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Common and Special Features of the First School of Drawing in Albania and the First School of Applicative Arts in Kosovo

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Abstract

This article tries to give a vivid frame of the historical background of the development of figurative art in both sides of Albanian borders, thus that of Kosovo and Albania, as a unique belonging of the same national features. It is represented through a historical and theoretical background so that to show the roots and the layers of the development of art in Europe, which is in all senses the impact Albanian art, but not only has taken from. Pure and concrete examples of Albanian painters of the very first generation and as an inspiration to what follows later, are given to demonstrate the will and need of Albanian society to cultivate artistic tastes.

Keywords: *figurative art, schools of art, painting and drawing, trends in painting*

"Art is the most sublime mission of man, since it is the expression of thought seeking to understand the world and to make it understood." Auguste Rodin

1. Introduction

The very first constituted schools of Arts in Albania started to sprout at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since the third decade of the twentieth century in Albania the first elementary schools teaching Arts started to put the basis of the professional art. So, in 1930 in the capital of Albania, Tirana, was established the first drawing school. While in Kosovo, the first school of Handicrafts was established in Peja some years later, in 1949. It was the only institution of artistic education dating since then, after the Second World War.

The approach used to analyze the benefits and the obstacles faced during the years so as to establish, contribute and influence the works of art of Albanian artists, we have taken into consideration not only the historical and theoretical background, but also some prominent representatives of the Albanian figurative art, from both sides of the border. Our attempt is to present in this analysis a dimension of socio-cultural approach, as well.

1.1 Historical background

The relation between art and its impact in society goes through the creation process of the artist itself. From generation to generation, it produced the historical layer where the predecessor

influenced the successor. Relationships between them are described in terms of influence and school, in the sense that artists, affected by their masters, were at the same time an inspiration to their fellows. This is seen also in terms of style, time and space. Thus, the categories of time and space, the art work, their influence and school, were used in composition of the picture. They were, somehow, the key to stylistic development.

On the other hand, the source of knowledge of the work of art lies outside the artistic region itself, but goes side by side with it. Furthermore, it is in transaction with it, and it implies with the political, social, economic, scientific, intellectual background, which compounds what we call, the general historical context. The fall of Rome, the coming of Christianity, and the barbarian invasions all had much to do with stylistic changes in architecture, sculpture and painting. The triumph of science and technology has everything to do with the great transformations of the Renaissance tradition that takes place in what we call modern art, the art of our own time. The work of art, the persisting event, is after all a historical document. (Gardner, 1980).

1.2 Theoretical background

Considering the work of art not only a historical event, we use categories which are indispensable for analysing it. Thus, among a set of categories, we deal with form and perspective. In painting, form is mediated primarily by light. The function of light should not be taken for granted when analysing a work of art, because its variations reveal form itself. In the analysis of light an important distinction is made between natural light and subtractive light. The latter is the painter's light in art, reflected from pigments and objects, which takes its value as a subjective experience of the artist himself.

Perspective is a method of organising forms in space, used mainly to create an illusion of depth or space in a two dimensional surface. Conditioned by exposure to Western single-point perspective, an invention of Italian Renaissance, we tend to see perspective as a systematic ordering of pictorial space in terms of a single point – a point where those lines converge that mark the diminishing size of forms as they recede into the distance. (Gardner, 1980:8-10) An exceptional example to this explanation might be observed in the works of art of the Renaissance and Baroque area, whose artists furnished us with masterpieces of perspective illusionism.

Considering form related to illusion, it is worth to mention that, while forms of architecture or sculpture exist in the three-dimensional space, actually, the forms of painting are brought to us only in a two-dimensional surface on which the artist creates an illusion. Human discovery of the power to project illusions of the three-dimensional world upon two-dimensional surfaces marks an enormous step in the control and manipulation of things perceived.

