

The background is a solid orange color with numerous white, expressive brushstrokes of varying sizes and directions scattered across it, creating a textured, artistic effect.

KOSOVARTS

Prepare to be inspired!

Art has proven that it can change societies and bring people together. Art informs and it represents and has the unique power to speak to everyone. A beautifully played chord or a provoking performance can move people equally, no matter where they come from. With this quality, art transcends boundaries and differences and raises our awareness into a dimension of understanding and common humanity.

The European Union in Kosovo/EUSR supports the promotion of arts and culture in Kosovo through projects such as Culture for All, as well as by enabling artistic performances, organisation of workshops and encouraging inter-cultural exchanges.

I have had the chance and the opportunity to meet some of Kosovo's most promising and accomplished artists who live in Kosovo, Europe and elsewhere in the world. I have been intrigued, surprised and intrinsically moved by their art. Art as created in Kosovo is not a soft power. It contains the essential elements of change.

This publication features some of the best young artists from Kosovo: musicians, actors, filmmakers, visual and performance artists, whose talent and work have crossed boundaries and travelled the world. They give us insight into their creative worlds and how they are motivated by life's experiences to create art.

I hope you will enjoy reading the personal accounts of the Kosovo artists featured in this publication. They talk honestly about their journey in various walks of art. Together, the stories they tell give us a glimpse into the fast evolving and developing scene of the Kosovo arts.

Samuel Žbogar

Head of EU Office in Kosovo/EU Special Representative



Table of Content

Petrit Halilaj - Connecting Art to Art - 8

Arta Dobroshti - Through Acting, I Express Love - 12

Astrit Ismaili - A Performance Artist Transforms Boundaries into Social Change - 16

Besa Llugini - An Artist Lives to Create - 20

Ardita Statovci - An Unconditional Love for Music - 24

Petrit Çeku - Music Is the Language to Understanding Life - 28

Blerta Zeqiri - Relaying Life's Experiences Through Short Films - 32

Alban Muja - Exploring Life to Make Art - 36

Rona Nishliu - Listen to Your Heart, That's the Best Way! - 40

Denis Murić - Destiny and Talent Mark the Making of a Young Actor - 42

Rudina Xhaferi - Love-Emotion-Dream-Rhythm-Inspiration: the Universal Ingredients of Performances - 44

Tak Qrk - An Urban Graffiti Trend Setter's Tale - 46

Flaka Haliti - Boundaries Dissolve As Artist Gives Life through the Opposites - 50



Thirteen young accomplished Kosovo artists share their tales.
Together, they tell the story of Kosovo arts.

Connecting Art **to** Art

Hajde, a word widely used in Kosovo, is a sentiment that embraces welcome and inclusion in many levels, encouraging others to join and co-experience.

Petrit Halilaj, a renowned young artist from Kosovo whose fame has long since crossed the borders, established Hajde! Foundation, as an open platform seeking to support and promote contemporary art in Kosovo, to generate cultural exchange with European artists and forge new creative links.



We learned from Petrit Halilaj that the idea of Hajde! was brewing in his mind for quite some time before it took form while he was at the Villa Romana Hajde! residency-in-a-residency. That is when Petrit felt the strong will and enthusiasm to take his idea further. As of fall 2015, Hajde! Foundation is an officially registered not-for-profit in Kosovo, conceived as “an intermediate space that is unfixed, versatile and fluid in form, dynamically adapting to a hosting context.”

Hajde! Foundation encourages dialogue and exploration in the arts, and is dedicated especially to a very young generation of artists, to form a unique structure for ongoing collaboration and exchange, and raise awareness and critical thinking in Europe and beyond about contemporary arts and artists from Kosovo. To achieve this, Hajde! Foundation engages in different activities: from talks and seminars, to residencies with critics and artists and support to arts and publication projects on local, regional and international levels.

What provided such a strong motivation to Petrit to give life to his idea of Hajde!? “It was my own way to becoming an artist. I was very young when we had to flee the war. At the camp I met Giacomo Poli, a volunteer psychoanalyst, who would give children paper and color pencils. I kept in touch with Giacomo, although we shared no common language. When I decided to study in Italy, Giacomo generously offered to take me in and support me during my studies. An immigrant from Kosovo, Arsim Sejdiu, helped mediate our contacts and basically helped Giacomo and me understand what it meant to come to a different country, to take someone into your house and support them in finding their way,” tells Petrit.

So for Petrit, Hajde! is a mediating third element between two contexts, most importantly, about a very basic human connection.

Petrit knows from first-hand experience how important it is for an artist to be able to concentrate on making art for some time and not worry about other things at the same time. At the same time, he likes to give back to the artistic community and empower other artists from Kosovo who might have less exposure and also less opportunities. With that in mind, he has developed different programs.

The Petrit Halilaj Studio tells us about the 6-month support program offered by the foundation for one student from the Academy of Arts in Kosovo. “The financial support serves to help him/her to not worry about living expenses during this period and fully concentrate on their work.” The lucky student will be chosen by a jury comprising of the artist Petrit Halilaj himself and two curators.

Another program is the open residency program, a close cooperation with the Kosovo Environmental Educational and Research Center (KEERC) in Junik. “We will invite artists of all ranges, not just visual artists, to propose a project that is concerned with environmental issues and nature and would benefit from the stay in the Junik area as well as an exchange with the group of biologists running KEERC.”

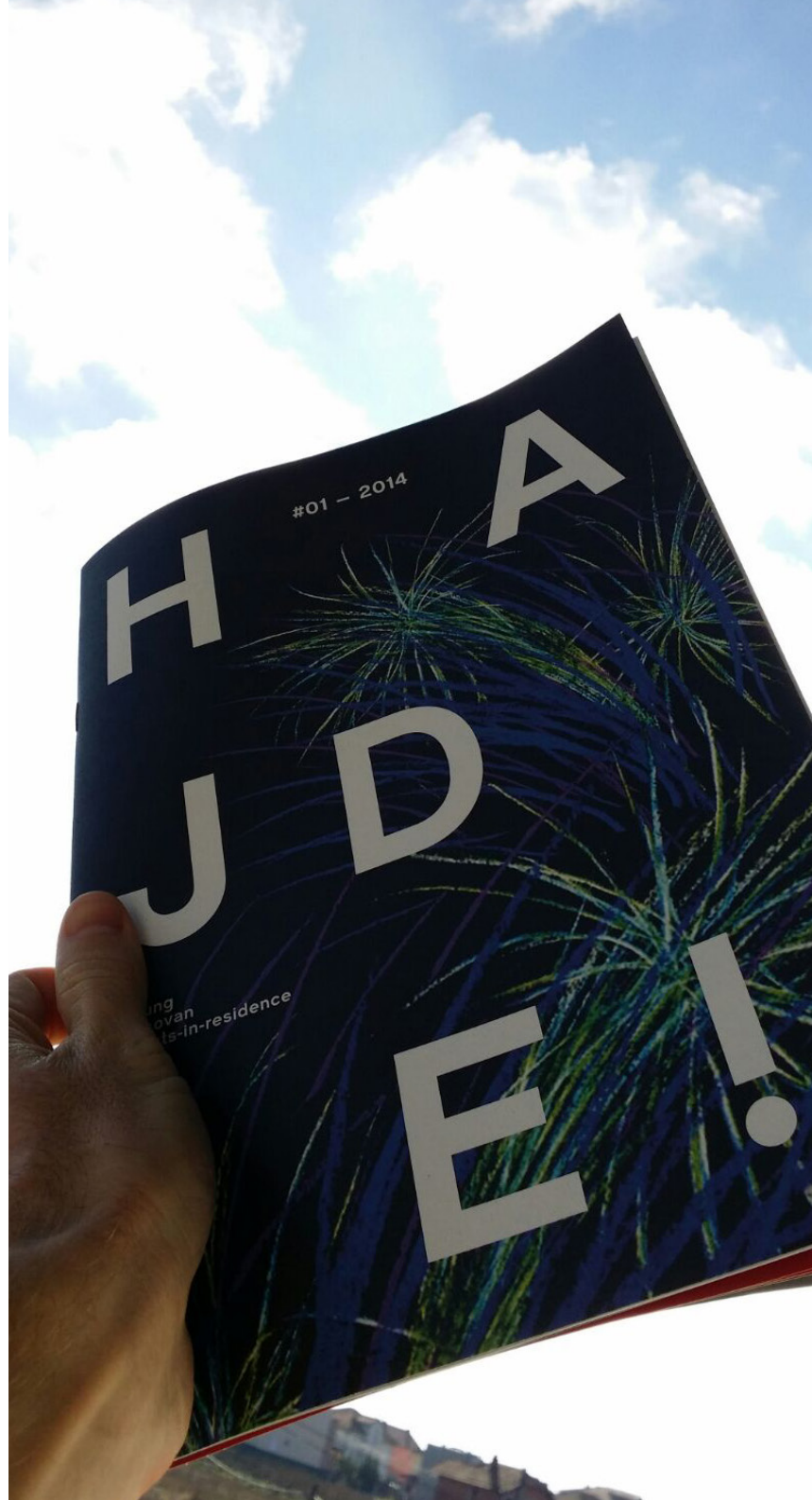
In addition to these two already defined programs, Hajde! serves also as a network for announcing and disseminating information on other possibilities and opportunities for artists to apply.

