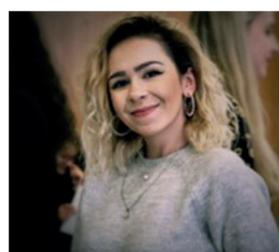
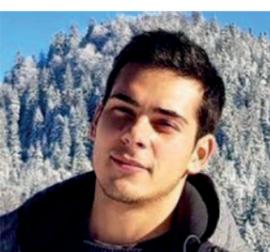
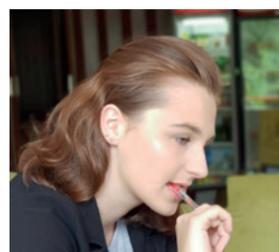
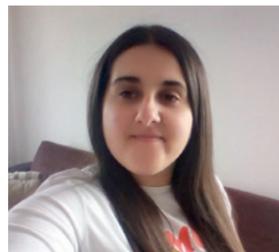






AUTHORS



EDITOR'S NOTE



Dear Reader,
Welcome to the first edition of MIR Magazine – an annual publication developed by the **Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC)** and **Balkan Diskurs**. MIR, which means 'peace' in Bosnian, is a platform for young inventive people who push social and creative boundaries. It is dedicated to individuals and organizations that left us a legacy of strongly built foundations to continue our fight for peace and justice.

The edition in front of you connects themes across borders – from art, fashion, music, and photography to activism, historical heritage, and peacebuilding. These diverse topics come together with one vision: **to promote young voices and connect communities across the inner and inter-state divisions in the Western Balkans.**

The articles, essays, and interviews in this edition were written by **33 authors, Balkan Diskurs youth correspondents** from the Western Balkan countries. Their ideas and dedication inspire us all and have made this edition possible. These young people worked under the supervision of the PCRC team, and my deepest gratitude goes out to Tatjana, Safet, Amina, Marko, Erna, Dolores, Benisa, and Kristina for their trust and devotion.

The development of MIR was made possible through our strong partnership with King's College London, University of the Arts London, and the dedicated team behind the **'Art & Reconciliation' research project**: Dr. James Gow, Dr. Rachel Kerr, Dr. Paul Lowe, Dr. Tiffany Fairey and Dr. Milena Michalski.

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PCRC started 2022 by winning the inaugural **2022 Local Peacebuilder Award** by Alliance for Peacebuilding. This new and important recognition spurs us forward to continue our mission of building peace, despite significant obstacles. With this in mind, I hope that when you finish reading, your belief in our region's future matches the conviction which drives our work at PCRC: **peace is possible.**

Velma Šarić
President, Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC)
Sarajevo, 14 February 2022

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HEROES AMONG US

Written by: Velma Šarić
Photography: Aleksandra Zaytseva, Paul Lowe
& Network for Building Peace

Heroes are all around us, often unnoticed, unrecognized and unappreciated. At a time when internet portals, newspaper columns and social networks are bombarded with daily political chaos, heroes are changing the harsh reality with small but determined steps. Activists, peacekeepers, students, taxi drivers, and farmers show by their example that the future, with a little effort, can be brighter, and that dealing with the past is the moral obligation of each of us.

The heroes among us break down ethnic and national barriers, fight for education without segregation, combat nationalism and chauvinism, and dream of a country without hate speech that is equally good for everyone.

Among them is Ajna Jusić, president of the Forgotten Children of War association, who describes herself as a woman, daughter, friend, activist, feminist, fighter and optimist. She knows how strong one's heart and soul must be in order to be able to resist hatred towards those who have done one injustice.

Ajna was born in 1993 as the first baby in the Medica Zenica association. Her place of birth was determined by the fate of her mother, who survived rape during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). She found out the truth about her birth by accident, as a high school student. She overcame the trauma this knowledge caused thanks to the selfless love of her mother and stepfather with whom she grew up. All this has turned her into a brave person who is ready to speak publicly about the most sensitive topics. She continues the fight for her own rights and the rights of children "born because of the war" through the Medica Association. Its mission is for the system to finally recognize and accept children born because of war.

"The very fact that I was born as a result of the worst crime – rape – made me quite eager to defend the concept of the family for the rest of my life. My mother and stepfather gave every ounce of their strength just to protect me from a society that is still not aware of how and in what way it discriminates and interferes with the normal course of life," says Ajna.

It is estimated that between 20,000 and 50,000 women and girls were raped during the war in BiH. After more than 20 years, no one is asking what happened to children born because of these crimes or out of relations with foreign officials who returned to their homes after the war without accepting these children as theirs. Ajna and friends, united together in the Forgotten Children of War association, are trying to remedy the issues revolving around the forgotten children of the war.

Ajna Jusić is an example of courage and of resistance to a system that to this day does not recognize children of war as a special category in Bosnian society. These children have so far experienced all possible violations of children's rights. She believes that young people need to understand how important it is that human differences, starting with religion, culture and history, should not be perceived as a force that separates, but a source of richness, from which to learn about community.

"For me, the greatest success is the fact that society has started to get acquainted with this topic. That simply, when we say 'children born because of the war' they know what we are talking about. When people offer support, it is the most important thing. We are taking small steps but, I believe, towards great success," concludes Ajna.

A CRY AGAINST SEGREGATION

A group of teenagers in Jajce achieved a great success when they opposed the decision made by the Central Bosnia Canton Assembly in July 2016 to establish a new school in the city under the "two schools under one roof" principle.

These young people realized that it was a matter of segregation and started protesting against this decision. The authorities did not take them seriously, but their persistence and courage, together with public pressure, resulted in the reversal of that decision.

These young people once again pointed to the dysfunctionality of the education system in BiH, which is a direct reflection of the post-war division in the country. Schools in the Republika Srpska are predominantly

monoethnic, while in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the phenomenon of "two schools under one roof" is present in as many as 56 schools. They were created as a temporary solution to encourage the return of displaced citizens to their homes and as a systemic protection of their rights at the cultural and linguistic level. However, schools work using that system throughout the Federation even today.

Instead of separating school systems into two monoethnic curricula, students from Jajce sought to continue to be able to attend all subjects together with the exception of so-called 'national subjects' such as language, religion, geography and history. And they succeeded in that.

They knew that a compromise to accept some separate curricula is not an ideal solution, but it is better than complete segregation. Ignored by politicians and the local community, young activists from Jajce took matters into their own hands, spoke out, and made a difference. Now, aware of their strength and the power of their voice, they serve as a reminder of the power of youth to direct BiH towards the path of reconciliation.

PEACEMAKING' TIL THE LAST BREATH

The peacemaker and humanist Goran Bubalo supported the young heroes from Jajce, as well as many others. He worked selflessly at the reconciliation processes to his last breath. Bubalo, director of the Network For Peace Building, passed away on June 9, 2020, at the age of 49, in Sarajevo, after a short and severe illness. National borders never limited his efforts to achieve peace. In fact, quite the contrary, he was a true cosmopolitan in his acceptance of all people, never standing for any kind of discrimination.

