

# Pentakos: Five Artists of Kosovo

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In October of 2007, the Stockport Art Gallery in Manchester, UK opened a two month exhibit of Kosovar art which was entitled "Fragile State: Art of Kosovo". Described as a statement about the "scars of history", "Fragile State" featured paintings which articulated the bitter experience of artists who had suffered through the years of violence surrounding the creation of the Kosovo Republic. It was very appropriate that these visual documentaries constituted a record of war and its consequences. Often graphic and even gruesome, the works of nine Kosovar artists transformed a people's suffering into personal statements. None was more graphic than Ismet Jonuzi's sculpture built from parts of weapons used in the region's fighting. The Manchester exhibits were a sobering and haunting statement about confrontations, violence, and human suffering at its worst.

On 19 May 2009, Washington's Woodrow Wilson Center was the site of the opening of a very different exhibit of Kosovar art. Entitled "Pentakos: Five Artists of Kosovo", the exhibit was a result of cooperation between the Wilson Center and the Kosovo Embassy. While the Manchester program underscored the often fatal shortcomings of mankind, these Kosovo works were a tribute to human resilience and optimism. In view of Kosovo's progress over the past year, such optimism emerges as an increasingly relevant theme for artistic representations of the Kosovar struggle.



Avni Spahiu and Professor Shyqri Nimani (left) welcomed visitors to the Pentakos exhibit.



The five artists featured in this program were Shyqri Nimani, Shaip Citaku, Enver Rakovica, Veli Blakcori, and Nexhmije Cerkezi. They share a common orientation in that their preferred artistic technique is graphic. The five differ in terms of age and inspirational background but most of them are members of the Kosovo Fine Arts Artists Association and teach at the Faculty of Art of the University of Pristina. While these collective works reflect the psychological trauma of war, their overall theme is one of hopefulness and is therefore appropriate at this stage of Kosovo's national development.

The fact that Kosovo has reached an important new level of national development was underscored by the presence of Professor Shyqrl Nimani



Professor Nimani speaks with Ambassador Sallabanda and others

who is a professor at the Faculty of Arts in Prishtina. Most recently he has served as the head of the working group which prepared Kosovo's national constitution. Professor Nimani's description of this service is a dramatic statement of the determination of the Kosovar people to create a constitutional structure that will ensure the advancement of democratic freedom and tolerance in their new state. Having seen the US Constitution, he was determined to create a document that

echoed those same values in its words and spirit but which would, in addition, reflect the physical appearance of the American document. Therefore, he secured an identical parchment and, using his artistic talents, proceeded to write the Kosovo Constitution in the calligraphy style used by America's founders in crafting the US Constitution. Professor Nimani labored for over fifteen hours in this task which was finally completed less than an hour before its formal presentation to the Kosovar Parliament.

Another artist who demonstrates the nexus between the world of art and the political world is Professor Nimani's former student, Enver Rakovica, who was one of the three featured artists able to attend the Pentakos exhibit. Over the past fourteen years, he has been featured in numerous individual exhibits in the UK, Turkey, and the Netherlands and has participated in numerous group presentations. His work enjoys broad international popularity and, in 2000, one of his works was used for the cover of Linda Wetherill's CD "Sound and Repercussion". In addition to being a major graphic artist, Rakovica, like Professor Nimani, is politically active, serving as a member of Pristina's Municipal Assembly and an advisor to the mayor of Pristina.



Enver Rakovica was one of the featured artists in attendance.

Repression of group identity has long been recognized as an act of aggression and the resolute character of Kosovo's art has been one expression of Kosovo's national resilience in the face of oppression. The Pentakos exhibit, therefore, has a special significance which was underscored by the attendance of numerous individuals noted for their

involvement in the region and an academic commitment to the study of the region's post-dictatorial transition. As he opened the week-long exhibit, the Kosovo Embassy's Charge d'Affaires, Mr. Avni Spahiu, was joined by Dr. Martin Sletzinger, Director of East European Studies at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. In his statement, Dr. Sletzinger commented on the remarkable linguistic diversity of the region and the significance of Kosovo's increasing international recognition. Two nations which have supported Kosovo's statehood, Albania and Croatia, were represented at the exhibit. Dr. Aleksander Sallabanda, Albanian Ambassador to the US and Croatian Ambassador Kolina Grabar-Kitarovic attended on behalf of their Embassies.



Dr. Martin Sletzinger



The reds, browns, and other warm colors seen in so many of the paintings are described as an expression of belief in a happy future.

While an art exhibit may lack the drama of international proceedings and violent confrontations, it does represent an important aspect of the national struggle. Most importantly, art is an essential aspect of culture and, therefore, of national identity. The opening of Pentakos brought a gathering of people from a broad spectrum of academic interests and intellectual articulation. The art displayed on the two floors of the exhibit hall was

a reminder of the fact that it is the artist who is best able to articulate the values and distinctive features of a culture. This day and the individuality of these artistic works on display were evidence that the Kosovar identity is vibrant and resolute in spite of the cultural repression to which it has been subjected. In this respect, Kosovo's victory is a beacon to all those throughout the world who value freedom and human dignity.

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