Due to its rhizomatic structure, Hajde! also facilitates contacts and connections for international artists who come to Kosovo for projects and thus create more exposure. This is a good way of sharing the wealth of the young and vibrant art scene in Kosovo while supporting artists find their way. Hajde! is already planning a research trip to Kosovo in the summer of 2016 for international curators and critics to meet with Kosovo artists.

Through the Villa Romana residency project, Shqipe Jonuzi, Qëndresë Deda, Yll Xhaferi, and Dardan Zhegrova, young artists from Kosovo, had a chance to connect with artist from all over Europe. A creative network grew from these connections that many still maintain. The Hajde! publication was then presented in Berlin at the book launch for the Villa Romana Fellows, so it certainly reached a very international audience.

Petrit Halilaj lives and works between Berlin, Kosovo, and Mantova. He completed his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Brera in Milan.

Petrit represented Kosovo at the Venice Biennale in 2013 and at the moment works on a solo show at Hangar Bicocca, Milan. He had solo exhibitions at Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 2015; Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, 2015; Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon, 2015; Galeria e Arteve e Kosovës, Prishtina, 2014; Wiels, Brussels, 2014; Fondation d'Enterprise Galeries Lafayette, Paris, 2013; Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen, 2012 and Kunstraum Innsbruck, 2011. He participated in group exhibitions at S.A.L.T.S., Switzerland, 2015, Punta della Dogana, Venice, 2015; Palazzo Cavour, Turin, 2014; Villa Romana, Florence, 2014; Museum Schloss Moyland, 2013; Museion, Bolzano, 2013; Kunstverein Nürnberg/Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft, Nürnberg, 2012; New Museum, New York, 2012 and the 6th Berlin Biennale, 2010 among others.





DARDAN ZHEGROVA - Here, 2014 - Video Session 1 - Let's stay connected, 2'47"

Through Acting, I Express **Love**

It looks like stars are woven in her life's journey. A child aspiring to become an astronaut was actually awarded the Shooting Star prize and has become a real star in her own right: this is **Arta Dobroshti**, one of Kosovo's most famous actresses. She has enchanted the public with her talent, presence, and warmth of acting. Arta says that love is the ultimate emotion, and for her, "acting is love."

“Everything in life is connected; there is no moment that is more important than another.” Indeed, Arta’s rise as an artist has been a series of such moments building upon one another to bring to the screen an actress that captures the hearts of the audience.

When Arta was a child her maternal grandmother used to call her “Shirley Temple”. Growing up, her family instilled in her the sense to enjoy life’s every moment and twist, and to always believe in her ability to achieve whatever she wanted to be. She accumulated different experiences from countries she lived in while growing up: her hometown Kosovo, and the USA.

“I am very appreciative of all my experiences,” says Arta, who likes to share moments from her life. “As a teenager, with three friends, we got jobs as bartenders at a discotheque, to earn our pocket money. I have also worked as a translator for journalists.” Her first experience with acting was in USA, when she was an exchange student, and chose drama as one of the elective courses. Back in Kosovo, Arta and her friends rehearsed for a street performance. At the time they could not go ahead with the plan of doing the street performance but Arta decided to listen to her gut feeling that “acting was so her.”

Arta has played both in films and theatre. She enjoys both. For her, acting is a spiritual profession, one that deals with human emotions, energies, and moments. “When you act, you imagine, you believe, you start acting upon that, and it becomes real. Acting shows how life works. Through acting, I express love.”

While Arta was in Bosnia and Herzegovina performing a play, she was asked to audition for a part in a film by the Dardenne brothers. That was the film *Lorna’s Silence*. Arta got the lead role, and much more that followed. The film and Arta herself, earned international acclaim, awards and nominations, including the Best Screenplay Award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2008.

In 2013, Arta was awarded the prize of Shooting Star in the 63rd Annual Berlin International Film Festival for her part of *Lorna*. *Glamour* mentioned her as one of most stunning looks on the red carpet at this film festival. Critics focused on her “warmth, humanity, sensitivity and smartness” as key words to describe Arta Dobrosi’s acting.



Arta has starred in several international films. In France, her work includes *Late Bloomers*, a 2011 drama film where she plays along William Hurt and Isabella Rosellini, and in 2012 *Three Worlds* (*Trois mondes*). She starred in the short film *Baby, UK*, which in 2011 brought her another prize in the Best Actress category from 24fps International Film Festival. She has played in three films in Albania, *Magic Eye* (*Syri magjik*) in 2005, *The Sadness of Mrs. Snajdrova* (*Trishtimi i Zonjës Shnajder*) in 2006, and *Vera* in 2007.

With her impressive talent and success, Arta has brought a lot of attention to the artistic potential in Kosovo. She thinks that as long as one believes and has hope, anything can be achieved, and that any individual can change the image of a country. “First of all we should love ourselves and who we are. WE are all the same and we are all connected. When we feel good about who we are, we project that feeling and other people like the place you come from,” says Arta.

Arta is currently busy with a new project. She is content and appreciative of everything in her life. After all, as she says, “it is all about the journey.”



The Shooting Stars initiative promotes young European acting talent and their careers.

For her role of Lorna, Arta has received three prestigious nominations in the Best Actress category from:
Cannes Film Festival
European Film Award
Toronto Film Critics Association Awards

Arta feels comfortable acting in a foreign language. “Words do not matter; it is the feeling that counts. Acting is all about feelings and emotions you put in.”





A Performance Artist Transforms Boundaries into Social Change

With his art he seeks the thread that links what is different, what is discriminated and what is socially unacceptable to create a space where contradictions come together and social norms are defied so individuals can build self-confidence to transform their spaces and express themselves. **Astrit Ismaili** finds inspiration in music, body, pain, dreams, aliens, injustice, tears, or the extremes to explore the energy released by the body and express itself through the performance.



In his artistic career, Astrit has used a variety of media to express himself, like theatre, photography, video installations and performance arts, to create different layers of expression. “Visual arts and performing arts are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they interact and clash and merge into each other.”

Astrit believes that art truly has the power to bring change. His belief provided the main impulse for one of his most famous performances – Prishtina Mon Amour. This performance was a unique experience for an audience of over 2,500 people of different ages and profiles who visited the almost decrepit building of the Youth Palace in the centre of Pristina to be part of the many simultaneous performances rolling into one.

“Prishtina Mon Amour was an independent project. It had nothing to do with the institutions. I consider that a response to fill a void felt by the artistic community and youth in general. Prishtina Mon Amour is an example that different people, with different interests or professions, can create together something beautiful and meaningful,” says Astrit.

Kosovo is a youth-dominated country. For Astrit, should this energy be channelled in the right way, it would bring marvellous results.

That is why Prishtina Mon Amour was conceptualized around the model of using this energy, imagination and creativity in a healthy and productive manner. “I wanted the participants to have an opportunity to listen to their body and express themselves freely,” says Astrit, who hopes that his project has served not only as a platform to introduce contemporary performing arts outside of the conventional frameworks promoted by schools and institutions, but also to serve as a new method for our bodies to speak.

“Art has the power to change – this was the idea that made performing arts the main medium to activate the decrepit area of the Youth Palace, and open the doors to the public on 8 September 2012. Visitors were also performers. I think everyone of us can perform,” says Astrit, who has turned this belief in the duality of the performance into his area of studies at DasArts in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Astrit is an artist on a mission – a mission to challenge boundaries of all natures: racism, gender, capitalism motivated by profit alone, and gentrification. He thinks such processes require a response through activism and hopes that with his art he will raise the awareness of the audiences and generate ideas for change.

Astrit and his performances have travelled around the world: Istanbul, Belgrade, Sofia, Skopje, Tirana, New York, Hong Kong, Basel, Zurich, Munich, Amsterdam, Vienna, Bratislava, Brussels, Sarajevo, Ljubljana, and Zagreb.