"Unfortunately, politicians are the ones who mostly emphasize differences among people via the repeated use of hate speech to separate us, pointing to the most common fictional differences, and targeting other religious groups and nations, as well as migrants and refugees.

They spread claims of our nation's supremacy over theirs, sowing poison against everyone they believe is different," said Bubalo in an interview with Al Jazeera.

Bubalo saw and treated people as entirely equal. He never looked through the prism of nationality or ethnicity in his work, actions or private life. Everything he did was aimed at helping people of all faiths, nations, races, and generations.

Štefica Galić, editor of the Tacno.net portal, a journalist, activist and, above all, human rights activist, from Ljubuški, has never cared about one's nation, religion or age. During the war in BiH, she and her husband Neđo saved Bosniak civilians from the Croatian army by falsifying their documents so that they would not be taken to the Heliodrom, Dretelj or Gabela camps.

Twenty years later, she addresses topics such as freedom of speech and hate speech recognition, but her engaged activism, which began during the war, has often not been welcomed by those around her. She faces numerous threats almost daily, either because of her activism or because of her editorial policy.

"I lost everything of material value and I had to leave the city where I lived. A lot of my friends, and even parts of my family, gave up on me. For them, I was and still am a traitor to 'my people'; a communist whore... For others, I am a heroine, a brave woman. I'm a normal person doing what I believe to be right," says Štefica, who had to move from Ljubuški to Mostar.

In 2018, she received the Johann Philipp Palm Award for Freedom of Speech in Germany, which is an acknowledgement of her many years of activism. In a society full of stereotypes, it is difficult to fight lies, corruption, and alienation, but Galić continues on.

"I believe in what I do, I believe we can do better because we are not how they present us to the world and to themselves. I do not want to believe in what the worst of society imposes on us, I believe what I see and in my own judgment, in the good as such, in good people and in good energy," she says.

DIFFERENT WAR HEROES

There have always been good people, even in the most difficult times. Sarajevo taxi driver Hasan Jusović is rightly nicknamed Duša ('Sweetheart'). At the beginning of the war, he saved Aco Nenadić, a soldier from the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA).

On May 3, 1992, in what was then Dobrovoljačka Street in Sarajevo, members of the Territorial Defense forces intercepted a YPA column leaving Sarajevo based on a withdrawal agreement. The column started from the barracks on Bistrik, and the plan was for the YPA soldiers to go to Lukavica, today East Sarajevo. The column with YPA vehicles and soldiers was cut off and stopped and 215 soldiers were captured. Among them was nineteen-year-old soldier Aco Nenadić.

As he lay on the asphalt, head down, someone prodded him with their foot. Aco turned and saw a familiar face. It was Hasan Jusović. When Hasan saw Aco captured with the other soldiers in the column, he realized that he had to save him.

"He won't survive, I thought to myself. The war has already started in the country, in Sarajevo, people are dying. I just thought about how to save him, so he could go alive to his parents," says Hasan.



While the detainees were being taken to the Sarajevo FIS department store, Hasan remained nearby.

"When they were placed there, I asked the commander to let Aco go with me. The commander then asked Aco if he would stay or go with me, and he decided to go with me," says Hasan, who then took Aco to his house in Sedrenik.

Aco lived in that house for a month, after which Hasan and one of his neighbors managed to take him to Špicasta stijena, a place known as one of the most dangerous sniper strongholds during the three-year siege of Sarajevo. Aco managed to cross over to the side controlled by the Bosnian Serb Army.

Duša and Aco met again in 2008. They are still in contact today.

Daut Tihić, a former soldier of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Dane Vasić, a former soldier of the Army of the Republika Srpska, are also in contact. The two met on the front line in Skelani near Srebrenica in the fall of 1992. Daut shot Dane and for 14 years believed he had killed him, until they met in completely different circumstances.

For the first time since the course of the war, the two met in a tavern. Daut immediately

recognized the man he thought he had killed. The meeting in the tavern changed them from war enemies to best friends.

In 1994, Daut went to live in Sweden, from where he returned after a few years, first to Breza near Sarajevo, and then to his native Skelane on the Drina. He opened a cow farm, sells milk, and is engaged in agriculture.

From the meeting in the tavern, they began to see each other more often, exchanging war memories but also today's experiences – one with agriculture, the other with growing herbs. The idea of the two of them cooperating was easily reached.

Dane lives on the other bank of the Drina in Bajina Bašta in Serbia. He sells herbs, forest fruits and berries, and has his own refrigerator and a chain of souvenir shops. The system has prevented them from setting up a joint farm, but the two of them are not giving up on the plan. Dane says that he and Daut are determined to cooperate and he is sure that they will succeed in that.

They did not want the war, like so many other ordinary heroes who fight for cooperation, coexistence, tolerance, and a better life for all.



Photography: Ordinary Heroes Peacebuilding Program (PCRC archive)
Photographers: Paul Lowe, Mirko Pincelli, Leora Kahn, Nicolas Axelrod, Sonia Folkmann, and Riccardo Gangale



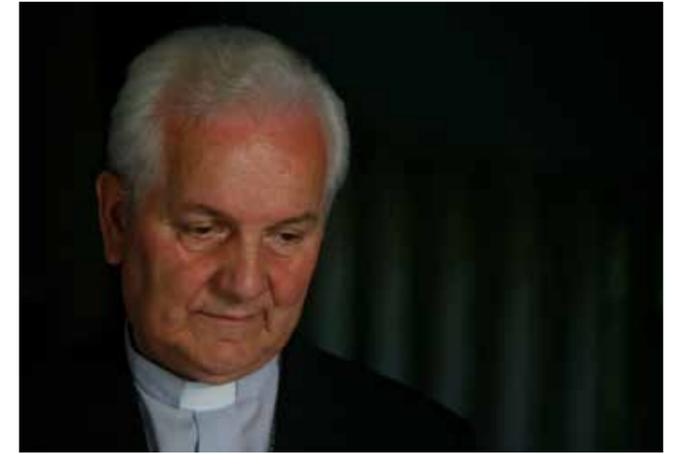
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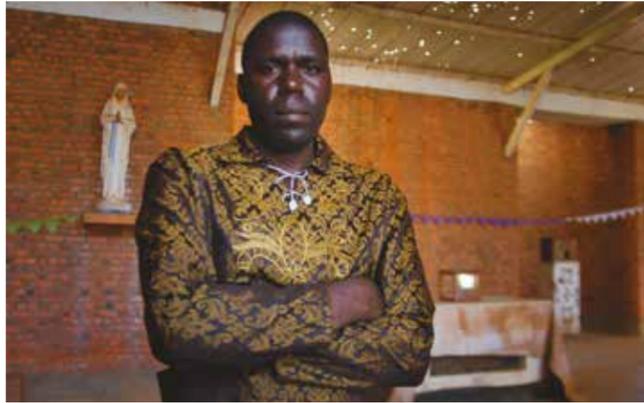
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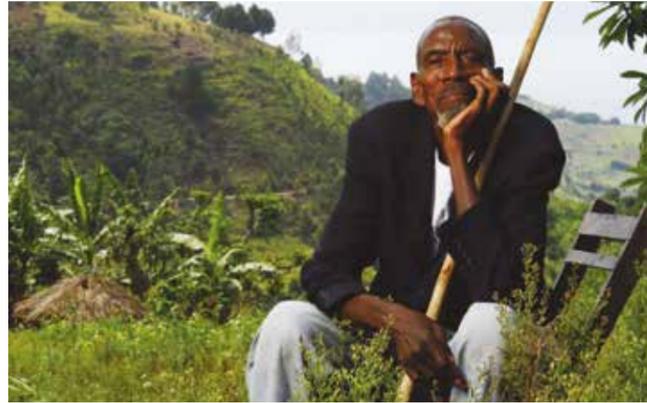
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Silas Ntamfurigirishyari