As far as analysis and interpreting is concerned, the difference lies in what is seen and what is represented. The optical fact is what we see, which is not necessarily what is represented. What is represented by the artist implies his own vision, illusion, feeling and capacity to put it on a two-dimensional surface, thus it has to do with artist's cultural and personal style. So, the difference between seeing and representing determines the variability of artistic styles. (Gardner, 1980:15)

2. The Uprising of Art Criticism

Considering art history, new humanism was developed in Florence, Italy during the second half of the fifteenth century. Local rulers established and supported important cultural centers in many parts throughout Italy. These cultural centers showed a deeper interest in language and literature which went side by side with the development of theory in art and architecture. There were laid the foundations of Arts Academies, like Platonic Academy in Florence as the most prominent one. The introduction of the printing press also was a high mark for that it could mean for the dissemination of culture. Also, the influence of its members' modernized and Christianized Platonism on Italian Renaissance thought was profound. (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2016) As the wheel of the history quickens in tempo while sweeping toward the highest point of the revolutions which marked the turn to the modern epoch, we can easily notice a new and restless spirit of criticism which tends to get rebellious from time to time. During this period we can notice an uprising of the simple, the earnest and the moral. Rousseau is the most prominent representative of

the “age of sensibility”, which was reflected in literature, architecture and painting, as well. So, moving forward to the Neoclassic epoch, as one of the revival styles of Romanticism, we can notice how art critics deal with the doctrine of Jacques-Louis David of the superiority of classical art, according to whom, art must contribute forcefully to the education of public. (Gardner, 1980:711-12)

Coming closer in time, we now have our last stop, the modern era, which is marked by revolutionary changes on every frontier – scientific, technological, industrial, political, economic, social and cultural – all of them affecting directly or indirectly the artist and the creation process as a whole. In this fierce, quick and determinant change, art and all its components tried to establish its authority, which mainly came from the criticism. Thus art critique tried but didn't manage to canonize and categorize the trends, the stylistic variations, the inspiration and its representation in different forms and manners of this period. So many new forms of expression sprouted out, that art critics found it harder and harder even follow or get known to them within a short period of time, but nonetheless, they agreed in the definition of this epoch as Modernism.

3. The Impact of World Art on Albanian Artists

As we have mentioned above, the modern art revolution took place in the main artistic centers of Europe. This happened also because the artists of this period detached themselves from the academic art which was supported from the fundamentals layed since Renaissance. This revolution, often compared to that of the Renaissance in Italy. When the artists of that period involved painting, sculpture and architecture in a completely new path, comparing to that of the Medieval times.

The modern artists, although different in size, searched for, tried and discovered the newest needs of the epoch coming to birth, raising progressively a figurative system which is discerned, and later it is opposed to the old one. Same as the Renaissance artists did back in time, now the new trend overthrew the way of thinking and sensibility. (SCPA, 2004:5) After the artists revolution of the beginning of the twentieth century, in the first decades there were present and cultivated a series of trends and artistic movements, like The Fauves in France and Expressionism in Germany, were encouraged by the newly discovered exotic arts, bringing colours to a new and sparkling intensity, never seen before. (Gardner, 1980:811-13) Also, we can notice the sprout of Symbolism and Art Nouveau, the former carrying the subjectivity of Romanticism to new extremes, and the latter, protesting not simply against a sterile Realism, but also against the whole drift toward industrialization and mechanization and unnatural artifacts being produced.

Meanwhile, in world metropolitan city of New York, during the mid twentieth century there was taking place the most important event of the fifth decade, all thanks to the painters Pollock, De Kunning and Rothko, followed by Matisse, Brancus, Ruo etc. it was because of these events that the history of world art took a turn, being valued the same as rooted as the events happening at the beginning of the same century. Meanwhile in Paris the painters gather around Bissiere, the artist Matie who proclaimed the dismantling of the signs, Andre Malraux (French Minister of Culture) created the Biennale of Youth in 1959. (SCPA, 2004) All the same, during this century, some years later even some new artistic expressions are placed, like abstract expressionism, pop art, new realism, new figuration, conceptual art, *arte povera*, land art, trans avant-garde etc.

