to go to Albania for the first time in 2006 (laughs). So...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** But artists went...

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, not through the Gallery. If they went, they went individually. They didn't... not through the Gallery.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Through BVI.<sup>7</sup>

**Lirije Buliqi:** BVI od Culture, yes. Back then it financed the activities.

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<sup>7</sup> Bureau of Self-Governing Interests, now the Public Housing Enterprise in Pristina.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you tell us more about the program of the Gallery during those first ten years? Have in mind, I'm also interested because you were part of Yugoslavia, you had communication with many other galleries in provinces and in other republics. What was this exchange like?

**Lirije Buliqi:** We collaborated by exchanging exhibits, so, we would take an exhibit from the Republic of Croatia, the next year we would send an exhibit there. Collaboration was of very high level, so we had really good exhibits with Croatia, Ljubljana, Montenegro, and national collaborations. So, if an international exhibition that was of high value went to Croatia, that exhibition went around, so, it also came to Prishtina. And if it was international from Albania, for example, it didn't show only Prishtina or Tirana, it went to other municipalities. It went to Podujeva, Gjakova, Peja, so, the same exhibit. So international ones were exchanged.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** So the Gallery also had access to share art in other municipalities. You also sent them to smaller galleries, but at same time, you were part of a bigger network that circulated the exhibits, what happened in Ljubljana also happened in Prishtina...

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, that happened, or we sent them, it went to Belgrade, Zagreb, or the other way around. If it came from there, we took them there, but not a lot, because there weren't many galleries here, so they were small. They especially went to Gjakova..

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The House of Culture?

**Lirije Buliqi:** ...in Gjakova and Mitrovica was... yes, it was.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What kind of art was promoted?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Back then, there were more paintings, paintings and sculptures, so visual. Not videos and things like this. There were lectures, art critics came time after time, they were interested in the artists, we took them to ateliers, and this is how it worked. For example, if a commission of a few artists was formed and went to visit a peculiar artist's atelier, they looked at their work, evaluated whether they can participate in the exhibit or not, how many works, so there was always a commission.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you go to the ateliers with them?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Rarely, I rarely went because there was very little staff and someone had to stay in the Gallery. I went, for example, I had the opportunity to go to Skopje, Ljubljana, and Croatia.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You went to form relations, to get work?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Actually, I was there on official work, we held meetings, mostly the director with artists or some gallery we went to. So, I took part in these places. I also went to Ljubljana, his name is Jože, to

his atelier, and it was a great experience for me to see an atelier of a huge artist, who had many works. Very good ones, that were valued all over the world.

## Part Two

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I would like to go back to you and the Gallery, how did it happen that you decided to study sculpture?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Well, now I had two years of experience at the Gallery and I dropped my studies. I did not have time to study law. The late Engjëll Berisha noticed my talent, I would draw or browse art books and catalogs. He saw some of my drawings that I did for myself in my free time, and he encouraged me to enroll at the Academy of Fine Arts. Though I felt bad at the time, because I thought, “All the professors of art are at the Gallery, and they would think...” I was afraid of being perceived as taking advantage of that. Back then we had different work ethics.

Finally I decided, I applied, it was a five-day entry exam, I worked hard, I was highly evaluated and admitted. I chose sculpture because I like rough materials, clay and similar. Perhaps it’s something I have from my childhood, we did not have toys, and we played with mud. But I got in, and now the issue was whether they will approve of me attending the lectures with the full-time students. I was fortunate that I found understanding with the director and he approved it, of course, in the presence of all staff members who expressed...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** They agreed?

**Lirije:** They agreed that, if need be, to replace me at work for an hour, an hour and a half, while I’m attending the lectures. I graduated on time, it was good, I really liked it. We worked hard, though the work conditions were really poor. At the Academy, we lacked the materials to do sculptures. If there was clay, then we had to buy the tools to model the gypsum on our own. As students we had many expenses, because the Academy could not afford to cover these expenses. So, I’m talking about the time when I studied.