Currently, Astrit is getting ready for the Spielart Festival in Munich, for the world-premiere of the performance Innocent, where he appears as a director of three different performances being played at the same time and within the same space. For this project, he has collaborated with the performers Andreas Hannes, Antonia Steffens and Jose Portas.



What Astrit Means When He Talks About Love

Love lives in a dense forest, hidden among branches and leaves. When darkness arrives, Love shines through her eyes. It is heavy. It is gracious. It is half bird, half man. The closer to Love I am, the more I need Love. Love is in me, even when it is not.

Prizes and Awards

Artists of the Future 2012/residency in ISCP New York
Skena Up 2013, Best Director Award for the show Antígona
Skena Up 2014, Best Performance for the show Crave
Video Fest 2014, Best Video Performance award for E Dehun



An Artist Lives to Create



Besa Llugiqi is a young soprano from Kosovo who is capturing the attention of audiences across Europe with her beautiful voice, flawless vocal technique, and highly aesthetic interpretation, as the professional jury of “Elena Nikolai” International Competition for Young Opera Singers in Bulgaria concluded in 2013, when Besa was awarded the prize bearing the name of the renowned Bulgarian opera singer.



This year has been a busy one for Besa as her performances have taken her to many European cities: Amsterdam, Vienna, Sofia, Venice, Verona, Riva del Garda to name a few. Each place she visited has presented an opportunity for unique professional and cultural experiences, which Besa considers to be a special gift.

“Every concert, regardless of where it takes place, brings pleasure to the artist. It is important to be accepted and appreciated by the audience. Naturally, dedication and responsibility increase when you perform abroad because that performance surpasses the boundaries of an individual’s career. It is a privilege to represent your country, and to be able to tell people about Kosovo. Seeing the flag of my country on international stages is a source of pride and an incentive to do better and better.”

Besa lives with the love of classical music in her heart. Opera is an inseparable part of her life. “Every time I am about to finalize preparations for a concert or a part, the experience makes me feel fulfilled. My first public appearances were challenging enough to make me understand the importance and dynamics of my chosen path.”

Besa is a graduate of the University of Prishtina in solo opera singing. She completed her master’s degree in Skopje, FYROM, and is continuing her professional development in Bulgaria under the mentorship of Christina Anghelakova. She believes that an artist is constantly evolving. Each step in the career requires intensive dedication, and most importantly, an artist should respond to the

audiences, bringing together performance and talent within the chosen path.


In 2003-2005 Besa was awarded four times the first prize in the international competition in Pristina organized by Foundation Ars Kosova, and Best Interpretation of Albanian Composers. In 2009 she won the first prize of the National Competition “Jorgjia Truja” in Albania. In the same year, she was among the final top ten out of 94 international performers at the international competition “Marie Kraja” in Albania.

In 2011-2015, she was given the part of Liu in Turandot, and the part of Lauretta in Gianni Schicchi both staged at the National Opera of Albania; the part of Mimì in La Bohème staged at State Opera Rouse in Bulgaria. In 2012 she had her recital at “Dam” in Kosovo, was a soloist at Gabriel Faure Requiem in Albania and the Mozart Requiem in Bulgaria.

“The key to an artist’s success is finding the balance between life and work because an artist performs to live and lives to create. As artists, we live to give the best from ourselves while facing the dynamics of life.”

Besa is thrilled with the projects in her near future, which include concerns, operas and performances in several countries, of which she highlights the recital concert in Luxembourg and her debut in the opera Lucia di Lammermoor by Gaetano Donizetti.





An Unconditional **Love** for Music

She has played the piano in concerts and tours across the world: from Europe to USA to Asia. Concert halls in over 20 countries around the globe have resounded with the joy of life, sophistication and deep sensations flowing from her fingers. Meet **Ardita Statovci**, a pianist from Kosovo who now belongs to the world.



A quick look at Ardita's schedule of concerts shows a busy professional life, at times, with up to three public performances in one day. Combined with the impressive list of composers whose piano works she plays – Mozart, Schubert, Poulenc, Stravinsky, Brahms, Bach, Liszt and so on – and her talent, one can see why she has been named a “star pianist.”

As an artist, Ardita interlaces different cultures. Until the age of 15, she studied piano in her home country, Kosovo, excelling at every step. At that age, she was admitted at the Mozarteum University in Salzburg, Austria, where she obtained the title Magistra Artium as a concert pianist. After earning the title, Ardita continued her studies at Indiana University in Bloomington, USA, and completed her postgraduate studies at the Imola Accademia Pianistica, Italy.

Ardita feels that the piano is the essence of her being. She grew up surrounded by the sounds of the piano: both her parents and her sisters play it, creating a wonderfully cultivated atmosphere at home that was further completed by the professional classes with her professors. Ardita calls it “a beautiful symbiosis between family and music school” that flamed her passion for the instrument, which she describes as “my space of expression, where thoughts and emotions link as a burst of passion or meditative calmness, exploding in infinite and countless colours.”

She says she shaped her artistic personality studying the piano music across the centuries, including Albanian composers, taking something from each one. Frequent travels to other countries and encounters with different cultures have enriched and inspired her personal mosaic. Ardita enjoys each and every concert, and says the performances in her country of origin give rise to strong emotions that fill her with another dimension of positive energy.

Ardita's recipe for success sounds simple but is not easy. “Art is a difficult profession in many levels. A daily discipline is required, even in the emotional aspect. Apart from talent in music, you have to work very hard, persist, sacrifice and be willing to give your best. You criticize yourself, and you push yourself to go to the next level. Improving never ends.”

When she performs, Ardita tunes herself to the energy and emotions of the audience. Her being is all focused on the performance, thus giving life to some rare magical moments in the performer-audience dialogue. She feels that this is what makes a concert.

“A pianist's journey is wonderful, and challenging. It requires a lot of work; it requires everything from the performer. But the energy it gives you back is a unique fulfilling experience. There is only one condition to achieve this state – an unconditional love for music!”

Ardita Statovci has received several scholarships and prizes from the Society for Music Theatre in Vienna, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research, the Internationale Mozarteum Stiftung in Austria, the Piano Academy in Birmingham, UK.

She has also won awards and prizes at competitions such as the Yehudi Menuhin Live Music Now in Salzburg, the Bösendorfer Prize at Mozarteum University, International Competition Rotaract in Spain, Talent of Kosovo, International Ibla Competition in Italy.





Music Is the
Language
to Understanding
Life



Petrit Çeku has played as a soloist with major symphonic orchestras: Allentown Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Czech Chamber Philharmonic, Albanian Radio-Symphony, State Hermitage Orchestra of St. Petersburg, Kosovo Philharmonic, and Zagreb Philharmonic.



“When you decide to go to a concert of classical music, be prepared to give yourself to each voice you will hear simultaneously with other voices. In this context, a voice is a series of notes, connected to each other to create a musical line, which is a melody or similar. The relationship between different musical lines is controlled by many rules of counterpoint which make their co-existence possible. And then there is silence, which is the essence of music. Once you are dragged into the relationship of different voices and silence, you will be elevated in ways that cannot be described.”

Thus began an enchanting August 2015 evening in the heart of Pristina. A diverse crowd gathered to sit on the grass at the city’s park, which for that evening was transformed into an oasis of classical music – as if removed from time and space – to listen to the divine sounds of Petrit Çeku’s guitar and a lecture of his artistic reflections.

Petrit Çeku is considered a world-class guitarist, a virtuoso of his generation. He has performed across Europe and North America, and will travel to Asia later this year. He is a winner of nine first prizes in international guitar competitions, in addition to other awards. In 2008, he was awarded the Best Young Musician of the Year in Croatia.

Petrit was introduced to music early in his life by his father, who also played the guitar. He began to play around the age of 5 or 6, as soon as his fingers were long enough to reach the strings. At 9 years old, his uncle brought a gift, Petrit’s first own guitar. And so the journey began, with music as his first language in life. He started musical classes in Kosovo, went on to study and then graduate from the Zagreb Academy of Music in Croatia, and continued his musical instruction at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, USA, with Manuel Barrueco.

“The art of interpretation in music is a discipline much like those eastern spiritual disciplines that can only be passed down through the teacher-disciple relationship. Knowledge and inspiration that gets transmitted through the teacher-student institution is immense and cannot be imparted in any other form. Therefore, a major part of my personality is a direct influence of my guitar teachers. For me it was particularly exciting that I had the opportunity to study with one of my biggest idols, Manuel Barrueco.”

Petrit views his artistic life as a continuous series of concerts, and likens his work to a craft and each concert as a product of that craft, trying to be as perfect as possible. He typically chooses the repertoire himself, trying to have the same standard wherever he plays. He chooses from various composers those parts that fascinate him with their artistic intentions, which go beyond mere music.

