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N C E**

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WITH ARTISTS,  
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ME ARTISTË,  
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СО УМЕТНИЦИ,  
ЗА НАРОДОТ!

SA UMETNICIMA,  
ZA NAROD!

# RESISTANCE — EDITORIAL NOTE

The RESISTANCE International Artists in Residence Program is a new cultural platform in Southeastern Europe that has one principal goal: facilitating the ongoing cooperation and mobility of contemporary visual artists from the Western Balkans within their own region.

Conceived in Summer 2019 by ZETA – Contemporary Art Center in Tirana (Albania) in cooperation with three partner organizations from Kosovo, Serbia, and North Macedonia (Stacion – Center for Contemporary Art in Prishtina; Ilija & Mangelos Foundation in Novi Sad; and Faculty of Things That Can't Be Learned in Bitola), the project's initial conception benefited from the existent long-term experience of teamwork between all aforementioned organizations within the Young Visual Artists Award program (YVAA).

They joined forces once again in order to further support and qualitatively contribute to already established regional connections in the field through exchange of ideas and production of novel artworks focused on the main project theme: “resistance.” Understood in the sense of opposing, revolting against, or refusing any status quo as a given, the notion of resistance is here recalled in order to mobilize constructive, creative, and intellectual potential for necessary reshaping of discomfortingly politicized living and working conditions in the post-socialist cultural context of Albania and its immediate neighbors.

Marked by dramatic shifts over the last thirty years in all countries participating in the project, this context has turned out to be all the more toxic especially during the last decade (2010–2020), exposing the dark side of political governances that have remained “democratic” in their outward appearance (especially toward the European Union), while dramatically leaning toward autocratic regimes in the eyes of their own citizens.

To give but an example, the latest report issued by Freedom House in May 2020 classified Serbia, Albania, and Montenegro as “hybrid regimes,” in which the power is based on authoritarianism as a

consequence of incomplete democratic change and stating that “a growing number of leaders in Central and Eastern Europe have dropped even the pretense of playing by the rules of democracy.”<sup>1</sup>

The internal and external situations in Kosovo and North Macedonia, respectively, have not been much better either: a number of unresolved yet vital social, economic, and political issues still keep preventing their citizens from experiencing the life with dignity that they aspired to when, in the case of Kosovo, the state of independence was achieved back in 2008 and, in the case of North Macedonia, the former government introduced changes after decades long negotiations with Greece over the name status of “Macedonia.”

Regardless of their citizens’ primary interests, and despite some positive signals surfacing in the international media, almost every attempt to establish lasting conditions for democratic governance in the Western Balkans has been shrouded in the veil of profit-driven political scandals, personal greed for more and more power over the people’s rights, and the extinction of public property in pursuit of social elite’s corporate and private interests.

Additionally, and more specifically related to Tirana, artists and citizens of all sorts have, over the years, been involved in various types of revolt, expressing their disagreements with the ongoing destruction of public property in the name of “modernization and development” – a movement led by local political powers through financially and strategically motivated processes of architectural cannibalism not only at the expense of erasing Albanian cultural heritage or long-term residents’ habitats, but also at the expense of taking human lives under the pretext of “urbanization.”

The most obvious instance of this economy of destruction was the complex of buildings linked to the National Theater of Albania in downtown Tirana, that has served as a symbolic and material place of citizens’ resistance: for more than two years, together with local



# RESISTANCE — EDITORIAL NOTE

artists, they have been opposing the government's plans to demolish the old complex in order to build a new one. Another good example is the 2019 case of the Astiri neighborhood protest: it mobilized the inhabitants of the Great Ring around the city for quite some time against the government's plan to build a new road at the expense of demolishing the residential houses and small business stores built in that area.

In this context, Tirana has never lacked examples of artistic resistance, so it felt natural for organizers to include selected individual artists and collectives, whose work is distinguished by this anti-conformist attitude towards government policies, economic power, and social issues, into the residency program.

Based on these facts, the term “resistance” – a buzz-word delineating Tirana's cultural landscape since the new “Renaissance” political coalition, led by Edi Rama, started showing its irreparably negative side-effects years ago (despite its “colorful facades”) – became more and more natural as the main topic and the name for the project. The idea that the act of creation itself is an act of resistance helped organizers establish the title RESISTANCE (as opposed to problematic and destructive RENAISSANCE) for the residence without hesitation, while giving artists the opportunity to explore the concept in any aspect they want (political, social, cultural, economic, artistic, etc.) and building the talk program with guests, whose work shows these aspects.

Given this background, the central idea behind the RESISTANCE International Artists in Residence Program was to bring together seven artists from four countries of the region to Tirana, where – over the period of one month, in Spring 2020 – they would have a chance to meet each other, exchange ideas about their respective practices, and produce new artworks while reflecting, together and individually, upon the living and working conditions in their own countries (as part of the common, Western Balkans region) under the umbrella theme of “resistance.”

Besides, the non-Albanian participants would have a chance to become more familiar with the artistic and cultural landscape of Tirana, extremely influenced by the pressure imposed by political and economic players in the city and the country at large, which could possibly become visible or sensed in their own artistic production during their residency period.

While designing the project proposal for the overall residency program, the organizers took into account numerous instances that selected artists could be interested in while in Tirana, in terms of fresh insights into conventional landmarks of the city (including museums, galleries, and alternative art venues), but also in terms of networking (considering local artists that should be involved in the process where “resistance” – and artistic dissidence – play a central role), as well as in terms of public conversations that should be planned and developed so to provide multiple perspectives onto the main topic and how the notion of “resistance” has been embedded in the many and varied practices of the local art scene’s protagonists.

Seven artists were selected for the residency program: from Albania – Lori Lako and Fatlum Doçi; from Kosovo – Edona Ademi; from Serbia – Nina Galić and Darko Vukić, and from North Macedonia – Nikola Slavevski and Natasha Nedelkova. Each partner organization selected and proposed its own candidates. It is worth mentioning that for several years ZETA has been involved in organizing the ARDHJE Award for Contemporary Visual Artists from Albania, targeting generations of local artists up to the age of 35. It is part of a larger regional network (Young Visual Artists Awards – YVVA) that brings together twelve other organizations from Central and Southeast European countries. Over the years, ZETA has realized various collaborative programs and residences for artists with members of the network. Even in this particular case, partner organizations from Prishtina, Novi Sad, and Bitola proposed some names from the lists of artists who were competing in recent years for the local awards in every respective country as finalists. Their portfolios, the overall quality of their artistic work so far, and their availability to absorb the maximum from the art scene in Albania were some of the main selection criteria.

## RESISTANCE — EDITORIAL NOTE

This is also the reason why, besides the main part of the project (targeting seven selected artists, whose final outcome would be publicly showcased to Tirana's audience in the form of an exhibition that would open at the very end of the residency period), another indispensable part of the project was planned to have a distinctively discursive nature. The idea was to organize a series of public conversations around the main topic with a number of carefully selected local artists and cultural workers of different kinds, including those coming from the domains of painting, photography, public art, street interventions, publishing, theater, and cinema, namely: Lindita Komani, Edmond Budina, Ergin Zaloshnja, Pleurad Xhafa, Gentian Shkurti, Stefano Romano, Collective HAVEIT, Leonard Qylafi, and Luçian Bedeni. Initially, public conversations with each of them were planned to be mainly conducted at ZETA's premises, with two exceptions: the National Theater of Albania was scheduled for a talk with protagonists of the Alliance for the Defense of National Theater and the National Museum of Photography MARUBI in Shkodra for a talk with its director.

In September 2019, ZETA applied with the project to the Swiss Cultural Fund in Albania (SCFA) and a month later received a notification about winning the grant. Once the contract was signed in November 2019, the project implementation was on its way. The selected artists were invited to come to Tirana in March 2020, for a one-month stay, so that the project could be completed by May 2020 when the exhibition and the publication of a catalog, including all the results achieved during the residency program, would officially mark its end.

However, the initial plan had to be slightly modified due to unexpected conditions created by the outbreak of a viral pandemic across the world in March 2020, at the very same time when the artists started their residency program in Tirana.

The program began on March 9, exactly the day when the first case of COVID-19 infection in Albania was made public. Accordingly, the Ministry of Health announced its decision to ban all public events in the country (including those in the areas of sport and culture) in order to minimize

the risk of people getting infected in crowds. Since this announcement did not explicitly declare the number of people that could stay together in a given area, the organizers intended to continue to hold planned events only in the presence of artists and lecturers without any audience. The first and the only meeting held in this format was a conversation with Lindita Komani, Edmond Budina, Ervin Goci, and some other members of the Alliance for the Protection of National Theater, which took place in the Goethe Hall of the National Theater in Tirana.



In the following days, all the planned events had to be cancelled, as the situation caused by the new virus was rapidly deteriorating. On March 12, the state of emergency was declared and the country was heading towards border closure and imposed quarantine measures for all citizens. Given this framework, all the participating artists were asked to return back to their homes for safety reasons, whereas the program would continue to develop online over the Internet. The conversations with Gentian Shkurti, Leonard Qylafi, and Luçjan Bedeni were organized through an online communication platform, while the conversations with Pleurad Xhafa, Ergin Zaloshnja, Stefano Romano, and HAVEIT were realized in cooperation with the journalist Fatmira Nikolli.

The exhibition of artists' works (the production of which, in some cases, turned out to be inspired by their own experiences of the pandemic) had to be postponed for late June 2020. Curated by Blerta Hoçia and titled "Heterotopias of Resistance," it opened indeed on June 30, 2020 at the exhibition premises of ZETA in the presence of participating artists, lecturers, and audience.

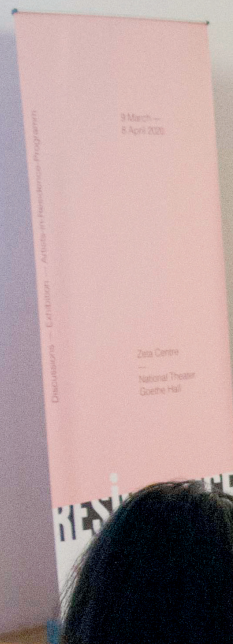






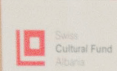
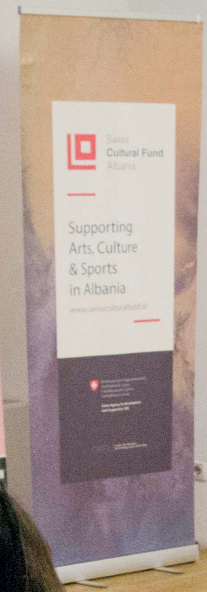
THE EVENT  Object  Subject

conceptualization / politics & culture



9 March -  
8 April 2020

Zeta Centre  
National Theatre  
Goethe Hall



State Cultural Fund  
Albania

Supporting  
Arts, Culture  
& Sports  
in Albania

[www.senccbf.al](http://www.senccbf.al)





















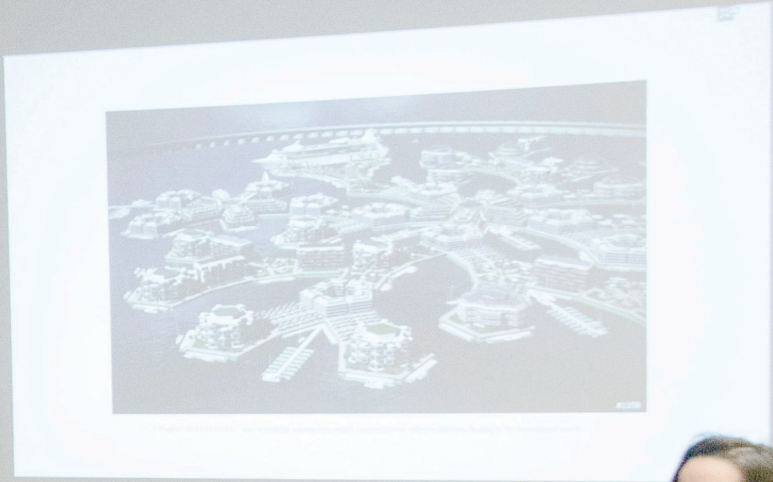












Discussions — Exhibition — Artists-in-Residence Program

9 March  
8 April

Zaha Centre  
National Theatre  
Goethe House

# RESISTANCE





HETEROTOPIAS

RES

OF RESISTANCE

ISTA

NCE

CURATORIAL TEXT BY BLERTA HOÇIA

# HETEROTOPIAS OF RESISTANCE — BLERTA HOÇIA

When we first began working on the regional artist-in-residence project, which we instantly entitled “Resistance,” we had no idea of the scenario that would subsequently unfold in front of our eyes, only two days after the beginning of our work. The scenario of numbness and insecurity caused by the viral pandemic outbreak that, due to its invisible nature, would become even larger through internal mechanisms of anxiety and methods used to exert power over citizens. This was indirectly dividing us, categorizing us and, thus, putting us under control.

The decisions, rightly made in order to contain the spread of the pandemic, also led to the increase of human rights violations. The power exerted on the assortment of their transgressions seemed to be continuously perpetuated by their justification.

New places of existence and resistance were born in order to oppose the absolute submission to control. These places function similarly to Michel Foucault’s heterotopias (*hétérotopies*) in his 1967 book *Des espaces autres*:

*...their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation, and I wonder if certain colonies have not functioned somewhat in this manner.<sup>1</sup>*

This parallelism with the colonies of former civilizations, which have been constructed as a result of the necessity to create new worlds, new places, reappears in the re-adaptation of the imagining and the designing of the Web, with social media and other countless online platforms. They act precisely as heterotopias of a simultaneously real and virtual compensation, as an infinite mirror, the particles of which reflect the multiplied instant of life in real time.

The Internet has become a placeless place, a heterotopia that resists the faceless gaze of power or, to be more precise, that has the power to return the gaze to the watchful eye of control. The places created online float in the dense space of the Web like a multitude of all the potential resistances of each and every organism. In a way, the online space is not the only one,

1. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces (1967), Heterotopias,” <https://foucault.info/documents/heterotopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en/>.

but it becomes one of the *loci of the great refusal*,<sup>1</sup> which unites us in our particular case – in our resistance – that coexists with the multitude of all others.

This heterotopia shifts in the very perception of how an exhibition will be performed, where the artists' works are sincere reflections of the present moment, each an act of resistance in itself. Thus, this same idea recurs in the space of the exhibition, through the creation of a temporary heterotopia for the duration of the inauguration, wherein next to each work, a monitor will be installed. This is where the artists will be present by means of a live stream via webcam – a position from which each of them will be able to become the gaze of their own work, thus monitoring and recording each encounter, each astonishment, each smile, and each gaze.





HETEROTOPIAS

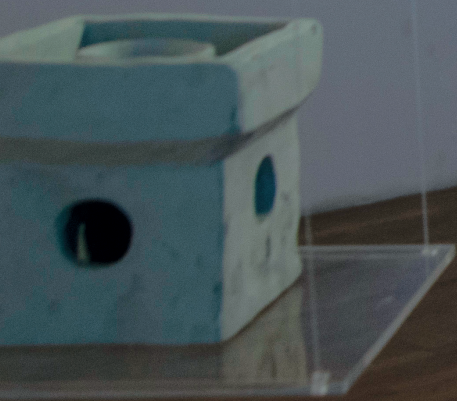
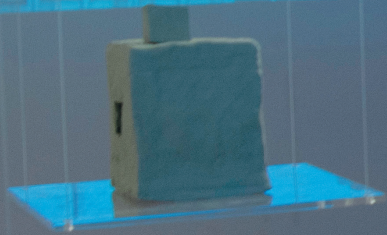
RES


OF RESISTANCE

ISTA

NCE

THE EXHIBITION



A photograph of an interior space, likely a gallery or museum. A projector is mounted on the ceiling, casting a blue light onto the wall. The wall features large, bold, blue text. The floor is made of dark wood planks. A thin blue light strip is visible along the bottom edge of a white panel on the left wall.

**EMERGENT  
PRODUCTIVITY  
IN THE TIME OF  
PRODUCTION OF  
EMERGENCY**





**EMERGENT  
PRODUCTIVITY  
IN THE TIME OF  
PRODUCTION  
EMERGENCY**

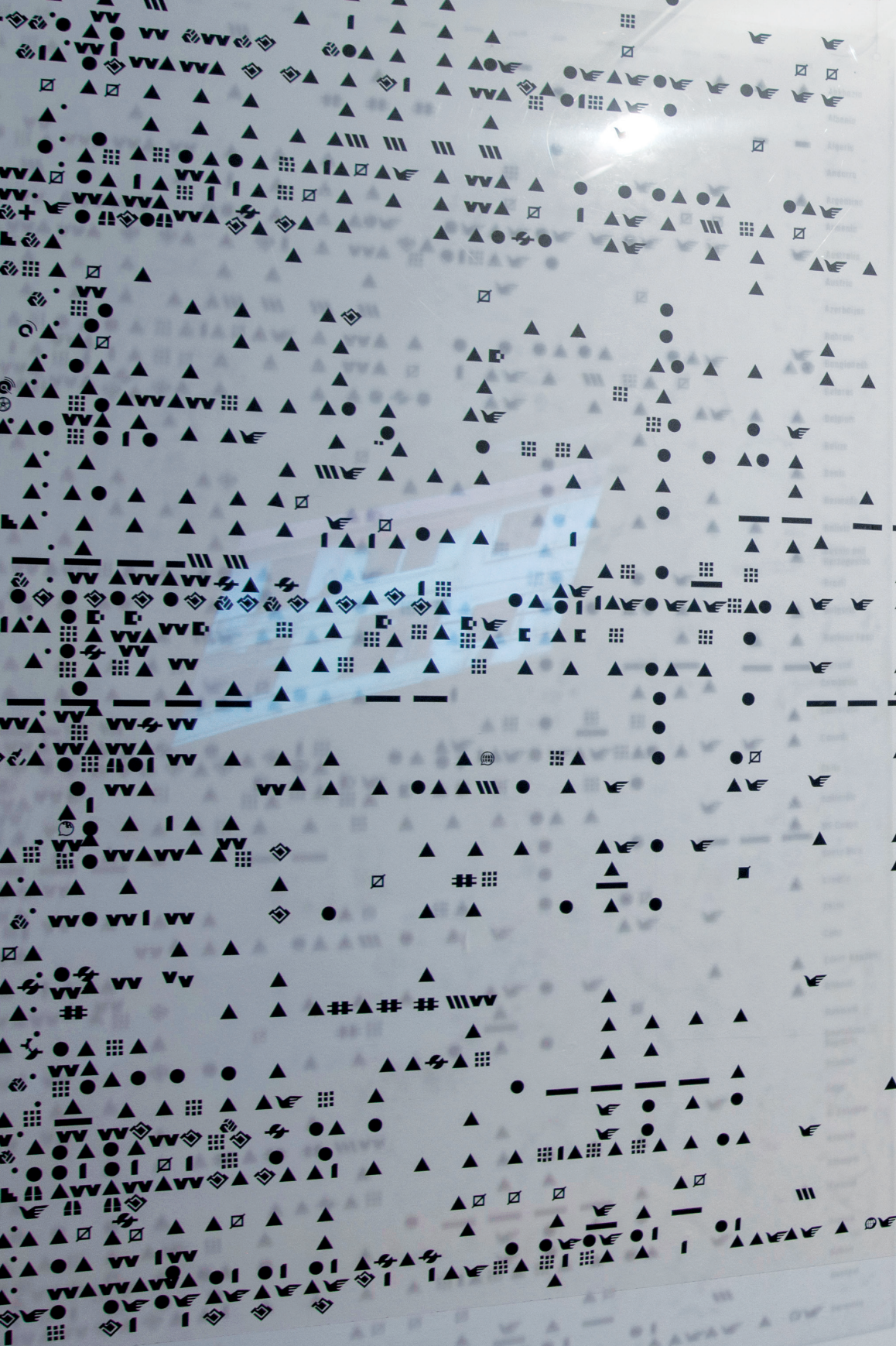
TY  
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OF  
Y



A large sheet of paper is mounted on the wall. It contains dense, illegible text or data, possibly a document or a list. The text is arranged in columns and rows, with some lines appearing to be separated by horizontal lines. The paper is slightly curved and appears to be part of an exhibit.







- Algeria
- Andorra
- Argentina
- Armenia
- Australia
- Austria
- Azerbaijan
- Bahrain
- Bangladesh
- Belarus
- Belgium
- Belize
- Benin
- Bermuda
- Bolivia
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Brazil
- Bulgaria
- Burkina Faso
- Burundi
- Cambodia
- Cameroon
- Canada
- Chile
- Colombia
- DR Congo
- Costa Rica
- Croatia
- China
- Cuba
- Czech Republic
- Djibouti
- Denmark
- Dominican Republic
- Ecuador
- Egypt
- El Salvador
- Estonia
- Ethiopia
- Finland
- France
- Gabon
- Georgia
- Germany



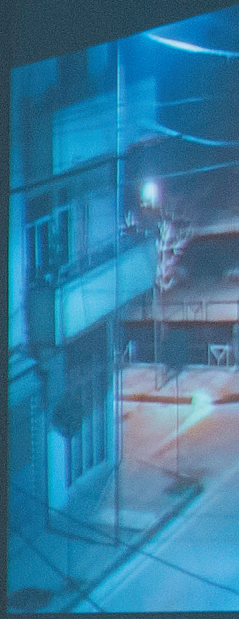
- Ghana
- Greece
- Guatemala
- Haiti
- Holland
- Honduras
- Hong Kong
- Hungary
- Iceland
- India
- Indonesia
- Iran
- Iraq
- Ireland
- Israel
- Italy
- Jakarta
- Japan
- Jordan
- Kazakhstan
- Kenya
- Kosovo
- Kyrgyzstan
- Lebanon
- Liberia
- Libya
- Macao
- Malta
- Malaysia
- Malawi
- Maldives
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Mexico
- Moldova
- Montenegro
- Morocco
- Myanmar
- Nepal
- Netherlands
- New Caledonia
- New Zealand
- Nicaragua
- Nigeria
- North Macedonia
- Norway







Project: [illegible]  
[illegible]  
[illegible]





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FATLUM<sup>(AL)</sup>  
DOÇI