In the winter, for example, the studio was really cold, the clay would freeze and we couldn’t work with it. Then we would model something out of paper, we improvised sculpture, but somehow we graduated. I was a student under the late Agim Çavdërbasha,<sup>8</sup> so in my last year of studies, he wasn’t

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<sup>8</sup> Agim Çavdarbasha (1944-1999) was born in Pejë, Kosovo. He was a Kosovo Albanian sculptor, he graduated from the Academy of Applied Arts of Belgrade and the Academy of Arts of Ljubljana. Çavdarbasha was a major influence on contemporary sculpture in Kosovo. He was a member of the Academy of Figurative of Arts of Kosovo and later of the Academy of Science and Arts.

well health-wise, he was admitted to the hospital in Ljubljana. I got my final grade from Zoran Karalejić,<sup>9</sup> who substituted for him in the early '90s.

**Erëmirë Buliqi:** Were there other sculpture professors in the Sculpture Department?

**Lirije Krasniqi:** There was Agim Çavdërbasha and Zoran Karalejić.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** No other at the time?

**Lirije Buliqi:** There was this other... no, actually just the two of them.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did you learn from them? They were key figures in sculpture. I mean, Karalejić was Çavdërbasha's student, but Çavdërbasha was the most important.

**Lirije Buliqi:** It was, as I said, at the time, when I was studying under him, he was not well health-wise, he had problems. So, he assigned us to produce works, but he was not there all the time to follow us through, he did but up to a point, so Karalejić had to take over. He tried to keep up with us, there was nothing to... only if we needed to consult him on something, but actually we always worked independently.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When I remember from these books that were promoted in Prishtina was that some kind of fair always existed in the yard of the Rectorate, where different sculptures were presented, was it part of the culture?

**Lirije Buliqi:** No, no, I don't think it was. Only if the students did it. Or if it was a program of the Academy, otherwise I don't know, I'm not sure. I wasn't...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I wanted to know, was sculpture promoted in the public sphere, was it...

**Lirije Buliqi:** For example, when the students finished the year, an exhibit was opened, like... after they took their grades, there were exhibits. Otherwise, I don't know. When the Academy was here, sculpture was, there were some barracks here where the unfinished church is, that's where we had classes. I didn't stay there longer, when the class was finished, I went back to work.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were there exhibitions that showcased sculpture at the Gallery? I am just wondering what was the status of the medium at the time, if it was promoted?

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<sup>9</sup> Zoran Karalejić (1937) was born in Prizren, Kosovo. He studied sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Pristina and Belgrade. He worked at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Pristina until 1999. During the Milosević regime, his artistic practice was politicized. Though he was primarily a modernist sculptor, in the '90s he was commissioned to do many realist statues of Serbian national heroes and intellectuals, such as the Vuk Karadžić statue placed in front of the Faculty of Philology in Pristina.



**Lirije Buliqi:** Agim Çavdërbasha's exhibition, Svetomir Arsić<sup>10</sup> had an exhibition, there were few exhibitions, you know, it was promoted. There was one from Niš, there was this artist, but I can't recall the name, she had some really interesting sculptures. There was this other one from Skopje, then from Albania, a sculpture exhibition from Albania through a collaboration that used to exist between the two galleries. So, there were exhibitions in which the medium of sculpture was present.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In '81, the students' protest, did it affect the Gallery and life, coexistence?

**Lirije Buliqi:** No, at work it didn't... it didn't reflect much, because artists weren't very involved, I think. We had problems with the space, where the Gallery was, had problems with... they would cut out electricity. Maybe it wasn't because of the protest, it was because of the rest, the rent was huge, the Ministry couldn't afford it. So, there was a period there, we failed, we paused.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Lirije Buliqi:** So, it was open here if it was, how do I say {explains with here hands} in small dimensions, for example, when they also went through Kosova, Prishtina, Peja, Prizren, I know they went to Podujeva, Mitrovica, but not all of them.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You educated people in visual arts.

**Lirije Buliqi:** Those that came from Albania mostly, the others couldn't, those were easier.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did the community concentrate more in the city, or did you have an address?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Now they had an address. Even though youngsters also tried, young students, those who finished it and as students who graduated in '80, there was an exhibit. Then the exhibit went to, all the new artists went to Japan, Paris, so...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** So, the Gallery also sold in...

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** A point which shared the artist, exhibited in other countries.