Music brings him all over the world, and with him, the name of the country where Petrit comes from. “I have a great appreciation for the people of Kosovo and what they have been through, as well as an understanding for the things that still need improvement in our society, because our past is very complicated. Kosovo would benefit hugely from a more broad and consistent support of the arts. Developing the artistic scene has shown to be very fruitful for many countries and I hope that Kosovo will expand in that way too.”

Petrit remembers his first experiences of live music from the time when he was growing up in Kosovo. He mentions the Chamber Music Festival, Remusica, Dam Festival, and Dokufest, which meant a lot to him.

“Years later, by appearing at these and other festivals, I hope to have had an influence on others, at least a portion of the effect those events had on me. These are not only festivals but also carriers of the classical musical life. So by coming back and appearing at those events, I am also saying thank you for all that the festivals gave to me. Dokufest, which I attend every year since its beginning, is like an elixir of life that keeps me going throughout the year.”

Petrit shares that he has just finished recording Bach’s complete Cello Suites, and the recording will be released by the end of 2015. This has been quite an experience for the talented guitar player. “Trying to avoid having my personality affect the music, especially in the slower movements of the suites, has been a real self-searching journey. Another way of improving the interpretation is by working on one’s personality, so that whatever is reflected is of better quality,” he confesses.

Nine First Prizes:

Parkening International Guitar Competition (USA), Allentown
Symphony Schadt String Competition (USA), Michele Pittaluga
Guitar Competition (Italy), Maurizio Biasini Guitar Competition
(Italy), Ferdo Livadic Competition (Croatia), Andres Segovia
International Competition for Young Guitarists (Germany), Emilio
Pujol Competition (Italy), All Croatia Competition (Croatia), Anna
Amalia Competition for Young Guitarists (Germany),

Relaying Life's Experiences Through Short Films

Blerta Zeqiri is a well-known director and scriptwriter of short and feature films from Kosovo. With her work, Zeqiri has participated in film festivals such as: Sundance Film Festival, Oberhausen International Short Film Festival, Bradford Film Festival, Palm Springs Film Festival, Vancouver Film Festival etc. Blerta Zeqiri is the winner of International Jury Prize for short filmmaking at Sundance 2012 for *The Return* (Kthimi).



A love of books and exposure to dancing and music from an early age seem to have shaped Blerta Zeqiri's passion for arts. An avid reader of novels, Blerta was only 8 years old when she started to write poetry and short stories. As a teenager in the '90s, with her two best friends, Blerta created the rap-music band BAM, which won second and first prizes at Show Fest festival in Kosovo. Growing up, Blerta decided to pursue a career in filmmaking, studying dramaturgy at the University of Prishtina, and film studies at the University of Paris VIII.

"As a student of dramaturgy I used to write a lot of screenplays. Every time my screenplays were made into films, I would feel despair, as I thought they did not turn out the way I intended to," says Blerta. "So I realized that in order to achieve my filmmaking vision, I had to learn the film language and direct my own films."

Blerta the filmmaker prefers succinct and universal themes that apply to every single person in the world. A family is trying to survive in Kosovo, but so are other families in the world, identifying with this struggle. This is the lens through which Blerta projects the history and the stories in her films: not news, but experiences. She wants to bring to the audience films that are both intellectually and emotionally provoking. In short films about human trafficking for prostitution purposes, Blerta has appealed to those who pay for the girls and to all the others who are aware of what is going on but decide to keep silent.

Through her films, Blerta aims to achieve hyperrealism, attempting to shoot scenes that appear to be glimpses of life captured by hidden cameras rather than a pre-written and acted scene. "I do not like to have symbolism or metaphors only for the sake of having them. I want scenes to be raw and authentic. Often, my films appeared to be not purposeful, following no screenplay."





Blerta's films always have themes inspired by urban life in Kosovo, and she often wrote screenplays based on people she knows or meets. For Blerta, every individual in Kosovo reflects the identity of Kosovo. In *The Return* (Kthimi), the film that brought Blerta much international acclaim and awards, the couple on whom the storyline focuses, dines on peppers, cheese, tomatoes cut in half and black tea.

There are two other films she particularly likes from her own work: *The Dinner* (Darka), which is only about three couples dining, and *Exit*, her first movie which she wrote and directed with her sister Lendita, another well-known filmmaker and visual artist.

"When we finished the film, my sister and I returned to France, thinking it was a failure. We watched it once a week and noticed more flaws. Finally, I got my courage to show the film to my professor who asked me to put subtitles in French. Then he asked me to show the film at school, along films by older students. Everyone liked our film best. Professors and students convinced us to send the film to various festivals, and positive responses began to pour in. In the first festival we participated, we won the first prize. It was beyond my dreams. When we went on stage to receive the award, I started crying – the film was about the most difficult period of our lives, it talked about three students locked in a flat in Pristina during the war – a dark subject which also brought me the biggest of joys I had experienced until that time."

Blerta is currently working on a new feature film called *The Marriage* (Martesa). The film is about a forced marriage that prevents another love story from happening. She is collaborating for this project with the world-famous French producer Cedomir Kolar. The team also includes one Albanian and one Slovenian producer. "This is a very important project for me," says Blerta.

Movies by Blerta Zeqiri

- 2011 - Short film "The return"
- 2011 - Short film "Kosova 2011", co-director
- 2011 - Short film "Children"
- 2009 - Short film "The dinner"
- 2008 - Short film "Ok"
- 2007 - TV documentary "City with no..."
- 2006 - Feature film "Exit", in collaboration with Lendita Zeqiraj
- 2002 - Short film "Exit", in collaboration with Lendita Zeqiraj

Exploring Life to Make Art

Alban Muja explores the stories he tells to the public through his art. Most of his work is influenced by social, political, and economic processes and transformations in Kosovo and the region. “My work is influenced by what surrounds me,” says Alban. His art is his position, with all its hues of colours.





“Memories and experiences have shaped my work. One of my earliest works at the beginning of my career was dedicated to my hometown, Mitrovicë/a,” says Alban. He thinks that an artist’s ideas take life from his surroundings. But for art to be successful, it has to be crafted in such a way that it bears meaning even when exhibited in another corner of the world. “An artist’s role is to react to what happens, not merely sit in front of the canvas and imitate nature.”

He believes more in the exploration of themes rather than the inspiration. “Inspiration is merely a starting point,” says Alban. “After that, investigation of a certain theme or topic is the biggest part of the work.”

Alban’s body of works is a broad spectrum of media, such as: videos, video installations, film, drawing, painting, photography, public space intervention and performances and other combined media. For him, a chosen medium of art is only a means to transform an idea into a piece of artwork. “I choose the medium or technique depending on the idea, I am not attached to one way of expression only. Otherwise, it would be a shortcoming for me,” he says.

It is a crucial role of an artist to work even when the conditions are not right, when it becomes difficult to find the direction. Alban says he is still searching for his direction, as he comes across the same challenges as his other fellow artists from Kosovo. “Freedom of movement largely affects the work and progress of artists. For someone who lives and breathes to create, freedom of movement is essential.”

In spite of this limitation, Alban’s works have been introduced to the world. He has participated in many group and solo exhibitions in Europe and beyond.

“I have participated in exhibitions and festivals in the majority of European countries. I was present in person in most of them. I believe it is very important for an artist to be present in person in these art manifestations. For me, not being there is like half-presence.”

Alban is working together with the Bosnian artist Lana Čmajcanin on two projects the main concept of which is the freedom of movement. The aim is to have these projects travel the 28 states of the European Union. Simultaneously he is working on two new exhibitions, one in Vienna and the other in New York.

Alban has been awarded many residencies or fellowships, such as ‘Tobačna 001 Residency’ from the Museum of Ljubljana, Slovenia; the ‘Apartment Project’ in Istanbul, Turkey; ‘Young Visual Artist Award from ISCP Residency and ‘ARTSLINK Residency’ New York, USA; ‘KulturKontakt Residency’, Vienna, Austria; ‘Backyard International Artist Residency’, Kuda-Center for New Media, Novi Sad, Serbia; ‘International Artist and Writer Residency’, Santa Fe Art Institute, New Mexico, USA; ‘Braziers International Artist Residency’, Braziers Park, Oxfordshire, UK etc.