NINA<sup>(RS)</sup>  
GALIĆ

EDONA<sup>(KS)</sup>  
KRYEZIU

LORI<sup>(AL)</sup>  
LAKO

(MK) NATASHA  
NEDELKOVA

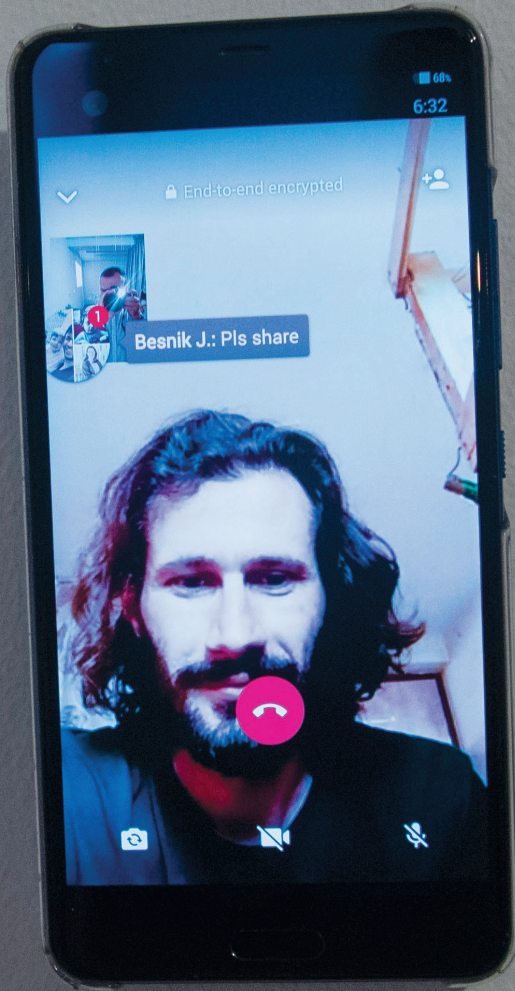
(MK) NIKOLCHE  
SLAVEVSKI

(RS) DARKO  
VUKIĆ

**KUJTO**

# LIRINË

FATLUM DOÇI



Fatlum Doçi

“Future City”  
Installation, Clay

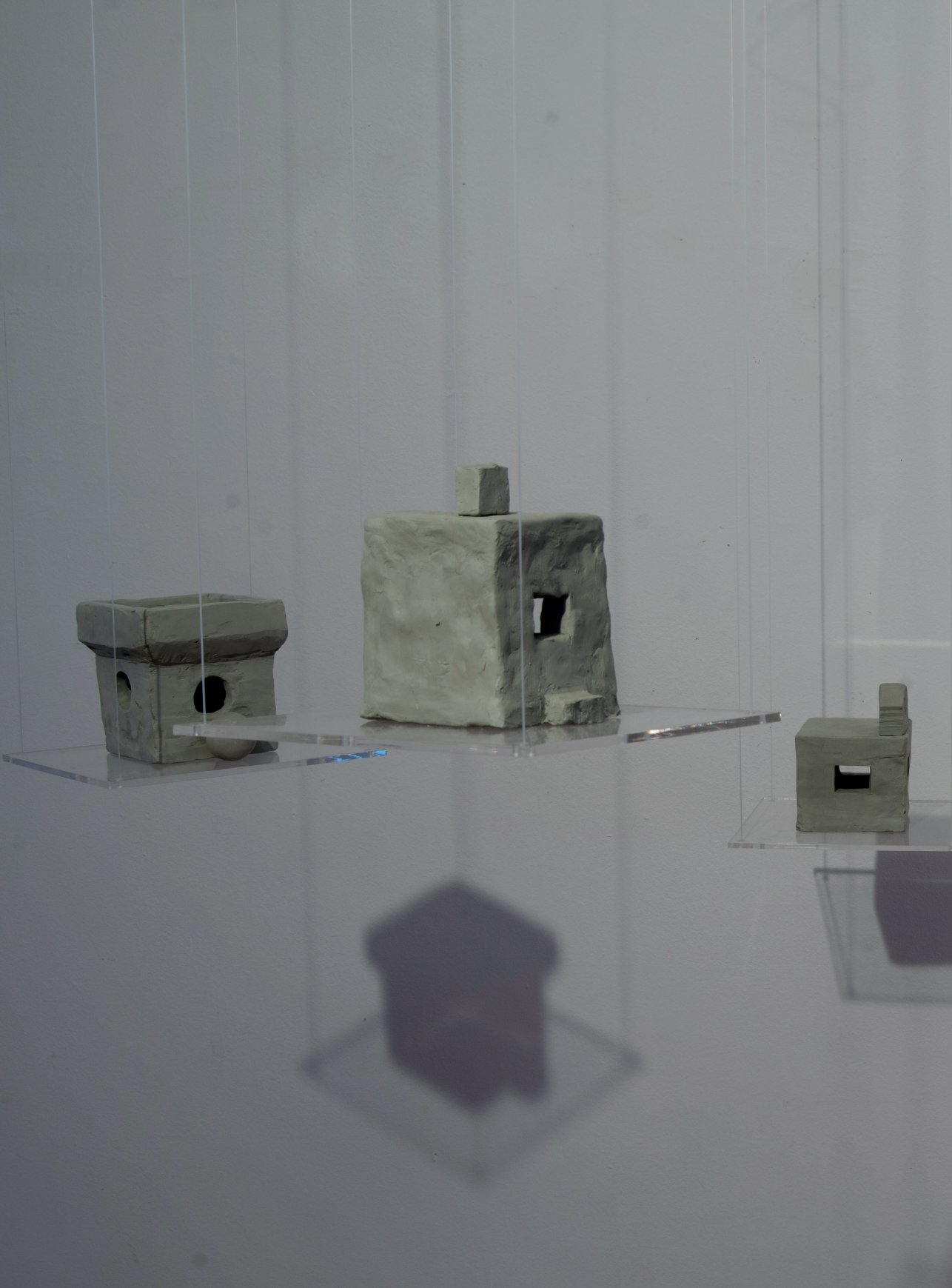
2020

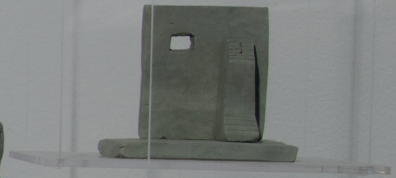
Fatlum Doçi's small-scale clay sculptures bring out the imagination as a very personal, intimate form of resistance. They form the picture of a city, slowly modeled by wet clay and made up of suspended islands, each of them being a cell house without any doors. This is the City of the Future that, according to the artist, exposes the dangers of power control, absurdity of material absurdities, and loss of spiritual consciousness.











**ПОСТО -**

# JIMO

NINA GALIĆ



Nina Galić

Together Alone  
Installation, Charts  
in Plexiglas

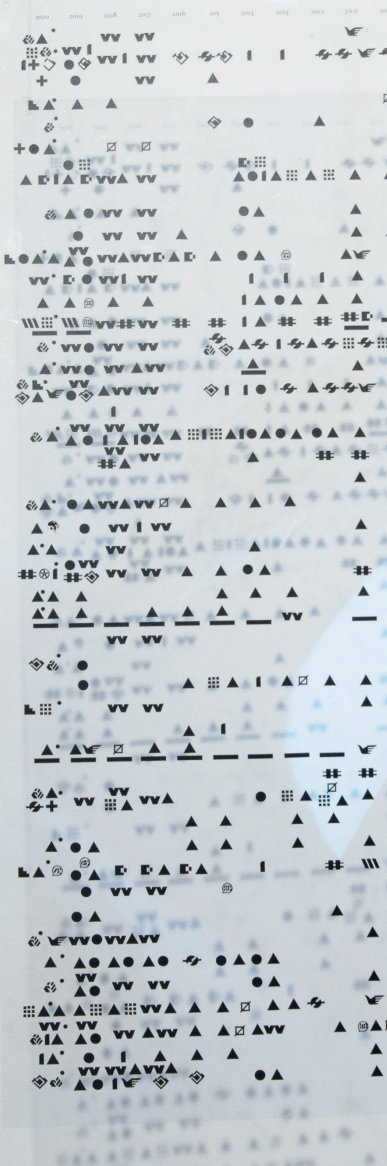
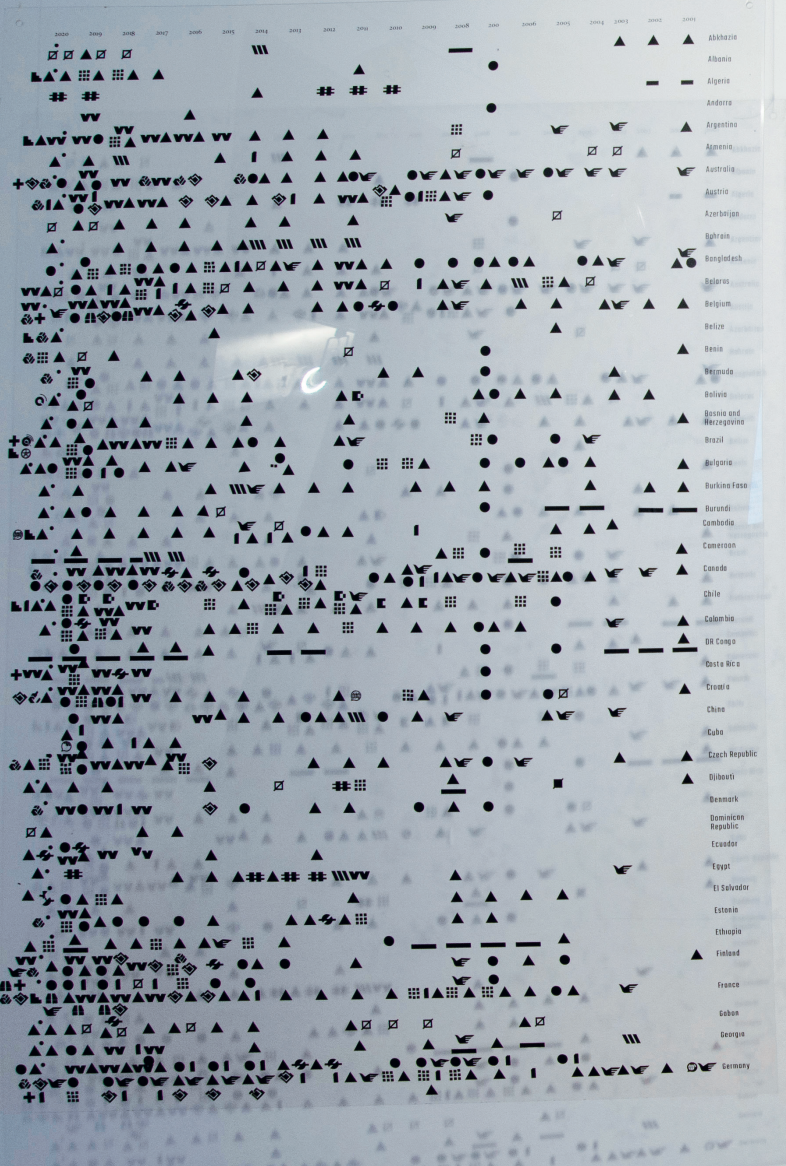
2020

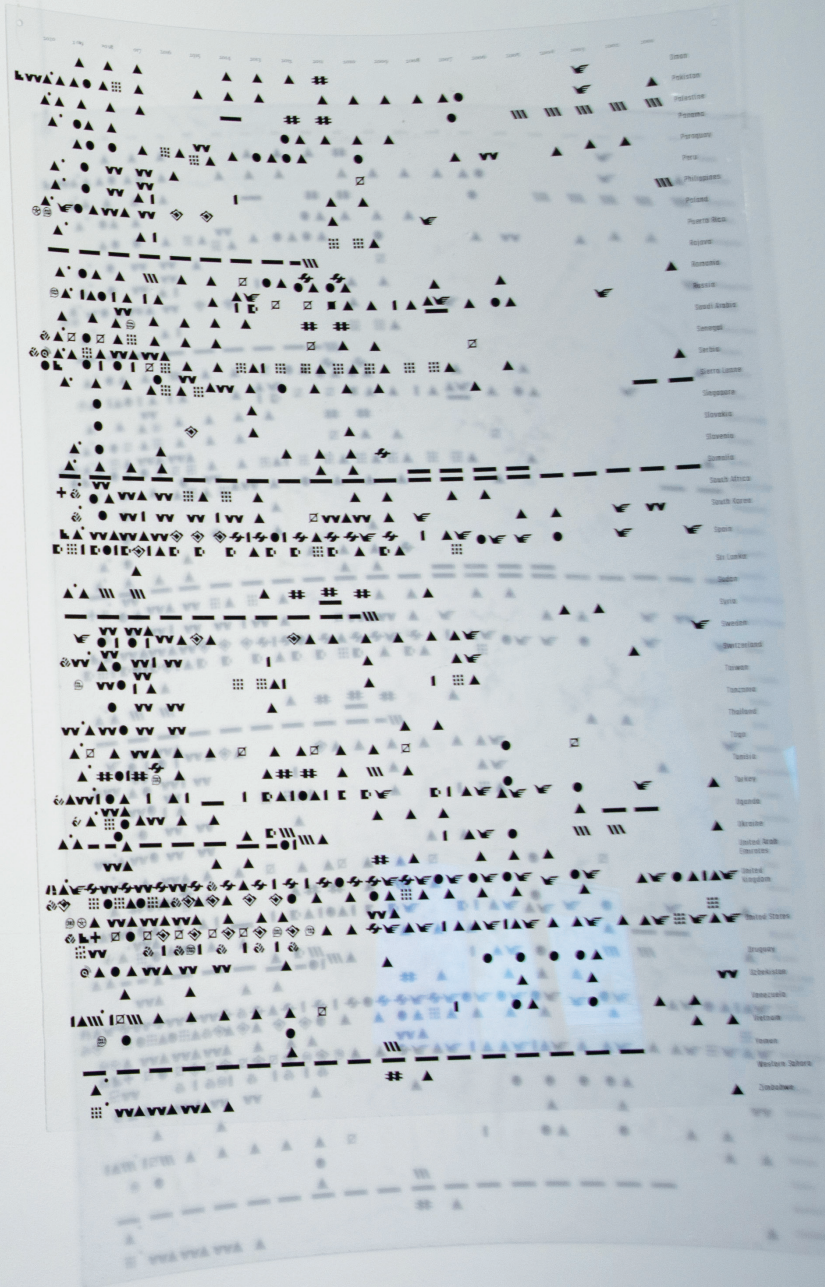
The installation of Nina Galić is the extraordinary result of her research and data collection of protests around the world. Encompassing the period from 2001 till the present day (the work, due to the information load, is still in process) presents data as numbers and symbols, which are actually distances and real bodies that stand up for their rights and shape the resistance in everyday life.









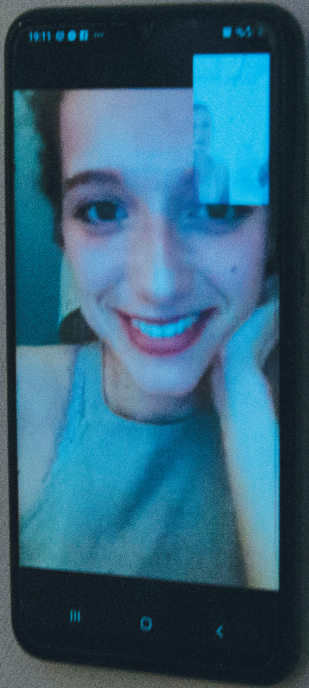


**REZISTENCA**



# KENNT KEIN EXIL

EDONA KRYEZIU



Edona Kryeziu

Windows without Exit  
Video Projection, 8'35"

2020

In the work of Edona Kryeziu, a nearly timid resistance takes shape, one not fully accepted, as a vision of dead-end windows opens to us. Windows are such because they lead somewhere, letting the gaze out, on the horizon. Here, dead-end windows are advertising billboards as a result of their static location in an in-between place; between the Palace of Youth and Sport with its austere utopias from the past, and the Newborn monument with its promise of a rebirth at present, a place where both remain somewhat forgotten. We see as they are painted white by the artist. A clear symbol of the regeneration, which also gives meaning to the deafening noise of the protest heard intermittently. In this way, the windows without exit become the locus and a symbol of resistance.









Hotel

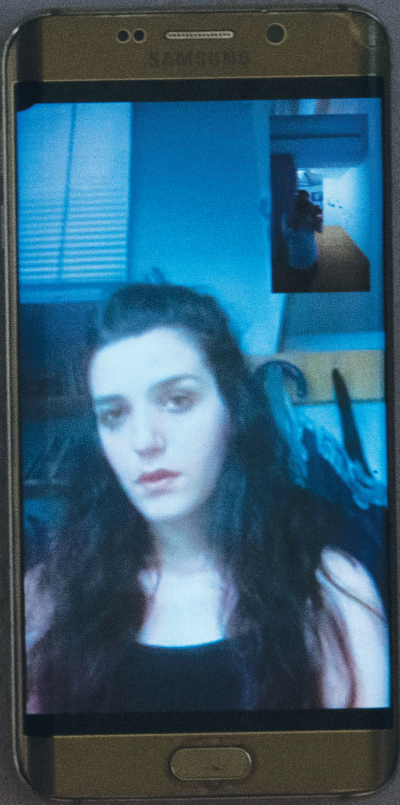


**REZISTENCA  
ËSHTË  
HEROIZMI**



**I FOLESË  
TË  
MILINGONAVE**

LORI LAKO



Lori Lako

Everything Was Forever  
Until It Was No More  
Video Projection, 7'20"

2020

Lori Lako's video work is a detailed look inside herself, her thoughts and hopes. It begins as an isolation diary, with seemingly painted images of the city's interior, the typical entrances to buildings, closed doors, followed by mercurial weather, a spring full of rain and snow, which seems to be a portent of bad news at a global scale. It is an intimate story of isolation as a form of resistance, but is it real resistance? Meanwhile, in the video's slow images, a lone man appears dragging his suitcase, at night, through the city, empty as a result of the siege. The same action is repeated the following day, the man a miserable Sisyphus of our time, silently dueling with reality.











**УМЕТНОСТА  
ВЕ ПРАВИ  
ПОСИЛНИ**



# ОТКОЛКУ ШТО МИСЛИТЕ

NATASHA NEDELKOVA



Natasha Nedelkova

Identity Tissues  
Video DVD, 12'13"

2020

Natasha Nedelkova's work is one of immediate clarity: expressed in images and sequences quietly following each other, it is enveloped in a sensation of helplessness that turns into revulsion. In it, intimate experiences flow into the greater collective ones of a region as forlorn as the Balkans, intertwining with films, and America – that source of all the contemporary world's flaws. "Identity Tissues" is a work born of the resistance during transition, one we've had to endure for over thirty years, a resistance of humor and cynicism concealed behind many masks and layers, a silent resistance. A resistance of the city itself resisting the lifeless faces that aggressively take one other's place.









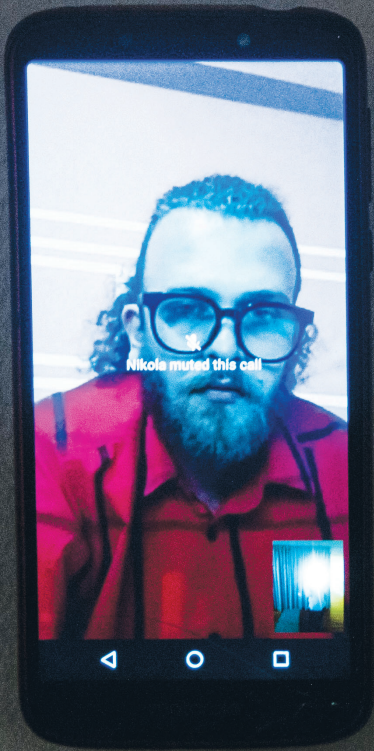


**КОРОНАТА Е  
ВИРУСОТ,**



# КАПИТАЛИЗМОТ Е КРИЗАТА!

NIKOLCHE SLAVEVSKI



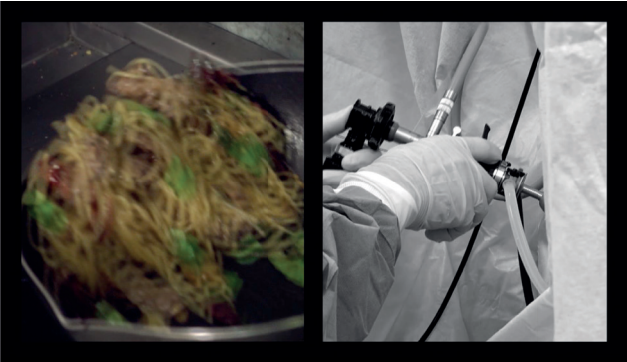
Nikolche Slavevski

Compositions in G major  
Two Video Channels,  
3'01," 4'24"

2020

Nikola Slavevsky's video work resembles a silent hymn to injustice, a visual anthem of the images which are served to us as truths endlessly contradicting one other. A contradiction that is inherent in global campaigns, #stayHome being one of them. The daily news acquires a vital importance and the endless data regarding infections and deaths are slowly reduced to a few figures and abstract numbers that lead to a state of constant confusion. Nikola's work highlights precisely this loss of awareness regarding the situation and the systems at large. These heterotopias of resistance are clothed, in part, with the elusiveness of experience and feeling while, elsewhere, they are a critique, a clash with the system. Somewhere else again, they possess a translucent clarity, enabling us to see beyond and imagine.







C

Studio



**B B C** NEWS **BREAKING**

**Profits are more impor**

**Los Angeles**



**stant than workers**

**PRAVDA ZA**

**PRAVDU!**

DARKO VUKIĆ



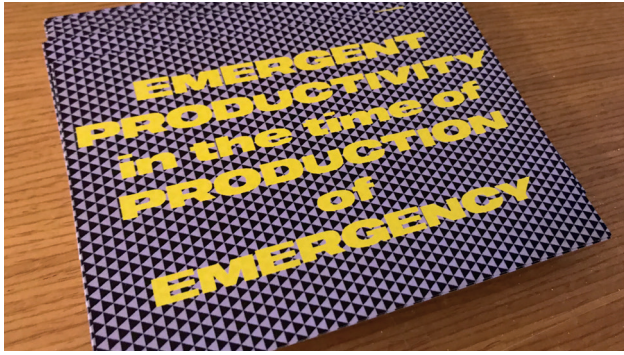
Darko Vukić

Where is the Context  
Installation,  
Lettering printing on wall

2020

This exhibition explores a multitude of resistances and refusals, as manifested in the work and research of each artist reflecting this specific historical moment. Such is the project presented by Darko Vukić, where one phrase written on the wall (“Emergent productivity in the time of emergency production”) creates an awareness of the period spent in compulsory isolation. Yet it is also more than that, because the artist reflects upon a system that produces emergencies and confronts them by producing in an “urgent” manner. It is precisely human behavior that predicts the theory of influence, by creating vicious cycles with no way out.

EMERGENT  
PRODUCTIVITY  
IN THE TIME OF  
PRODUCTION OF  
EMERGENCY





**EMER  
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**URGENT  
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TIME OF  
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**COON**

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# “AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ALBANIA TO EXPAND ITS CONCEPT OF PUBLIC PROPERTY” — EDMOND BUDINA, LINDITA KOMANI, AND ERVIN GOCI

The National Theater Protest in Albania, which has been going on daily since February 2018 in Tirana, brought together artists and activists to protect the historic National Theater building from Edi Rama government’s plan to demolish it and build a new one, the construction of which would be granted through a special law to a private company. A series of talks within “Resistance,” the regional artist-in-residence program initiated by Tirana’s ZETA Gallery in March 2020, kicks off with this exemplary case of a local public protest. So, what role does art play in terms of resistance?

E.B

I think it is truly advantageous to our community that the ZETA Gallery is organizing a conversation in the National Theater, which has been protected from demolition through an ongoing protest for the past two years. To answer your question: Yes, resistance has ancient roots in the art world. Drama and theater were born as a form of resistance in the most basic sense of the term: against evil, against vice, against bad politics. Since antiquity, this struggle, inherent in the theater, has served to advance human society – because, always and forever, opposition has urged society to take new steps, resulting in what we call “democracy.” Viewed from this perspective, theater has played an extraordinary role throughout its long history. From Sophocles to Shakespeare, in different times and places, theater has opposed evil – that which, more than anything, greatly damages society. Art in general and theater in particular have not simply fulfilled the function of entertainment. Thus, art was not born simply to entertain but also to function as some sort of contrast, both resisting to and opposing negative phenomena.

How did the protest for the theater begin?

E.B

Twenty years ago, the current Prime Minister of Albania (who, at the time, was the Minister of Culture) attempted to demolish the theater building in order to construct a commercial center, which would include a

theater: namely, a theater was meant to be at the ground level, with the commercial tower above it. This plan was met by extraordinary opposition from the best-known artists of the time, renowned personalities with careers that spanned over four decades. They went against him and his plan failed. When he became the mayor of Tirana, he again tried to destroy it and failed, once more. When he became the Prime Minister, the issue was taken up again but in an indirect, sneaky manner. At first, the theater was taken off the list of protected monuments, which paved the way for its demolition. Afterward, a law pertaining to the arts was discussed, resulting in the emergence of a project that required the destruction of the theater (built in 1939) and the allocation of the land where it is located to a private company. Out of an area of nine thousand square meters, one thousand square meters would be used for the construction of a new, three-story theater building, whereas the remaining eight thousand square meters would be used for the private company's own buildings. This simply translates to an appropriation of public land. This was the moment that marked the beginning of our two-year long resistance, complete with daily meetings and around-the-clock protection.

You and your peers have personally enacted resistance during the communist dictatorship. How have the forms of resistance changed in the meantime?

E.B.

Those were hard times, with different methods of resistance.

Yet, even then, there were forms of resistance in the local art world, although not to the extent that they existed in other Eastern European countries (given that, in Albania, the violence and repression exerted by the state were much stronger). We are talking about a time when, if someone sang Italian or British songs, they ended up in jail. As for the theater, however, it was impossible to function “underground” and one had to find secret pathways inside the official framework. Speaking of my personal experience, I can single out two instances. I adapted Ismail Kadare's novel *Doruntine* (*The Ghost Rider*) for the stage



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and, despite its eight-year long censorship, the audience eventually managed to see it. Later, in 1983, Kadare offered me another one of his works and suggested I adapt it for the stage as well. I read it, liked it and adapted it within a month. The piece addresses the theme of violence exerted by the state over an individual and, consequently, six years had to pass for it to be allowed on the stage. When it finally reached it in 1989, the winds of freedom had already started to blow in Eastern Europe. The play was very well received and the public was extraordinarily enthusiastic. Yet, the winds of freedom collided with the great repression. The state sent several commissions from the Albanian League of Writers and Artists and the Central Committee to put an end to the show – even the Bureau of the Central Committee organized a meeting for the same purpose; but, by then, the performance was on a roll and could not be halted. This lasted until the moment when Ismail Kadare sought political asylum in France.

An escape as an indicator of resistance.

How did that affect the performance and the theater?