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, yes. Especially in Japan, they also went to Paris.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did they only go through the Association of Artists and through the Association and the Gallery?

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<sup>10</sup> Svetomir Arsić - Basara (1928) was born in the village of Sevce, the Sharr Mountains. He is a Serbian sculptor and storyteller. In 1958, he graduated from the Academy of Applied Arts in Belgrade, under Rade Stanković. Arsić was a member of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo and was widely known in Yugoslavia for his war monuments.

**Lirije Buliqi:** The Association was also involved in these, how do I say, the activities of associations exhibited in the Gallery and the Association of Figurative and Applied Artists had an appointment.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** And the Faculty for the final exhibit, right?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Faculty, no {shakes her head}, not in the Gallery.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The Academy of Arts didn't have an appointment?

**Lirije Buliqi:** The Gallery, no, not the Academy, not for students, just these... I know that once in '80, there an exhibit was opened, it was called *The Diploma*, that generation of artists in '80 opened the exhibit and it wasn't practiced anymore. After they had it, because that... actually, they had those in the Academy, they got graded and the work of students was exhibited.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Lirije Buliqi:** Back then, almost every exhibit that happened was exchange, so you brought it, every country that brought their exhibits here, we would send ours there the next year. It was a regular exchange.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Reciprocity.

**Lirije Buliqi:** Reciprocity, yes. {Puts on her glasses} these were, {looks down to her notes} it was in Ireland, Glasgow, Holland, Great Britain... Sarajevo, all the prints in '85.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were prints more developed or what?

**Lirije Buliqi:** More developed than... prints were more developed, and it was exhibited more. I don't know if it was because of the transport or the work, but there... look, there was always friendship, always with the director, because Shyqri was a serigrapher, he did the posters and such. It seems Fatmir Krypa had the group, Hysni Krasniqi, then there were some {puts on her glasses} Fatmire Kyrpa, these were the regulars, they would come, Ymer Shaqiri.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Yes, they also were at the Biennale in Slovenia.

**Lirije Buliqi:** At the Biennale, they were at the Biennale, now I... So, they were in Ireland, Japan, {looks at her notes} to Budva, New Delhi. For example, Xhevdet Xhafa was in New Delhi, {reads her notes} Xhevdet Xhafa, Destil Marković, Dimitar Kondovski. They all went to New Delhi.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Lirije Buliqi:** Back then it was, there was a distinction in employment, so there were three to one. Three Albanians (laughs), three Serbians, and one Albanian. The collaboration was always mutual here, artists were invited, they didn't compete. Back then it was, those who were more active were invited to group exhibits and went to other places.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** They also made sure all communities were represented.

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, yes, surely. It was somewhat obligative. But it worked, there was good art, ours and theirs.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** All communities.

**Lirije Buliqi:** All communities, yes {nods her head}.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Is there anything you want to add before we get to '89? About work in the Gallery, for its public program, lectures?

**Lirije Buliqi:** There were lectures, they would also come, how do I say, for example Vlada Bužančić came, an art critic, he lectured here. Some people from Belgrade came and held lectures, media would come, whoever was interested could come, artists, to follow the lecture and... I don't know.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was there an opinion about what the Gallery is doing, so the media wrote about the Gallery...

**Lirije Buliqi:** The media always wrote, at some point... I mean all the media wrote, *Jedinstvo* also followed the Gallery's work for a long time, with positive critics. Later, they started, all of those, it was the same journalist who started writing the opposite. Back then, the turmoil started, some kind of distinction. Everything was criticized by them.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** This is more around '88-'89.

**Lirije Buliqi:** Then, yes. It was obvious...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was the reason, why did they want to damage the work, since it was common?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Back then... this was... when we exhibited, when there were common exhibits, if a Serb participated in the exhibit, it was criticized. Even the preparation of the program of the Gallery, and the program in general, the exhibits, were all criticized. Once there was a check-up from the police and the Office for International Relations, which was in operation back then, they came thinking they would find something according to what was written, and everything was in order, with the announcements of exhibits, with programs, everything was in order. They would look if they were bilingual, if Serbian was parallel with Albanian. So, English was also obligatory, so every catalog was in English, Serbian, and Albanian.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The control increased?