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Josephine Dusabimana



Suada Šešum



Zoran Mandlbaum



Hang Romny



Khon Ang



Ngen Ngon



Andree Gellan



Jan Karel Wijnbergen



Paulina Kisielewska



(ANTI)STEREOTYPICAL BALKAN

YOUTH

Written by: Benisa Bibuljica
Photography by Balkan Campers

The Balkans – a long history of unrest, a plethora of political systems and regimes, uncertain destinies, unjust bloodshed, both provocateurs and the provoked, attackers and defenders, and contrasting stories about who is to blame. The Balkans – a tapestry of territorial and non-territorial identities. One generation lived through the rise of stereotypes and prejudices, the next generation passed them on, the next resisted them, and now this generation must call them out for what they truly are: unfounded nonsense.

The new generation, liberated from the madness and misconceptions, is an inspiration today to all these seemingly different but oh-so similar people.

“I have to admit that I did not have stereotypes towards others, because I grew up with

people of different nationalities or different backgrounds, so I learned to avoid such – mostly unfounded – stereotypes. Except that stereotype which says we love food and company. I confirm that,” says Omar Memišević from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

They have understood how to resist the temptation to generalize things and have not spent their time upholding prejudices. Instead, they accept individual differences.

“For example, the stereotype that Bosnians and Herzegovinians are great comedians, who can make anyone laugh and yet in some situations be stupid. Serbs are musical, and Montenegrins are lazy. I have met individuals who match those descriptions, but I have also met Bosnians who do not know how to tell jokes, who are introverts. I have met Serbs who are not musical at all and Montenegrins who have more energy than me. I believe that each person is different and special in their own way,

and that one should not generalize and build an opinion based on stereotypes or prejudices, but instead by getting to know each other,” says Gabrijela Hodžić from Croatia.

FIGHTING STEREOTYPES

They can make friends out of “enemies” because they give everybody a chance. They make their friendships and acquaintances with people of other nationalities at conferences, seminars, competitions, projects and exchanges. They reject the fears that their communities feel regarding “others”.

“I can say that I will not allow people’s views to influence me when it comes to relations with people from the Balkan countries,” says Tamara Janackovska of North Macedonia, adding that any condemnation of such friendships is an intrusion into one’s private life and decisions.

These young people recognize that these attitudes come from a series of catastrophes,

important thing is whether people are happy, or how much they love and respect each other,” explains Gabriela.

The collectivization of opinion, which has taken hold of people’s private lives and thoughts, has turned patriotism into radical nationalist claims. At the same time, it has caused society to become more closed and made people value strict borders, which are imagined as necessary divisions and delineations.

“I think it is important to be proud of your country, but at the same time it is useful for others and for you to respect and be open to people from other countries. I definitely do not support nationalism,” says Gašper Grad from Slovenia.

THE RICHNESS OF MULTI-IDENTITY

Multi-identities are a treasure and richness wherever you are in the world, including the Balkans, and the Balkans should be a place where everyone can live peacefully, individually and together. For Gabrijela Hodžić, diversity is a sign of prosperity and not an issue.

“We just have to respect each other. Wish your Catholic neighbors a Merry Christmas on December 25, write a congratulatory message to a neighbor for a child’s khitan, invite a friend of another religion to your slava, help an old woman in the building bring bags inside, give a qurbani to a nun. Why not do that?” she wonders.

Actor Andrija Milošević believes that the only thing that matters is to be human, something he considers whenever he posts videos on his Instagram profile. He sends well wishes for all holidays to all Balkan men and women.

“It doesn’t matter what your religion is, it doesn’t matter to which nation you belong. It is important that we are there for each other in the most difficult times. It is important that we help each other, because there is only one thing that hinders us and that is hatred,” points out Milošević.

Respect, openness, trust and love are the values that all the people of the Balkans should carry with them towards a more tolerant coexistence.

“Let’s start with the things that make us similar, and together we will learn about the things that make us different, accept them, and turn them into something to benefit our relationship. We have a lot to learn from each other, and we must not close the door on each other because of the past. Let’s go side by side towards

a healthier and better future,” says Jovana Dančetić from Serbia.

Humans do not have two hearts, one created for love, and the other for hatred. The moment trouble becomes widespread, then there must be only one heart: the one created for solidarity. The language in which we understand each other and the words that bring us closer are the driving force for us to put aside our histories. The privilege is in the simplicity. And what about us as Balkan people? We are singularly unique and together perfectly complementary.

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"The application process simply involves showing that they are interested in travelling and that they want to experience it with their peers from other countries in the Western Balkans. After their return from the study exchange, we always enjoy listening to their experiences and looking at photos," says Berina.

Activists and young people from marginalized and rural areas, as well as young people with other difficulties, are encouraged to participate in the projects.

There are ample opportunities, for example Berina mentions a regional project carried out by the Akustik Association from Tuzla, in which young people with disabilities were involved with the help of music.

"These young people need to be able to integrate into regular social activities and processes, which of course requires more planning. We want to see more of such projects, ones that provide opportunities for such participants," she says.

In cooperation with the Sarajevo Film Festival, RYCO organizes an exchange program that offers young people from other Western Balkan countries the opportunity to come to Sarajevo during the festival, learn about multiculturalism, watch movies, talk to directors and actors, exchange opinions and experiences, and have a good time enjoying the city.

As the coronavirus pandemic has spread around the world, many new exchange programs have been suspended and projects that were underway were continued in an online format.