E.B

In fact, this was the best excuse for terminating the show. On that day, I experienced the most extraordinary emotions in all my life. In the theater, there was a speaker phone that you could use to communicate with all the workers. Speaking into it, I told them: “Ismail Kadare has just requested political asylum. Don’t worry about anything. We will win.” We were still doing the play and the emotion we felt that day was communicated to the audience. It was one of the best performances. The audience seemed to have felt this. It was during that performance that, for the first time, the victory sign was used. By this, I want to convey that art has its own power in bringing about change, in raising the awareness of an entire society. When a society is asleep, it is basically dead. Later on, when students began protesting for the purpose of overthrowing the regime, I went to the Student City in Tirana: this is where a group of representatives (composed of students and professors from the Academy of Arts) had gathered with the aim of going to the President’s office and

demanding political pluralism. I was accepted into the group simply because I had staged Kadare's "A Moonlit Night." One of the students told me: "Professor, we have rejected a great number of intellectuals who asked to be part of this, but you put "A Moonlit Night" on the stage and, by doing so, inspired us to fight against the regime."

I became part of the protests thanks to the play and art – because art is a form of resistance that has the power to change society.

Thirty years later and you find yourself resisting again: this time, against a new government. Is theater a cause or an effect of this resistance?

<sup>E.B</sup> Yes, thirty years have passed and we are resisting again because the government wants to demolish the National Theater. This act does not simply concern a building but a cult object that is connected to the nation's spiritual life, its soul. All of the principal Albanian cultural institutions were founded here. This building's fall will denote the fall of democracy in Albania. Thus, we have resisted by using different methods, most recently by establishing a Festival for the Protection of the Theater, which has increased and expanded the message of art as a theater of resistance. During the first year, while we were guarding the theater from the outside (from the square), we played films and music, we performed ballet dances. When, after the confrontation with the police, we took over the theater hall, we reached a different stage: that of reviving the theater. There has been great support from people who love both art and resistance. Theatrical troupes from various places – Italy, U.S.A., North Macedonia, Austria, Kosovo – have come to us; this is something that clearly shows the importance of the art of resistance and protest. I think that caring about a building like this one means to truly love it. Regardless of our political differences, we are united by our shared love for this project. And our smallness ultimately results in greatness.

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What has the National Theater Protest taught society?

L.K  
There is no hierarchy in the Alliance for the Protection of the Theater and everyone has offered their own contribution. There is something extraordinary in the fact that the resistance movement has maintained a horizontal nature. The protest has established a functional model and this is, perhaps, its most significant achievement. And hundreds of people have participated in it! Thus, we have provided Albanian society with the example of persisting, no matter how small the number. The resistance has proved a valuable lesson and a colossal step forward because the Albanian public has discovered that this method works. 64 activities, 24 shows, 6 exhibitions, 6 literary evenings, and several talks have been organized in a theater with no running water or electricity – thanks to voluntary contributions and an electric generator. Furthermore, tens of tons of supplies were collected to help the victims of earthquake that struck the country on 26 November 2019.

Among many intellectuals that have assumed an active role in the protection of the theater, there are only a few writers. Why has the voice of writers been missing from this cause?

L.K  
Literature written in the Albanian language is lagging behind, in this sense. Unfortunately, the topic of resistance has been put to rest by Albanian authors and this is becoming crystal clear in the case of the National Theater protest. During the course of two years, only two authors have participated in it so far: Rudi Erebara and Flutura Aça. The silence of the authors is telling. The voices that have been heard belong to a variety of professions but the ones most expected to speak are entirely missing. One expects that, in dark times like this one, writers would become the beacons of society, illuminating the path, announcing what is coming. We come from a culture whose 19th and 20th century's Revival poets led the way for the development of the country and the modern Albanian society itself. They were obliged to be knowledgeable in various spheres for lack of experts in different fields. If Budina mentions

Shakespeare as an instance of resistance, I propose Fan Noli who, in the beginning of the last century, translated a number of the world's masterpieces, including Shakespeare, in order to revive the spirit of resistance. His purpose in translating Shakespeare's work was to provide examples of resistance. In view of this distant century, I feel presently sad for Albanian authors who hesitate to address not only the theater issue but also other phenomena and challenges that plague the country. The Austrians have played a major role in my education. In Austria, literary people and renowned writers are not scared and openly express their views on delicate social issues. Here, many authors are ashamed to express their opinions on political issues and want to distance their art from social issues or any form of protest against political powers. I don't understand and I refuse to understand the reasons for this stance, as I believe that the author is a citizen and, as such, he or she has certain civic duties. However, this is a debate that is entirely missing in the Albanian literature. The theater issue could be a bedrock of creativity in terms of literature. During my participation in this cause, I have written an entire play which is inspired by Arturo Ui, but is placed in the present day.

How has the theater, supposedly the artists' domain,  
become the domain of the intellectuals?

E.G

The government's greatest advantage is having the institutions and bureaucracies at their back and at their call. Those in power can apply pressure to all those working for the administration, artists included. And, ultimately, artists are lacking freedom in terms of role models to follow and, also, in terms of their social status. This fact was felt tremendously at the beginning of the protest because there was the conviction that whoever is the master of a profession is also the master of the buildings, of the word, of the public. Thus, we were placed under a certain amount of pressure of "what did we want with the theater" ("we," being the non-artists). Those who pressured us, the artists, were the ones who were the

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first to abandon the cause. The case of the theater has shown a great disconnection between bureaucracy and free citizens, between the state property and the private property, between individuals who act as free agents and participate out of their own free will in the movement, and other forms of protest by self-appointed people who take on titles simply because they happen to be part of the institution. I remember that during that time, my mentor, prof. Artan Fuga, stated that artists are the first to say “the Theater won’t be demolished”; but that’s all they can do, as they have no rights regarding the building that is, of course, public property. Many of the artists who abandoned their theater work in institutions are professors at the Academy of Arts. I believe that their abandonment of the cause is strongly reflected in their students. Indeed, this kind of attitude and these types of actions render the university a dead institution, despite the many wonderful people that work there. It is dead because it does not produce anything.

This building has been occupied by us, for the first time in over a hundred years of the Albanian state. A public building has never been occupied by the public beforehand. This has resulted in a new situation as everyone who will come to power in the future, and even the professional communities, will have to face the following fact: the buildings in which they work or which they occupy for professional functions are also public property and they do not strictly belong to them. Furthermore, this is an opportunity for Albania to expand its concept of public property. We have the concept of state property but we lack that of public property. The latter does not necessarily belong to the state, on the contrary. What I am suggesting is that institutions must be open. All of this tension and conflict have been created for the sake of the theater, but we must protect it at all costs.

That is why I am here, constantly, as the theater is of our vital importance – in addition to being an important cultural monument and a part of our heritage. We must open the gates and the public cannot let this

public property – their property – be trampled on. We must teach people that everything in the city belongs to all of its citizens; it is public property. That is why it is worthwhile to fight for the National Theater's survival: if we have no attachments to public property, we're merely consumers – simply tourists in the city we supposedly inhabit.





**FESHIZËM**



# WATER SLEEPS, THE ENEMY DOES NOT SLEEP — ERGIN ZALOSH NJA

Fatmira Nikolli

Ergin, many know you as Diversanti (which basically refers to “a person who engages in sabotage”). Your artistic pseudonym triggers memories of Albania’s period preceding the 1990s. Why have you chosen this alternative name? Do you feel like a “saboteur” in the present society? Does the word “Diversanti” still denote an individual perceived as someone who aims to overthrow the “power of the people” (in the contemporary sense of this phrase, borrowed from the 20th-century Albanian vocabulary under Enver Hoxha’s dictatorial rule)?

E.Z

In February/March 2016, I met a group from Organizata Politike that was very active back then in the protests against the new law on higher education (which was meant to raise tuition fees for students attending public universities), as well as in the Tirana Lake Park protests (concerning the city’s protected green area endangered by construction projects that don’t fit into it). In collaboration with this group of people and another artist, we organized a series of workshops on street art. In addition, we decided to form another, street art political group, with the aim of raising our voice against the neoliberal politics of the “Rilindja” (Renaissance) government led by Edi Rama, the Prime Minister of Albania, since 2013. The group was named ÇETA, which means “military unit” when translated into English. ÇETA existed for about one year, more or less, and produced ten works of great public impact, each of them denouncing the authoritarian behavior of Rama’s ally, the Tirana Municipality. It was precisely at the moment of my separation from ÇETA when I created an alter ego called Diversanti. In German, “ein Diversant” means a saboteur. However, the name originates from the Soviet communists’ notion of “диверсия” (diversiya). In terms of choosing the name, I was undoubtedly inspired by Albanian films of Socialist Realism. Diversanti mainly creates works of a controversial nature proper to street art: this is why I had to separate him from my own identity – my “Ergin-self” keeps focusing on conceptual, not street art works. This division does not mean that one excludes the other. Do I feel like the “saboteur” of the present Albanian society? I don’t think I am quite at the level of being

considered a dangerous saboteur of the actual populist power. I simply try to assume a critical stance towards manifold problems that exist in our society and our political system, from both local and global perspectives. Those who are different from “the crowd,” or those who refuse to obey the norms of mass culture will always be perceived as the black sheep in the herd. Whoever attempts to have a critical approach, or to remain a free and independent thinker with regard to the politics implemented by an authoritarian government towards its citizens, will undoubtedly be a thorn in that government’s side.

<sup>F.N</sup> In your projects “Naming the Halter in the Hanged Man’s House” and “FESHISM,” you see a public square as the place of execution, whereas the Center for Openness and Dialogue (COD) is a “cell” of the artists who are “fashionable enough” according to the government’s definition of the term. Others have viewed the COD as an institution that goes as far as to annex criticism. Today the COD has almost lost the name it was trying to earn, don’t you think?

<sup>E.Z</sup> In the video “Naming the Halter in the Hanged Man’s House,” one public square in Tirana changes into a place of execution for the unaware citizens who find themselves under the threat of the rope (which symbolizes the power). This serves as a reverse image of one of the squares ingrained in the Albanian collective memory, namely, a place in central Tirana where, in 1991, the statue of the former dictator Enver Hoxha was taken down and dragged.

In “FESHISM” the attention is focused on two significant moments: firstly, the project refers to fashion according to the government’s concept of it (the name “feshism” is a play of words, because it sounds like “fashion”); secondly, it tries to bring attention to the exercise of authoritarian force by the “Renaissance” government through the mixture of fashion with fascism (that is, “fashion” + “fascism” = “feshism”). As for the COD, now I think it’s safe to say that the center is far from the place it once aspired to be; instead, it has become the mirror of the Prime Minister’s policies and

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artistic tastes – a space that has failed both in terms of “openness” and “dialogue.”

F.N

“Backfire” is a project in which the crosses of the “Astiri” neighborhood houses are displaced to the buildings of the National Parliament, the Socialist Party’s headquarters, the Municipality of Tirana, the Prime Minister’s office. It intersects the public buildings where decisions of national importance are taken with residential buildings that have to surrender to and suffer from these decisions. Do you envision this reaction in “Backfire” as one that the citizens will have, in the future? Can resistance transcend art?

E.Z

Unfortunately, no. I don’t think that during these thirty years of “democracy” the Albanian people have displayed a stable and sustainable resistance, which could match the idyllic predictions reflected in works of this nature. We all know that recently, after a two-year long struggle with the “Renaissance” government, the resistance of the Tirana’s New Ring residents vanished. Houses are being demolished one by one, lot after lot. Nevertheless, there are cases worth mentioning, which prove that resistance is not always simply a way of artistic expression. The protest for the protection of the National Theater, which is still going on and has produced some successful effects, represents such a case. Whoever resists, wins.

F.N

While many artists choose to separate art from activism (through “artivism”), you suggest just the opposite. By using images of propaganda – from a gun to water as gold – in order to dismantle it, you are completely direct, full frontal in your work. Why have you chosen to be so open?

E.Z

When we speak of activism, we’re not addressing the audience of a gallery but a city at large (in this case, Tirana) and its inhabitants. If the posters in question, including my fanzine *Sputnik*, were not

straightforward, then no one, or only a few select people who get the chance to see them, would understand the message conveyed by the images. As I mentioned earlier, as Diversanti, I create works by which I try to be as communicative as possible in addressing the general audience and a public life. It is very important that the message reaches its destination – the people in the street, in this case. As a result, I hope that the work will garner some sort of reaction: to rouse a dormant mind from sleep and passivity, to get someone to leave the pub or, at least, to force the municipal employees to remove these posters from the walls (as has often been the case).

<sup>F.N</sup> Many of your works focus on the violence against the city, the urbicide in Tirana – a phenomenon that the government serves to us, its citizens, as the pinnacle of good taste with an avant-garde approach. How has the urbicide shaped our shared and personal spaces?

<sup>E.Z</sup> Since I spent the most beautiful period of my life in Florence, where I graduated from the Academy of Arts, I think that, in a way, this experience has helped me cultivate definite appreciation for beauty and architecture. Yes, it is true that several of my works focus on the “violence against the city,” the phenomenon of urbicide. The rampant violence against the city of Tirana began with the “Paris Commune” neighborhood and, via the so-called Urban Renaissance, it has spread throughout the country. With over 700 construction permits in the last three or four years, the mayor of Tirana Erion Veliaj is dealing the final blow to the city. The ceaseless construction is taking its toll on the city and its inhabitants. Tirana ranks among the first cities in Europe in terms of urban pollution and the increase in the number of patients with respiratory diseases and various tumors. I also think that the city definitely shapes its inhabitants. Thus, if we live in a “violent” and polluted city with a distinct lack of green and properly public spaces, then its citizens will also be violent, unappreciative and disrespectful of beauty, elegance, and public property. Architecture and urbanism are the arts that shape civilization and differentiate us from other beings inhabiting the planet.

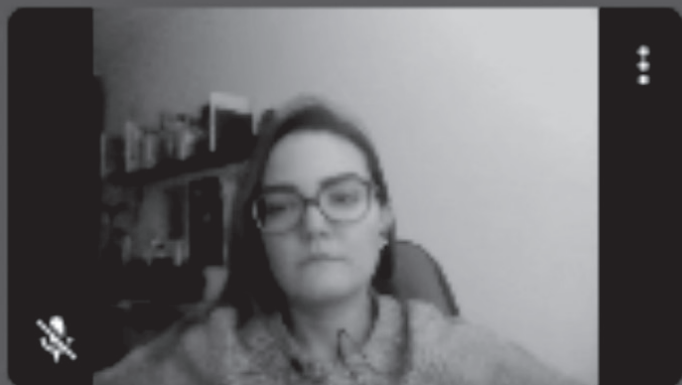
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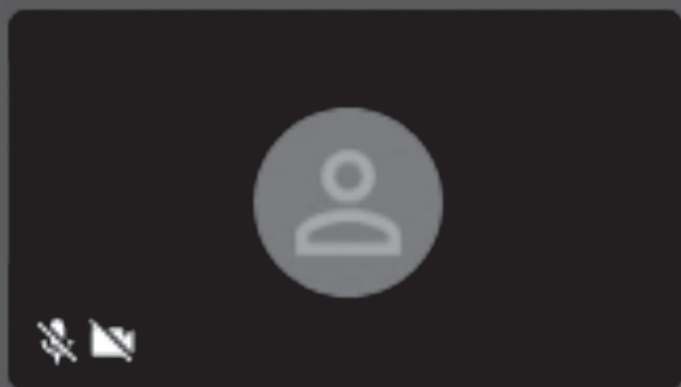
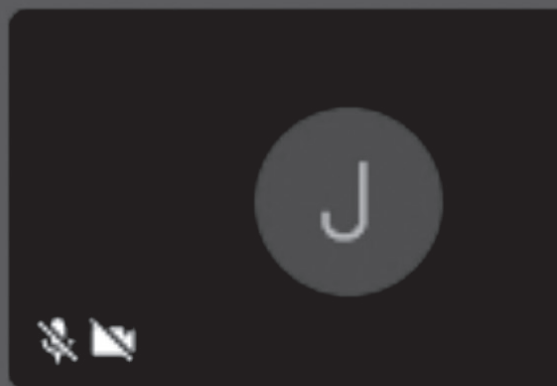
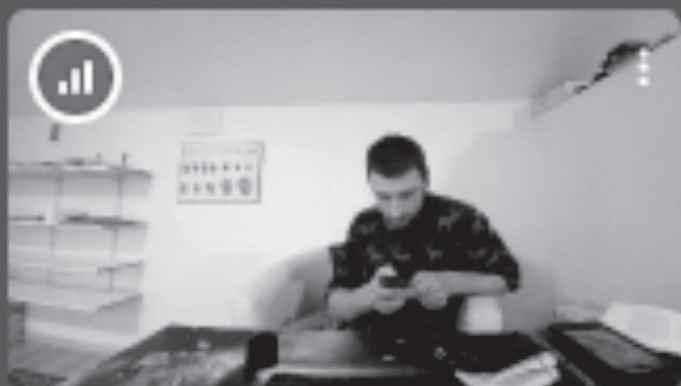
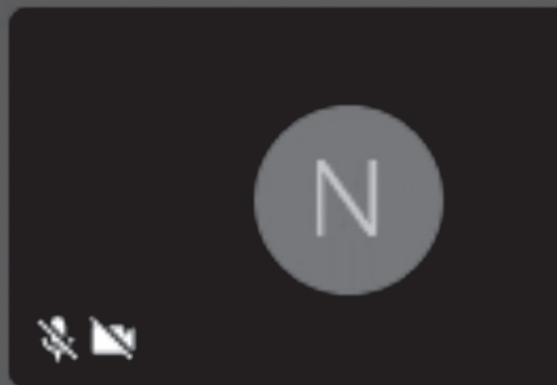
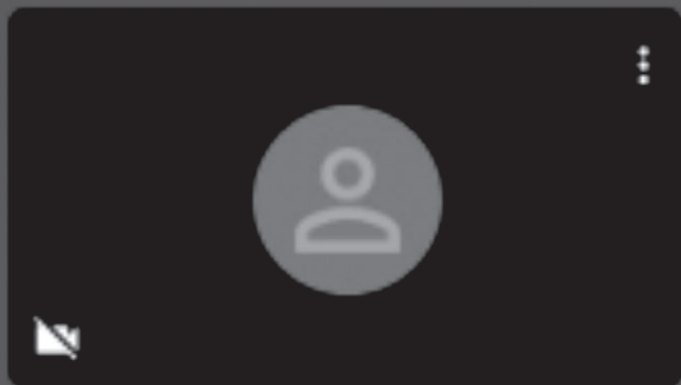
<sup>F.N</sup> In your project “Ground Zero” you stop at construction sites and plant tear-gas bombs, which were everywhere over the last year. Ironically, in your previous project, you have also focused on the asphalt pavers bearing the EU flag which, these days, happen to be some of the few vehicles with permission to circulate...

<sup>E.Z</sup> In “Ground Zero” I start from the theory of gentrification – a practice experienced in many countries, not only in ours. In essence, gentrification is a type of corporate policy that cooperates with a state for the purpose of forcibly coercing the proprietors of a property or apartment to vacate the territory targeted for development. The situation of the New Ring residents, but also that of the residents of a number of Tirana’s suburbs, best exemplifies the process of gentrification and the government’s exercise of power – starting with police batons and the excessive use of teargas grenades. The drone-photographed squares in “Ground Zero” are ones full of high-rises, shopping centers, corporate offices, and those of oligarchs, the same ones who will invest in the much-discussed New Ring expansion project. Here, we have the same reasoning as in the “Backfire,” namely, that the bombs will push back the perpetrators of the crime against the Astiri neighborhood residents. As far as the asphalt pavers go, I would like to quote one simple proverb: “Water sleeps, the enemy does not sleep.”

<sup>F.N</sup> The month of March 2020 has limited all our freedoms. Cities and citizens are “imprisoned” and have lost most of their basic rights, while the government has obtained in “official” ways (via Decisions of the Council of Ministers) all of the rights we considered legitimately ours beforehand. Furthermore, the freedom of media has weakened at the same time that many world leaders are using the COVID-19 pandemic in order to solidify their power. What is your interpretation of the situation in Albania and beyond?

E.Z. As we are currently witnessing, individual freedoms and rights will be restricted well beyond March. In order to shed light on the extraordinary situation we are going through (biblical to some extent, I would add), let's stop for a moment at the "Problem – Reaction – Solution" strategy. The problem (virus, pandemic, or any kind of crisis that tests states and nations) is created. What is expected are the reactions (panic, fear, paranoia, uncertainty regarding the future, collective hysteria, economic crisis, etc.) of those afflicted by the crisis. The ones that created the problem are also the ones offering the solutions (restrictive measures, social and physical distancing, a ban on public activities, restriction of individual rights and freedoms, censorship of the media, a police and military state, massive surveillance of citizens, enforced vaccination, curtailing of freedom for the ones who break the quarantine). The situation we are going through is testing us not only on an individual level, but also collectively – as a society, as human beings. What George Orwell wrote in his novel 1984 seems almost superfluous here, but is worth mentioning because of its perpetual contemporaneity: "If you want a vision of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever."







# IMAGES IN SPITE OF ALL — LEONARD QYLAFI

Your work “Estate” (2007) departs from the sudden transformation of the environment around you: in response, your video documentation of this process signals a revolt against it. What are the traces left by this transformation in the eyes of a beholder?

My work is invariably connected to my personal experience of life, of the environment I live in, and the society I belong to. The transformation of Tirana affects a person, in terms of urban space and individuals experiencing such a change. This may even include the cases in which these alterations eliminate places to which one is personally tied. Memory and experience are ideas that trigger my creative process and their exploration interests me greatly. “Estate” is a video composed of photos taken over a period of two and a half years. The work illuminates my relationship with the environment and space I live in. It all started spontaneously, with me simply taking pictures from my balcony. A green house, built during the time of communism, was destroyed and an apartment building began being constructed at its location. Showing its slow construction, the video raises broader questions regarding the urban development and transformation that have been taking place in Tirana for the last twenty years. It all happens very quickly and the city’s inhabitants are not included in the process determining the form of transformation assumed by the city. The video is made to be viewed in a large space. At first, it looks like a still photograph and the audience may ignore it; but if someone returns to look at it again, they will notice that the image has changed. Through various elements, I have tried to make the viewer question the attention that we, as individuals, put into the changes happening in our surrounding, the ways we participate in these changes and our relationship with public spaces.

In the “Whispers and Shadows” (2011) you show an excavator working at night. This entirely ordinary occurrence in Tirana becomes extraordinary through the female voice-over discussing the concept of the city-state or polis.

When the monotony of the excavator's noise is interrupted,  
it results in the creation of a new interrelationship of noises.  
Why did you place Aristotle in front of an excavator?

The excavator digging in the dark, in the middle of the night, while people are asleep – and its appearance, the way it moves and how its lights create a sort of theatrical effect – this process triggered my attention. To the image, I added the voice of a girl reading one fragment of Aristotle's *Politics* specifically the one discussing the polis. There, the philosopher elaborates on the idea of polis born as a place where people can live together: a concept at odds with the excavating machine. Aristotle argues that the primary principle underlying the polis is harmony in coexistence. In the Aristotelian polis, people find a way to coexist without letting one's interests prevail over those of others. Balance and harmony render the polis a healthy living place.

Similarly, in the "Private show" (2006) you affirm the opposite of such harmony – but now, instead of Aristotle, you and a musical piece are the protagonists. Why do you place your focus on these ruins?

The sound in this video is a recorded performance of myself playing a self-composed piece among the ruins. The latter likely belonged to an informal building that was demolished one morning. Regardless of its formal or informal nature, people had lived and breathed in these spaces, which were part of their everyday life. As the building was located on the way to the Academy of Arts, a path I used to traverse every day, one day I noticed it suddenly not being there anymore. What I experienced was a sort of shock. Something I was seeing everyday had disappeared, without a trace, and I did not know the reason for it, nor what would come afterward. This episode illustrates a kind of rupture experienced in the relationship between us and the places we live in, especially when those places are changed abruptly, without us being aware of such changes or being involved in the process. I played a piece that I had composed in honor of this disappeared

# IMAGES IN SPITE OF ALL — LEONARD QYLAFI

building, a sort of requiem for something that no longer exists. Certainly, this performance is open to different interpretations; but the main idea concerns the break with the continuity of things or with our relationship with them. It is the sudden rift in an individual's daily experience.

This work is closely connected to urban change in Tirana and, considering the issue of resistance, the big question is: what are the best ways to resist something?

How can an artist resist or evoke resistance? There are different ways to express this. One is commonly known as activism and has to do with a thoroughly straightforward expression. Yet, there are other methods. One could be allegorical: for instance, taking a simultaneously subtle and sharp approach, without addressing political issues directly. Regardless of the chosen path, being critical of what is happening in our society and in our environment is a civic responsibility. Society's reactions to these shifts, the ways we participate in them, how we share our reactions with one another and the methods we use so they can be transformed into works of art, these are responsibilities as well.

Does the questioning of history imply a critical approach or it is rather an act of resistance?

I have worked with the concept of memory for a long time. Actually, questioning your country's history or, rather, questioning the way it has been narrated to you, constitutes another example of being critical as an artist. Such a process raises questions regarding memory and education, as the things we learned at school may become or are actually transformed with time – also, because things that may resemble them can take place at a later point in time. Different historical events may echo or even supplement one another.

The image may lie, showing a reality that does not exist.