**Lirije Buliqi:** It increased, more from journalists because there was no need, once maybe they had the wrong information, never again.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Then how, until when was Shyqri Nimani there?

**Lirije Buliqi:** He was...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** He was there for ten years, right?

**Lirije Buliqi:** '90, he was there for ten years, until '90. In '91 the director changed. Shyqri finished his mandate, two mandates. The new director came, then we faced other obstacles, because this, how do I say, the financing, Ministry [of Culture] of Serbia financed the Gallery.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Yes, we lost the autonomy as a territory, then...

**Lirije Buliqi:** At the time, we had many financial problems, so not many activities. Electricity was cut a few times, the Gallery was closed, actually we could not enter until a solution was found. Then, the Museum of Revolution, where the Gallery is housed today used to be the Museum of Revolution. The Museum was transformed with a decision from the Ministry of Culture of Serbia, but luckily the workers were transferred to work at the Kosovo Museum. So, no one was fired, but the exhibition space remained and the building was given to the Gallery. At first, when we went, they willingly gave us the space, the director of the Museum of Revolution freed two offices for us so that we could continue with work. Though we could not really do work, we had no public program, we did nothing.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** For how many years...?

**Lirije Buliqi:** We did nothing for three years, that was until '92, '93. A new director was appointed, and until '93, we had only two offices, then when the Museum was transformed, then the building was left to the Gallery. That's when we started with some programming, because the violent measures took place and a Serbian director was appointed, then we organized two or three exhibitions. In the beginning, we organized the Kosovo Spring Saloon, most of the participating artists were Serbs, hardly four or five Albanian artists replied to our invitation. So, then the Albanians started boycotting, though we did print a few exhibition catalogues, there were few participating artists, but not in great numbers as it used to be. The Gallery began exhibiting Byzantine frescoes...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did this affect the collection?

**Lirije Buliqi:** No, they did not touch the collection.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** No, I mean did these political issues start to reflect on what kind of works were being collected?

**Lirije Buliqi:** This was all connected to politics. The fact that we did not have a space was political. The space was Museum's, and there they organized their own activities. We hardly organized three exhibitions.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you have exhibitions while it was still the Museum of Revolution?

**Lirije Buliqi:** No, for us it was closed. The works of the collection were withdrawn, and in those conditions for a few years, there were some exhibitions mainly of Serbian and Macedonian artists. Also, Montenegro had one with the frescoes. There was also this exhibition of this sculptor...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did the staff change?

**Lirije Buliqi:** No, the staff grew. A curator came, Bilana Vraniqi came, there was no one else. Then some *izbeglica* [Srb. *refugees*] came (laughs).

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Refugees.

**Lirije Buliqi:** Refugees came from wars, from Bosnia, they came there, three of them were hired.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In the Gallery?

**Lirije Buliqi:** In the Gallery. They weren't, they were cleaners, the one who was a curator, the other one was a technical worker until it closed down, the war started.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were there... before we talk about that. What kind of artists were exhibited there, was it obvious... did the exhibits orient towards the icons or how?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Not just icons, there also... I have to see, because names...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** No, just your opinion, were there, or weren't there?

**Lirije Buliqi:** No, I think they were paintings, prints, and sculptures, I wanted to say that even this artist...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Arsić.

**Lirije Buliqi:** Arsić exhibited his works, he had an exhibition at the Gallery, but then he asked to loan some of his works that we had in the collection. He asked for twenty sculptures to send in Belgrade to exhibit and those never returned. So, these are among those works that are missing in the collection.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The war happened, or?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, war happened and they were there. But then I requested their return after the war, but he did not allow it, he said, “My house was burned down [from war].” He used this as an excuse to never return them. Though the Academy of Arts and Science in Serbia does mention that Arsić’s works belong to the collection of the National Gallery of Kosovo.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How was the war, did you go to work during the war, during the bombing?