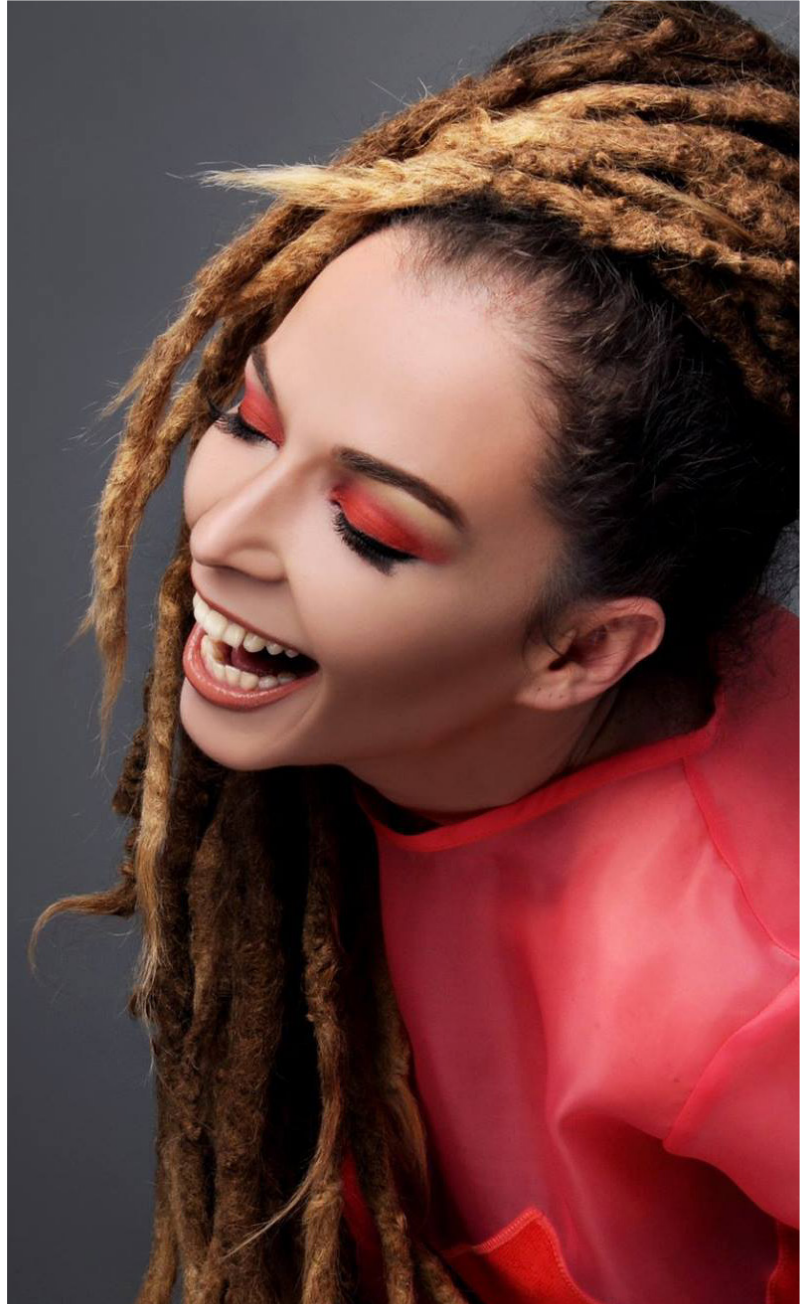
Group and Solo Exhibitions

Institute of Contemporary Art Zagreb, Croatia; Škuc Gallery, Ljubljana, Slovenia; The National Gallery of Kosovo, Pristina; Miza Gallery, Tirana; Center for Contemporary Art ‘Station’, Prishtina; Viennafair, Vienna; Myymala2 Gallery, Helsinki; UnionDocs, New York; Able Kulturverein, Berlin; Siz Gallery, Rijeka; Mardin Biennale, ‘2nd Biennial of Contemporary Art in the Atomic shelter in Konjic, BH.; ‘Mediterranean – Arrivals and Departure’ Ancona; “Qui Vive?” Moscow International Biennale, Moscow; 28th Ljubljana Graphic Biennale; Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rijeka; Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava; Museum of Contemporary art of Vojvodina; 1st International Tehran Biennale; Columbia University, New York; Berlinale’ 60 film festival, Berlin; DelawareContemporary Center for Arts; VOLTA 5, Basel; Cyberfest, St Petersburg; 53rd International Short Film Festival Oberhausen; Open Space, Vienna; NGBK, Berlin; Brot Kunstthalle, Vienna; ARTspace Media Art, New York; Göteborg Museum of Art ; Cetinje Biennale 5 ; Nova Gallery, Zagreb; City Museum, Ljubljana.

Listen to Your Heart, That's the Best Way!

Life itself, changes, surprises, routine, people she knows well or people she only met once, music, friends, city, and the water. This is a list of what makes her inspiration brew and explode.

Rona Nishliu realized around the age of 17 that her life had no meaning without songs and music. Now she is living her passion fully as one of the most well-known young singers from Kosovo.



Rona's powerful voice and talent were unveiled heart and soul to the public in *Ethet e së premtes mbrëma* talent-seeking show in Albania, where she made it to the top five. She says that her close family spotted her talent early on, and encouraged her to attend classes at the music school. However, the biggest achievement with international recognition is her participation in one of the world's prestigious stages, the Eurovision Song Contest 2012 in Baku, Azerbaijan, winning the fifth place. "It was a complete surprise!" says Rona.

People still stop to talk to and hug Rona in the streets to thank her for her extraordinary performance. "Some people even sing lines from the song to strike a conversation; some others express how proud they are of my presentation at the Eurovision Song Contest. There are even foreigners who sing my song *SUUS* in Albanian!" exclaims Rona, who is pleased to see that her performance is not forgotten.

Rona has taken her on-stage talent to many places in Europe, as she has performed in Hungary, Austria, Romania, Cyprus, Russia, the Netherlands, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina to name some. "These performances are very important and challenging to me. Being in so many foreign places helps me ask always for more from myself, and gives me the courage to work harder." Rona says that she uses music to try to transmit her own history and the history of her country. "The new

countries I visit pushed me to come back and discover more about my own country."

As it happens this year Rona has finished her first album *Me motive tonat* (Our motifs), which she considers as the highlight of the year. The album fuses Albanian motifs from all regions with free jazz, soul and trip hop. She has worked with many other artists for the album *Me motive tonat* and in spite of being aware how difficult it is to present their work to the world, she strongly wishes to do that.

"Although we say that information goes viral and it is becoming easier by the day to make it in the world, the truth is that we are very isolated and it is hard to achieve results from where we are. Therefore, every window for communication is important to promote the art and the country abroad," says Rona.

Other than her music, Rona is passionate about activities that give back to the society and the country. She has been involved in a number of humanitarian and awareness raising initiatives, such writing a song against gender violence in teenagers or a song about the importance of healthy teeth in children. "I am always ready to serve the community. This fulfils me and makes me feel useful."



Destiny and Talent

Mark the Making of a Young Actor

One afternoon, as usual, **Denis Murić** and his friends went to train for a football match. Little did he know that he was walking right into fame. As he was playing football, casting for the movie *Enklava* (The Enclave) was going on at the cultural centre of Zvečan/Zvečan. During one of the breaks, Denis went to check out what was going on. Something about Denis' personality and demeanour impressed the filmmakers, and he got the role.

"When I was first told that I got the part, I did not think much about it. Then, a couple of months later the film director called my father and me to talk about the film and my role. This is how it started," says Denis. "My first film was *Enklava*. It created the opportunity for me to get a part in the next film, *No One's Child* (Ničije dete). In a way, if it had not been for *Enklava*, this success with the second film would not have happened."

After the shooting for the first film started, Denis says he felt a little strange being on the set. "I had never imaged being on a set before. But I was very lucky – everyone: the director, the actors, the film crew, looked after me."

He was completely taken by everything: how the cameras worked, how the film director and the crew made the film happen, how the actors played. "I learned one important thing while on the set. It is not one person who makes a film but everyone together. The awards go to everyone's efforts," says Denis, who strongly believes that small budget films can be the best ones.

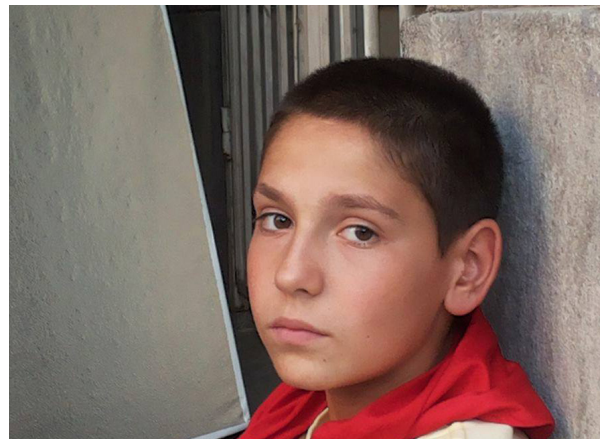


Denis has played already in four films. He has even played the role of a zombie! However, the role he played in No One's Child when he was only 14 years old remains his favourite so far. "I liked the story of that film. It is based on real life events about a boy found in the woods in Bosnia." The film has won 12 awards in several international film festivals. "When I was in Venice, where the film got 4 awards, including the audience award, people who talked to me wanted to know more the story of the film and about the character I played."