In your project called “Imagery,” you look for the figure of an individual in a crowd. How do you manage to find this person?

In the period between 2013 and 2014, I completed a series of paintings based on images pertaining to the communist period of Albania. It all started with a research of magazines published in the years between 1970 and 1980. At first, this simply had to do with my aesthetic relationship to them, as images I found there are the images of our childhood. They are more than familiar to most of us. Their appearance and the way they were made cannot be mistaken with anything else. Yet, the deeper I went with this research, the more I saw the need to question the history we were told through them. In this instance, painting became my critical language. I began this critical process with the collection of images documenting the “big state performances,” such as the International Workers’ Day, celebrated on May 1 with great street parades, or the festivities organized for the Albanian Flag Day (Independence Day), on November 28. What interested me more than anything was how, from a political point of view, the individuals participating in these parades were used as pieces of a greater puzzle, without having been allowed to maintain their status of individuals in the true sense of the word. They were merely fragments of a broader picture. This process of emphasizing them, separating them from the crowd and magnifying them, was fascinating. The bigger the close-up, the less I could see and everything became all the more interesting. At the same time, this experience became a kind of allegory of the remembering or learning process. The same concept applies to the “Shift & Reverse” and the “Row, Row Your Boat,” works which make part of the same research.

Several years ago, this research was taken further – for the purpose of your nomination to represent Albania at the 2017 Venice Biennale. To what extent could the questioning of an image raise questions about history?

# IMAGES IN SPITE OF ALL — LEONARD QYLAFI

The process of questioning an image in the series of paintings titled “Occurrence” (2017) was constructed upon the photographs that I personally took in 2011, featuring the Tirana’s main boulevard – the same location where the state parades used to take place. On the occasion of the 21 January 2011 anti-government demonstrations in Tirana, four protestors were killed. By calling it an “incident,” I am suggesting that this tragic event happened unexpectedly. On that day, the boulevard was full of people and you simply could have witnessed the history of your country happening in front of your own eyes.

At first, I put the photos aside but, afterwards, since I had been working for a long time with the images from media printed under communism – and they were taken at exactly the same place, the boulevard – I naturally veered toward the decision of combing the two: my own photographs and those from the 1970s magazines. I used the same method, blowing up an image in order to find, to detect, to recognize individuals in a crowd. It turned out that the same location recorded in two distant moments in time had an entirely different appearance: on the one hand, there were those colorful images of the past, with people forming a mosaic, and on the other hand, there were these not-so-colorful photographs from 2011 in the shades of grey, black and red, where people appeared to be disorganized and unhappy. We should not forget that the former ones were made for political propaganda purposes, whereas the latter – in the light of civic protests demanding freedom of speech.

Thus, what we see inside the photograph is not what has necessarily taken place?

This work raises questions about the nature of the image, specifically whether it tells the truth. What is it that we take from photographs? Sometimes, what we take from beautiful things is not the truth. Presently, I am working on different projects dealing with photography, including social media and phone images, the digital platforms used today to disseminate images. I am focused on images because we live in times when images

dominate, they are omnipresent and innumerable. Approaching them critically is important for an artist, because ignoring them is not an option. We should question the nature of the image that we see or, rather, consume every day. And we consume a lot, a great deal of our experiences is shaped by the visual impact. Images may be ephemeral but they construct the reality we live in – and precisely because they construct this reality, I am focused on the nature of the image.

Do you consider your work a sort of resistance because it juxtaposes two collective memories belonging to two different historical periods?

No, not only because of that. You can resist something without participating in it. This is also a form of resistance. If you make art out of what is happening, you are reacting. If you ask questions, you are resisting, too. That is what I have tried to do with the incident of the 21 January 2011 demonstration in Tirana. This type of resistance, intertwining various topics, is the one I can do best – as well as questioning memory and history.

There are questions that must be asked, especially in Albania where everything is quickly put under the carpet and easily becomes only a memory, without any explanation or any answer to offer. There was no lustration process in Albania, we have not had any public discussion about the crimes committed during communism. There wasn't a clear division of the past from the present and the transition took place in a very ambiguous way. And, at times, we act as though nothing happened. When I was asked why I put together the images of the 1970s parade with those of the January 2011 demonstration in Tirana, I don't like to say it explicitly but, actually, it is because the same political powers that organized people into public parades during that time (where participants were acting as mere numbers, dragged to make part of the performance out of their own will, waving a white flower and reciting "Long live the Party of Labor") are the same political powers that, in 2011, exerted such

# IMAGES IN SPITE OF ALL — LEONARD QYLAFI

pressure on people who had to come out and protest against something like corruption. However, even if these protesters become violent, the state cannot resort to murder. This cannot be justified. We thought we were learning about democracy but, in 2011, we showed that we had learned nothing. The juxtaposition of these two memories is an attempt to wake up society because it is our right to do so. We have the power, not politicians. This is my resistance, at least as I see it: telling our own experiences of truths, because there is no absolute truth. It is important to ask questions regarding the role of an individual in the society. Finally, the language and form of visual art is the other aspect that interests me: for instance, how can painting, in these technologically saturated times, exert by itself an act of resistance.

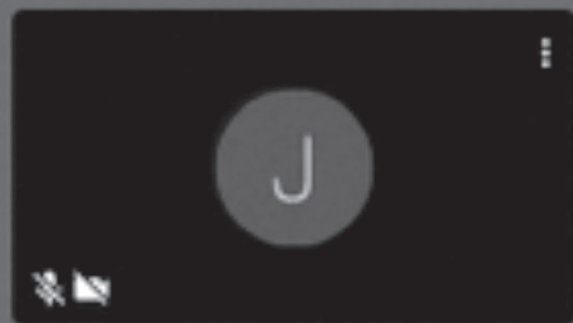
The topics that artists deal with in their creation are not necessarily marketable. Do artists depend on those who buy their products, on the public as buyers? How can you resist in life by making art – which of its “languages” you must speak, specifically?

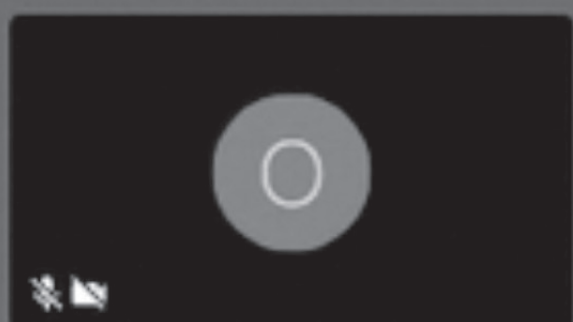
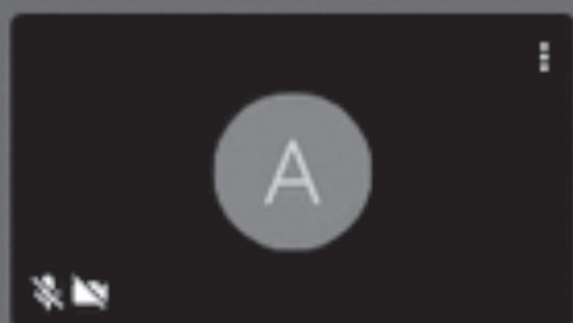
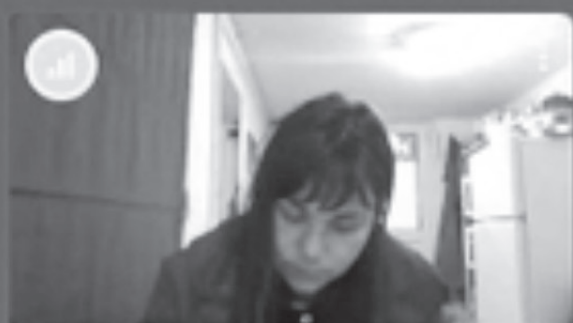
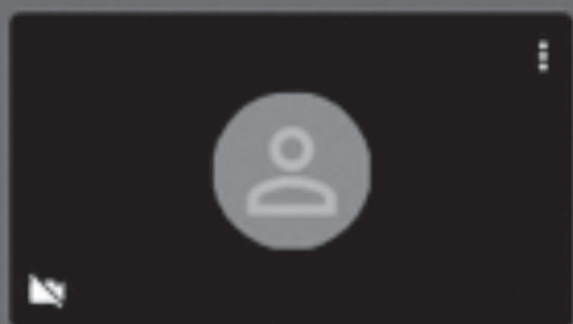
It depends. The collectors of video art are few. Even the best-known artists working in the genre sell their pieces to institutions or museums. Paintings, primarily two or three-dimensional, are the most frequently sold. The international art collectors prefer something to hang on a wall or, perhaps, a sculpture, maybe even installations. Videos cannot be watched all the time. Photographs and paintings may hang on a wall and can be viewed constantly. However, the artist cannot choose the medium because it is sellable although one must make a living from one’s work.

The medium is the language used by the artist and it has its own vocabulary. Video is a time-based process and this cannot be shown in painting. The construction of the building across my balcony (I am referring to my project “Estate”) is neither a photograph, nor a video or a painting. It contains all and moves through time. Painting, however, reinterprets photography in various ways. I believe that, from an ontological perspective, photography represents a moment in time,

something that exists, while painting is a creation ex nihilo and depicts something that does not necessarily exist (or it may exist in a form different from the one represented). It does not matter to me whether the language chosen is photography or painting but the latter, as an older art form, has a history that can both help and harm the artist (given that it is difficult to evoke anything new in the medium). Ultimately, though, the artists should not blame themselves. Regardless of what we do, even if it is not particularly fulfilling, we will get our answers. Let's resist then!







# UNFRAME YOUR POLIS — GENTIAN SHKURTI

A dialogue, in a black and white video, presents the city and its colorful facades to someone who is colorblind. How was the idea for the “Colorblind” born?

The ancient Greek concept of the city-state, the polis, has much to do with the social relations among citizens, in addition to its urban or architectural aspects. The artist is also a citizen. But the question is: who participates in governance? The city I live in changes constantly and my work is inspired by these changes. Back in 2000, the then-mayor of Tirana started a project of painting the façades of many of the edifices of the capital. It was his very first intervention as mayor and a very significant one. The manner in which this idea was presented was that, following this intervention, the citizens of the capital would feel better in their city. In other words, when surrounded by these colors they were supposed to become happier. Meant as a sort of “color therapy” for the population, whose opinion was never considered for this undertaking, the intervention was actually not democratic at all.

It is interesting to watch the video, without colors, and listen to someone describing it. It appears as if it contradicts (or provides a “negative” response to) Anri Sala’s video “Dammi i Colori” (Give Me the Colors)?

It is not a response. I was unaware of the fact that Anri Sala had completed this specific piece and it was not yet published. “Colorblind” was my own personal response, my reaction to the way I felt following the mayor’s intervention. There have been a few works about this subject but art-as-a-response is not the kind of art I prefer.

Your video recalls Derek Jarman’s film “Blue,” though the latter presents an entirely different structure and a necessity of exposing a single color (blue) to the viewers. The perspective from which spectators perceive the speaker in your video is interesting, however. This work is simultaneously poetic

and strongly political. Is this related to a kind of progress that is apparent but cannot be seen?

Art is a language, but it is not the kind of communication that you can use to say things quite openly. Art is not about activism, though I have nothing against activism, but I would not like my work to be accessible solely by an Albanian audience and understood only by those who are familiar with the country's context and history. I would like my work to be equally understood by foreigners – an Australian, for example, who may not even be able to find Albania on a world map. The way I see it, the city in question could also have been Singapore or any other place on Earth, but it happens to be Tirana.

“Democratic Painting” seems to be a continuation of the “Colorblind.” By using the highest-voted colors amongst a group of 100 people in order to create it, would you say that this work of art functions as an act of opposition to insufficiently democratic conditions around you?

A connecting thread between the “Democratic Painting” and the “Color Blind” implies that what I am doing is the exact opposite of what is done by the mayor, who paints the city's façades in an undemocratic manner. He should have asked the residents about their own opinion on this intervention, because he is the head of the municipality. And the city cannot be used as a personal canvas, to be painted on. An artist, on the other hand, need not ask. A painter cannot be so “democratic” as to ask others how they would prefer a painting to take shape.

In stark contrast to the mayor, an artist should be a “dictator” when it comes their own artistic practice. When I decided to create the “Democratic Painting,” I documented the color preferences by one hundred people who had been asked to provide their opinions, and then used the most “voted” ones. I chose the most standard colors.

# UNFRAME YOUR POLIS — GENTIAN SHKURTI

You gave these votes the final form of a landscape painting, thus subjugating the democratic vote to your own will. Perhaps this does not make the process so democratic anymore?

The painting's size is 1.30 meters per 1 meter and, within it, there are everyone's votes expressed in colors. I chose to give the votes the form of a landscape after I concluded the monitoring process and saw the abundance of blue, red, and green. And, ultimately, perhaps the artist cannot be that democratic. An author cannot write everything he is asked to write. This is my own work, based on the people's choice but, in the end, I am the "dictator" who places their hidden votes on the surface of a painting.

You treat the subject of dictatorship in its literal meaning, the starting point of which can be found in children's books read in the 1970's (such as *Back to the Future*). At first glance, some of your works seem to depict the present-day Tirana with the style of the communist future. How is that possible?

In some ways, this is the fantasy I had when I read the book "A Journey to Outer Space," written by Alqi Kristo and published in 1972. It tells of a boy who, upon his journey into space, returns back to Earth to describe Tirana as a city of skyscrapers. When the book was published, the tallest construction in Tirana was the "15-story-building" (otherwise known as the Tirana International Hotel) and what the author is describing is 21st-century Tirana, which is, indeed, what happened with the shape of the city thirty years following this novel's publication. It predicted, in a way, the outlook of our present-day urban life. During communism, the idea that Tirana would one day look like this was unthinkable. The book, written in the 1970s, offered this metaphor of progress using skyscrapers. It seems to go hand-in-hand with the politics of construction in Tirana nowadays.

This prediction about Tirana from a communist perspective seems interesting. Could it be somehow related to the sense of optimism that the regime demanded?

The novel was a science-fiction, a literary genre popular in communist countries, or the Soviet Union's "satellites." However, in my research for this piece, I learned that back then there were no sci-fi writers in Albania. Albanian writers at the time wrote about daily life, progress, socialism, etc. They were forced to produce such literature. The work that I analyze was the sole novel of its kind written by this author, whose most common subject was the agricultural cooperatives (state farms resulting from communist land reforms). As children, we were told in school that, once the socialism we were experiencing was over, communism would follow and, with it, money would become unnecessary. This utopia implied that working people would not need money because they would have everything without it. In the book, the planet that the boy visits has already undergone communism and he tells of the future.

If we are talking about potential foretold futures, can we speak of a "post-coronavirus future" or will we return to communism (given that the current strict measures taken by the government are exhibiting a certain authoritarian nature)?

I don't know. My work carries the sign of our times and we are indeed living in hard, tough times, times that will leave many of us traumatized. This is a trauma for all humankind. Not only for artists, who are perhaps more "sensitive." It would be strange not to produce a work out of this, as it is a situation that fuels creativity – especially in social media.

Much of your work is intertwined with the subject of resistance, but not in an entirely straightforward manner. How do you separate activism from art?

# UNFRAME YOUR POLIS — GENTIAN SHKURTI

I would prefer if my work is not perceived as directly tied to resistance. I call “activism” what I share through online social media, while my “art” is my actual work. These are two distinct things. I prefer to separate art from activism also because I would not want to be permanently tied to the times I live in. I would like my art to resist time and to be understood after 50 or 100 years from now. Resistance takes on meaning when a change caused by it finally takes place. When I separate art from activism, I am implying two different languages. Activism is a stance, which I also have in my artistic practice, but art engages another language to convey its message. As an activist, I have worked with animation and have publicly supported the protection of the National Theater on social media, but I do not see this as a work of art. In order to live, I produce commercials, most importantly for companies I do not believe in and products I don't like. Sometimes, I find it difficult to separate my three distinct activities (as an artist, an activist, and a commercial producer) but, if you look closely, there is a common thread running through all three of them. I don't see a conflict of interest between them because they represent different languages. The language of activism is very local: on the one hand, I address Tirana through my activism because only its contemporary citizens can understand what I am trying to communicate; on the other hand, through my art works, I speak to all humankind regardless of time and space, because of the language I use in my artistic practice. Nevertheless, dilemmas are inevitable.

In your work titled “Frames,” an open landscape painted in the socialist realist style stands in stark contrast to the construct inside of which it is presented: something as “free” as nature is presented in a structure of rationalist architecture. It looks as if the painting suffers within this structure where it has lost its freedom.

Before the painting process begins, measuring and shaping a canvas in order to frame the future painting is always beneficial for the final composition. The painting process is conditioned by this limitation and,

therefore, encourages a more balanced image within the predetermined shape of the canvas. A realistic painting attempts to immortalize one moment of life in a scene chosen by the painter. In landscape painting, this “freezing” of a moment that the painter wants to capture lasts longer in time than is the case with continuously moving objects. A landscape offers you the luxury of realism because the scene faced by the painter changes slowly. In the series of landscapes titled “Frames,” I have attempted to capture a moment or a scene from real landscapes of my choice. However, these selected landscapes will necessarily change in the near future. With the point I made earlier in mind (about how framing serves to balance the image), my awareness about the inevitable fate of the landscape I choose to depict brought me to the next point: I thought to expand the limits of the frame and to frame the landscape painting according to this fate, in order to accommodate its transformation. If the fate of the selected landscape in the near future is a certain reality, then consequently the frames must virtually expand to include this reality. In this case, the framing goes beyond the artist’s authority over his or her canvas.

You seem to reveal a kind of conflict between the idea of freedom – in the sense of “free will,” conventionally speaking – and its limitations. In the “Frames,” you focus on urban transformation, but could there be an interpretation stretching beyond this, toward humans themselves (for example, in reference to a “framed” or restrained individual)?

I think that any limitations of freedom, or “frames” imposed upon the life of any individual, have often proven to unleash previously unimaginable creativity. This is a strange relationship about which I could list countless examples but, suffice to say, this is simply the way it is.

You refused to participate in the exhibition “Albania, 1207 km East,” organized between September 2016 and January 2017 at the MuCEM – Museum of Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean in Marseille, France. The main reason behind your decision was what you saw as a kind of cultural propaganda where visual arts play the role of



# UNFRAME YOUR POLIS — GENTIAN SHKURTI

an “escort” in pursuit of an exoticized presentation of the country.  
What specifically made you withdraw from this project?

That was an exhibition that changed along the way. The project was conceived through a collaboration between the Albanian Ministry of Culture and the French Embassy in Tirana, with an idea to have several contemporary artists from Albania and France selected and jointly presented in two exhibitions: the first one was to be held at the National Art Gallery in Tirana, and the second one at the MuCEM in Marseille. Meanwhile, in the period between the two shows, many changes were introduced regarding the representation and the conceptualization of the exhibition.

To be precise, I was indeed selected to take part in this project and to showcase several of my works, but the original idea – of an exhibition that would reflect one part of the Albanian contemporary art scene – at some point started to be disfigured. Unlike the initial proposal, the exhibition was slowly becoming a kind of propaganda of Albania’s cultural scene, in the pre-1990s style, where these types of events would serve up an incoherent fusion of a folkloric and a modern Albania. Thus, I decided to withdraw from this propaganda and, indeed, the curatorial text confirmed my hunch. The most pivotal part of the event was not reserved for the participating artists but for the presentation of Albania’s cultural “achievements.” Let me also put it this way: in order to make a sustainable living here, in Albania, being a contemporary visual artist makes this task entirely impossible. So, I work in the fields of advertising and production of commercials. I try hard to keep these two activities separate. The relationship between art and the government’s propaganda is a fundamental part of my artwork. None of the works I exhibit will ever “advertise” any government.

Indeed, how can the art of an artist who refuses to be appropriated for political purposes survive? Does it mean that, by refusing this, artistic production is then doomed to remain outside of the art scene (considering the fact that the art scene in Albania is determined by the official political institutions)?

I disagree with this viewpoint about the local artists who do not produce art because the official institutions determine the art scene. Official institutions could support the art scene that, in view of a long-term politics, would serve immensely toward the emancipation of our society and, consequently, its general development, too. However, I do not think that official institutions should affect individual creativity. All a musician needs to place notes in a score, all a writer needs to write masterpieces, all a visual artist needs to draw, and even scientists – to draft a man’s journey to the moon – is a piece of paper and a pencil. When these two, paper and pencil, are prohibited, then we can say that the state is determining the creative activity of an entire society. As persistent as they always are, there will always be art, artists and “official” artists.

You deal with “frames,” even with the work entitled “Conform” (2015), but there you place the frames in the background, in a way to adapt the handcuffs to the hands. What is conformity: a passport, or a punishment that we inherit from our childhood education?

Conformity is a choice – in the same way that one chooses to apply for the most valuable passport when the opportunity presents itself to an Albanian (since you mentioned passports and I liked it). Anti-conformity emerges as a consequence of the existence of rules established by authorities, i.e., of the conformity. I doubt if any anti-conformity would exist in an anarchic world. Childhood education is very important, but I think that what makes us choose conformity as a “passport” has more to do with the character of an individual. It is indisputable that circumstances and education are crucial in shaping the character of an individual. And this is true even more so nowadays, with the massive influx of information, which ultimately becomes part of education and which serves to shape the character of a child. Through the extended computer usage and the time spent on Internet browsing, digital information authority prevails in comparison to parents’ or educators’ authority, as it used to be the case in the “ancient” times of thirty years ago!

# UNFRAME YOUR POLIS — GENTIAN SHKURTI

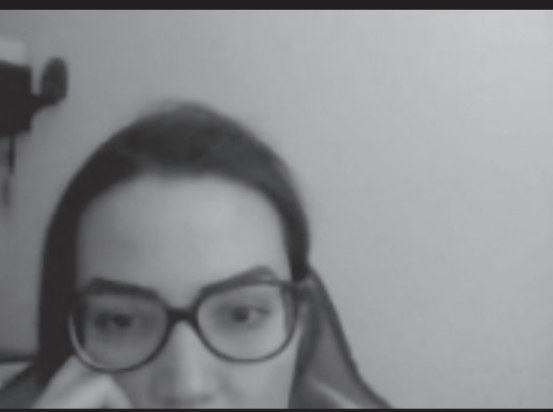
Does an individual artist feel that he or she becomes marginalized due to what he or she is, due to what he or she thinks, or due to his or her ideas on what constitutes freedom?

I cannot speak on behalf of other artists, but I personally do not feel marginalized because of my ideas and freedom. The opposite is true. I was unmarginalized then, when our limitations in accessing the Western world and its art were larger. I think it is Albania itself that is marginalized along the way that the Albanian society has been governed over the last 100 years: which almost seems to be an attempt at keeping an entire society marginalized, not only the artists. Have you noticed that, when they leave the poisonous Albanian soil and find themselves in a more fertile ground, talented Albanians flourish? If they had remained here, they would have been severely mistreated. Today, in a world where state borders no longer represent barriers to communication, there are thousands of ways to evade marginalization. I often think that nowadays, as with conformity, marginalization is also a choice.

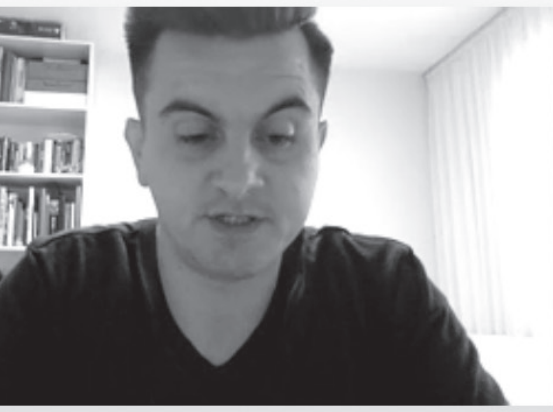
In your “Architectural Project” from 2004, you construct a “residential building” with one-room apartments. It can seem almost prophetic, especially today, as we find ourselves imprisoned due to the actual viral pandemic. We can also see it as a “frame” of our daily life. Is there another premise of this art work that we should keep in mind?