"It was very difficult for all of us to accept the fact that we are talking about multiculturalism without the physical closeness, without seeing each other and laughing together. However, we quickly got used to the new health priorities and we adjusted the projects to the online world. Young people have been able to see, talk and create in the same way through online platforms," explains Berina.

She says that they tried to make the workshops and trainings as creative and interactive as possible. One such project was implemented by the Association of the Open Entertainment School from Sarajevo together with participants from North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo.

"After finishing the successful activity, I said to myself, 'Okay, now anything is possible!'" says Berina happily.



RYCO: ACTIVATING THE REGION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Written by: Adelisa Mašić
Photography: RYCO Archives

Thanks to exchange projects funded by the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), more than six thousand young people have been given the opportunity to travel to the countries of the Western Balkans and exchange knowledge and experience with their peers. These young people have promoted reconciliation, working in diverse ways to deal with the past.

The agreement that birthed RYCO was signed on July 4, 2016 in Paris by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia. The main headquarters are located in Tirana, with local offices also located in the capitals of the other member countries.

"RYCO does not implement projects but finances them. We act as donors. We continuously publish public calls for project proposals, and if these proposals meet the criteria, they are supported. Projects usually last from four to nine

months," explains Berina Bukva Alibašić, a local official in Sarajevo.

The question of conflict, or of dealing with the past, does not have to be the explicit focus of the projects, because reconciliation happens the moment young people meet, and start to socialize and exchange their experiences. According to Berina, the most important thing is for young people to travel, study, and fall in love with the countries of the Western Balkans.

RYCO has had four open calls for projects so far, funded more than 120 projects in the region, and entered into a multitude of partnerships. Most often, these are educational workshops and trainings that enhance knowledge and competencies around interculturality, multiculturalism, dealing with the past, and analyzing the facts or interpretations of certain historical events.

"However, the topics of the activities do not always have to be war events or conflicts. They can be any topics that interest young people, because in essence what is important is for them to travel around the Western Balkans and write new stories. We want to connect young

people from Priština, Niš and Mostar, so that they socialize and exchange their knowledge and skills," says Berina.

RYCO raises awareness of the importance of young people being able to travel around the Western Balkans, meet each other and share experiences. In fact, through this initiative, many participants have been able to travel outside their countries for the very first time.

"It is not difficult to bring together young people from six different countries, because there really are so many that want to work together. Our projects testify to that. We believe that we have great people in every field across the Western Balkans, but that we don't yet have a real culture of neighborliness because we're not used to it. We want to give an opportunity to all young people, and especially to those who were not born with a silver spoon in their mouth," emphasizes Berina.

What has been especially interesting for the young people has been the study visit to Japan. So far, three generations of youth participants have been part of this particular project. It is not just a matter of mere travel, adds Berina, but of learning in a distant land.

¹ This term is without prejudice to Kosovo's status, and is in line with United Nations Council Resolution 1244 and the Opinion of the International Court of Justice on Kosovo's declaration of independence.



ONLY AN HONEST MAN CAN BE FREE

Written by: Mirnes Bakija
Photography: Ajdin Kamber

Atheology and history graduate from Banja Luka, Danijel Mihić is often said to be an unusual educator. He strives to be an older friend to his students and teaches them how important it is to stay honest because, in his own words, only an honest man can be free.

Danijel teaches Orthodox religion classes in Banja Luka. For him, education is not a job, but a vocation. He tells me that if you are engaged in this profession, it is quite natural that you be socially responsible as well. Danijel also explains how our educational system essentially comes down to the memorization of an enormous amount of information which students easily forget.

"Even when they learn, children do it solely for the sake of assessment, and critical thinking, as far as I know, is only mentioned in passing when they learn about democracy," says Danijel.

Five years ago, he launched an initiative which later grew into the Kultura Kulturi (Culture to Culture) organization. Initially, the initiative aimed to fight for the renovation of a part of the

Banski Dvor cultural center. They wanted a club that would be a kind of bridge between "high" culture and those who were new to such cultural activities. He says that, fortunately, with the arrival of the great Mladen Matović to the position of director of Banski Dvor, their activism in that regard is no longer necessary. Today, this space is completely renovated and open to everybody.

"We are still looking for a way to pressure the authorities to start an independent cultural and educational center. We have plans for something big, we're just waiting for the opportune moment," adds Danijel.

He says that in addition to activism, volunteering is a good way for young people to get involved and contribute to positive changes in society. He believes that any volunteering activity with the right intentions will be successful, and that it is generally a good way to connect with other people. He himself has gained dozens of acquaintances throughout the region thanks to volunteering.

"Volunteering is a noble thing and you set a good example that motivates others to unlock the humanity within them, so it creates something much bigger. You get a lot of positivity all around," Danijel adds.

He says that the most important characteristic of a person is to be constantly growing and developing. In order to achieve this, Danijel emphasizes, we should be free, and in order to be free, we should be brave enough to remain honest in the face of anything. Only an honest person is truly free. In addition, it is extremely important for a person to say what they think, regardless of whether they will make a mistake. For him, people should act on their words, communicate healthily, look at things from different perspectives, and never unthinkingly condemn people with whom they disagree. Those are the ones from whom a lot can be learnt.

"WITH KNOWLEDGE, YOU OVERCOME PREJUDICES, RISE ABOVE DIVISIONS, AND SEEK ESSENTIAL COMMON INTERESTS. FOR EVERYONE EVERYWHERE, THIS IS ESSENTIAL FOR SURVIVAL AS IT HELPS US TO SAVE EACH OTHER FROM THE HOPELESSNESS THAT IS SO OFTEN PRESENT," SAYS DANIJEL.

He plans to publish two books soon. His first book, *Better Days Are Coming*, which he has been working on periodically over the last ten years, is a short diary of his experiences and thoughts regarding the arduous process of growing up. The second book is an extensive and somewhat more serious book in which he describes all the regions of the world from the point of view of history, geography and faith. It is penned to be published by the fall.

"It's so much more wonderful to be outside the box. Outside the box that they've pushed us into, which remains largely undisturbed as our lives pass us by," adds Danijel.

We are witnessing the departure of a large number of young people from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Danijel believes that this problem is complex and layered. First and foremost, he believes that we are all more or less responsible for the condition in the country. He explains how in the last three decades, politicians have reduced culture and education to a party enterprise, at the head of which they place their people so that their orders can be executed without discussion. He says that it is difficult to identify specific culprits in the present situation, but he sees the solution in culture and education.

"We are a group of neglected people and nations, blind in sight. We do not see beyond the end of our noses. We are sickly, cynical and distrustful. Some will say that we have bigger issues than those of culture and education, but that is not true. Our biggest misfortunes stem from the fact that we are uncultured and uneducated, and we are like that because our elites leave us to gnaw away at ourselves and everyone around us. It is easier to manage the crowd if you pull the wool over their eyes," he explains.