Denis is still in high school in North Mitrovica. He is fast approaching the age to begin making plans for his future paths. Acting is one. "I like acting, I can see myself there. I would like to try theatre also," says Denis, adding that computer science is another field of study he is very interested in. The future looks bright for him.

No One's Child Awards

Abu Dhabi Film Festival 2014
Cairo International Film Festival 2014
FEST International Film Festival
Venice Film Festival 2014
Palm Springs International Film Festival 2015
Wiesbaden goEast 2015
Zagreb Film Festival



Love-Emotion-Dream-Rhythm- Inspiration: the Universal Ingredients of Performances



There is no limit to the breadth of feelings in **Rudina Xhaferi's** performances and art. Her creativity flows and grows in Pristina, which for her is not just a city but also the space located between her two most extreme emotions: chaos as the offspring of the daily grind, and immense love from her family. There is one keyword to describe everything that permeates her creations, and that word is "beauty".

Rudina classifies herself as a visual artist. She creates videos, installations, painting on nails. She performs, does scenography for TV and theatre, and theatre costumes. Recently she has added fashion design to her list of activities. Expressing herself in all these media comes naturally to her, and she has the courage to say a lot. Actually, she does say a lot through her attempts to push the boundaries of imagination to the farthest limits, always seeking to challenge herself. She is the source of ideas and curiosity motivates her.

Performance is a form of art that Rudina adores. “It is a very specific medium. It is alive. It is fleeting; only the audience that is present can actually enjoy a performance, nobody else. It cannot be sold,” speaks Rudina of her passion, adding that apart from realizing an idea, performances have a crucial element: the energy.

“The energy is born with the artist; one cannot learn it like we learn other things. An artist must feel the energy that is sent over to the public.”

Speaking of performances, Rudina has already staged eight of them since 2001, when she first started in this area.

“Each project brings the best of memories, whether projects I did on my own, or projects I worked in a team. The first step to working in a team is to select people who give me good energy. As we work intensively we all become one family to give our best and convey our message to the audience in the best way possible. The audiences always amaze me with their presence.” Says Rudina of her performances.

Rudina views her performances as a two-way communication with the audience. For her, the true spirit of the performance comes alive while communicating with the audience. “Talking to the audience after the performance is another performance. People tell me what they feel right there and then, they are more sincere. I cannot find the words to describe how I feel at such moments.”

Perhaps Rudina’s gift to translate all life’s moments and facts into a performance guided by the beauty of everything is a result of her parents’ dedication to nurture an atmosphere of warmth and love at home, no matter the situation the country was going through as Rudina and her siblings were growing up.

In over 18 years of her professional career, Rudina has organized 7 personal exhibitions and participated in more than 20 collective ones. Pristina, Athens, Naples, Bombay, Manchester, Puglia, Bregenz, Ljubljana, Istanbul, Bratislava, Tirana, Vienna, Piran are some of the world’s cities that have been enriched with her art.

Her day job is at the Radio Television of Kosovo as a set designer, while also giving her contribution to the National Theatre, Oda Theatre and the National Theatre in Tetova, FYROM as a set designer and a costume designer. Some of the theatre plays that bear her signature are “Cat On a Hot Tin Roof”, “The Lady Who Loved Penguins”, “American Buffalo”, “Albanicum”, and “Madhouse”.

Rudina is the talent behind a unique way of expression: that of painting on nails not as a fashion statement but as a deep message. It is the alliance of masterpieces from famous artists: Picasso, Munch, Warhol etc., against aggressiveness that has caused so much suffering. She called this alliance “Rudinism”. In fact, she has dedicated a lot of time and energy to the concept of presenting art through painted nails, as she also defended her master thesis with the topic ‘Rudinism – A Typography of Urban Fashion’.

Artworks: “I Hear Nothing”, “Selfportrait”, “Tattoo on hair”, “Looking for My Star”, “Freeing from the Frame”, “Continuing to tryptich”, “Loogking for my star”, “Rudinism-Urban fashion Typography”, “So good to be an albanian”, “Rudinism-Urban Fashion Typography”, “LEDRI”, “The thinker” and “Spring”.

“Through my art I want to talk about the issues that affect the Kosovo society in different places of the world. My works use the universal language of art. As such works need no translation they communicate directly to the public, regardless of where the public is from. So, through my work I can go beyond the boundaries, not just geographic but also demographic and social ones.”

An Urban Graffiti Trend Setter's Tale

Not so long ago, **Tak Qrk's** unique tag appeared along elaborate graffiti around Pristina. The more tags there were, the closer he felt to the city he loved. Then the same love for the city made him stop the tags. "I did not want the city to overflow with my tag. Pristina does not have excessive graffiti and that is a good thing, otherwise the city would look even more polluted," says the young artist.



Tak Qrk's special art – graffiti, is a product of how he experiences life in his hometown. "I have developed several mural concepts around Pristina, I feel they add to the life of the city. The presence of such artwork has its effect on everyone." Tak Qrk considers that the essence of his art is a combination of his passion for graffiti and his friends' debates about politics and social issues.

"I am not an active participant of discussions about politics or economy or life in our country in general," says Tak Qrk "but there is this place deep inside me where I keep notes on true feelings." He then proceeds to pour these feelings on the elaborate designs on public spaces, for all to see and process. For Tak Qrk, art is about reality; it is not easy for the truth to be unveiled, yet the truth is universal.

Tak Qrk entered the world of graffiti when he was around 15 years old. At that time, a group of Hope Box Angles from the Netherlands visited Kosovo as part of a project to visit post-war cities in search of young artists and initiate them into the discipline of street art. "It was the Hope Box Angles who discovered me. I read about them on a poster in the street. I met with them and I discovered my way of doing art."

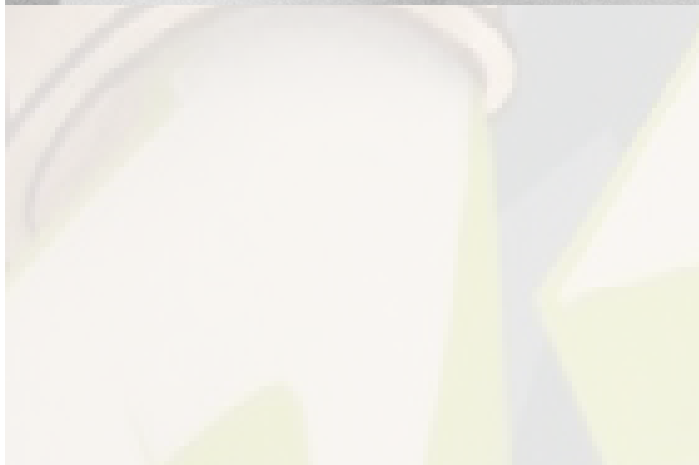
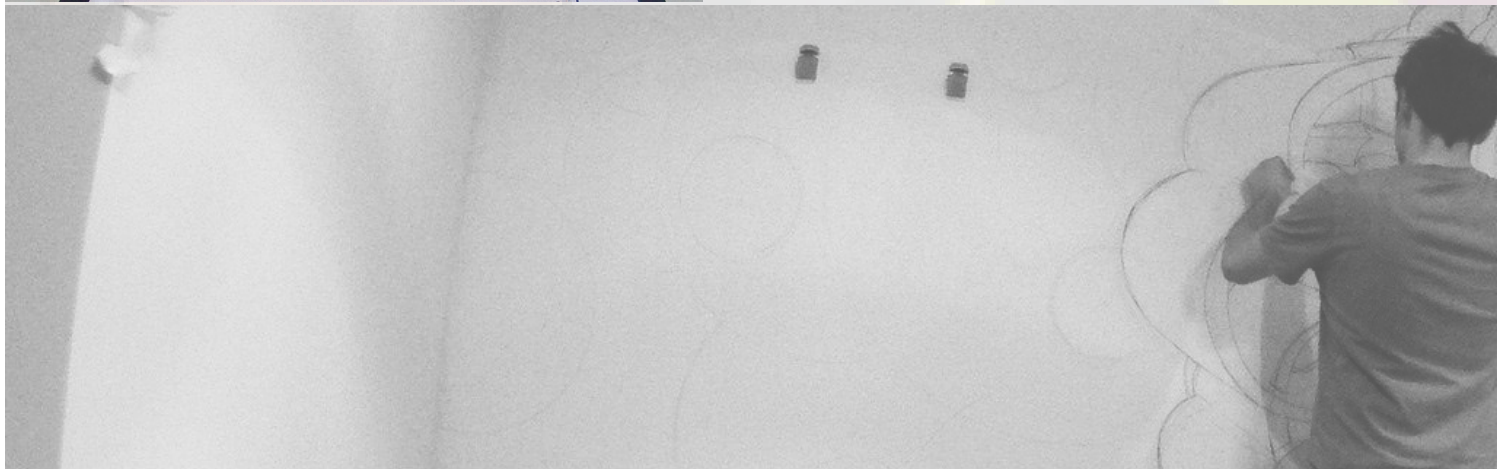
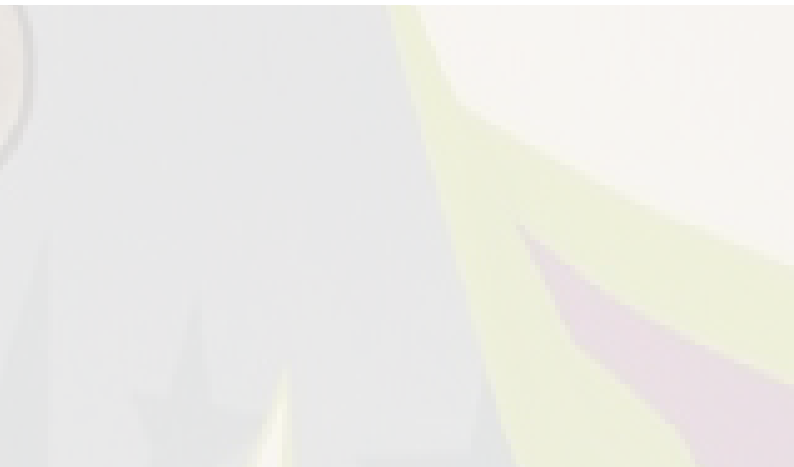
Together with the Dutch group, Tak Qrk and two other young artists from Kosovo immersed themselves in the then little-known art of graffiti. They exhibited their work at the arts' gallery in Mitrovica, even covered with graffiti the protective walls of the UN mission offices. "The graffiti symbolize the reality of life in the streets. At that time I thought it was not even a permissible form of art," says Tak Qrk.