I would not dare call it prophetic, but it is true that this piece is particularly relevant today. Perhaps, because limitations have always existed – today as much as ever. Social distancing need not only be caused by authority. Self-isolation can be the result of choice. Or, as in our current case, imprisonment can result from the authorities meeting a tiny microscopic virus. This is why, I think, this piece is relevant in different periods of time.





alketa ramaj

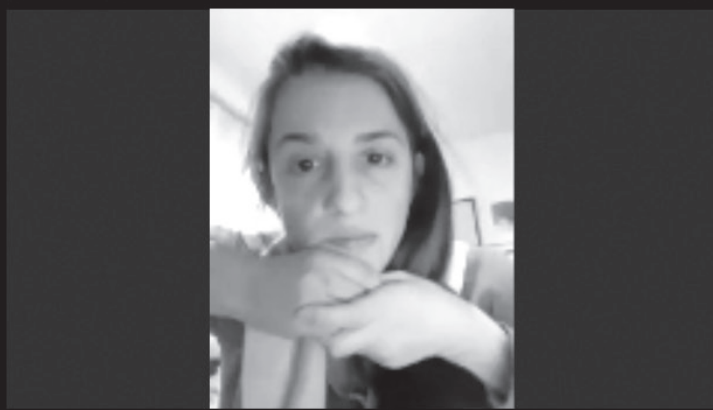
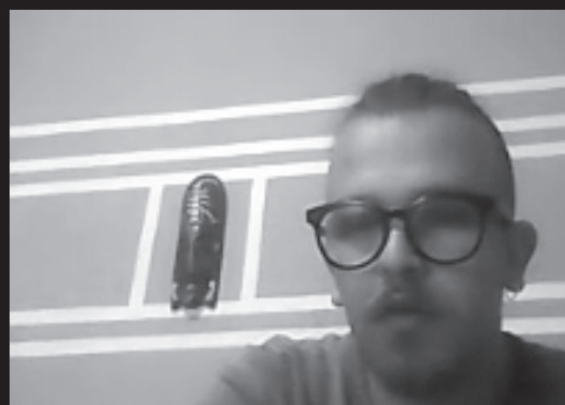


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# HOW CAN A MUSEUM CHANGE THE CITY? — LUÇJAN BEDENI

How would you describe the “journey” of the Marubi National Museum of Photography from the mid-1800s to the present?

The Marubi Museum is of crucial importance in Albania, not only for the images we have in our collection, but also for our large archive of unused visual data. I have had the pleasure of seeing many museums of photography around Europe and the United States, but I have never come across the same kind of archive as ours, containing glass plates, negatives, and films. The Marubi Museum has had its “journey” from a private photographic studio through an archive to a museum of photography. Its beginnings as a studio were in 1860, but the archive was created much later, in 1970, when the communist regime (that used to prohibit all private property) transferred the studio’s ownership to the Albanian state. As such, the Museum has collections of all the historical photographs of the city of Shkodra – recorded by thirteen photographers – which total to around 500,000 glass negatives and films. During the period of state ownership, the dictatorial government opened the archive under the name “Fototeka Marubi,” an image library, with Gegë Marubi as its first director. He was the one who, in 1972, began to keep an exact inventory of the negatives and continued to do so until his death in 1984. It was in 2016 that the “Fototeka” became the National Museum of Photography “Marubi.”

How come that an Italian, who arrived to a city ruled by the Ottomans back then, turned out to be the cornerstone of a more than a century long photographic dynasty?

Pietro (or Pjetër) Marubi came to Albania during the second half of the 19th century and, after traveling from the north to the south, he settled down in Shkodra. At the time, the city was becoming an important regional center, which is what had ultimately encouraged him to open the photographic studio there. Let me say that I am not talking about this only as the director of the Marubi Museum, but as a scholar who has studied Pietro Marubi’s life for almost eight years. Many of the things we know

about him are myths. Many stories describe him as a “criminal who fled Italy,” or as “the very first photographer in the Balkans.” Confronted with such narratives, it became a duty for me to write a book, based on my own research, that sheds more light on his life. He is certainly not the first photographer in the Balkans. Before Marubi’s arrival to Shkodra, there were many photographers already present in the region at the time (and even further to the east). I have found documents providing evidence that his journey to Albania was a chance occurrence. Settling in Shkodra must not have been easy for him: back then, the city was involved in the organized rebellions against the Turks, as a result of the Tanzimat Reforms (1839–1876) that meant to consolidate the weakening Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, he settled down in a house in Shkodra and worked as a painter and architect before establishing himself as a photographer. He opted for photography in the 1860s when he found the studio, the original location of which is still unknown. In 2017, I discovered 17 images depicting the same garden, which makes one assume that his first studio was an open-air garden where these photographs were recorded.

What do you consider to be Pjetër Marubi’s most iconic or important images?

There are several of them. I would start with one of the first photographs Marubi made, which is his self-portrait. It is a very important image, not only because of its unique size but, also, because of the fact that it is one of the oldest photographs to have been developed by a technique known as the wet-collodion process. Another important photograph represents a married couple, Rrok and Maruka Kodheli (Pjetër Marubi’s gardener and his wife). I have selected this one because it is connected to yet another photo, that of a boy on a donkey. The boy is the gardener’s son. This is how we learn that, when Marubi arrived in Shkodra, he employed a gardener who would help him maintain the garden where his photographs would be recorded. Rrok Kodheli was the father of Mat and Kel Kodheli, who later became Marubi’s “adopted” sons. They did not



# HOW CAN A MUSEUM CHANGE THE CITY?

## — LUÇJAN BEDENI

only serve as his assistants: they inherited the photographic studio upon Marubi's death in 1903 and became heirs to the Marubi photographic dynasty. The boy on a donkey is Mat Kodheli, whom Marubi sent to the studio "Sebastianutti & Benque" in Trieste so he could learn about the art of photography. Upon his return to Shkodra, Mat worked with his brother and Pjetër Marubi, but also with Kolë Idromeno, yet another important figure of the National Renaissance, a cultural and national awakening movement in the 19th century Albania.

In addition to the portraits and records of the city's prominent figures, can we also talk a bit about the Marubi Studio as an innovative force behind other genres?

Giacinto Simini comes to mind here. He was a famous doctor from Lecce who seems to have been involved in the Italian unification movement (or "Risorgimento"). Following his rebellion against the king of Naples, Simini came to Shkodra where, once settled down in a large house, he established the very first surgical hospital in Albania. His is the one of Marubi's oldest photographs, dating back to 1860. Then, we also have the photograph of Giacinto's son, Genaro, in three different positions. These images may very possibly be one of the first advertisements produced in the country. Genaro's photograph is clearly a collage. Though a broader knowledge of the history of collage as a genre is necessary here, I would venture saying that this may be one of the very first photographic collages in the world from those times (1860). We see the same young man in three distinct roles: first as a customer, then as a patient and finally as a doctor, wearing a white shirt. This collage most probably served as an advertisement for the services offered by Simini's hospital.

The Marubi Studio was also designed as a theater stage, where a variety of rituals could have been photographed. The upstage comprised of a painted backdrop, depicting images from nature, in combination with real, physical elements (such as rugs or chairs), which all together created a hybrid, three-dimensional space. When we were in the process of constructing the museum, we recreated a stage with a similar backdrop,

so to recall Marubi's epoch: this turned out to be one of the most popular areas for our visitors. What we also have on display at the museum are the original, now restored objects of the Marubi's studio, as well as documents proper to it.

Nevertheless, photography remains the primary object of interest for the Marubi Museum and this is where the question arises: what was the very first photograph taken by Marubi and whom, or what, did he depict? Do we have any precise answer?

It is precisely the image of Di Donato, the Italian consul who lived in Shkodra at the time. Until 2013, it was thought that this image represented the first photograph made in Albania, depicting a prominent patriot of the time. However, a four-year-long study revealed that the man depicted in the photo is actually the Italian consul to Shkodra. In this period, all international consuls in Albania resided in Shkodra because, in the aftermath of the 1878 Congress of Berlin, the city represented a strategic geographical location; many of them went to the Marubi Studio to have their photographs taken.

Upon Pjetër Marubi's death, Kel Kodhel Marubi took over the studio. What had changed in this transition from the first to the second generation?

Kel Marubi became Pjetër Marubi's assistant at a very young age. Both he and his brother Mat (who died when he was 18 years old) were children when they were introduced to the business. After Pjetër Marubi's passing away, Kel inherited the studio and, for a very long period of time, he kept Marubi's last name along with his own. Initially, the studio's name was Foto-Studio "Marubi"; when Kel took charge of it, he renamed it "Dritëshkronja Marubi," in Albanian, which can be understood as "writing in light" ("dritë" refers to "light" and "shkronja" to "letter of the alphabet." He gave the studio an Albanian name because, at the time, Albania was undergoing the movement for its independence from the Ottoman

# HOW CAN A MUSEUM CHANGE THE CITY?

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occupation. Those who would have their photos taken in the studio would refer to Kel as “Marubi’s Kel” rather than by his own name, Kel Kodheli. It was for this reason that Kel ultimately decided to keep Marubi as his last name. In his youth, he was involved in the independence movement, an activity that had him arrested by the Ottoman authorities several times.

Regarding the studio’s name, did the focus of Kel’s photographic work likewise change?

Kel was very involved in the independence movement and, when we look at his photographs, we see that all of them were taken during historic events and motivated by historical reasons. Take, for instance, the image of the patriotic club “Bashkimi” (“The Union”) that, in 1908, would establish the Albanian alphabet as part of a larger commission. He zooms in on the moment when the Albanian flag was raised, which stood for the official declaration of independence performed, actually, by his daughter Benardina. His focus changed during this time of historical changes also because Pjetër Marubi’s studio (unlike Kel’s) used to operate in the Ottoman, not independent Albania. Moreover, Marubi was an Italian and the relations between Sardinia and Turkey (the Crimean War allies in the 1850s) were good in Pjetër’s times. When Marubi passed away, Kel was confronted with new circumstances and decided to focus on the Albanian national awakening and independence movement, in order to create and reproduce historic images. One of the most famous reproductions is that of Albania’s Declaration of Independence, which is how we know what the original looked like (as it was lost meanwhile). Another well-known reproduction (from an original photograph taken by the brothers Manaki), is the image of the aforementioned Alphabet Commission.

Are there any cases in the collection where photography incites history by having it exposed?

There are some. The Marubi archive stores not only the images of the

first Albanian Parliament but also of some of the most prominent women involved in the 1911 anti-Ottoman movement. Among other things, I would like to point out one image of the Albanian uprising. It shows revolt against international forces in order to expose the genocide committed in several villages of northern Albania, nearby the border with Montenegro. We have to understand how important the role of photography used to be in the city of Shkodra during that period. All of the photographed individuals came all the way to the Studio Marubi from their distant villages for the sole purpose of having this photograph taken. Even the Minister of Justice at the time, an imam (the person who leads prayers in a mosque), sent Kel Marubi a telegram asking him to take his camera and take some extraordinary photographs in order to expose these massacres to the international community.

The Marubis were taking photographs of the political figures of the time, thus preserving their portraits for the future.

What can be said about these leaders from the Albanian past?

Kel Marubi documented public manifestations honoring the Albanian monarchy and he also photographed members of the royal family. While Pjetër Marubi was the official photographer of Montenegro's royal family, in the 1930s Kel Marubi had been the official photographer of King Zog I of Albania until the country's occupation in the Second World War.

What happened with Marubi's third generation, that of Gegë?

Gegë Marubi was Kel's son. Upon his return from France in 1928, where he had studied with the Lumière brothers, Gegë began working with his father. In his archives, we find a photographic reflection on the most influential elements of his epoch in Albania. He was the one who had brought new infrared photographic technology to Albania. He had been the company name "Dritëshkronja" until it became a state-owned entity during communism. At that point, he offered the family's archive of photos

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to the state and got appointed as the person in charge of the inventory. Gegë Marubi left a valuable photographic legacy in glass plates, but his contribution was not limited only to this.

The Marubi Museum exposes a century of Albanian history through the most representative photographs and their authors. Are there any images that have been added to the permanent exhibition or taken down from it, since the museum's inauguration in 2016?

Yes, there are. One of them is the image of a dead man's body dragged around the city by the communist state forces. It is one of the most powerful images in the entire history of Albanian photography. On one side there are the soldiers of the new regime and, on the other side, there is Jup Kazazi, the leader of the first anti-communist uprising that took place in the region of Postrribë near Shkodra. Following the uprising (which aimed at overturning the new government but failed to do so), the soldiers were on their way to arrest Kazazi. However, he had committed suicide before they could get hold of him. They took his lifeless body and exposed it publicly around the city in a particularly inhumane manner. This photograph used to be part of our collection's permanent display but, in 2018, I received a letter from Jup Kazazi's son who expressed that he felt insulted by the exposure of his father's image in the museum. For him and his family, this exposure was too emotionally taxing and heartbreaking. He demanded that the image be removed from the permanent exhibition and, after much debate, the Ministry of Culture ultimately granted him this wish. I personally believe in the importance of having this image exposed, not only because 70 years have passed since the event or because we have an important documentation of a public act, but also because people have the right to know about massacres that have taken place. At this point, we should be grateful that we have these visual documents at all. After we had taken the image down, I investigated the topic and found out that images of a similar nature have been winning awards to the rank of the Pulitzer Prize. We are Marubi's

fourth generation and we need to digitize, preserve and expose all the extraordinary images we have.

Before it became what it is today – the National Museum of Photography – it was a struggling photographic studio. How did the resistance against difficult conditions begin so to get “Marubi” to this point?

It began in 2012 when I was 24 years old. The first few days after I took office, I spent more time outside of the office and more around the entire institution. It was not in particularly good condition because it had to be reconstructed and a swift intervention had to be made. The conditions were extremely bad and most of the people I was talking to didn't even understand what I was saying. We had problems starting from the humidity in the photo library, a very basic issue but one that could be very harmful to the photo archives. We had no inventory at all since Gegë Marubi's death. Lights and security cameras were needed to monitor the gallery and its valuable archives. I had to discuss about the conditions with everyone. I insisted that the media and various ambassadors visit “Marubi” so they could witness these conditions by themselves. I did not give up and, day after day, gradually we got to where we are today: a contemporary national museum of photography with new challenges ahead.

How can a museum change the city it belongs to?

When the museum opened in 2016, we created a strategy we believed in. Our dream was precisely to change the city, not its structures but its philosophy and mentality so that we could freely share our ideas with and within it. Exhibitions were the most important part of it, but also the public talks, which is why we invited photographers, artists, and philosophers to hold discussions where the entrance was free. Another important part of the program were publications: since 2016, we have published our bi-annual exhibition catalogues. We need more staff in order to reach

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our objectives for the collection's digitalization, however. As part of a UNDP-supported project, we were able to digitalize 100,000 images but we still have 400,000 more items to do. With Blerta Hoçia, we have a conservation plan in place and now we are at the point of implementing the highest quality materials for the envelopes and boxes that conserve the museum's photographs. There is much that we have already done in terms of changing the general philosophy regarding the best methods of conservation. In addition to our educational events, we are also organizing many other ones where, every month, we hold 2–3 meetings for children of different ages. We are having a conservation program in the summer. We have created seminars and many of the volunteers for our summer programs are students from schools in Austria who specialize in digitalization.

The Marubi Museum once held an exhibition with clearly altered, manipulated photographs, something that is very important in the history and role of propaganda.

What came to light in the end?

There were many images displayed in that particular exhibition, but I distinctly recall two of them. The first is the one of the hospital advertisement that I have already mentioned before. The other is the photograph of Albania's former dictator, Enver Hoxha, out on a balcony in Shkodra. The original photograph from 1936 (when he was still not involved in politics) shows Hoxha and his fellow patriots. Years later, when he came to power, he tampered with the image by removing all those who were present and leaving only himself displayed. This is a case of photo retouching for propaganda purposes. Before this, we had cases of photo retouching for social purposes, for example, regarding the Italian soldiers who had their photos taken at Marubi's. They wanted to have photographs showing them together with their wives and fiancées. So, they would give Marubi separate images of themselves and of their partners, he would join the two images and create a final one where the couple was depicted together.

Would you say that the archive confirms the country's history and its most significant events or it manipulates them?

It confirms this. The only problem is that there are some images that are already known to have been retouched to manipulate the truth. These are well-known discussions, such as the one about the very first Albanian photograph. I cannot say what was the first Albanian photograph because there are several of them. In general, they confirm the history of photography. Based on the research that I am presently conducting, Marubi's story in Albania, his life in Shkodra, and some of his old photos tell a slightly different story than the one we are familiar with. It is improbable that the first photographs were taken in the studio. But, in general, the images of the archive are not manipulated. Some have been retouched during the dictatorship, but this also gave many new details to the history of Albanian photography.

During this period of isolation due to the viral pandemic outbreak, when the Marubi Museum receives no visitors, what does a normal day look like?

These days, I am writing the last two chapters of my research, which are the most important chapters of my entire work as they reveal an unknown part of the photographer Marubi. I have been able to shed light on a photograph without a title and without a date and, after a long time, I think I have finally pinpointed who this image might depict. I believe it is a well-known traveler who visited Shkodra in the past. Our archive contains countless captivating images and I would compare the Marubi photographers to the Abdullah Frères (Brothers Abdullah), Ottoman Court photographers from Constantinople. We have also discovered that there are 360-degree panoramas of the city of Shkodra, preserved in various negatives with secret numbers. By compiling them, I have been able to construct a complete image of Shkodra in 1860. I believe that it is an older one than the image by Josef Székely, discovered by Robert Elsie.







# SHAVING PATRIARCHY — HAVEIT COLLECTIVE

Fatmira Nikolli

At the very beginning of this project, the notion of “resistance” had a clear meaning: it was related to the contemporary political and social context of Albania and the Western Balkans in need of an organized effort by one portion of the civil population to withstand the corrupted governments’ actions, most notably in relation to various forms of public life and discriminated public behaviors. Currently, as this period of isolation and quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic forces us to stay home alone, do we need to reformulate the concept of “resistance”?

<sup>H</sup>As a concept, “resistance” can very well adapt to the present enforced condition of staying home by becoming a way of challenging oneself. Then, perhaps, everyone would be obliged to reflect on daily life and, in case of art-related people, even produce new artworks.

<sup>F.N</sup>We readily surrendered our freedoms, urged by our fear of sickness and death. How far could this response set us back in time?

<sup>H</sup>If we view staying home as a form of resistance, then it won’t feel like giving up our freedoms but rather a process of social maturation that will, over time, get us back on our feet. It could set us back in the financial sense but, by following the guidelines of staying home, it could take less time to get back to normality.

<sup>F.N</sup>Considering that the COVID-19 pandemic stopped the entire world in an unprecedented manner, from us living in the Balkans to those living in New York, Paris, or Berlin, what life lesson should we extract from this situation?

<sup>H</sup>This period’s main lesson is that the current condition is serious and that each of us must exercise caution. These days are marking a radical change in the world. Everything is changing, starting with the hug you

don't give because you don't want to endanger the other person and yourself. The distance and the extended isolation necessary for survival will "freeze" social relations.

<sup>F.N</sup> Your public performances have positioned you as one of the most prominent Kosovar groups working in the space between art and activism. Each of your performances, starting with the "Coronation" in 2011 (in reaction to the murder of Diana Kastrati by her ex-husband), has provoked a reaction on both social and individual levels. How much have you succeeded in breaking the barriers?

<sup>H</sup> The purpose of forming the HAVEIT art collective was to fight nationalism, gender oppression, and for the rights of LGBTQ+ people. As for breaking barriers, that could best be evaluated by others; nonetheless, if we have not managed to break them, then at least we have shaken them and raised our voices to talk about those issues.

<sup>F.N</sup> In 2014, you faced a lot of public pressure with the "Kiss." Given that in the patriarchal societies of Kosovo and Albania a same-sex kiss is considered – if not a disease – an object of pity, is your kiss supposed to be perceived as utopian?

<sup>H</sup> In addition to the public pressure, we were also shocked by people's reaction to our Saint Valentine's Day "Kiss." We knew that the acceptance of LGBTQ+ persons would not be easy but we could not have predicted that there would be numerous people calling for our death. It certainly seemed like an overreaction. Then we understood that social media could be used by artists as a means of obtaining a clearer picture of the reality in which they live – in this case, our reality turned out to be much more backward than we had previously thought.

<sup>F.N</sup> Your works focus on the experiences of marginalized social groups, the LGBT+ community, discrimination against women

# SHAVING PATRIARCHY — HAVEIT COLLECTIVE

and patriarchal dominance. In addition to the prevalent judgmental mentality, is this inequality a result of our institutional systems being powerless and themselves part of the prejudice?

<sup>H</sup> Our works focus on the daily experiences of someone who lives in Kosovo and faces numerous problems on a daily basis: from the lack of access to clean drinking water at home, through gender discrimination in schools or at work, to the lack of institutional support for artists. Due to their own state of corruption, our institutional systems are also powerless to change anything in our country. Our institutions judge individuals – and this is at the center of our work.

<sup>F.N</sup> In relation to this, you also focused on the government of the former Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, specifically through your photographic image in the traditional Albanian men's chamber (oda). What role does politics play in social problems?

<sup>H</sup> In the overwhelming majority of cases, politics in Kosovo takes place in this men's "chamber." At the time of making the photograph, the "chamber" was being mentioned constantly. The country's social issues are created by our institutions' lack of reaction and by our politicians' indifference regarding certain issues.

<sup>F.N</sup> War rapes remain undeclared, not only as a result of men's hurt pride (regarding their inability to protect their wives and sisters) but also because they, the males, are the first ones to judge them. In the performance "Examination," you denounce the entire circle within which women are forced to act. What is the general perception of these women? Do they judge themselves as well?

<sup>H</sup> When we discuss people who were raped during the Kosovo 1990s war, men's pride is irrelevant and, as such, should be ignored. From the

stories we have read, we have noticed that women were the ones who stayed at home, protecting their houses. During the “Examination,” we reacted to the sexist language used by the parliament’s deputies and to their attitude toward persons raped during the war in Kosovo. We have not done any research on the general perception. The important thing, however, is that about 20,000 people have been raped during that war and each of them deserves and has our respect.

<sup>F.N</sup> Despite the fact that the Albanian society exists in a kind of suspension between the civil law and the traditional law (or the Kanun), the latter ignores male violence against women in general, including murder, because it still values “the execution of revenge” in the case of “unmotivated” killings. What is suggested by this hybrid, the Kanun’s reinterpretation and the utter absence of the rule of law?

<sup>H</sup> The reinterpretation of the Kanun and the overestimation of a set of traditional laws that were in use long time ago, should be treated very carefully in the present day. In the past, this set of rules distinguished the right from the wrong – the norm of how people should live and behave in society. We think that the Kanun is valuable and its preservation – as a historical artifact, which can also inform contemporary anthropology and culture – is, indeed, important. However, in a patriarchal society, at a time when we are fighting for gender equality and many other similar rights, such a book can only exert a negative impact and be misused for the aim of oppressing women.

<sup>F.N</sup> Kosovo’s government was toppled at a difficult time, when the whole world is fighting a disease caused by the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. Political convictions aside, it is interesting that in Kosovo it was a woman (Vjosa Osmani) who led a political party toward victory, but her male colleagues did not let her manage the party. What is the real role of women in politics?

# SHAVING PATRIARCHY — HAVEIT COLLECTIVE

<sup>H</sup> We believe that the agreements or disagreements within a political party are none of our business. We must believe and fight for individuality, a mentality in which a politician's gender does not matter. Otherwise, in this state of pandemic, it would be best that our politicians take measures and work together to face this challenge and not create unnecessary drama and uncertainty. In a time when we should focus on "survival," we have become part of the political game and noise that have damaged us so much already. That's why it's important that we remain active and fight against injustice.

<sup>F.N</sup> From "Shaving Patriarchy" to "Baby Blues," "We Have a Mouth," "Bad Beast," or "The Middle Finger," the topics you address are many and varied. They encompass not only the right to life but, also, the right to a good life and to a good education, which is the starting point for the future. How much is this panorama of topics affected by events taking place close to you and by your childhood memories?

<sup>H</sup> Unfortunately, we grew up in a violent environment: we lived through the war. Those memories are a part of us and they are hard to shake. Growing up, the love of art and beauty inspired us to go after the dramatic arts: film, theater, drama, and acting. Meanwhile, we realized that it is impossible to share art with the social and political reality, so our work reflects the revolt and resistance that an artist must take part in, in order to fight any kind of power and limits, be they external (related to the social sphere) or internal (related to the individual sphere). The latter aspect is especially relevant in terms of the challenges one must face as a woman. Our position in a patriarchal society invites for the internal struggle towards freedom and a more authentic expression.

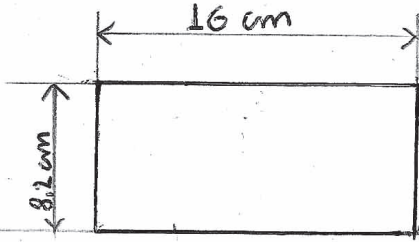
<sup>F.N</sup> Often, we are shaped by what we have experienced during the first 10–12 years of life. Freudian theories aside, to what extent have your childhoods and families influenced what you are and what you do today?

<sup>H</sup> When we were younger, our mothers constantly insisted that we should regularly go to school and get our compulsory education. They did not want us to do house work. They were saying: “Grab those books. I’ll take care of the house work. Go ahead and study. I don’t want you to ask your husband for money – you should be able to take care of yourself.” As far as Freud’s theories go, they don’t mix well with feminism and we have never paid too much attention to them.