Taking into consideration that world art has made giant steps through the centuries; there was completely a different reality in the trends of the Albanian art. Since the third decade of the twentieth century, in Albania there were sprouting the first elementary schools of art, where there can be found the first foundations of professional art. So, in 1930 in Tirana it is documented the first drawing school, while in Kosovo it is documented in Peja the Handicrafts School opened in 1949, as the first and only institution of artistic education after the Second World War. It is known the fact that art in Albania and Kosovo almost in all its phases went detached one from the other. It were exactly the historical circumstances and all the unjust situations that Albanian people have been found throughout the centuries, that were imposed to the territorial, political, social, economic separation of Kosovo from Albania, but also from other ethnic territories. The same destiny accompanied even the cultural trends of our national existence. A product of this painful reality was

undoubtedly that of the figurative arts, forced to act separately one from another.

On our way of analyzing both schools of art in two separate boarder parts of the same nation, we realize that the School of Drawing in Tirana, established by Andrea Kushi, Mario Ridola and Odhise Paskali prepared the artists of the first traditional realist generation, who were educated as professionals in the Academies and High Schools of Rome, Florence, Athens, Bucharest, Belgrade, Zagreb and Paris by the end of the first half of the twentieth century.(Kuka, 2014:173) Painters like Abdurrahim Buza, Zef Kolombi, Androniqi Zengo Antoniu, Bukurosh Sejdini, Nexhmedin Zajmi, Qamil Grezda, Foto Stamo, Kel Kodheli, Sadik Kaceli, Sofia Zengo Papadhimitri, Vladimir Jani, Hasan Reçi, Vangjush Tushi, Shefqet Agalliu, Fadil Pëllumbi e Abdulla Cangonji, and sculptors Janaq Paço, Kristina Koljaka, Dhimitër Çani became the elite of the second generation of figurative arts. Their creativity, ideas and images were active until the end of the fifties but still existent up to the nineties. (Kuka, 2014) They had reflective knowledge and capacity towards the model and atmosphere in real life, finding itself many times among the academic, realist and impressionist interpretations.

There were also traces of ideological compatibility to the creation of art works, forced to follow the method of socialist realism, concludes the scholar Suzana Varvarica Kuka (Kuka, 2014). According to her, all the artists during their first steps created figurative images; some of them described the national memory enriching it with romantic content. Although, there were artists that distinctively stressed the academic experiences of the Italian schools, naturally it appeared the object as a target of interpretation. This was expressed with the emotional impression through colours and skilfully emplacement of brushstrokes. (Kuka, 2014) On the other hand, when talking about the School of Applied Arts in Peja, unhesitatingly we say that students there were free to unify the imagination and artistic creativity, based on the experiences of the world modern art (except of the first thre or four years when the socialist realism was imposed to them). In this sense, the new artists were allowed to realize artistic work indispensably of their individual credo. As a consequence, the figurative expression of realist, impressionist, dadaist, surrealist, new figuration, as well as cubism and abstraction, were present in the artistic creations of the students. Young painters held as their reference the world artistic actuality since their very first steps. After finishing their high school, they were easily engaged in the ex-Yugoslav and Western art trends during their studies in the Academies of Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Bucharest, Sarajevo, Paris and Rome. The experience gained in the School of Handicrafts in Peja, as well as the authenticity of artistic expression, where the Kosovo environment and atmosphere is outlined, as well as autochthonous originary folk elements, made that the Kosovo artists be noteworthy and leave their traces and names everywhere.

The artists that came out of the School of Handicrafts in Peja, who later studied in different countries, like Shahin Kryeziu, Vlada Radoviq, Muslim Mulliqi, Gjesh Gjokaj, Nusret Salihamixhiqi, Tahir Emra, Rexhep Ferri, Xhevdet Xhafa, Engjull Berisha, Shyqri Nimani, Agim Çavderbasha, Agush Beqiri, Nuredin Loxha, and many others, became the founders of the contemporary art in Kosovo.

4. The First School of Drawing in Albania

Referring to the study "*The School of Drawing – a cradle of the Academy of Fine Arts*", realized from Prof. Dr. Ferid Hudhri (one of the most well-known historians of art in all Albanian territories) we realize that the School of Drawing in Tirana is identified as the first arts school all over Albania. (Hudhri, 2000:43) The scholar Hudhri chronologically highlights the history of this School of Drawing since its very first steps. Hudhri also argues that the establishment of the School is ahead of a series of artistic events during the years 1920-1930.