ABRAŠEVIĆ: A SAFE HAVEN, A HUB OF ACTIVITY

Written by: Marko Mlikota
Photography: Denis Ruvic

Throughout its two decades of work, Abrašević Youth Cultural Center (YCC) has had to support itself in its project of providing Mostar with a social hub, a gathering space, and a place that creates unique and alternative cultural opportunities for young people. Abrašević's history goes back much further than is commonly known, but its goals remain unchanged to this day.

"The Abrašević Workers' Cultural and Artistic Society (WCAS) was founded in 1926 with the aim of developing the cultural life of workers. The work of the WCAS was interrupted several times throughout the 20th century, depending on the historical changes that affected Mostar. The rebirth of Abrašević as a place of emancipation started at the turn of the millennium. In the disarray after the wars of the 1990s, young

people from a number of new youth organizations looked to the future and decided to come together. They had the same goal and desire – to obtain a space for the free circulation of independent thought and alternative cultural development," says one of the volunteers and well-known Mostar activist, Husein Oručević, on the revival of the new 'Abraš'.

According to Oručević, they gained experience in resisting the general hopelessness of the postwar period, firstly through the initial squatting of various destroyed spaces, then through their enthusiastic work to maintain much-needed alternative cultural activities. This is how the idea of more serious collaboration among young people became more concrete.

Several peace-oriented organizations were developing the idea of merging their work under one umbrella organization and in 2003 the 'Mobile Cultural Containers' project – an OSCE-supported Achim Koch project – had a key role

to play. As part of the project, young people across the devastated Balkans were provided with a place of gathering and of tolerance in these makeshift rooms. Their slogan 'In Defense of Our Future', says Oručević, perhaps best describes the creation of the Abrašević Youth Cultural Center.

"That year was also marked by a painstaking court battle with the City for the recognition of ownership over this space. The demolished building of the former Workers' Cultural and Artistic Society on the boulevard was still being fought over as spoils of war. However, YCC Abrašević officially became the legal successor of the former WCAS, which enabled this new non-governmental organization to become the only one in the Balkans, and one of the few in Europe, to own such a large space", says Oručević.

The name Abrašević itself, he explains, was used by many such organizations during the last century. It is named after the late Serbian

poet Kosta Abrašević, who celebrated the ideas of unity, freedom and workers' struggle with his revolutionary poetry.

"WCAS Abrašević in Mostar had the task of emancipating the working class with cultural uplift during their official eight hours of recreation. It was a hotbed of new ideas, art and culture in general, so many cultural institutions created later in Mostar find their roots right here. The older generations of Mostar still remember the theater productions, music, dance and various other WCAS cultural and entertainment programs with nostalgia," Oručević points out.

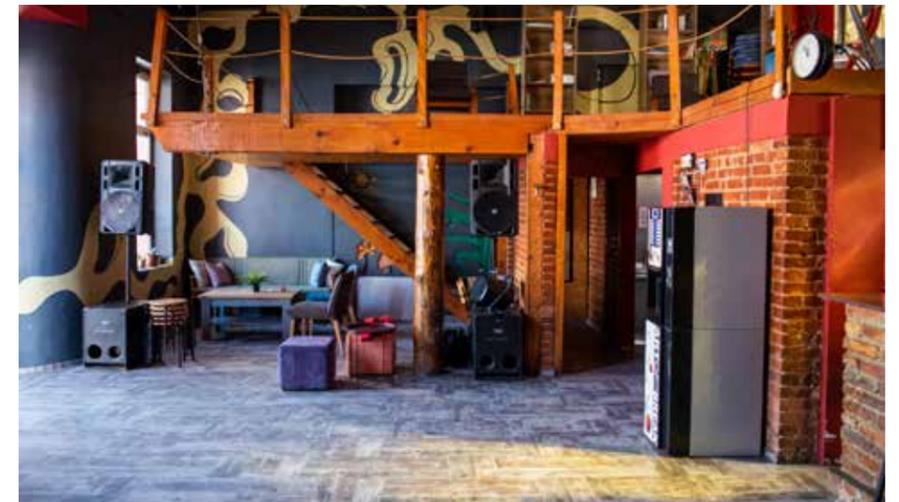
The program that the 21st century Abrašević offers to its fellow citizens is the only progressive, future-oriented cultural content available in Mostar. It is here that events such as the Mostar Intercultural Fest, Street Arts festival, and Short Film Festival take place. Zoster and Damir Avdić Diplomtz held their first concerts in the city here, along with many other quality bands from abroad.

'Abraš' has nurtured numerous peace and alternative events, bringing people together and helping the social and cultural development of the city. In fact, the YCC, Oručević recalls, played a key role even in Mostar's most difficult times.

"Abrašević has played the role of many city institutions. It is a theater where films are screened and concerts and talks are held, all of which found its place here when there was

nowhere else for it in Mostar. Abrašević has provided shelter for refugees and opened its doors to excluded individuals and groups in our society. It has supported the socially endangered, the disenfranchised, and the LGBT community, but also those who simply cannot find their place in a deeply divided city. Abrašević tries to continue in this vein today, adapting to the current context and needs," says Oručević.

Abrašević, he says, is a hub of ideas and activity where new ideas are also born – sometimes useless and not so great, and sometimes good, useful and sustainable. In this context, the vision of Abrašević is to present and bring to Mostar new, bold, experimental and engaged trends in culture, music, art and socio-political practice, and to try to incorporate them into this city through the engagement of individuals who appreciate these values.





THE FIGHT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA

Written by: Amra Ćatić
Photography: Media Center Belgrade

Civil society plays an important role in many fields, but its role is particularly prominent when it comes to anti-war initiatives and those concerning post-conflict and transitional societies

When we talk about the agenda on an international level, the role of civil society in war and post-war contexts is gaining increasingly more recognition. Discussions have also been raised over whether and how civil society can strengthen the peace-building strategy. Sonja Biserko, founder and president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, believes that there are groups and individuals who have done a lot in the fight for truth about the war and post-war events.

"The Helsinki Committee dealt with exposing the Serbian nationalist project that was responsible for that war. We have published numerous books exploring it, which are now indispensable literature. We have also worked on disclosing the policy towards minorities and refugees, who were also victims of the state," she says.

She adds that they have produced numerous films, testimonies, books, and other publications, but that Serbia does not promote them.

"On the contrary, its propaganda overwhelms the public with conspiracy theories against the Serbian people, which creates great confusion and mistrust. The biggest victims are young people who grow up in that distorted matrix of nationalism and denial, and who will be the leaders of this country in the future," adds Biserko.