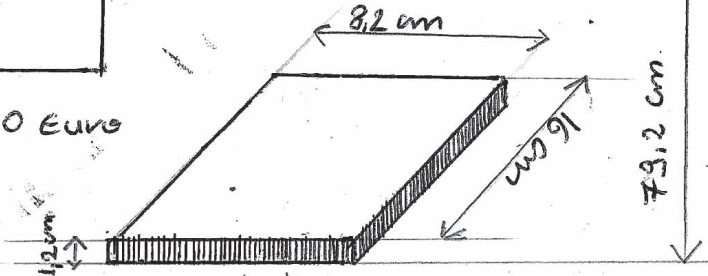
<sup>F.N</sup> There has been a lot of prejudice against you as a result of your work. But each one of us pays personal costs for public actions. What advice would you give those who are younger than you, and perhaps less brave or determined to stand for their rights?

<sup>H</sup> We cannot really provide a formula for how to be bolder or more determined. What we can say is that, from day one, we have been passionate about taking action and being heard. Even today, it is not that we are more courageous or more determined: we simply love what we do. We believe in each other and in what we create. Above all, we believe in change. We believe that the time of macho men with long mustaches is gone.

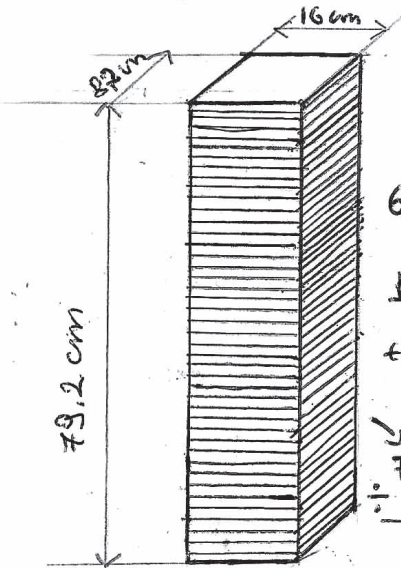




1 kartmosedhë 500 Euro

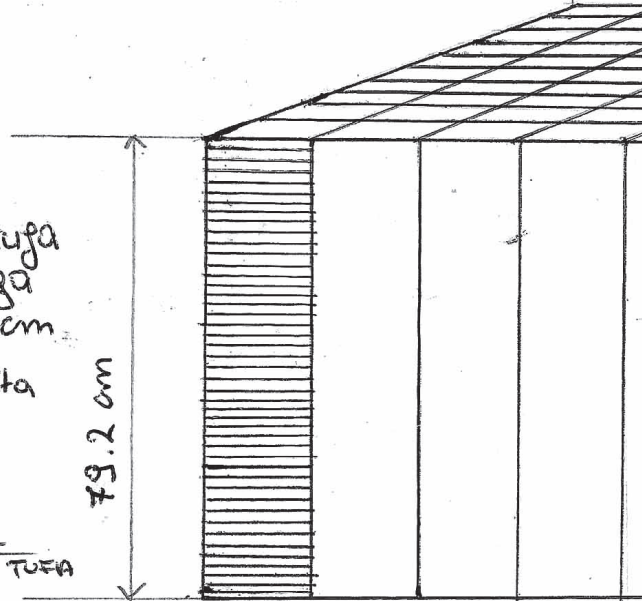


1 tufë me kartmosedha 500 Euro  
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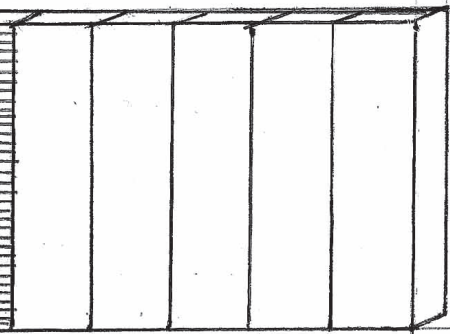
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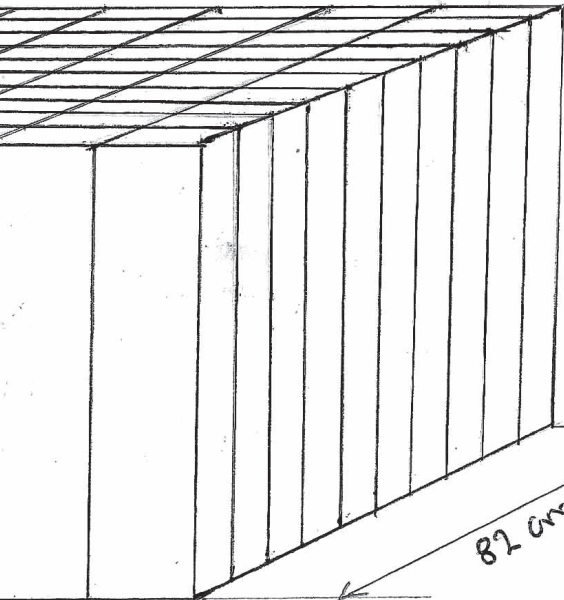


1 ksilonë me 66 tufa = 3.3000.000 Euro

96 cm



→ 6 kollona me nga 3,300,000 Euro  
= 19,800,000 Euro



→ 10 rreshtat me nga  
6 kollona =  
19,800,000 Euro x 10 =  
198,000,000 Euro  
+ 2,000,000 Euro  
= 200,000,000 Euro

↓  
"CORRUPT" ALBANIA MPs



OSCE INTERNAL  
REPORT/2015

2000.000 Euro janë  
40 tupa të cilat vendosim  
në rreshtin e 67 të.

Kubi ka përmasat

79.2 cm x 82 cm x 96 cm

# WHAT WILL REMAIN FROM RESISTANCE — PLEURAD XHAFA

Fatmira Nikolli

After two years of protesting against the government's decision to demolish the building of the National Theater, you took to the stage the printed equivalent of 200 million euro. This is the supposed sum for the sake of which the building would be sacrificed. Were you trying to "buy" the theater's future with this money?

P.XH

"Two hundred million euro" stands on two parallel lines of reference, which meet at a specific point, providing, thus, two different layers of interpretation.

The first line involves the confidential report on Albania, drafted by the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) in 2015. In this paper, the OSCE investigates the links between politics and organized crime, going as far as to address the wealth resulting from this relationship. This document also implicated the Prime Minister Edi Rama. Notably, the report sheds light on the Prime Minister possessing 200 million euro, undeclared, placed in an "offshore" bank account in the United States.

The second line, which is still part of a dialectical process, concerns the demolition of the National Theater. Of particular interest is the fact that two years after the publication of the confidential report, the same sum, two hundred million euro, resurfaces again, violently demanding the demolition of the National Theater's historic building.

This act created a public debate and clearly indicated that the people in power had arrogantly neglected to consider the conflict of this "scenario." It is precisely this moment that gave rise to one of the most prolonged and unique protests in Albania. Actors, directors, activists, and citizens created a movement of resistance that still goes on and ultimately enabled the state's withdrawal from the corrupt deal of the public – private partnership.

If you remember, the publication of the secret OSCE document also created a wave of public debate, which was eventually put out by the organization itself. The OSCE declared that the material, which it had

published, was based on local media reports.

Starting from these details and the ensuing events, I decided to represent the 200-million-euro sum in the shape of a cube, using the fake five hundred euro banknote. Afterward, the physical space of the theater's stage would complete the work.

I think that this exorbitant sum is not merely the product of the sense of greed that urges one toward absolute dominion. At best, it is the naked reflection of today's political power.

<sup>F.N</sup> In addition to the 200-million-euro cube, you made another one almost a year ago, namely: a cube composed of 143 tons of cannabis sequestered by the Albanian police during the period of 4 years. You ironically titled the work "The Largest Sculpture Ever Made in Albania." I am saying "ironically," because it is simply a piece of paper...

<sup>P.XH</sup> If I can make a slight correction: the "cube" composed of 143.9 tons of narcotics was not made by me. My intervention was to evidence this vast quantity and make sure that the Ministry of Culture, as part of the "apparatus," admitted it as a piece of art by registering it on the National Centre of Cultural Property Inventory.

The whole world knows now that during the period between 2015 and 2019, the illegal planting of *Cannabis sativa* was a program carefully planned and implemented by those in power. As a result, the former Minister of Interior Affairs found himself facing the Serious Crimes Court charged with drug trafficking in collaboration with and establishment of a structured criminal group.

According to the classified report of the State Intelligence Service for 2016, 127 police officers, including senior directors, were involved in drug trafficking. Today, only a small number has been arrested while the rest is still free. The audio tapping of the investigative files published by Peter Tiede, a journalist of the German tabloid *Bild*, finally confirmed what we had all known before without having had evidence to prove the truth of it.

# WHAT WILL REMAIN FROM RESISTANCE — PLEURAD XHAFA

The audio recordings revealed the scheme and the ultimate purpose of the money obtained through drug trafficking.

If you think about it – how the state, in collaboration with organized crime, had established an economic and social structure parallel to the official one – it is fascinating. This structure functioned based on several hierarchical rules.

A portion of the money obtained from trafficking *Cannabis sativa* went to pay the poor villagers who cultivated it in thousands of hectares spread out all over Albania. The Albanian police was paid to oversee the process. Another portion was invested in the construction sector, and what closed the cycle was the purchase of people's votes in election campaigns. This well-organized structure naturally leads to the top of the hierarchy where the "Artist–Politician," at the same time the Prime Minister of Albania, acts as a sculptor whose material is human clay. If we read it from this aesthetic point of view, I would say that this is the most dangerous version of the "social sculpture" theory by Joseph Beuys.

<sup>F.N</sup>  
"A Monument to Failure" (2016), an intervention in public space devoted to the 26 victims of Gërdec, was replaced by a tree soon after it had been installed in front of the Presidential Office Building in Tirana's main Boulevard. As a way of reminder, the tragedy – the explosion of a former weapons depot in the village of Gërdec nearby Tirana – occurred in March 2008 and destroyed hundreds of houses within a few kilometers from the depot, thus killing 26 people and causing over 300 injuries; in 2013, the High Court of Albania considered it a technological incident, but in 2017 the Appeals Court in Tirana declared the Ministry of Defense responsible for it. Has the new tree replaced the memory of your cut tree stump?

<sup>P.XH</sup>  
I don't think so! The explosion in Gërdec is an event firmly imprinted in our collective memory. What concerns the Gërdec case still nowadays is

our incapacity to confront government's violence during and after this event. Like many others, this event has become fossilized in our collective memory creating, in this way, a collective pathology in terms of social anxiety, which ultimately results in a manipulated and disappointing reality.

If we dig deeper over societal impotence as a consequence of power manifested through violence, drama, and scandals, we understand that we subsist in a perpetual state of shock. In this context, focusing on questions that trigger and activate memory is a necessity. What "they" fear the most is what history will testify in the future. This penetrating idea renders "them" even more aggressive with the memory. In the case of "A Monument to Failure," the "new tree" is an explicit and violent example of this control. As a result, if we planted a "new tree" for each scandal, today we would have an entire "forest" populated by monsters.

F.N

You have confronted power and those in power through your counter-propaganda approach in various projects. One among many is "Negative I-II-III-IV" (2015), a work about the victims of Albanian opposition demonstrations on January 21, 2011—the people who have never received due justice. Can art offer redemption to the downtrodden?

P.XH

I don't think that art can assume the position of meeting out justice because that would automatically place it in a judgemental position, which, in turn, would deform it. Art is much more radical. Art is an idea.

F.N

In your video "Mind Goes Blank, Eye Is Gazing into the Future" (2009), you reuse the books of Enver Hoxha (which served to decorate the cabinets of Albanian families after the fall of the system). To give a new meaning to the methods of propaganda, you dump them in the sea. Why?

P.XH

The sea allows the eye to perceive space in its vastness, unobstructed by the horizon line. During the regime changes in Albania, the horizon was

# WHAT WILL REMAIN FROM RESISTANCE — PLEURAD XHAFA

the internal call of confirming our existence through the exploration of the unknown. The regime's repressive methods, in both physical and mental sense, seem to have provoked, in the vast majority of society, what is known in psychology as "psychogenic amnesia." In other words, a condition where the memory of previous traumatic experiences is avoided: they are concealed by a defense mechanism created in the brain. As a result, the mind is more disposed to memorize new experiences. This phenomenon has placed our relationship with history in a hypocritical connection. The absence of confrontation with the truth has emerged into a hybrid political system. Even at the present time, a notable number of people in power (prosecutors, judges, and politicians) have been directly responsible for signing macabre executions of citizens in the name of "Enverist" propaganda.

In this line of thought, the video entitled "Mind Goes Blank, Eye Is Gazing into the Future" features the ideological books of Enver Hoxha that mirror, in a certain sense, our contemporary society. Only the appearance has changed. The essential content remains the same.

F.N

In the project "Lot 3" (2019), dealing with clashes between the residents of Tirana's "Astiri" neighborhood and the police, you stop and focus on a scribble to give it a new meaning. Why?

P.XH

In September 2018, the government announced its plans for a €40 million investment for the reconstruction of a 2.2 km road segment, part of Tirana's Outer Ring Road. The bidding procedure, which was announced soon after, split this segment into three lots. Two construction companies entered the tender for each lot, but one of them did not actually bid, making the other company the winner by default.

The reconstruction project demands the demolition of 317 properties in the area, the majority being informal constructions built over the last three decades. During this period, citizens from all over Albania decided to settle in the area, building their homes and family businesses along the roadside.

The same thing has happened in virtually every suburb of Tirana.

This situation is well known both to the government and the local authorities that regularly collect taxes and contributions from the inhabitants. Of course, before every election, all political parties have promised these people the legalization of their properties.

The same promises were made by the ruling Socialist Party in 2013 and again in 2017, until the government dispatched the authorities to mark the buildings slated for demolition with an “X,” spray-painted on the outside doors in blood red. Furious about this deception, the inhabitants staged protests, blocking the streets and confronting the police. As an act of revenge, they used black spray paint to scribble across the sign depicting the winning project for the reconstruction of the road. However, these actions did not stop the government from making the lives of the inhabitants even more difficult. The scribbles over the “Lot 3” site sign are, simultaneously, an act of uprising and the residents’ response against a corrupt scheme. What I saw in the scribbles was the power of the “sign,” which opened the possibility of a potential space for action. My intervention highlights this power by multiplying the “sign” as a model to follow in the future.

Unlike the case of the National Theater, the “Astiri” case violated a fundamental human right – having a roof overhead. This explains why it failed to obtain the citizens’ support, who saw it as a personal problem. In the end, the residents’ protest was suppressed, paving a way for the construction plan’s extralegal provisions.

What will remain from “Astiri” resistance is the red line mark of “Lot 3.”

F.N

Court art and the art of resistance have always been considered opposites, coexisting with or fighting against each other. These categorizations, which place artists and their messages in two distinct groups, also concern artistic and personal survival. How would you characterize this confrontation?

P.XH





# WHAT WILL REMAIN FROM RESISTANCE — PLEURAD XHAFA

F.N  
What has been the personal cost in your case?

P.XH



F.N  
Presently, the COVID-19 pandemic has turned our lives upside down in a matter of days, making us willingly surrender our rights. Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben, Bill Gates, and Yuval Noah Harari have all discussed a post-pandemic world, one that may look very different from the present one. In your opinion, what will this future look like?

P.XH  
This pandemic only further confirmed the failure of values that we, as a human society, have built. What defines us in these uncertain times is the fear, in all of its dimensions.

If we think about it, the most significant changes in the course of history have happened as a result of fear. This moment is one of these, I believe. But it all depends on how we will use this primal instinct. Are we going to use it as a saving grace, or delegate it to those in power who will undoubtedly wield it to their own advantage?

F.N  
Does resistance mean compliance this time?

P.XH  
Certainly, self-isolation at home and physical distance are acts of resistance. Yet, these responses place us in an entirely vulnerable position with regard to. In a literally abandoned and empty terrain, the establishment has already started to use fear to legitimize control. By completely violating human rights, the decision-makers are giving a new shape to the world, in which control through advanced technology is the dominant feature.  
Forced to live in these conditions, people ask to be heard. This is why, during the second week of the pandemic, a wave of protests went viral on

YouTube. People were protesting from their balconies. At first sight, it seems like a noisy act of rebellion, but if we watch intently, the disarmament becomes clear. Kosovo was the most glaring example of democracy and sovereignty violations, produced by that pandemic fear.

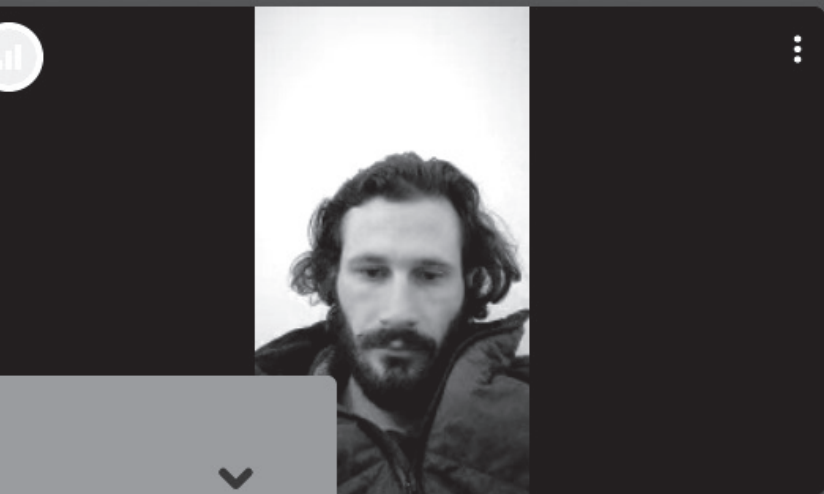
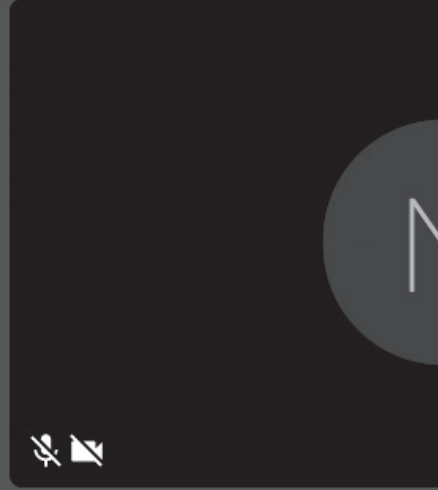
In essence, these videos represent our present status as political animals.

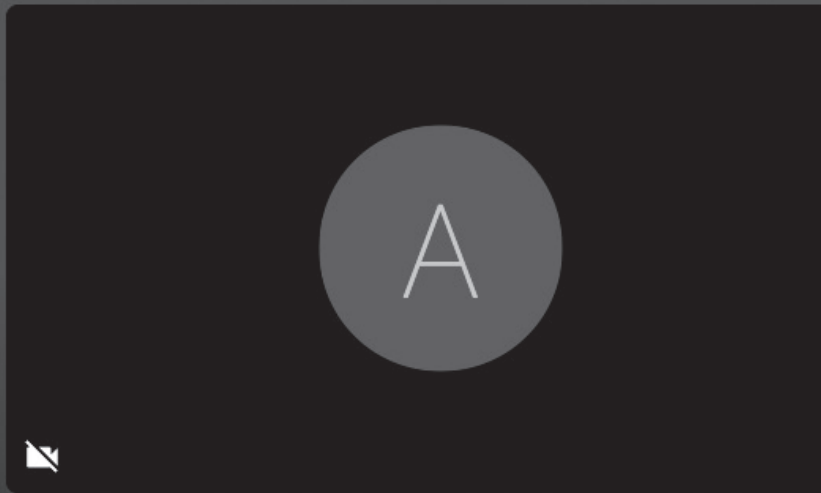
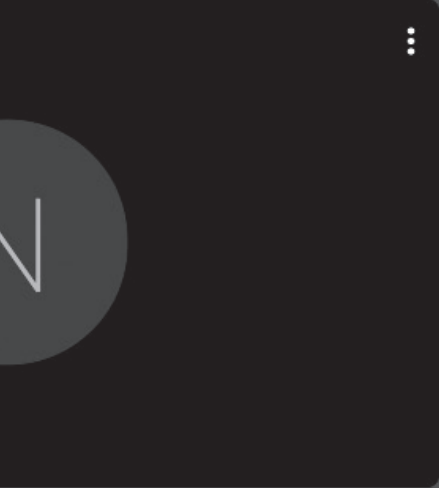
Impotent, disarmed, the enemy is not only the virus but those in power as well.

<sup>F.N</sup> What can art do during this time?

P.XH







# TIME AS RESISTANCE IN PUBLIC SPACE

## — STEFANO ROMANO

Fatmira Nikolli

Why do you view time as a form of resistance in public space?

S.R

The concept of time has always fascinated me and is a part of all of my projects, because it is, first and foremost, a component of all of our actions: a dimension of our being. We cannot think or act without taking time into consideration. Consciously or not, time is an integral part of how we understand existence. Can we define time? Yes, certainly, but offering a single definition for it would be difficult as the temporal dimension is ubiquitous in the idea we have of existence and, perhaps, it only exists in relation to our existence. Time has always fascinated people for its apparently inviolable structure and the concept's inherent poetic dimension. Everything we do or produce (including art, of course) is undoubtedly – as Aristotle understood it – a part of the temporal–spatial dimension. Thus, we can interpret time as a definite component of any artistic project, understanding the way it influences its realization or considering it as a constructive and fundamental element of the project.

F.N

In a time span of two years, you have completed 57 projects as part of what you call the “1.60 Insurgent Space.” In each of them, you focus on the temporal dimension. How do you locate this dimension in space?

S.R

In order to elucidate the concept of time in space, I would like to bring up a project where I collaborated with Heldi Pema, an artist from Tirana. He has taken one of communism's slogans – “All of the nation's people, soldiers” – and reused it to say: “All of the nation's people, artists.” We removed this slogan from a public space into a room of the Tirana Art Academy's dormitory. We emptied the room and placed the altered slogan there.

I think that here, the way that time operates becomes very clear. We took something belonging to the communist past (namely, a propaganda message targeting the masses) and used it in this new way when, in order to see it, one had to go to this private room. As a result, the idea of time and space assume a new meaning in this work.

F.N  
Can the concept of suspended time, lost time, or regained time find a place in art, even if it is done in an ironical manner?

S.R  
This is precisely the approach that another Albanian artist, Enisa Cenaliaj, and I used in a performance we did together. We went to the place formerly known as “Kombinati,” an important textile factory with a pedestal on a square where the statue of Stalin used to stand during the period of communism. When the systems changed, people removed the statue and only the pedestal was left. Enisa wanted to play a bit with the iconic image of the communist worker and, at the same time, with the idea of the future, of another future. She wore worker’s clothes and positioned herself on top of the pedestal, holding a monumental pose to address, at once, Albania’s past and future – having in mind that, during communism, the idea of the future was a bright one and could be actualized only through the joint effort of the nation’s people. When regimes come to an end, time reaches a standstill – and the future becomes suspended: this is what we were trying to convey. Thus, with this work, Enisa was attempting to recuperate lost time and the future. While we were working, an older woman – who happened to pass by – asked us whether the statue would remain there after the inauguration, without having realized that the “sculpture” was actually a human being in the flesh.

F.N  
For the project “1.60 Insurgent Space,” Armando Lulaj and you observe an ice cube melting in an unusual environment. Does this work represent the running of time that is so characteristic of our epoch?

S.R  
Armando Lulaj’s video “Time Out of Joint” borrows its name from a novel written by Philip K. Dick. This particular work evokes the idea of dystopia. Armando took an ice cube in the shape of a vertical monument and placed it in Tirana’s landfill. We stood there with a camera, watching and recording the ice cube until it melted, in order to observe the strange relationship that the environment forms with the ice. There were

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## — STEFANO ROMANO

animals waiting for the stream of water, Roma kids who played with it while time was passing and the ice cube continued to melt. There was also an idea of human responsibility regarding the environment that we saw in the video. The work, socio-political in its nature, was connected to the idea of time passing quickly and us, the people, melting just like that ice cube.

F.N

In the cases of Helmut Dick's project "Blackbox" and Stefano Cossu's "monument," is time the structure of the works?

S.R

In 2006, the German artist Helmut Dick's came to Tirana with the aim of creating a floating sculpture composed of a sheep's head placed on a black box of the same size as that of a sheep; inside, the box contains a stereophonic system through which one hears the recorded sounds of a dog barking. He placed the sculpture on the waters of the Lana river and it provided a temporal experience as one could see it, accidentally, or follow it throughout its journey. Together with the Italian artist Stefano Cossu, otherwise known as "The Invisible Industries," I did a project that happened in continuous time. The title was "Fundraising for a monument of Adolf Wölfli," the Swiss artist associated with Art Brut. Stefano wanted to collect the money by playing dice. With this aim in mind, he had built a wooden suitcase that, when opened, turns into a table that could be used for playing. Ultimately, he wanted to see whether the sum he had collected could be translated into a real monument. Time is essential in this work, too: not only because, as a project, it happens over a certain period of time, but also because it is developed through time and space (given that he implemented it in different cities and at various times and, also, because its structure – the idea of time – is a constituent part of it). We wrote something about it together in one of Tirana's pubs.