Specifically, in 1920 the painter Vangjush Mio, being one of the greatest painters of the tradition, opens in Korça the first exhibition of landscapes. This painting event, showing the artistic creation of the painter within the poetic landscapes marks a historical turn for the Albanian art. As a consequence, the exhibition gave an impulse to the later activities in the field of figurative arts even in other cities carrying a cultural tradition in Albania. It was Father Gjergj Fishta the one who gave life to the idea of conceptualizing and organizing the collective exhibition of the Shkodran painters

in year 1923. Until its peak in collective exhibitions came in year 1930, as one of the most exhibitions of the Albanian artists bringing together the artistic works of the most prominent painters and sculptors of the time, as Kolë Idromeno, Spiro Xega, Ndoc Martini, Murat Toptani, Simon Rrota, and Andrea Kushi, representing their talent, invention, mind depth and individual sharpness. This exhibition of the contemporary artists, which was righteously cited as a historical one, evidenced that Albanians possessed artistic talent and affinity. The press at that time valued it as an exhibition which truly impressed the fascinated audience of Tirana. (Hudhri, 2000:50)

Hudhri addresses the attributions of the founding of the School of Drawing to the society "Miqhtë e artit" (*Friends of Art*), members of which were many eminent names, like Kolë Idromeno, Ndoc Martini, Murat Toptani, Simon Rrota, Spiro Xega and Andrea Kushi. However, alongside the traditional artists, there were engaged young artists as well, who at that time had only finished the Academies of Arts abroad, like: Odhise Paskali, Vangjush Mio, Qenan Mesarea, Zef Kolombi, Abdurrahim Buza, Lasgush Poradeci, etc. To this line of the most well-known figurative artists were joined artists of other fields of culture, like singers and instrumentists, forming a whole organism acting under the umbrella of the society "Miqhtë e Artit" (*Friends of Art*). This society was estimated as a very successful cultural mechanism because it embraced names that made up the history of Albanian figurative art, as well. The realized exhibitions were a positive signal for the shining future of the Albanian art. There was the place where the idea of opening an Arts Academy came into life. (Hudhri, 2000:43) One of the needs identified, was the opening of the drawing courses, which was vitalised from Andrea Kushi, the painter who taught Drawing in the Gymnasium of Tirana. (Hudhri, 2000:50) The course awakened an extreme interest to the youth, where there were listed in total 150 boys and girls as candidates to attend the course. They were subject to selection twice in a row, from which the most talented ones were chosen to follow the stream of art. Within this period of time the School of Drawing was established. Based on the document issued on 29th of January 1932, the Ministry of Education explains that the Artistic Committee, by the means of this institution aimed at training in fine arts those boys who showed distinct capacities. Prof. Mario Ridola was identified as the Director of the School, as well as the organizer of the Artistic Committee, assisted by Andre Thanasi, one of the Gymnasium teachers. The director of the School was engaged to distinguish those really talented boys in order to stimulate them by according several scholarships for further education. The lessons during that year were normally paced. There were also preparations of studios for the practice work and they were provided with the professional means and equipment for work. By the end of the school year, in June it was organized a joint exhibition of students and teachers, where Ridola himself exhibits its own work together with the students. (Hudhri, 2000:52-4) In 1932 there was organized the successive exhibition where paintings and drawings of Sadik Kaceli, Gani Strazimiri and Bukurosh Sejdini were distinguished, also prominent sculptors L Lazar Nikolla and Filip Makovci. The importance of this exhibition lies in the fact that there it was made possible the gathering of all the Albanian artists in a joint activity. (Hudhri, 2000:70-1)

Alongside with the drawing section, it was also active the sections of painting, sculpture and plastic. There was a need for recruitment of new artistic pedagogical staff to join the existing one of Ridola, Andrea Kushi, Odhise Paskali, Lasgush Poradeci and Abdurrahman Buza, because of the opening of new profiles.