**Lirije Buliqi:** During the war, the bombing, we did go to work, but not much, a few hours. Altogether, we were three or four working, we didn’t know what to do because Albanians already quit their jobs. Some were forced to quit, but at the Gallery, we were not, we had no pressure, we were not forced to sign any document, though we would not accept. But then we consulted the former Minister of Culture in exile, Mr. Bicaj, he said, “If the Serbs did not bring anything for you to sign and you are not under pressure, don’t quit” because everybody quit, “don’t quit your job under no circumstance.” So, we did not quit, we continued, but I remember that we were let off for two weeks.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was their justification?

**Lirije Buliqi:** There was no justification, only that, “You don’t have to show up in the next two weeks.” We had no idea what was going on.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When was this, in the beginning?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, it was in the beginning, right in the beginning. It was at that time when Albanians were expelled from their homes and deported. So, two weeks, then later they called us back to work, but it didn’t take long and they were forced to leave. Later the director came, in fact, the director did not, but someone took charge... when the Serbs left, so the Serbs were forced to quit their jobs, then we remained. But no one from our staff was here, Blerim, Rexhep, all of them were deported. So, I was all by myself in the Gallery for a month. So, in the entire Gallery I was all by myself.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Who was the last director, Tanasković?<sup>11</sup>

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, it was Tanasković. He was very polite and treated us well. I know that he had problems with his fellow Serbs, because he supported us and did not fire any of us. There was this time when he placed the labels on our office doors, though they were not needed, however he did that in both languages: Albanian and Serbian. I recall the two of them got into a fight, the director of the

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<sup>11</sup> Ljubiša Tanasković (1942–2017) was born in Sredska, near Prizren, Kosovo. A painter by training, Tanasković was the Director of the Pristina Gallery of Arts during the 1990s. He graduated from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux–Arts in Lyon, France in 1974, and received his master's degree from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Pristina in 1994.

library, who was a Serb, with the director of the Gallery, who was a Serb too. But he was very fair with us and very correct.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you tell me more about this month when you were all by yourself at the Gallery? You were the only one who had the Gallery's keys?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, yes. This was the most difficult month. I didn't know... it was June, June.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Okay. June, 1999.

**Lirije Buliqi:** '99. It was really scary because the city was emptied out, you didn't know what to expect, no one was in the office, no one was in the building. I was all alone in the Gallery, but I have to stress this, that the collection was not touched. So, they could take it if they wanted to. Those two weeks when we were asked not to come to work, we were sure that they wanted to take the collection, but no, they didn't touch it, except Arsić that loaned his works from the collection and never returned them. So for a month I waited for someone to come, if someone would come to ask questions, or they forgot about the Gallery altogether.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Tell me more about the month of June 1999, it was June 12 when the city was liberated, so a big part of that month you were under pressure from Serbs?

**Lirije Buliqi:** At first, I mean it was great joy to see the Serbian army withdrawing and the Albanian population returning to their homes. I remember being out in *Kurrizi* [*The Spine*] and not recognizing anybody, you could see... because the city was emptied out, all empty, this aspect was terrifying, it was terrible. I went out into the street and saw people and said to them, "Welcome!" People that I never met. Even now I don't know them, you know, but I was really happy to see them, because the city without people looked like a horror movie.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Bleak.

**Lirije Buliqi:** Bleak and terrifying, because you didn't know where they were and where they went.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were there Serbian paramilitary forces in the neighborhood?

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, there were plenty. I would go to work later than usual, would stay two-three hours, but the moment I would get to the Gallery, I would lock the door because I was afraid who would come, the collection was there, and I was a woman all by myself. For the entire month, this is how it was. Every day I went to the Gallery, then I came home because I also feared that someone might break in. You know, it was horrible. Luckily, while at the Gallery, no one came to the door to provoke me, I mean, no one came, in those days, no one passed by.

I went to work, later Blerim came time after time. So, for a month I remember being all alone in the Gallery. After a month, maybe I am not being exact, but I know that I kept the Gallery locked, and I

heard the ring and went down the stairs. Now, I knew Luan [Mulliqi]<sup>12</sup> as an artist, but the person who accompanied him I didn't know. He said, "I came to introduce the new director of the Gallery." And I, of course, was overjoyed. We opened our doors, the director came, we called the staff to come back and start work. So these were some of the sequences of those days, because my memory is a bit erased.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** So, the after war period began with Luan?