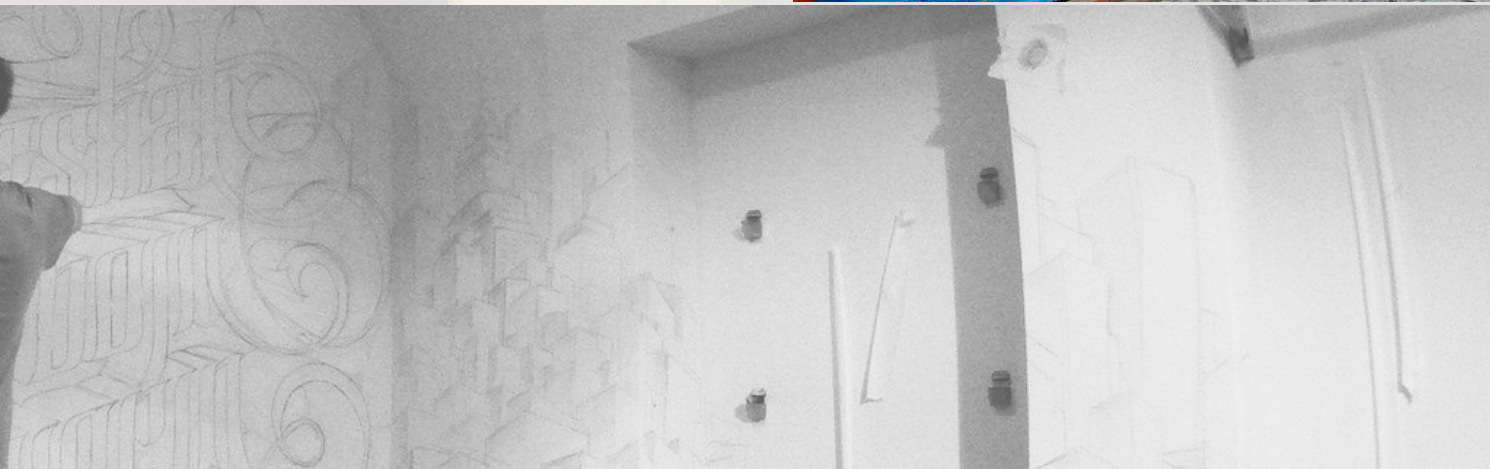
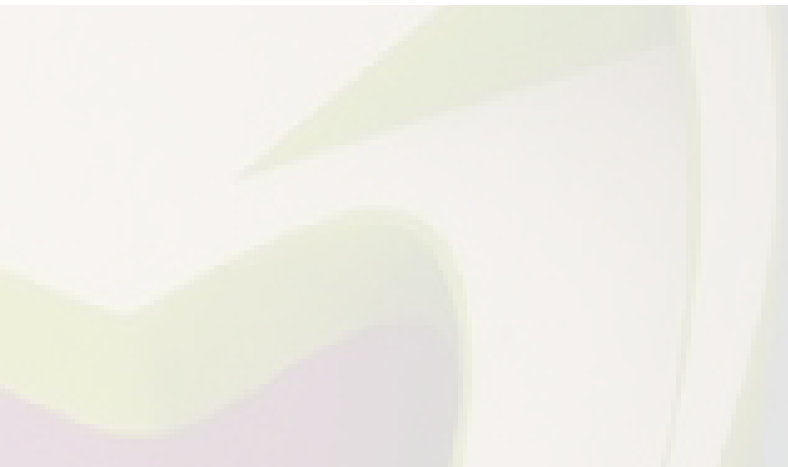
He remembers he started to sketch around the age of 11-12, the notebooks with his brother's drawing being the sole source of inspiration. Then, the sketches slowly developed into the more elaborate form of graffiti, which Tak Qrk mainly taught himself by surfing the net. His talent and skills grew. "Whenever I met with foreign graffiti artists, they would be surprised by my style, which they considered quite advanced, and amazed by the fact that I have developed this art on my own, without any guidance."

Tak Qrk most probably is the only graffiti artist from Kosovo who has placed his tag abroad. He has participated in a variety of artistic activities in FYROM, the Netherlands, and Albania. In 2015 Tak Qrk went to London to work on the interior design of a new bar. "In London I have used a new special technique with nails and carving for a mural executed through a mixture of disciplines. I think this is only the beginning."

Tak Qrk is a graduate of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Prishtina. He works as graphic designer, interior designer, always being on the lookout for new techniques and tools to express his true feelings.