Given that during these years the main concern in the field of figurative arts was the perspective of development, the creation of an art in its own originality would be based on the country's tradition, on its taste and on the experience of the world art. (Mato, 1995:105) The school teachers Paskali, Buza, Kushi and Poradeci, as well as its director himself (though of Italian nationality) insisted that the artistic expression to be based upon Albanian identity values. So, in the ateliers of the school there was enthusiastic browsing and cultivation of our entire ethnography, as a core element of our ethnos. A considerable space was given to the folk costumes, which were spreadly worn by the citizens at that time. As a result, in the school environment the students of this school drew, modeled and painted the replicas carrying traditional clothes.

5. The Teachers of the School of Drawing

5.1 Odhise Paskali

The artist who brought up the level of Albanian art of sculpture is the man from Permet, Odhise Paskali, that comes back to his homeland after finishing his studies in Italy. He joins to the group of Andrea Kushi, Mario Ridola and Abdurrahim Buza establish the first School of Drawing in Tirana. He is discerned as a multi dimensional artist possessing various gifts, high cultural interests and rare creative propensity. As a complex figure, he is seen as a writer, historian of art, knowledgeable in philosophy, competent in the culture of West and East, of literature, ethnography different theologies, and of 8 foreign languages. He is also characterized by a propensity for aesthetics and critique of art. (Forumi Shqiptar, n.d.) Odhise Paskali is the author of the monumental statues which are identified to be the first works of this kind in Albania. His creativity continues even in the post liberation period with many art works. He is still one of the most prominent personalities of the Albanian sculpture. His name is given to the Middle High School of Applied Arts in Peja, Odhise Paskali.

This artist was evaluated with the most prominent prizes that the Albanian government gives, like "Artisti i Popullit" (*Artist of the People*) and he also received the decoration under the Order "Nderi i Kombit" (*Honour of the Nation*). While according to Ibrahim Kodra, the genius of Albanian painting, Paskali could be compared to the quintessence of the arts, one of the most distinctive geniuses of the history of mankind – that of Michelangelo Buonarroti, considering him to be the *Michelangelo of Albania*. His name was carved with golden letters in the pantheon of the Albanian sculpture, thus we are convinced to conclude that such a marked figure of art is an honour for the Albanian nation.

5.2 Andrea Kushi

The Shkodran artist Andrea Kushi had the great opportunity to know the creativity of Idromeno, Martini and Marubi. He was soon identified as one of the most eminent figures of the old generation of the Albanian painters. Once he finished the Academy of Arts in Belgrade, he is engaged as a teacher in the school of *Normale* of Elbasan. Since 1931 he founded the first course of drawing in Tirana. Scholars hold that the School of Drawing was built upon the basis of the drawing course of Kushi, as the first arts school in Albania. (Hudhri, 2000) The main focus of his work were the portraits and landscapes. Among the most known painting creations of his, we find "Portret Vajze" (*Girl's Portrait*) and "Plaku me Shkop" (*The Old man and his stick*) considered to be the masterpieces of the artist. His tableaus are found in the National Gallery of Arts in Tirana and in art galleries in Shkodra and Elbasan. His themes, both in "Plaku me Shkop" (*The Old man and his stick*) and "Portret Vajze" (*Girl's Portrait*) show his idea of existential concerns. According to scholars, motivation urges the creative process to produce art. Thus, the themes of existential realities are motivated by a universal desire for immortality. (Otto Rank, 1932) We can interpret here the Girl's Portrait as a universal beauty or The Old man and his Stick as a man's life passing by, from Gestalt theorists' point of view, who describes our perceptual tendencies toward closure. (Benau, 2009)

5.3 Abdurrahim Buza

The painter from Scopie (*Shkup*) originated from Gjakova in Kosovo, after finishing his studies in the School of *Normale* of Elbasan, went to attend the studies in the Academy of Arts in Florence. Coming back from Florence, he starts his job as a teacher of Drawing in Tirana in 1933. Following his instructions, the youngest generation of the Albanian artists learned the art of painting in the School of Drawing. Buza is estimated as one of the greatest masters of painting in the history of the figurative arts in Albania. (Hudhri, 2000) The painter of the social and historical tableaus, the honorable teacher and lecturer of so many generations, thanks to his works, he can be evaluated as "Piktori Kombëtar" (*National Painter*). (Koleksioni Abdurrahim Buza, 2018) The painter