As one of the leading non-governmental organizations in Serbia, the Helsinki Committee cooperated with the Hague Tribunal and greatly contributed to shedding light on the context in which the crimes took place. According to Biserko, working with refugees, especially those from Croatia, was very important because, at that time, the idea of not living with one another was simply accepted. On their return to Croatia, almost all refugees passed through their office.

Shedding Light on the Truth
Katarina Golubović, President of YUCOM – the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights, tells us that the activities of this organization have greatly contributed to clarifying the truth about

some of the most serious crimes that have occurred in the region.

"YUCOM is one of the founders of RECOM (Regional Commission for the Establishment of Facts about War Crimes), through which the truth about the most serious crimes was placed high on the political agenda. With RECOM and other organizations in Serbia, we have stood with Srebrenica for many years. We have tried to awaken the dormant minds of our society and remind people about the victims of the crimes that were committed in our name," she points out.

RECOM deals with war crimes and other serious human rights violations committed in the former Yugoslavia between 1st January 1991 and 31st December 2001. It was initiated by a discussion about the role of the media in telling and revealing the truth about the past. Representatives from non-governmental organizations and associations of families of missing persons and victims from post-Yugoslav countries voted for a regional approach to establishing the facts about war crimes.

Jelena Krstić, program director of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, points out that there has been notable, but not fully satisfactory, progress.

"From a regional point of view, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has helped with the establishment of the facts about a significant number of war crimes cases, including the Srebrenica genocide. We can only imagine where we would be without such a court: not only would murderers and abusers of women, children, the elderly and the helpless walk the streets freely, but the way would be completely open to creating a truth that suits the political elites that themselves produced the wars to profit from them," says Krstić.

She states that the RECOM initiative was very important for the region, which from 2006 until 2012, for the first and only time so far throughout the former Yugoslavia, enabled victims to talk about their experience and have their stories heard in the communities from which their perpetrators came.

Over the last decade, the role of civil society in implementing peace agreements, contributing to reconciliation initiatives, and promoting democratic transitions has been of paramount importance. There is a growing need to understand the role that civil society can play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

According to Sonja Biserko, the brutal disintegration of Yugoslavia was the focus of the entire world, which is why war in Bosnia is very well documented. Consequently, it is not a



question of not knowing what the war was, nor who were victims and who aggressors.

"In addition to the fact that the ICTY passed numerous verdicts that clearly testify to the nature of the war and to the responsibility of the aggressors, the court produced a huge amount of documentation that is available to everyone. However, there is now a fierce struggle for its interpretation, which, of course, does not take into account the facts. Serbia is systematically working to undermine everything that has been done in the Hague tribunal, relativizing its responsibility and acting as a victim," points out Biserko.

The State Influence on Society: Where Are We Today?

When it comes to the post-conflict situation in one country, in addition to civil society, the authorities play a major role, both at the state and local levels. State authorities are important because they are a means to simultaneously establish a state presence in the region and to demilitarize politics in divided societies. The role of the state is crucial in post-conflict reconstruction due to its access to information on local conditions and needs, and greater ability to interact with communities and traditional authorities.

Katarina Golubović believes that the authorities of the Republic of Serbia are focused on presenting war crimes as completely finalized stories, and that political relations in the region are also in favor of such aspirations. She adds that solving questions around war crimes and prosecuting them is not included into strategic documents.

"Add to all this that in recent years, we have been hearing more about war criminals in Serbia than about war crimes. Within institutions – public and otherwise – and on national TV channels, dealing with the past is so regressive that it seems that all of us, with the return of compulsory military service, are going back to the past. Serbia, which aspires to be a member of the European Union and a member of the Council of Europe, has set a high bar in respect of human rights, but it is nowhere near to reaching it right now," explains Golubović.

According to her, Serbia, unfortunately, is constantly running up against one thing: dealing with the war past. "Although with the conditions of media freedom as they are and the absence of the right to a fair trial, it has become an invisible obstacle," she says.

Pressure from the International Community
According to Marijana Toma, transitional justice expert from Serbia, the process of dealing with the past and accepting responsibility for crimes committed by Serb forces in the wars in

Croatia, BiH and Kosovo has never been the sincere will of political elites and society in Serbia but was the result of pressure from the international community in the process of Serbia's European integration.

"The reason is that the process of dealing with the past has been reduced almost exclusively to war crimes trials, instead of including other initiatives, such as establishing the truth, reparations for victims, building a responsible culture of remembrance, and institutional reform. And what was undertaken in these areas was superficial, insufficient and insincere, done exclusively with the intention of sugar-coating the situation for the international community and possibly reducing tensions in the region," points out Toma.

She adds that the contribution of organizations involved in documenting crimes in the former Yugoslavia is immeasurable in relation to initiatives taken by the state. NGOs took the difficult and exhausting steps that the states needed to take – to investigate crimes, gather evidence and documentation of crimes, fight for the rights of victims, and finally, provide reparations to victims.

Although government or international leaders may not be aware of the importance of the cultural context in which they implement post-conflict initiatives, it is civil society participation that provides the cultural context and understanding of certain characteristics of a community.

Despite its important role, civil society must act in agreement with, not replace state functions. This creates a way for citizens to become active players in their society to ensure that their interests are protected, and government initiatives are culturally appropriate.

Why is the Media Important?

Different voices are important for freedom of speech in a democracy and, equally, for a broad understanding of knowledge and autonomy. The media can play a special role in supporting the peace process, enabling participation, dialogue and reconciliation, and strengthening civil society. Therefore, the media are considered important in the transition to a stable and democratic society.

"I think that it is the duty of the media to keep the topic of the legacy of the war alive in public discourse and to oppose the tendency to remain silent about it. However, in agreement with the institutions, the media convince citizens that collective guilt is being imposed on them and thus turn them away from their neighbors. They give space to convicted war criminals to present their fake versions of the crimes in which they participated," highlights Jelena Krstić.

The media have a significant role in addressing identity issues in a post-conflict society, as well as in conveying the story to the rest of the world.

"Far more attention has been given in Serbia, for example, to Mladić's lawyer's and relatives' statements, to representatives of the current Serbian government who have long stood in support of Mladić, and to other war criminals, than space given to victims' statements and stories," says Marijana Toma.

Post-conflict violence can be attributed in part to the media's failure to adequately mediate a country's conflicting views. The media cannot only influence society before conflict – meaning to avoid it – by recognizing and properly addressing the issues at stake, but they can also influence afterwards. Lack of information



can make people desperate, restless and prone to manipulation at any stage of a conflict.

The role of civil society in the round
In addition to a free media, in post-war situations, as in emerging democracies in general, political parties are crucial. In situations where one party is dominant, it is necessary to encourage the development of alternative political parties, in order to avoid the creation of monopolies.