**Lirije Buliqi:** The after war period begins, yes.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did the Gallery rebuild, I mean the staff, the people...

**Lirije Buliqi:** The staff, a part of them were no longer here, Blerim came, after a while Rexhep also came, not how we started. We also notified Rrahman, because Rrahman didn't work regularly, I was here. So, this is how we started, then we immediately started organizing exhibits, we fixed the offices, we adapted, and we started with exhibits.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Which were the first exhibits?

**Lirije Buliqi:** The reopening of the exhibition was done with an exhibition.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** With an exhibition, what kind of exhibition?

**Lirije Buliqi:** With an exhibition, yes. There was also Golgota Kosovare, a group of artists who got together. So, it seems like the pleasure of reopening was the same as when I started working there. The artists were happy, we didn't know... emotions, very interested to exhibit. The reopening happened and a lot of artists came, international came, there were also internationals who came regularly. Then the reopening of the job vacancy happened, us the existing staff, according to UNMIK, we had to apply for our jobs.

Then we got accepted, a more professional staff. When we started in the beginning, we didn't even have the means. We didn't even have money, we didn't have wages, but Luan started getting donations, he at least ensured our wages, I think he even started using his own money just to cover us, we didn't have wages or material or anything. Then we started getting donations, the activity began, there were new job vacancies, we continued with exhibitions. Then the Artistic Board formed, then the Director Board, because in the beginning it was artistic, then it was the Director Board, the activities began in the Gallery.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Then, when you became part of the Ministry, when did the Ministry begin to take responsibility for the Gallery?

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<sup>12</sup> Luan Mulliqi (1953) born in Gjakova, Kosovo, graduated from the Academy of Figurative Arts, the Department of Sculpture in Pristina in 1977. He received a master's degree in Belgrade in 1979. He was the first post-war director of the National Gallery of Arts.



**Lirije Buliqi:** We started with the activities, but everything went very slowly. So, we started getting our wages, it was a long procedure, first with job vacancies, then, how do I say, with the minimum wage, you know. It was a very complicated administrative period, until the decision was made for every exhibition to apply, to make a project for every exhibition, one by one, and it's still the same.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Liri, there were ceramics workshops that were organized in the Gallery during the time when Luan Mulliqi was the director, can you tell us more about this?

**Lirije:** It was 2004, actually in 2003, the Gallery had an exhibition of a great ceramic artist Hanibal Salvaro.<sup>13</sup> And he offered to lead a workshop, which was supported by the director. For us that was... the university did not offer such courses and I did not know the work process. So, we were really happy, we were a group of twenty artists. The demand was even greater, but we could not accommodate more than that. Salvaro offered to help, actually we bought the kiln, which was quite expensive, but the Ministry of Culture approved our request to purchase it, and he raised the funds for clay and glazings and tools that are needed for ceramic-making.

**Erëmirë:** During these workshops, he taught you many techniques in ceramics or how?

**Lirije:** At first, he brought readymade vases, but I was not attracted to that, and he brought clay. As I told you, it was an artform I did not know, he brought the clay, two types of clay, we had white and regular type. He taught us molding, the firing process, drying process, glazings, the entire process. This lasted for five days. We started working, we were a group of students, actually mostly students, and we started working. It was a great pleasure, a great experience, very valuable, that I really needed it to undergo that, but everyone needed it because there were no such workshops before.

**Erëmirë:** So, even the staff got engaged in the workshop and grew professionally?

**Lirije:** We gladly worked. We worked and had created a great work environment. In front of the Gallery, it became like a workshop space, we would work the entire day until late at night. So, those readymades he brought, we just tested out the glazings after the single-firing process. A technique I never heard of before, the raku technique.<sup>14</sup> That is the most difficult, it has a longer process, but is the most pleasant one.

We started working with ceramics, we had a small kiln that we needed to divide it in parts to fire it, so at least each artist has a work completed in its entirety. We worked hard and the moment the

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<sup>13</sup> Hannibal Salvaro (1935) is a Croatian ceramic artist. He studied civil engineering at the University of Zagreb. Since 1958, he has explored many ceramic techniques and innovations in the clay firing and glazing process of ceramic-making.