Abdurrahim Buza overpasses his academic formation in Italy and paints in a quite special way, treating the mountainous character of the homeland people to which he belonged. Buza, like the great Kadare (who has unveiled the magic of the life of his rigid city of Gjirokastra), naturally brings to us the magic and mystery of the life of the Kosovo people, traditional customs and customs, heroes and men of Kosovo, daily life; to fascinate and shake, that, like in the fabulous tapestry of Kosovo, he "end embroider" with his story. The craftsman's personality Buza is already appreciated for his style and the pictorial palette which, although unfolding in the picture of modest dimensions, they are monumental and often magnificent and are traced by the mystery of a naked beauty.

The Albanian state has honored and appreciated the creativity and the image of the painter Abdurrahim Buza by decorating and honoring with the high titles "Meritorious Teacher", "Deserved Painter" and "Painter of the People"

5.4 Lasgush Poradeci

Among the teachers of the Drawing School is also the well-known Albanian poet Lasgush Poradeci, who was also known as a painter. He painted nudos, portraits and landscapes, but poetry attracted him more. Lasgushi's artistic creations are said to be scattered among friends and relatives. He was among poetry and painting. Even when he did not paint anymore, Lasgushi continued to stick to painters and sculptors. According to Arieti, it is artists who join disparate elements to create a "concrete universal", in Poradeci's case his universal was found in poetry and painting. It is interesting to analyse Poradeci as an artist because his complex process of creation, moving from poetry to painting, reveals the unconscious content, still within the tableau, either with words or with colours. Arieti calls this process as the "*mirror reversal of dreaming*", when referred to Poradeci we can notice this process as a dreamwork in itself where the latent is within the tableau – either poetic or of painting - and the manifest is the work of art itself. (Kahn, 2009)

6. The Notorious Students of the School of Drawing in Tirana

The first drawing school in Tirana brought big names to figurative art. Ibrahim Kodra is among the students who attended this school. He then attended the Italian Academy of Arts, namely the Brera Academy in Milan, Italy. Italy of renowned art traditions, within a few years he stood among the most prominent painters of the time. Painted in a new form, typical of the Hill, is regarded as one of the prominent representatives of contemporary European painting. Genius artist after experiencing success in neoclassicism, cubism and abstract painting, ranking among the world's genius artists, makes the whole nation alive. Sadik Kaceli was among the talented students who attended the high studies of arts in Italy. Also a proven figure in the field of figurative arts is Nexhmedin Zajmi, Kolë Koledhi, Ll. Nikolla, B. Sejдини, A Cangonji, Q. Grezda, S Tuqi, Filip Makoqi, F. Stamo, H. Reci, P. Shoshi, G. Strazimiri, Z. Bumçi, etc.

It was the Italian Academy of the Time, in Rome, Milan, Florence etc., a study address for scholars of the Drawing School. However, Paris as the center of European culture, Athens and Budapest were the centers of the Arts Academy which were selected by young artists to build artistic personality.

Among the most important activities that initiate and implement the school are the international competition for Skanderbeg, which was organized in 1937. As it is well known, the right to realize the monument of Skanderbeg was awarded to the Italian sculptor R. Romanelli, who in September 1939 placed the statue in "Albania" square in Rome. The drawing school, the former teachers and her former students are a place of honor in the history of Albanian art. There they took the first steps in the professional way for the development of figurative arts, there are many of the best works of the tradition, there were prepared future teachers of the younger generation of Albanian artists.

7. Conclusions

The whole work of the Albanian artists throughout these decades has to take more land to be

evaluated and estimated as such, not only because it is our primary duty as scholars or researchers, but also it is our obligation to transmit the aesthetic form of art to other generations. Albanian artists have shown to be dedicated and motivated during their creation process, but another important element was the strong connection among them, in sharing experiences and in contributing in the cultivation of the artistic spirit to the younger generation. They were an inspiration for the others and for each other. Although divided by borders, they had features in common. This paper is an attempt to bring out some of the most eminent figures of that generation, their spirit expressed by their works of art. We believe that our contribution will serve as a first hand material to other scholars or researchers within the field of art criticism.

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