As well as this, the new governments of war-torn societies face the challenges of rebuilding the state, while at the same time they need to address the causes of civil conflict in a way that will prevent a future return to violence.

Efforts to rebuild society may include providing security to citizens, reforming legal and political institutions, revitalizing economic and social structures, assisting refugee return, promoting reconciliation, and facilitating political participation. In some cases, it is possible to rebuild existing structures, while in others it is necessary to create new ones. Actors and agencies working to rebuild social and political societies can range from international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to local and international governments, as well as the local population.

Ultimately, post-conflict peace-building strategies often concentrate on short-term political and economic stabilization, omitting the social components of state recovery for a later stage of the process. However, removing the root causes of conflict requires a broader approach to capacity building that will lay the foundations for future lasting peace. In this regard, the steps that are crucial for establishing sustainable peace in such areas should be carefully studied, focusing on all the parts that are essential for peace building.





MARKO MLIKOTA

Marko is a Balkan Diskurs trained correspondent from Mostar. He holds a BA degree in Public Relations from the Faculty of Philosophy in Mostar and is currently pursuing a master's degree in Zagreb. Marko is employed by a PR agency in Croatia and is an associate of the internet portal Bljesak.info. His journalistic areas of interest are topics related to budgeting and money and to social law.

"In 2017, with the training in investigative journalism and documentary photography, I sailed into the PCRC world. For me, as a graduate at the time, the knowledge acquired during the training helped to an extremely great extent. In addition to the skills I have acquired, there are also the valuable acquaintances with colleagues throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina who strive for one goal - a more just and more equal society for us all. PCRC not only offered me education and acquaintances, it also gifted me the opportunity to collaborate with them on many important projects. I believe that my journey with PCRC will continue on."



MAIDA ŠLJIVIĆ

Maida is a Balkan Diskurs trained correspondent from Tuzla. She finished medical high school in Tuzla in 2018 and is now a third-year International Relations and Diplomacy student at the Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Philosophy in Tuzla. As a student activist, she is the President of the Student Council of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Tuzla, as well as both Vice President and President of the

Commission for Economics and International Cooperation of the Student Parliament of the University of Tuzla. She is interested in the work of the non-governmental sector and youth activism, and is an active member of the editorial board and permanent author and contributor at the Bosanska misao portal (Detant Association).

"At the training for the Balkan Diskurs youth correspondents, I learned more about journalistic reporting, writing articles and the basics of photography - including documentary photography and photo stories. What I would especially emphasize as important is connecting and making acquaintances with young people from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, having discussions, cooperating. I carry with me a wonderful experience and beautiful memories after the training, and what remains forever with me is the importance and power of the written word and photography."



ANJA ZULIĆ

Anja is a Balkan Diskurs trained correspondent from Banja Luka. She holds a degree in Journalism and Communication Studies from Banja Luka's Faculty of Political Science, and a master's degree in Journalism Studies from the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb, where she currently lives and works. She gained journalistic experience writing for BiH media and spent two years as a journalist on various student writing portals, writing about everyday student life and the education sector. In March 2021, she returned to the civil sector. Her main interests in her reporting are human rights-related topics.

"My story with PCRC and Balkan Diskurs began in 2017. After the trainings and workshops on citizen journalism and documentary photography, I had the opportunity to work with the whole team to find and bring to fruition new

stories dealing with human rights, minority groups, and people and organizations from smaller communities in BiH who restore faith in people, togetherness and a better future. Over almost four years of engagement, I am especially grateful for the professional and private support and advice I have had from the entire BD team."



ANĐELA KNEŽEVIĆ

Anđela is a Balkan Diskurs trained correspondent from Priboj. She is a graduate journalist at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of East Sarajevo. She worked for two years at BH Radio and BH Television. She won third place in the PR Challenge competition in 2019, and in 2020 she started an Arabic language course at KC Kralj Fahd in Sarajevo.

"Back then, as a student of journalism, I applied for training in order to improve my previous knowledge in writing. And only when I became familiar with Balkan Diskurs - bearing in mind that I am from Serbia and I write and speak in the ekavian dialect - I knew that I could write in a language that I know, that I hear, in which I read, and by which I live. I found my real self thanks to the training. Talking about people, 'ordinary' heroes, places and about the way people deal with great joys and great sorrows can be overly emotive and painful. That is why it is a challenge to write about these topics, thoughtfully and from the heart."



MILAN SOFRENIĆ

Milan is a Balkan Diskurs trained correspondent from Bijeljina. He is studying Information Technology at

the Sinergija University in Bijeljina. He has worked as a volunteer at the PRONI Center for youth development, where his engagement covered youth work, youth mobility, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. As part of these activities, he held a workshop that, through dynamic group work, helped young people to get out of their comfort zone to better learn about themselves and their potential. Milan enjoys working on his own self-improvement and expanding his potential, and passing on his knowledge to others.

"I had high expectations from the youth correspondents training. The lecturers and the organization during the pandemic exceeded all my expectations. The way in which the lecturers transferred their knowledge and experience influenced me a lot. In addition to the basics of media literacy, they also helped me to articulate myself more concisely and clearly in informal conversations. I look forward to every project and task related to Balkan Diskurs and PCRC, because it will help me prosper as a person."



ANDREA ALEKSIĆ

Andrea is a Balkan Diskurs trained correspondent from Banja Luka. She has a master's degree in International Relations from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Banja Luka. She is interested in volunteering and international cooperation among young people.

"Balkan Diskurs is a great opportunity to connect with correspondents and journalists throughout BiH. From the initial training and onwards to further cooperation, we have the opportunity to socialize, learn and work on interesting topics. Writing for Balkan Diskurs is, I can freely say, one of my favorite hobbies, because it helps me become comfortable with complex topics and diverts my thoughts away from work and everyday obligations. I hope to be part of this team for a long time to come."



AZRA BERBIĆ

Azra Berbić is a human rights, peacebuilding, and environmental justice activist. She has eight years of experience in law and six years of experience in journalism and project management. As a freelance journalist, she writes for Balkan Diskurs, Al Jazeera Balkans, DWP Balkans, zamisli.ba, tacno.net, and other online media. Over the past decade, she has been active in many NGOs across the country, including Zenica, Kakanj, Banja Luka, Prijedor, Mostar, and Sarajevo. She has volunteered and also worked as a consultant, managing projects and leading and coordinating activities.

"Working in the editorial office of Balkan Diskurs gave me a unique insight into how true community journalism operates. I got the opportunity to develop my writing ability thanks to great mentoring support and the opportunity to learn from the world's greatest journalists and photographers. That experience has shaped the development of my career in journalism, and I have been given a unique chance to create my own series of stories and lead a team of journalists and photographers."