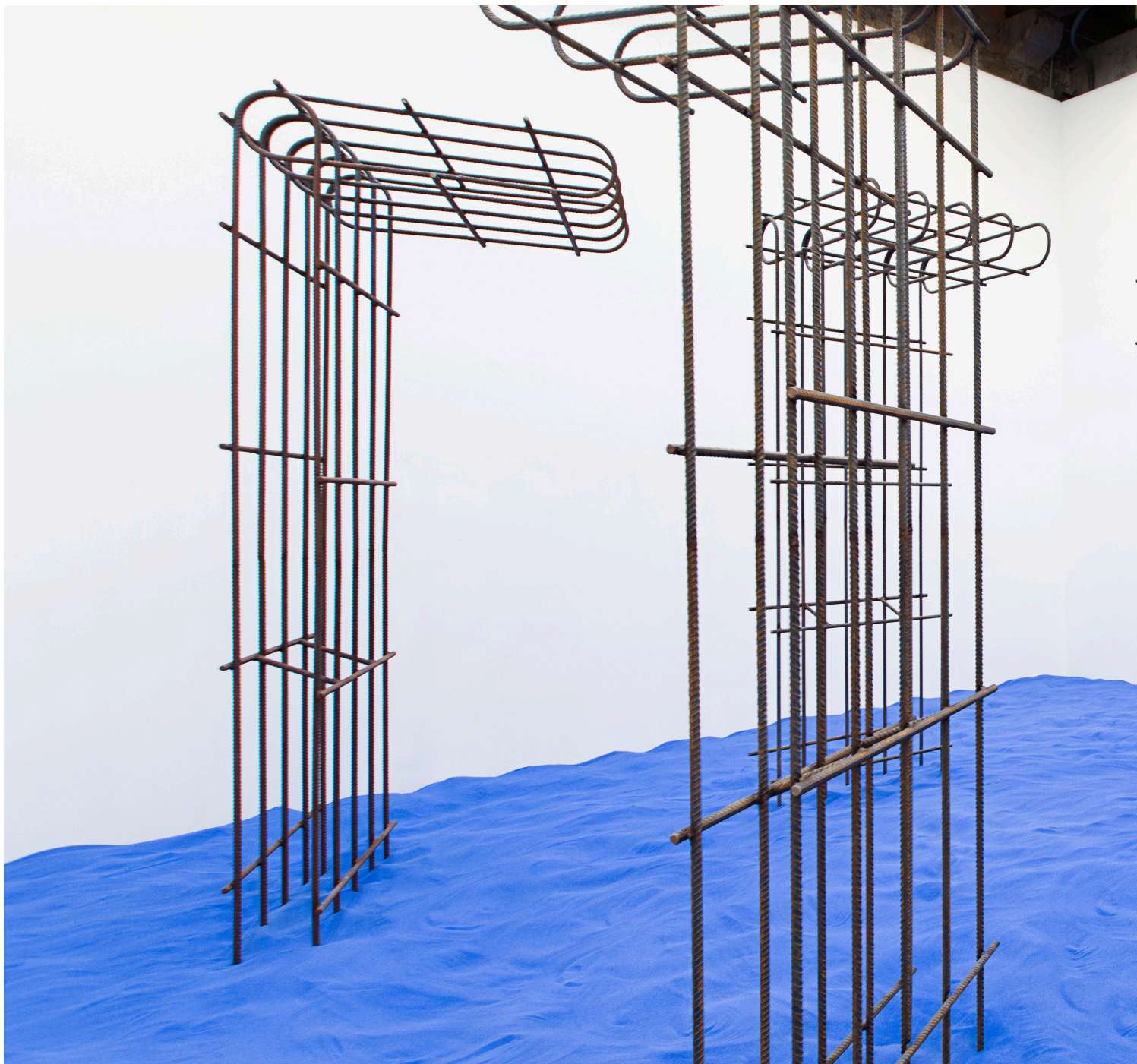
"I have another goal," says Tak Qrk. "That is to encourage young artists and inspire them to keep alive their passions. I know how hard it is to nurture a passion that does not fit with the prevailing mentality. My advice to young artists is: work as hard as you can. I did not know where my passion would lead me. Exploring life, myself and art made me who I am."

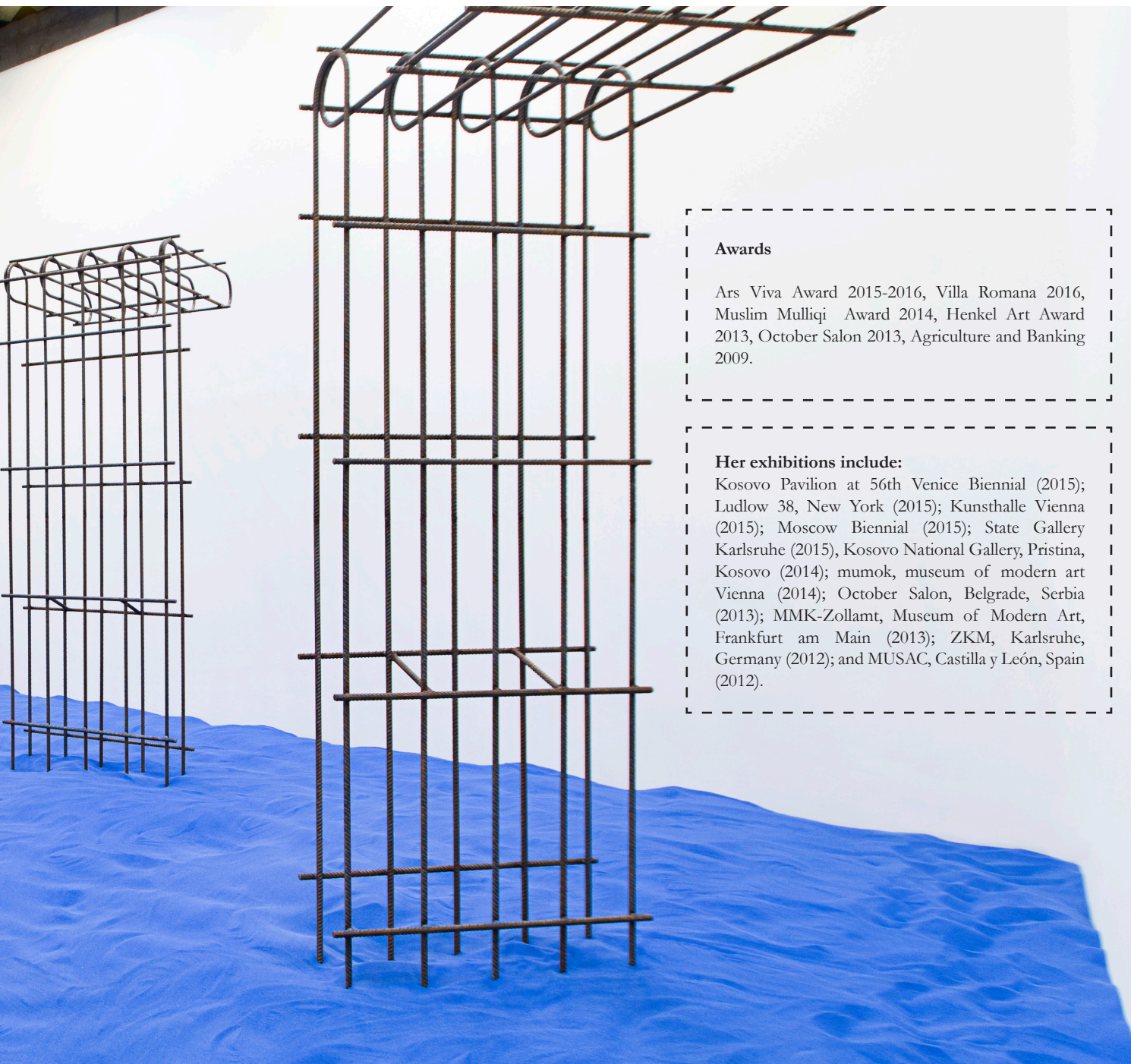




Boundaries Dissolve As Artist Gives Life through the Opposites

Borders and barriers, freedom and mobility, narrow spaces and the horizon, physical being versus the imagination, thick lines and thin lines, the eternal blue of the sky that belongs to everyone, where one can see a face or not, a face that carries a deeper meaning that transcends the defining line of what might be a woman's or a man's face. It may be challenging but it is absolutely stimulating to be at the receiving end of **Flaka Haliti's** art.





Awards

Ars Viva Award 2015-2016, Villa Romana 2016, Muslim Mulliqi Award 2014, Henkel Art Award 2013, October Salon 2013, Agriculture and Banking 2009.

Her exhibitions include:

Kosovo Pavilion at 56th Venice Biennial (2015); Ludlow 38, New York (2015); Kunsthalle Vienna (2015); Moscow Biennial (2015); State Gallery Karlsruhe (2015), Kosovo National Gallery, Pristina, Kosovo (2014); mumok, museum of modern art Vienna (2014); October Salon, Belgrade, Serbia (2013); MMK-Zollamt, Museum of Modern Art, Frankfurt am Main (2013); ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany (2012); and MUSAC, Castilla y León, Spain (2012).

Text:
Linda Gashi

Design and Layout:
Florim Mehmeti

Cover:
Tak Qrk

Editing:
Fjolla Çeku Sylejmani

Photographs:
Fadil Berisha - 33
Emanuel Gjokaj - 37
I. Dugolli - 25
Arben Llapashtica - 27
Dardan Rushiti - 28

Copyright:
European Union Office in Kosovo/EUSR

Reproduction is allowed if information about the source is given

Translation and print:
EU Office in Kosovo/EUSR, 2015



Str. "Mother Teresa" no.16 Pristina 10000, Kosovo
T: +381 (0) 38 25 99 99
F: +381 (0) 38 25 99 25
M: +377 (0) 44 50 95 10
E: pr@euicc-ks.com

Čika Jovina n.n., North Mitrovica
T: +381 (0) 64 44 04 662
M: +381 (0) 64 90 97 882
E: mi@euicc-ks.com

www.euicc-ks.com



European Union Office in Kosovo / European Union Special
Representative in Kosovo
Kosovo Street 1 (P.O. Box 331) Pristina, KOSOVO
Tel: +381 (0) 38 51 31 200; Fax: +381 (0) 38 51 31 305
E-mail: delegation-kosovo@eeas.europa.eu
Web: <http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo>