F.N

In the work created with the Italian-Syrian artist Tabibzadeh, could your approach be described as "time as consumption" or "that which happens outside of time as we know it"?

<sup>S.R</sup> The Italian–Syrian artist Alessandro Nassiri Tabibzadeh had an idea which took an extraordinarily long amount of time in terms of getting authorizations and permits. His project “TR4480C – An Odyssey of the 21st Century” began with the consumerist idea of things, material goods. Usually, when we buy a car, we keep it for a while and then replace it as its “life” is over. Yet, these vehicles continue their lives in places that are usually outside the EU territory. Tabibzadeh bought a car that had arrived from Italy to Albania and then he took it back to Italy, driving from Tirana to Durrës and then taking a ferry to Piacenza. Once in Italy, he organized an exhibition using the remaining parts of the car, i.e., its material compressed into the shape of a square (which is a process that all cars undergo). The car ended up as a “sculpture” of its own life-cycle, simultaneously highlighting the consumerist idea of the material good and its life span. Like in aforementioned projects, time and space are of utmost importance here as well.

<sup>F.N</sup> If we consider memories as mementos of the past, could Salvatore Falci’s “Memory” be interpreted as the return of the past to the present?

<sup>S.R</sup> In Falci’s project “Memory” (2006), ten students from the Academy of Arts were asked to draw the Tirana of their memories: a place of their first kiss with another boy or a girl, or their favorite secret spots in the city. In a way, they created a map of the city that was both real and imagined, so they drew this map over the pedestrian’s area of the Skanderbeg Square. Upon completion, Falci asked the students to redraw the marks they left by using water in order to render them invisible, to erase them. The idea was to retrieve something from their childhood, bring it to the present, show the memory to the audience and, then, erase it once more. In this case, it becomes clear how important time is, in both the structure of the art work and in the effect it exerts upon the audience, as it presents someone’s idea of Tirana, of the city, during a brief but definite moment in time.



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## — STEFANO ROMANO

<sup>F.N</sup> In the Albanian language, the words “histori” (history) and “histeri” (hysteria) are only distinguished from one another by a single letter. By playing on the letters that make up the word “hist(e)ory,” you take a position on Albania’s past (which has a concrete form in the present) but, unlike Falci’s work, here it is threatened, asked to disappear. What is the importance of time as memory?

<sup>S.R</sup> “History Removing” is a work realized in 2011 in collaboration with my wife, Eri Çobo. The work was a response to the decision taken by the former prime minister, Sali Berisha, to destroy the Pyramid of Tirana, the former museum devoted to Enver Hoxha’s legacy. For us, this decision was hysteric in the sense that it entailed the destruction of symbols of Albania’s past in order to avoid confrontation with them. We prepared a large banner with the aim of placing it on one side of the Pyramid. We wrote the word “histeri” on the banner: a word that is nearly identical to the word “histori,” the only difference being one letter, *e* instead of *o*. To us, this monument (built to commemorate the dictator) was no longer representative of Albanian history but, rather, of its hysteria as a result of inability to deal with the past. The work was realized in the aftermath of protests, organized for the purpose of protecting the structure. Now, Edi Rama’s government is doing the same thing: well, not directly destroying the Pyramid but ruining its identity. The government has a new project that will ruin the structure in another way – by transforming it into a youth center. Its transformation and subsequent loss of identity will deprive young and future generations of Albanians from confronting the country’s terrible past. During the presentation of the new project, it was said that this center would include a few shops as well. Business, as usual...

<sup>F.N</sup> Time as memory and the present as a threat to the past are themes that are also featured in your project about the National Theater in Tirana. Is this work a sort of requiem?

S.R The video about the Theater is approximately 13 minutes long. In it, I see the theater as a human being, “a person.” I wanted to treat it as an old man, filming its physical state while also asking several actors and intellectuals to write a few verses for a lullaby created for the theater while using the “exquisite corpse” method. None of the participants knew the identity of the others and none knew the lullaby’s other verses. Each wrote a short verse that I collected and composed a melody; afterward, I asked a girl to sing it. The video shows the parallel histories of the “old man” theater and the young girl. Viewers understand this dynamic when they see the girl singing the lullaby to the theater, with the song resembling a farewell song devoted to a dying person. This is the text of the lullaby: “In your emptiness I find solace / I will sleep with you until someone comes and sings us a few wake up notes / I like the shadow on the ground. / Theater they’re playing a play with / a tragedy could tell your drama. / Let the letters take their place. / Today, I saw a crowd for the first time / it was a voice that cannot sing good night or sweet dreams / and tomorrow I will recognize you / in another shape.” I am surprised that, in the end, it sounds as if it was created by the same person. The girl is in an abandoned factory and what connects her to the theater is simply this lullaby, its verses. The video begins by showing the girl’s body and that of the theater. By the end, when the girl and the music box appear, it is the voice and the music that connect the viewer to the theater.

F.N You return to the theater as the curator of an exhibition composed of students’ works. Was this project a continuation of the previous work, the video, or a form of resistance?

S.R For the theater exhibition, the students were free to work with whatever they chose. When the opportunity to exhibit there presented itself, it meant a step further in the implementation of the work because (even if your work does not concern the theater) you are working for the theater if you can exhibit there: this is a fact that is now inherently political and

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changes the nature of the work. This shift happened as a result of the political context. For the students, it was a new experience as they did not think that they could ever exhibit there. Many were not even aware of the situation and we had to explain it to them. A few even agreed with the idea of destroying the theater and I accepted this position as well. The confrontation with this reality was certainly interesting.

The setting changed either the students' works or their meaning and they were well aware of this. For me, personally, the exhibition was a natural continuation of the video.

F.N  
What is the role of time in resistance?  
Do we have to gain time, all the time?

S.R  
There is a contrast between it and the speed required from an artist. In my opinion, time is essential and it doesn't really make a difference whether we work on temporary or eternal projects. Time must be emphasized as an element of resistance. Even now, what we are going through (with the virus-caused crisis) is still a matter of time. It seems like nature is telling us to stop. It is time for survival; time for our turn. Even if we work in public spaces, we must see time as an element that cannot be ignored. We are not in an art gallery where time appears to stop or seems, at least, to be different. If we are in a public space, we have to hurry up.

F.N  
Will the pandemic change our way of life?

S.R  
I think something will change. I am not optimistic about a lot of changes, but the virus certainly appeared because we have to change ourselves. It happened as the world's reaction to the fast life we are living. Our relationship to public space will change somewhat as well. However, what worries me is the way that time is being used in certain places, like Hungary and the situation with its Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, for instance. It is a kind of dictatorship that is being established during a

difficult period and it signals a way that the things are changing while we are still in the midst of the situation.

The ratio of time in space will make us read our cities differently. These days, I have seen many images of Italian cities where nature has reclaimed some of these spaces: there are birds outside like very rarely beforehand. I think this means that we have to reflect upon the way that spaces change and how our behavior changes, our time on this planet. I hope that in the same way this pandemic has a global scope, our answer to it will be global as well.

<sup>F.N</sup> Our spaces today are narrower and public spaces are off limits for us. In these new conditions, should we have high expectations in terms of art during the quarantine?

<sup>S.R</sup> These days, the dissemination of art through social media has been both great and overwhelming: but it is always better to share art than “trash.” I am not sure whether it is the right approach. It all came too soon and, in the course of a few weeks, our lives, habits, and the way we see reality changed. I think that the art world had to react. Museums and galleries are closed. This is the first response to the question of art sharing. I don’t think it is the future, though. That will depend on the artists themselves and their own response to the crisis. If, after this situation, artists will change their approach to the art system, the system will also change. What is happening today is merely an answer to what is happening, not a new way of distributing or selling art. I don’t believe that the way we are seeing and experiencing art presently is mirroring the future. In this moment, it is a beautiful utopia.

<sup>F.N</sup> The Venice Biennale this year suggests a new contract with space. Should this agreement be reconsidered in terms of time and space – both personal and public, in the age of the virus?

<sup>S.R</sup> Recently, I have thought about Winston Churchill’s phrase, namely: “we shape our buildings; thereafter, they shape us.” This is especially true now. We shape

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cities that we cannot experience in the same way as before and they, in turn, shape us. The question of “how will we live together” is crucial. What we are going through right now constitutes a sort of resistance and something like the present political situation in Hungary urges us to think about what we are sacrificing for the sake of our health. It is not a secondary concern. We quickly gave up our rights for an emergency that, in turn, resulted from our lifestyle: it is that much of a contradiction, put in these terms. I read Giorgio Agamben’s text “The Invention of an Epidemic” and, although I disagree with conspiracy theories, I do think the present situation is a consequence of the way we live or experience the world, the way we are destroying the planet and this is its response to our behavior. Nonetheless, it is important to think about what we are sacrificing in order to survive the virus nowadays and, afterward, to survive time. Presently, people should be made aware of the sharing of common spaces. As it stands, we are spending 24 hours a day inside the same space with our nearest and dearest. Time becomes essential as we need to renegotiate with them issues such as privacy and finding time to think. This will certainly alter our way of being together. Now, even familial relationships are changing and we will need a new contract as a result.





*These are the things we are*

100 St

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Small Business  
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*fighting for*





# THESE ARE (NOT) THE THINGS WE ARE FIGHTING FOR! — JONIDA GASHI

It is a truth universally acknowledged that contemporary art is fundamentally powerless vis-à-vis the status quo and unable to produce meaningful or, at least, long-lasting change.<sup>1</sup> Of course, this does not preclude the existence of politically motivated artworks, though, on the flip side, the label “political” has possibly never been applied as liberally as it is today. Thomas Demand, Carsten Höller, Philippe Parreno, and Anri Sala would probably describe their work as “political” too, which would explain their otherwise unlikely involvement in Albanian PM Edi Rama’s project for the newest cultural space in Tirana, the Center for Openness and Dialogue (COD). In the context of this collaboration, Parreno and Höller produced two site-specific works, “Marquee, Tirana” (2015) and “Giant Triple Mushroom” (2015) respectively, which they donated to the Center, while Thomas Demand agreed to kick off the Center’s temporary exhibition programme. As for Anri Sala, he played a key role in bringing the whole project together.

As far as cultural center go, the COD is unremarkable, apart from the fact that it occupies the first floor of the Prime Minister’s Office. Given its location, it is perhaps not surprising that the COD was inaugurated on the occasion of German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s visit to Tirana on July 8, with Thomas Demand’s most recent work in the exhibition in the entrance hall, “Sign” (2015) which symbolises, rather conveniently, the “partnership between the people of the world by consumerism,” providing the backdrop to Rama’s and Merkel’s joint press conference on the day. As it happens, Angela Merkel’s visit to Tirana took place only a few days after the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras called a referendum on the bailout terms that the EU, and in particular Germany, were trying to impose on the Greek people. It meant that the topic of the Greek crisis would inevitably come up during the press conference, and come up it did. A local journalist asked Edi Rama whether the recent tensions inside the Eurozone had tempered the Albanian government’s enthusiasm to join. In his answer, Rama stressed that his government was more determined than ever to steer the country in the direction of

1. I have borrowed the title of this paper, with a slight modification, from Rirkrit Tiravanija’s contribution to the second edition of the Tirana Biennial in 2003, consisting of the line “These are the things we are fighting for” painted across the façade of a socialist apartment block in Tirana.

EU integration, even at the cost of being considered “old-fashioned,” an unfortunate choice of words the sole purpose of which was to gratify Merkel and, by implication, extend the Albanian government’s modest support to the German government’s hardline stance towards the situation in Greece.

In the following weeks, as news about the COD began circulating on the internet and puff pieces started to appear in newspapers like the *Financial Times*, the artists representing Germany at this year’s Venice Biennial, Jasmina Metwaly, Olaf Nicolai, Philip Rizk, Hito Steyerl, and Tobias Zielony, along with a number of Biennial employees, hung a Greek flag emblazoned with the word “Germony” over the inscription “Germania” at the entrance to the German pavilion. The gesture was intended as an act of solidarity with the Greek people and as a note of protest against austerity measures everywhere. Of course, the gesture was very modest, though quite loaded symbolically, and its impact on government policy was absolutely nil. At the same time, given the spectacle of the inauguration of the Center for Openness and Dialogue, it is difficult to imagine how even such a gesture would be permissible in Tirana’s newest cultural space. This raises a number of questions about the relationship between art and politics today, specifically about contemporary art’s ability to function as an emancipatory force inside the spaces of power.

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Edi Rama’s affair with contemporary art began in earnest fifteen years ago, when, having graduated from Minister of Culture to become the Mayor of Tirana, he began the project he is still most famous for: The painting of the façades of the socialist apartment buildings of Tirana. It is around the same time that Rama lent his support to the first edition of the Tirana Biennial, itself the brainchild of Italian entrepreneur Giancarlo Politi. In 2003, two of the curators of the second edition of the Tirana Biennial, Anri Sala and Hans Ulrich Obrist, decided to invite

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Olafur Eliasson, Dominique Gonzalez Foerster, Liam Gillick, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, to each design the facade of one of the socialist apartment buildings. Much in the same vein, in the context of the fourth edition of the Tirana Biennale in 2009, curators Edi Muka and Joa Ljungberg invited Franz Ackermann, Tomma Abts, Ann Edholm, Per Enokson, Tala Madani, Adrian Paci, and Helidon Gjergji, to contribute to the project. Needless to say, the association with the Tirana Biennial helped to give the facade project more exposure, particularly among art circles, as did Anri Sala's "Dammi i Colori" (2003), a sixteen-minute video projection that was first shown at "Utopia Station" at the 50th Venice Biennale.

"Dammi i Colori" is structured like a conversation between Anri Sala and Edi Rama in the back of a moving cab, where the latter can be heard commenting on the facade project as images of Tirana pass before our eyes. Jacques Rancière has discussed the work in *The Emancipated Spectator*, comparing Rama's post-communist project to the dream of the Russian avant-garde of "an art directly involved in producing the forms and buildings of a new life," and praising Sala's work for using the "distant" art of video to question the kind of politics of art that attempts to "fuse art and life into a single process."<sup>2</sup> We can, of course, question the extent to which "Dammi i Colori" represents, in fact, a cool reflection on Rama's initiative, or "political art" in general for that matter, but the more interesting question is why so many other artists, curators, critics, etc., participated in and supported the facade project as well throughout the 2000s. The comparison between Rama's project and that of the Russian avant-garde is fitting here, for just as the artists of the Russian avant-garde enjoyed for a time the support of the Soviet authorities, so the artists, curators, critics, etc., who have collaborated with Edi Rama on various projects, from the facades to the Center for Openness and Dialogue, have been afforded an extraordinary degree of access and support. This kind of access and support is as unusual today as it was at the turn of the last century, and the fact that Edi Rama was (is) an artist himself is frequently offered as an explanation. Rama discusses his

2. Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009).

decision to give up painting and move into politics in “Dammi i Colori” as well. What we take away from his narrative is that Rama is all too aware of art’s fundamental “uselessness,” so much so in fact that he decided to stop practicing art altogether and start practicing politics instead, since as a politician he makes decisions that shape reality on a daily basis. Moreover, the possibilities are potentially endless and the facade project is but an example of what can be achieved. This is especially true today, now that Rama is Prime Minister.

The fact that Edi Rama is sympathetic to the plight of the contemporary artist who seeks to not merely criticise the status quo but also change it, as well as the fact that he himself does have the power to change the status quo, is probably what makes him so attractive to artists, curators, etc. – foreign ones in particular, who have no real understanding of Albanian society or politics. The support Edi Rama has received from powerful members of the art world, such as Hans Ulrich Obrist, may in turn explain why he has never had to develop what might pass for a policy or set of policies for the arts and culture. As a consequence, two years after Rama’s government took office, the most important arts and cultural institutions in Albania are still in a dire state. In the meantime, there have been several misguided attempts to use contemporary art as an interface between Albanian society and the country’s difficult communist past. Specifically, art exhibitions have been set up to mark the opening to the public of spaces closely associated with the communist regime, including Enver Hoxha’s official residence in central Tirana. Needless to say, these turned out to be encounters from which neither art nor history benefited much, in part also because the spaces in question stayed open for very short periods of time (only a few days usually) and the events taking place inside them were organized hastily. This is not to suggest, however, that Edi Rama has not used art politically, for he certainly has done so throughout his political career, most consistently in conjunction with design, broadly understood. The façade project, for instance, is an urban design project in the first

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place and then an artistic project. Already when this project was still underway, it made no sense to think of the contributions of the artists as actual works of art (hardly any one does in fact, least of all the residents of Tirana), and it was impossible to distinguish between the handful of designs that the artists were responsible for and the rest of them. This is truer than ever today, since many new constructions in Tirana now feature colourful painted patterns on their facades, and the trend has spread to other cities as well. Additionally, the facade project could only take place in the context of Edi Rama's campaign to transform Tirana's cityscape, by demolishing the countless kiosks that had sprung up (illegally, of course) in the city center after the collapse of the communist regime in 1990, while simultaneously signing off on countless planning permissions that transformed Tirana into what many of its residents describe today as a "concrete city." The Center for Openness and Dialogue is also a design project first and foremost. It marks the completion of substantial renovation work that not only goes beyond the first floor of the Prime Minister's Office where the Center is located, but actually started out in the upper floors of the building, which are not accessible to the public, and in the surrounding grounds, where the transformation of a car park facing the back of the building into what looks like a miniature golf course is perhaps what stands out the most. For the doubtful, it suffices to examine a picture album uploaded on Edi Rama's Facebook page titled "Images that Speak for Themselves" that follows the logic of "Before and After" advertisements for weight loss, hair loss, cosmetic procedures, and the like.<sup>3</sup> For the more curious, there is a time-lapse video of the entire process as well, which looks like a sophisticated advert for an architecture studio or an interior design firm, and where the works by Demand, Höller, and Parreno which appear towards the end of the video assume the questionable status of "finishing touches."<sup>4</sup>

Now, design, in contradistinction to art, is useful. That is, design serves a practical purpose, usually to make "things" more attractive

4. See: <https://www.facebook.com/edirama.al/videos/vb.13873477152210153078386456523/?type=2&th eater>.

3. See: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10153085172701523.1073742774.138734771522&type=3>.

or more appealing to the user. Art, on the other hand, serves no such practical purpose. For instance, painting the drab facades of the socialist apartment blocks of Tirana with bright colours made these buildings more attractive for the people living and working inside; it also made the streets in which these building are located more appealing and thus helped improve Tirana's urban landscape as such. By contrast, Anri Sala's "Dammi i Colori" serves "merely" as an object of contemplation – contemplation of the relative success or failure of the façade project, among other things. Similarly, at the Center for Openness and Dialogue, even if we accept that it was founded so as to bring the institution of the Prime Minister's Office closer to the people and not only to make this particular Prime Minister's policies more popular, it is the state of the art facilities inside that will ultimately entice visitors to return and use the space in the future. (After all, in order to justify staying open, in the literal sense of the term, the COD will have to attract not only a continuous stream of visitors but also users.) By contrast, the artworks by Demand, Höller, and Parreno fulfill what is essentially a rhetorical function, encouraging critical reflection and debate as art is wont to do – the "Dialogue" in the title. Rama's attempts to integrate art and design in the projects he has initiated or lent his support to, betray a totalizing impulse that, as Jacques Rancière suggests, is reminiscent of the old idea about the so-called "total work of art." At the time when the likes of Malevich, Rodchenko, and El Lissitzky dreamed of "an art directly involved in producing the forms and buildings of a new life," however, the Bolsheviks were actually in the process of radically transforming the life of the society on all fronts, not just the artistic or the aesthetic one. By contrast, the totalising impulse we detect in Rama's artistic/aesthetic endeavors evokes rather a particular take on the idea of the "total work of art," namely, the notion of "total design." Mark Wigley argues in "Whatever Happened to Total Design?" that this concept is so central to modern architecture that it underpins both the tendency towards "implosive design," i.e., "designing everything in a single work of architecture," and the seemingly opposed tendency towards "explosive design," i.e.,

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“adding a trace of architecture to everything.”<sup>5</sup> From this point of view, the move from public space, i.e., the façade project, to the spaces of power, i.e., the Center for Openness and Dialogue, is not accidental. The Center for Openness and Dialogue, as a space where every detail, down to the doorknobs, has been paid the utmost attention, at times at the expense of functionality, is paradigmatic of this Prime Minister’s vision for the entire country, namely, of architecture as the driving force in the transformation of Albania.

Already, the instrumental use of art in political struggles has often been criticised on the grounds that it inevitably leads to the aestheticization of politics (fascism) instead of politicizing aesthetics (communism), as Walter Benjamin famously put it in the 1930s. Of course, many cultural critics and theorists would argue that ours is a time of total aestheticization, or total design, so that everything from art to politics has become a spectacle, which is something that Philippe Parreno’s “Marquee, Tirana” clearly alludes to, since Parreno’s marquees have usually been installed in spaces dedicated to contemporary art, such as the Guggenheim in New York, the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, etc., rather than in spaces embodying political/state power. Be that as it may, the spaces of art and the spaces of politics are simply not equivalent. I alluded to this at the outset when discussing the German pavilion at this year’s Venice Biennial, but let me take another example. A few months ago, on May 1, a group of artists and activists occupied the atrium of the Guggenheim in New York to protest against the working conditions at the Guggenheim’s Abu Dhabi site. It is difficult to imagine that Albanian student activists who have taken to the streets (again) to protest against Rama’s controversial higher education bill will similarly be able to occupy the entrance hall of the Center for Openness and Dialogue without the National Guard getting involved, if anything for reasons of security. It might be useful here to think of the question of “aestheticization” along the lines that Boris Groys does in “On Art Activism.”<sup>6</sup> Groys suggests that the notion of the ‘politicisation of

6. Boris Groys, “On Art Activism,” *e-flux journal* 56 (2014), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-art-activism/>.

aesthetics' is grounded in an understanding of aesthetics that is rooted in design, since the function of design is precisely to make the status quo more attractive, whereas the notion of the "aestheticization of politics" is grounded in modern (and contemporary) art, whose function is to recognize the status quo as being already dead, thus theoretically opening up the horizon for its overcoming. Because the Prime Minister's Office is still the place where, more than anywhere else, the status quo is produced on a daily basis, this makes it rather difficult for the art inside it to transform the status quo into a corpse, as Groys suggests. Conversely, every artist exhibiting at the Center for Openness and Dialogue will have to ask themselves about the politics they are being used to further. This is a tall order indeed, for although some of the finest politically motivated artworks are the product of an engagement, often the fruit of years of research, with specific events and histories, we do not usually think that art's task is to keep up with the politics of the day in the way that, say, the media does. The risk then is that the artworks displayed at the Center for Openness and Dialogue instead of making the Prime Minister's politics more transparent, will obfuscate it.

8. See: <http://www.51n4e.com/news/launch-atelier-albania> and <http://atelieralbania.planifikimi.gov.al/>.

I want to conclude by giving an example of how this obfuscation can take place. In the speech he gave during the official opening of the Center for Openness and Dialogue, one day after Angela Merkel's visit, Edi Rama thanked a number of people, among them the architects who supervised the project, Johan Anrys and Freek Persyn.<sup>7</sup> The names mean absolutely nothing to most Albanians, even though they should. Anrys and Persyn are two of the founders of Belgian architecture firm 51N4E, responsible for developing a number of important architectural projects in Tirana when Edi Rama was still mayor (some of which were completed and others not). When Edi Rama became prime minister, 51N4E played a key role in founding Atelier Albania, a "laboratory" unit inside the National Territorial Planning Agency that is directly responsible for all major architectural and urban planning/renewal projects across the country.<sup>8</sup> It is irrelevant here how capable or incapable the founders

7. See: <http://www.kryeministria.al/la/newsroom/fjalime/nje-hapesire-e-re-per-artistet-shqiptare1436446199&page=12>.



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of 51N4E are, the fact remains that the ethics behind allowing a foreign private company to play such a decisive role in shaping the urban development of the country are highly questionable. Apart from this, there is the fact that it is impossible to find out who works for Atelier Albania, certainly not from Atelier Albania's webpage or any other government website.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Atelier Albania as well as 51N4E have been involved in tendering procedures, both in Albania and abroad (Belgium), that have given rise to suspicions about corruption, suspicions over which one of the founders of 51N4E and Atelier Albania, Peter Swinnen, was dismissed from his position as State Architect for the Flanders government last February.<sup>10</sup> The Albanian government and the Prime Minister himself have never addressed these suspicions, at least not convincingly. Contemporary art, which was once Edi Rama's strongest selling point, especially outside of Albania, is thus quickly becoming his alibi, particularly in view of the most recent news stories about Rama and his government. I am referring here to the coverage in the German media of the dramatic increase in the number of Albanian asylum seekers in Germany since the beginning of the year, during which time Rama managed to attend the openings of two solo shows featuring his drawings in commercial galleries in Berlin and Munich, but not once visited a single refugee camp. In the meantime, the local media have focused on Rama's ambivalent attitude, to put it mildly, toward the process of the decriminalization of the political parties in Albania. These are the kind of issues that the art at the Centre for Openness and Dialogue should address but does not and perhaps cannot.