<sup>14</sup> Raku firing is an ancient Japanese ceramics technique that has been used for centuries. The history of Raku dates as far back as the 16th century. Traditional Raku pottery is also known to have been used by the Zen Buddhist masters who liked its simple naturalness.

workshop was over, we exhibited. Then some of the works were selected to take part in an international exhibition. Among them, I got a prize, Blerta [Syla] got it too, we were very successful as a group. Our works were liked and exhibited. All of us expressed a desire to form an association, such as the Association of Applied Arts. We started it, but we went with it halfway and it failed.

**Erëmirë:** Sure, so it was a great opportunity for you to combine your skills in sculpture and ceramics, and to create new works. Can you talk more about this?

**Lirije:** What left an impression on me, and on others I think, was the firing process of raku technique. For example, we created a vase or plaque, we left it to dry at room temperature, after it dried out, the firing process took place. So, the temperature was 900 degrees, we had to measure the temperature well. The workshop leader had the equipment; we fired and painted them, and fired them again.

At first, we didn't even know how to create nuances, because again we were applying glazings which we never have seen before. I am talking about myself, but also the others have not worked with it before. We did the firing process, later we tried the raku technique. It provided many possible combinations, you could do a hundred combinations, you could increase the effects, work more on the structure. We tried this new technique and that was already a level up, more difficult to produce works.

**Erëmirë:** Just tell me, how did it help you grow?

**Lirije:** I had the opportunity and the privilege that the kiln remained in the Gallery. I lead two workshops with a group of students, and that for four or five days. We did the firing process longer, and later on I continued developing my practice. The moment I had a bit of free time in the Gallery, I used the kiln, the colleagues helped me to start the firing process and to return the kiln in its place. I worked quite a lot, enough to open my own exhibition.

**Erëmirë:** What kind of ceramics did you make?

**Lirije:** I am attracted more to plaques, I like creating structure. Depending on the material I had, for example, I used a sack or a rock that had an interesting design or I gave clay the shape of a sculpture, a vase with irregular shapes, which is something I like more. So, I am glad I finished it, and my work is liked by my artist colleagues.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I mean, an interesting technique, because it's also a painting and in that style...

**Lirije Buliqi:** And the canvas, the canvas I used is from Dukagjin, there are these *marhamat* [*handkerchiefs*] from Rugova that since childhood they've left a {looks at the wall} mark...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** An impression.

**Lirije Buliqi:** A good impression that I now make, I would still do them if I could (laughs).

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What were the last ten years like, I mean from independence and on, 2008...

**Lirije Buliqi:** I mean they were, for me they were... now the new generation does more videos, installations, these are something new to me and also attractive. But, I'm still... maybe since I belong to an older generation I am more of a fan of the brush rather than the new models. Even though these are very valuable, they have a lot of imagination, there are a lot of artists who know the work and are very talented, who we should help and value, and make a rewarding exhibition which they usually have. There was the one *Artistët e së Nesërmes* [*The Artists of Tomorrow*] to go abroad to form...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** For residence.

**Lirije Buliqi:** Yes, for residence.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Tell us about today, you retired a few months ago, maybe summarize these 40 years, what was it like for you? A life connected to the Gallery...

**Lirije Buliqi:** For me, how I imagined life, life took a completely different turn, a turn for the better. It was a great and pleasant experience. An experience that allowed me to shape myself, to become an artist. I worked with great will... I mean, I had stressful situations, crises, terrible moments, and good ones of course. Some people don't appreciate you, some do, but in general, I had a great experience. I retired on May 4.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** 2020?

**Lirije Buliqi:** 2020. I cannot say it is difficult, it's not bad. The important thing is to have health. I thank the Gallery and Ministry of Culture staff who bid me farewell in a dignified way. The goodbyes were good and emotional, it's a very touching moment, but I didn't experience it badly, not at all. I worked hard, I contributed as much as I could. So, I was open to artists, for all that was needed, all who needed help in the Gallery, I gave access to students to our archives. I believe I was very dedicated and I managed to help someone.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Thanks a lot, Lirije!

**Lirije Buliqi:** Thank you for your time, for giving me the opportunity to describe a 40-year experience. Thank you!

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** It was my pleasure.