Tirana  
December 2015

9. See, for example, the website of the National Territorial Planning Agency: <http://www.planifikimi.gov.al/>.

10. Alan Hope, "Official Architect Peter Swinnen Dismissed with Immediate Effect," *Flanders Today*, February 4, 2015.





B I O

G R

A P H

I E S

## CV — ARTISTS

### DARKO VUKIĆ

(1992, Ivanjica, Serbia) is a visual artist, researcher, and author based in Belgrade. He graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade (2016) where, after his studies at the department of Transmedia Research and Painting, he is now enrolled in a PhD program. He is a member of The New Centre for Research & Practice (online platform, based in Michigan, USA). His work was selected for Perspectives 15, Šok Zadruga, Novi Sad (2016). He was a finalist of "Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos" Award (2019, YVAA, regional project Young Visual Artists Awards). He was invited as a guest lecturer at the Faculty of Art and Design, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic (2019) and curated two editions of the Prosthetic, a pavilion of The Wrong – New Digital Art Biennale (2017/18, 2019/20). He considers himself a post-conceptual artist whose research-based and theoretically framed practice draws upon a wide array of tools and materials, both conventional (such as drawing) and less conventional ones (such as digital media and performativity shaped by them).

### EDONA KRYEZIU

(1994, Saarlouis, Germany) is a visual artist and writer who lives and works between Prishtina and Berlin. She holds an MA

in Visual Anthropology (with the focus on Migration & Diaspora Studies) from the University of London. Her work, mainly realized through video and photography, has been lately featured in two exhibitions, namely: "In Transition: Images between Fact and Fiction" – The 16th "Gjon Mili" Biennial of Photography, National Gallery of Kosovo, Prishtina (2019) and "The Artist of Tomorrow Award: The Finalists," Stacion – Contemporary Art Center, Prishtina (2019). Edona was brought up in Germany to Kosovo-Albanian parents who fled the region in the 1990s in the wake of the Yugoslav wars. Her diasporic positionality sparked her interest in transnational legacies and forms of expression, specifically in the realm of moving images. Digging into personal/collective archives, her installations comment on past events, expose the present as expressed in every-day substances, and offer a glimpse into (im)possible futures. In her research, she is unraveling the process of longing for belonging, universal to all, expressed differently in a world structured into national, socio-economic and cultural communities.

### FATLUM DOÇI

(1991, Shkodra, Albania) is a visual artist who lives and works in Shkodra. He studied multimedia arts at the University of Arts in Tirana, where he graduated in 2015. Ever since, he has developed a body of work that encompasses painting, drawing, watercolor, sculpture, video, installation, jewelry, and typewriting art. Regardless

## LORI LAKO

of the medium, Doçi envisions his creative process as a departure from the ordinary and a journey inward, in order to experience what appears to be obvious to the human eye and, also, what doesn't. His most recent solo exhibitions include: "Puzzle," Museum Stanze della Memoria, Siena (2019); "Words," Galerija Flora, Dubrovnik (2019); "Signs," Galerija Podroom, Kulturni centar Beograda, Belgrade (2019); "Signs," Galerija VN, Zagreb (2019); and "The Presence of Absence," Tulla Cultural Centre, Tirana (2019). Since 2015, he has participated in group exhibitions in Albania and abroad (Italy, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Russia), among which the most important are: "Autumn Salon of Albanian Artists," Art Gallery, Shkodra (2019); "Ex Gratia," Collezione Giuseppe Iannaccone, Milano (2018); "A five-pointed star," ZETA Gallery, Tirana (2018); "ARDHJE Award for Young Visual Artists," ZETA Gallery, Tirana (2018); The Biennial of Humor and Satire, Gaborvo (2017); Mediterranean – 18 Young Artists Biennale, Tirana (2017); "It Looks Like," Zeta Gallery, Tirana (2017); "Inside-Out," Tirana Art Lab, Tirana (2016); "Idromeno Award," Art Gallery, Shkodra (2015); arTVision – A Live Art Channel, M'ARS Center for Contemporary Art, Moscow (2015). Besides "Resistance," organized by ZETA Gallery in Tirana (2020), he took part in international artist-in-residence programs organized by: The Siena Art Institute, Siena (2019), HULU – The Croatian Association of Visual Artists, Dubrovnik (2019), and Art House, Shkodra (2017). In 2015 he was part of the Light Residency in Rijeka, organized by an electro-acoustic duo JMZM in collaboration with Goran Petercol.

(1991, Pogradec, Albania) is a visual artist who currently lives and works in Florence. She graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence, where she obtained her BA degree in Painting (2013) and her MA degree in Multimedia Art (2017). During 2014 she also attended her MA classes at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich, thanks to the Erasmus scholarship. Through her work, mainly concerned with the internet and digital media, she reflects on the condition of post-modern humanity, outclassed by images and messages that hinder the decoding of the world, historical memory and listening to the self. Her most recent exhibitions and screenings include: "Biennale Giovani," Orangerie – Villa Reale, Monza (2019); "Long Distance Relationship," Espace Témoin, Geneva (2019); "Lo schermo dell'Arte," Cinema La Compagnia, Florence (2019); "Qui dormivano i monaci," Abbazia di Mirasole x Casa Testori, Milan (2019); "La cura," Manifattura Tabacchi, Florence (2019); "Still Life," Terzopiano Arte Contemporanea, Lucca (2019); "Eight layers," Art House, Shkodër (2019); "The sea is far, though my tears are salty," Galeria e Artit, Shkodër (2018); "TU 35 Expanded," CENTRO PECCI, Prato (2017); "Downside-Up," Tirana Art Lab, Tirana (2016). She also took part in artist residency programs such as: "La cura," Manifattura Tabacchi, Florence (2019); "Who cares about art?," Art House, Shkodër (2018); "Nobody's body," Spazio K, Prato (2017); and "The Subtle Urgencies," Città dell'arte/Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella (2017).

## NATASHA NEDELKOVA

(1993, Skopje, North Macedonia) is a visual artist who lives and works between Skopje and Paris. She holds a BA degree from the Faculty of Fine Arts – The Saints Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (2015) and an MA degree in Film Theory from the École normale supérieure in Lyon (2019). She is currently working towards the Artistic Research PhD Program at the EUR ArTeC – Université Paris 8. Her interest in relationships between the moving image and the fabrication of subjectivity led her to explore further the digital mechanisms of contemporary visual world on two main fronts: how images of oneself (and micro expressions in particular, when they are traced) can become a source of quantification, information and control, as well as how – in response to this connection – the audiovisual “staging of the self” can express an act of resistance in cinema, video art and performance – for the benefit of upcoming dissenting communities. Besides her participation in Can Serrat – Art Residency nearby Barcelona (2016), she was involved in collaborative performances such as “Silence,” Museum of the City of Skopje (2016) and “I am a camera” (together with Marko Gutic Mizimakov), Skopje (2015). Besides her video installation “Post-Ideological Tactics,” exposed at the International contemporary art fair Paratissima in Skopje (2017), her most recent group exhibitions and screenings include: “I Want To Abuse,” GMK Zagreb (2019) and Tabakalera, San Sebastián (2015); “Constanza / Dialectics of Ordinary Desire,”

Gallery 7, Skopje (2017), Can Serrat Art Residency, El Bruce (2016), and Escampar Festival, Esparraguera (2016); “After YU,” Imaginarium: Contemporary Video Art from Macedonia, Grey’s School of Art, Aberdeen (2016); and “Factory,” AKTO Contemporary Art Festival, Bitola (2016). In 2018 she was nominated for “Denes” – The Young Visual Artists Award and was selected for XII Biennial of Young Artists – MoCA Skopje.

## NIKOLCHE SLAVEVSKI

(1989, Bitola, North Macedonia) is a visual artist and political activist based in Bitola. He studied painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts – The Saints Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, where he graduated in 2014. In the years following his academic education, he became involved with local and international citizens’ initiatives such as the Leftist Movement Solidarity and the “Reds” (the Yugoslav section of the International Marxist Tendency). His artistic practice has been deeply intertwined with other forms of his public engagement. Slavevski is a fervent advocate for social justice and worker’s rights: be it through image-making and exhibitions (which explore the non-elitist prospects of what he calls “revolutionary art” and the liberating role played by artists in society), or through journalism and political campaigns (which mainly focus on issues related to the working class and marginalized communities). Besides his first solo exhibition “Paint It RED” (National Institution Center

of Culture – Bitola, 2017), his work has been featured in the following exhibition projects: “All day/Celodnevna,” Social Center DUNJA, Skopje (2019); “Post Truth/Desire,” Faculty of Fine Arts, Skopje (2019); “Long Live Our Labor!” – 6th Festival of Documentary Film, Zrenjanin (2019); “(DIS) CONNECT,” Vienna (2019); “White Noise,” Vienna, Austria (2019); XII Biennial of Young Artists, Skopje (2018); Pop Up AKTO Festival, Bitola (2017); 3rd International Exhibition of Artists and Art Teachers, Evora (2017) and “40 Years of DLUB,” Magaza, Bitola (2014). In 2019 he took part in the KulturKontakt Artists in Residence Program, organized by Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research. Last but not least, Slavevski also performs the role of an art educator: over the years, he has been volunteering at the Children’s Art Studio “St. Cyril and Methodius” in Bitola, which made it possible to gain twice the status of a team leader of “On-site painting,” the international children’s art colony in Hong Kong.

#### NINA GALIĆ

(1987, Kraljevo, Serbia) is a visual artist based in Belgrade. She obtained her MA degree from the Sculpture Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade. She was a scholarship holder of Dositeja – The Fund for Young Talents of the Republic of Serbia (2010–2011) and the “Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos” Award finalist (2019). Nina creates objects, sculptures, spatial installations and

interventions that function as downsized modules of disciplinary architecture and put into question the idea that human behavior might be shaped and regulated by building designs. Thus, her approaches to material world link up with her understanding of contemporary power relations proper to capitalist mode of production of culture, social structures and agonistic economies. Her solo exhibitions include: “If Your Future is Not Mine,” U10 Gallery – Belgrade (2019), “Sculptures,” Kontakt Gallery – Kragujevac (2017), “Sculptures,” Remont Gallery – Belgrade (2015) and “Sculptures and Drawings” at the Belgrade Fortress Gallery (2011). Among her group exhibitions, the most notable are: “Recognition 4,” Art Gallery “Nadežda Petrović,” Čačak, National Museum – Kraljevo, Contemporary Art Gallery – Niš (2019), The “Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos” Award, Remont Gallery – Belgrade (2019), “Romanze mit der Revolution” – ACC Galerie Weimar (2018), “GRAEAE,” Art Gallery of the Cultural Centre of Belgrade (2016) and “Masac – masac,” LASALLE College of the Arts, Institute of Contemporary Arts – Singapore (2011).

#### CV — LECTORS

##### Edmond BUDINA

(1952, Tirana, Albania) is an actor, director and writer based in Tirana. He studied Dramatic Art at the Albanian Academy



of Arts, where he graduated in 1974. Since the mid 1970s until his immigration to Italy in the early 1990s he worked at the National Theater in Tirana, where he performed in over 50 plays. Between 1980 and 1992 he was an external lecturer for the master's courses in acting, diction and directing at the Academy of Dramatic Art in Tirana. He is also one of the founding members of the Albanian Democratic Party. Budina's greatest accomplishments at Tirana's National Theater were achieved with the dramas by Friedrich Schiller, Henrik Ibsen, Luigi Pirandello, Arthur Miller, Bertolt Brecht, François Rabelais, and Nikolai Pogodin. His theatrical adaptations and staging of various works written by Ismail Kadare marked a turning point in the history of Albanian theater. Besides theater, he has worked for radio, television, and cinema and as a consultant for various newspapers and magazines. When in August 1990 the last communist president of Albania, Ramiz Alia, organized a meeting with leading intellectuals of the time on ways to reform the country's political system, Budina was one of the invited academic representatives demanding democratic pluralism. In 1992 Budina emigrated from Albania and continued his work in Italy, initially with small documentaries and roles in theaters, while later on with movies. Besides his collaborations with Ermanno Olmi's cinema school, the Ipotesi Cinema (1993-1994), his projects abroad include, among others: a documentary "Guardando al ritorno" (Looking back, 1994); theater plays "Tabir

Sarrail" (The Palace of Dreams, 1995) and "Migranti" (Migrants, 1996) – a show that won the Italian National Prize for translation; a soap opera "Un posto al sole" (A Place in the Sun, 2000s); and a short movie "Domenica delle palme" (2002). In 2003 he made his directorial debut with "Lettere al vento" (Letters in the Wind), while his movie "Balkan Bazaar," first official co-production between Albania and Italy, was released in Italian cinemas in 2011. "Broken" (2017) is one of his most recent international cinematographic projects.

#### ERVIN GOCI

(1982, Kruja, Albania) is a pedagogue and activist based in Tirana. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy from the Department of Philosophy and Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana (2005) and his Master of Science degree in Human Sciences from the Faculty of History and Philology, University of Tirana (2008). His PhD studies, initiated in 2010 at the Department of Journalism and Communication, Faculty of History and Philology, University of Tirana, concern the Albanian society confronting the challenge of routine perpetual measuring of the media audience. Since 2006 he has been a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of History and Philology, University of Tirana, where he has been teaching on Civil Society, Public Space, Social Theory, Public Relations, Audience Measurement, and Media Users Behavior. Prior to this, he was an Assistant

Lecturer at the Journalism and Communication Department, Faculty of History and Philology, University of Tirana (2005-2006). He was also an External Lecturer at "Marin Barleti" University in Tirana (2009-2011) and an External Lecturer at the European University of Tirana (2008-2011). His research papers have been presented in national and international conferences and publications including, among others: "Information in the era of social media : The case of newspaper Panorama" (Prishtina, 2016); "Typologies of audience behavior into the perspective of digitalization process" (Tirana, 2015); "The audience measurement in Albania – Efforts to institutionalize" (Prishtina, 2014); "Youth media exposure, and their behavior as interactive audiences" (Tirana, 2013) and "Promoting the image of mobile communication industry in Albania (Tools and Strategies)" (Tirana, 2011). He has been a team member of research projects such as: "Albanian Media confronting new challenges with an outdated economic model" (Tirana, 2017), "Television without Television" (Tirana, 2017), "Monitoring the impact of ethnic-based community media on Roma population in south-east Albania" (Tirana, 2012) and "Monitoring media exposure and access of communication in the 'closed institutions' (Prisons)" (Tirana, 2011).

#### GENTIAN SHKURTI

(1977, Mamurras, Albania) is a visual artist based in Tirana. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana (1999),

where he studied painting and later worked for two years as an assistant professor. Nowadays he works at the AFMM – Marubi Film and Multimedia Academy in Tirana. Apart from the group exhibition "Traveling light. Nothing to lose," Chelsea Museum of Art -New York (2006), Shkurti's works have been exhibited primarily in Europe at venues such as: National Gallery of Kosovo, Prishtina (2020); Ludwig Museum, Budapest (2016); 54th Venice Biennale – Albanian Pavilion (2011); Pompidou Center, Paris (2010); Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana (2006); Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel (2003); Sammlung Essl, Vienna (2003); Locarno International Film Festival (2003); 1st Tirana Biennale, National Gallery of Arts, Tirana (2001); Museo Civico d'arte contemporanea, Ortona (2000); and 7th International Cairo Biennial (1998). Some of his works are part of public art collections such as the Ludwig Museum, Budapest and the Essl Museum, Vienna.

#### HAVEIT

is an art collective comprised of two pairs of sisters – Alketa & Arbërore Sylaj and Hana & Vesa Gena – founded in 2011 in Prishtina (Kosovo) as a form of protest in the aftermath of a local crime in which a 27-year-old student Diana Kastrati was shot dead in the street by her ex-husband. Ever since, empowering women's social status in Kosovo has been the central tenet of their artistic and activist practice, which combines public

performance, photography and video to explore social issues relevant to their living and working environment (including sexism, gender stereotypes and the denial of LGBTQ rights by patriarchal chains of power). In 2018, HAVEIT received the Open Society Foundation's Award for Democracy for their efforts against gender inequality, violence against women, and discrimination of the LGBTQ community. Some of their projects include: "Use Your Mouth," Stockholm & Tirana (2014); "What color is your flag when it burns?" Prishtina (2014); "Unconnected, and plastic," Prishtina (2014); "Kur baba kajke, nana m'i lajke sytë," Tirana (2014); "Hanging on a Curtain," Tirana (2014); "St. Valentine's Day," Prishtina (2014); "Examination," Prishtina & Athens (2013); "Je Suis Glamour," Prishtina (2013); "How would you see me when you could see me," Stacion – Center for Contemporary Art Prishtina (2013).

#### LEONARD QYLAFI

(1980, Korça, Albania) is a visual artist who lives and works in Tirana. He studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana, where he received his MFA degree in 2003. Profoundly linked to his personal life experience and a research-based meditation on material records (like books, films, or photographic documents), his paintings, videos, and photography are as much investigations of the processes shaping the narration of events in his home country as they are subjective reflections on the

nature of images as such. He represented Albania at the 57th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia (2017) and was the 2008 winner of ARDHJE Award For Young Visual Artists from Albania. He took part in international artist-in-residence programs such as: NIFCA – Nordic Institute of Contemporary Art, Helsinki (2005–2006); T.I.C.A – Institute of Contemporary Art, Tirana (2007); Kulturkontakt Austria, Vienna (2008) and ISCP – International Studio and Curatorial Program, New York (2009). His solo exhibitions so far include: "Occurrence in Present Tense," La Biennale di Venezia – Albanian Pavillion (2017); "Imagery," Zeta Gallery, Tirana (2016); "Museum of Nature," Zeta Gallery, Tirana (2013). Among his group exhibitions, the most notable ones were held at venues such as: NIMAC Museum, Nicosia (2018); National Gallery of Art, Tirana (2017); MuCEM, Marseilles (2016); Izolyatsia Foundation, Kiev (2016); City Museum, Belgrade (2014); Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2012); Kunst Raum Riehen, Basel (2012); MODEM Centre for Modern and Contemporary Arts, Debrecen (2011), International Biennial of Contemporary Art, Tirana (2009) and BJCM – XIII Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean, Puglia (2008).

#### LINDITA KOMANI

(1979, Tirana, Albania) is a writer, translator, and publisher based in Tirana. She completed her studies of business and

finance at the University of Graz (2006). She also completed master studies in EU Business Law at the University of Tirana (2014). Currently, she is completing a master study on EU Project and Public Management at FH Joanneum in Graz. Besides her professional life, dedicated to business consultancy and management, she has been an active writer and translator since 2002. Her works, published in Tirana since 2012, include poetry, short stories, and essays, among which: "Post impresion" (Ombra GVG, 2012); "In the tongue of awakening" (Poeteka, 2015); "Life motto" (Kompas, 2018) and "The understood Noli [Fan S. Noli]" (Kompas, 2019). Her upcoming, yet unpublished project is a comedy play "Arturo is back (or how the Movement for Asylum started and got transformed)." In 2017 Komani started her own small publishing house (Kompas) with the purpose to produce books she considers of value for the Albanian market and worth being translated (by herself) into the Albanian language. Titles published so far include fiction books (Kahil Gibran's "The Madman," 2017; Mark Twain's "The Diaries of Adam and Eve," 2018; "Literary Austria since 1945," 2019) and non-fiction books (Carl Buchberger's "Principality Albania," 2017 and Theodor Herzl's "The Jewish State," 2018). Since 2018 she has been involved in Tirana's resistance movement for the protection of a local theater. In the framework of the Festival for the Protection of the Theater, she translated two plays (Franz Kafka's "America" and Thomas Bernhard's "Frost"), which were put on stage by the Thalia Theater in Hamburg and the

THEATER.punkt in Vienna, respectively.

#### LUÇJAN BEDENI

was born in 1987 in Shkodra, where he also lives and works. Since 2012 he has been the Director of the Marubi National Museum of Photography in Shkodra. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana, where he graduated in 2009. He was the 2009 winner of Ardhje Award for Young Visual Artists from Albania. He participated in the artists-in-residence program at ISCP – International Studio & Curatorial Program, New York (2010).

#### PLEURAD XHAFA

(1984, Lushnja, Albania) is a visual artist and activist currently based in Tirana. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna, where he graduated in 2012 with an MFA in Visual Arts. He is one of the founders of the Debatik Center of Contemporary Art ([www.debatikcenter.net](http://www.debatikcenter.net)). In 2014 he was the winner of ARDHJE Award for Young Visual Artists from Albania. Xhafa develops projects that examine the effects produced by neoliberal political experiments. His research and critical work comes as a result of a post-conceptual practice, which operates on a documentary basis to subsequently report – visually and politically – to the culture of our time. Some of his site-specific interventions in Tirana have been realized in collaboration with. His work has been presented in international group exhibitions and festivals such as: ALTERNATIVE FILM/VIDEO Festival,

Belgrade (2018) "Les Rencontres Internationales," Paris/Berlin (2015-2016); "Teatri i Gjelbërimit – Department of Eagles," FAB Gallery, Tirana (2016); "Shame On You," Celje (2015); "ARDHJE Award: The Finalists," Zeta Gallery, Tirana (2014); "Lavoro/Work/Vore," Udine (2013); "What is Waiting Out There" – 6th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (2010); 4th Tirana Biennale (2009); "Desire and Evidence: ONUFRI XIV," National Art Gallery, Tirana (2009); and "Every Revolution is a Throw of Dice," Loggia della Mercanzia, Genoa (2006).

#### STEFANO ROMANO

(1975, Naples, Italy) is a visual artist, curator, and lecturer who lives and works between Tirana (Albania) and Bergamo (Italy). He graduated from the Accademia Carrara, an academy of fine arts in Bergamo (2002) where he studied Visual Arts. He also worked there, first as an assistant of Adrian Paci (2002–2004) and Salvatore Falci (2006–2008), then as a tutor (2008–2010), and finally as a professor of Visual Communication Methodology (2013–2015). In 2004–2005 he was a guest-lecturer of History of Contemporary Art and New Technologies, an experimental course at the Fine Arts Academy in Tirana. Between 2010 and 2012 he was a professor of Contemporary Art History at the Polis University in Tirana where, since 2017, he has been teaching two courses: Phenomenology of Contemporary Art and Phenomenology of the Object. He is the co-founder of DZT – DyZeroTre, an artistic

and architectural collective (since 2012) and MAPS – Mobile Archive on Public Space, a digital platform for interdisciplinary research on issues related to art and public space. His process-based artistic practice, which encompasses temporary actions, performances, installations, videos and photography, examines manifold contradictions of social reality through transient and unexpected images produced by 'light-gazing'. He has taken part in numerous exhibition projects since the early 2000s, among which: "Monumenti Impermanenti," Fondazione Pini, Milan (2019); Autostrada Biennale, Prizren (2018); "Ex Gratia," Collezione Giuseppe Iannaccone, Milan (2018); "RGB," Zeta Gallery, Tirana (2018); "Collective Monument," Stamp gallery, University of Maryland (2018); "responseABILITY," Rotor, Graz (2018); Mediterranea 18 Young Artists Biennial, Tirana (2017); "There must be something in between," ato – architekturforum oberösterreich, Linz (2017); "Teatri i Gjelbërimit – Department of Eagles," FAB Gallery, Tirana (2016); "A Manifesto," Tulla Culture Center, Tirana (2015); "Post fata resurgo," Palazzo della Misericordia, Bergamo (2014); "HISTØERI removing," UpperLab, Bergamo (2013); "Would you stay a little longer?," Zeta Gallery, Tirana (2011); "Stuck in a paradox, I start shaving myself," CHAN Contemporary Art Gallery, Genova (2010).

## JONIDA GASHI

is Chair of the Department of Art Studies at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and the Study of Art (Academy of Albanian Studies) in Tirana, Albania. Her current research focuses on the newsreels and documentary films of the Albanian communist show trials, as well as the so-called “revolutionary vigilance films” of the 1970s and 1980s. She has a PhD from the University of London in Humanities and Cultural Studies. In her thesis she examined the highly complex and often paradoxical temporality of contemporary film and video art. Her research interests include contemporary art theory and criticism, the philosophy of time and theories of repetition, film theory and the history of cinema, and the artistic experience of post-socialism in contemporary Albania. She is one of the founders of DebatikCenter of Contemporary Art ([www.debatikcenter.net](http://www.debatikcenter.net)).

## RESISTANCE

The International Artist-in-Residency Program for the Western Balkans Spring–Summer 2020

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