BENISA BIBULJICA

Benisa is a Balkan Diskurs trained correspondent from Bijelo Polje, who currently lives and works in Sarajevo. She graduated from the Faculty of Political Science, University of Sarajevo, where she also obtained a master's degree from the Department of Political Science. She has been working in the non-governmental sector for two years as a certified

youth worker, peer educator and PR in the field of youth work, and since 2021, as a project assistant at PCRC. After completing the training and mentoring program, she started working as a youth correspondent for Balkan Diskurs.

"I can say the experience gained during the training is one of the most beautiful so far, because the results that followed have contributed a lot to my professional development. In addition to meeting quality young activists, I also had the opportunity to learn from quality people. I would recommend to any young person to apply for the training because their work will surely be recognized. I found my lucky star right here, and here I am now - at PCRC."



AMINA SEJFIĆ

Amina is a Balkan Diskurs trained correspondent from Sarajevo. Her great passion is the English language and peace activism. She holds a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature, and a master's degree in Security and Peace Studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo. Amina's primary professional interest is to help Bosnia and Herzegovina fight for a more stable and safer future. In addition to her current position as a Project Assistant of the Post-Conflict Research Center, she is also a Youth Correspondent at Balkan Diskurs.

"If you want your voice to be heard, the Balkan Diskurs platform will provide you with a place that cherishes diversity and invites young people to speak their mind. Working with Balkan Diskurs and PCRC has exceeded all my expectations - not only do you get a chance to write about things that cannot be found elsewhere but you also get to work with people from all walks of life and backgrounds."



MIRNES BAKIĆ

Mirnes is a Balkan Diskurs trained correspondent from Sarajevo. He graduated from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo and acquired the professional title of Bachelor of Business Communication, before then enrolling in the master's degree in Communication Studies, obtaining his MSc in Communication (Public Relations specialization) in 2015. His spheres of interest go beyond those formally studied during his education. He has been in the non-governmental sector for many years, as well as working as a freelance journalist.

"My first encounter with PCRC took place in May 2019, when I was one of the participants of the Balkan Diskurs training. Then I had the opportunity to learn from great media professionals and great world photographers, and the acquired knowledge helped me a lot in my professional development. Given that in addition to journalism, I also deal with human rights activism, it was extremely important for me to cooperate with an organization that has a high degree of professionalism, and is largely committed to the protection of human rights and freedoms."

YOUTH OF

BALKAN DISKURS

A SELECTION OF MESSAGES

FROM OUR AUTHORS



PRONI: YOUNG PEOPLE ARE INVALUABLE

Written by: Benisa Bibuljica
Photography: PRONI Center Archive

“Just imagine, dare and ask – the PRONI team has the answer,” says Miroslava Milivojević, a student at the PRONI Academy of Youth Work in Banja Luka.

The Center has been operating on a national and international level since 1998, when it was launched in Brčko. Its main goals are the education of young people and the promotion of peace and activism among citizens.

“The strategic goals of the PRONI Center for Youth Development have changed over time, as have the needs of young people and the socio-political context in which we operate. However, some of the strategic goals have remained the same, namely the contribution to building a democratic society in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the social education of young people, peacebuilding, intersectoral cooperation, support for youth activities, and promoting European integration,” says Adnan Pečković, employee of the PRONI Center for Youth Development in Brčko.

Twenty-three years of working with young people have led to the publication of their Handbook for Youth Work. They say, however, that working with young people is still a relatively new profession in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that it is still not recognized as a profession. Youth work unquestionably deserves a better status in our country because

of the huge contribution it makes to improving young people’s lives.

PRONI is the founder of the largest network of youth clubs in BiH, with 42 clubs in total. In addition, thanks to the STaR BiH (Societal Transformation and Reconciliation) and YouVolution projects through the BHRI initiative, several more youth clubs have emerged. It is a space intended for young people, which they can use both for their personal and professional development, as well as just for socializing.

More than 40,000 young people are, directly and indirectly, part of the activities that the organization implements across the country. More than a hundred projects aimed at improving their personal and social development through non-formal education have positioned PRONI Center as an important part of the non-governmental sector. All of this is part of their mission to encourage as many young people as possible to be active members of the community, understand the world around them, and influence problem solving.

PRONI Center has over 20 full-time employees based in different cities who continuously strive to maintain continuity and connect young people from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They do this through activities that promote cohesion regardless of nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender and other territorial and non-territorial identities. Young people cite PRONI as an exemplar in the non-governmental

sector, and some consider this NGO to be the best in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“The way that the work of the organization is established is something that every institution should follow as a model of how to work with youth, as well as what the principles of work should be. It is a highly collegial environment, each of the employees and volunteers is always ready to help and contribute to the implementation of activities to the very best standard. All members of PRONI are equal, there are no differences, because they all have the same goal – to enable young people to have a better perspective,” says Milan Sofrenić, a student of the PRONI Academy of Youth Work and a volunteer at the youth club in Bijeljina.

Alma Mustafić, a student of PRONI Academy of Youth Work in Sarajevo, ranks PRONI among the best NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina because, she says, the competence and expertise of staff allows them to transfer knowledge in the best possible way, and innovation and dynamism further improve the quality of work.

In addition to creating a safe space for young people, ensuring equal opportunities for the development of their capacities regardless of who they are and where they come from, and building peace, tolerance and coexistence through cohesive policies, PRONI also works on the economic empowerment of young people. They offer European connections through the European Youth Card program, while also promoting youth mobility as an Erasmus+ Youth

Contact Point. As the only licensed representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, PRONI opens up new opportunities for young people with this program.

“Since joining PRONI until today, I have seen so many positive changes in myself and I have so many more opportunities. Those are things that everyone needs. In addition to expanding knowledge, the best possible thing for every young person is to socialize and meet other young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond. By participating in activities, I made friends for the rest of my life and with whom I am still in contact even though we are miles apart. For me, every city in the country is associated with one or more people I have met and made friends with. The greatest thing in life is when you know that you are welcome wherever you go,” says Milan Sofrenić.

They refuse to allow young people to be left behind, not even during the global COVID-19 pandemic. They have adapted their work to the new conditions and redirected their education to the online world, thus preventing youth potential and development from suffering the consequences of the new situation.

Participants in their online education tell us that they were skeptical to start with and had a whole host of different fears of online activities, for example that they would only be silent observers. However, now, they emphasize that their experiences were richer and better than they expected.

“It was all just silly fears. I got a lot more out of it than I expected and I really pushed myself to get out of my comfort zone. But none of that would have been possible had it not been for the great PRONI team that made that online world and online workshops look so much less scary and less embarrassing. It’s an experience that has changed me but also directed the path

of my life towards new things and challenges. I came out of my comfort zone thanks to the PAOR program. I dared to stand out from the crowd, to be that individual who changes things,” says Elma Mulić.

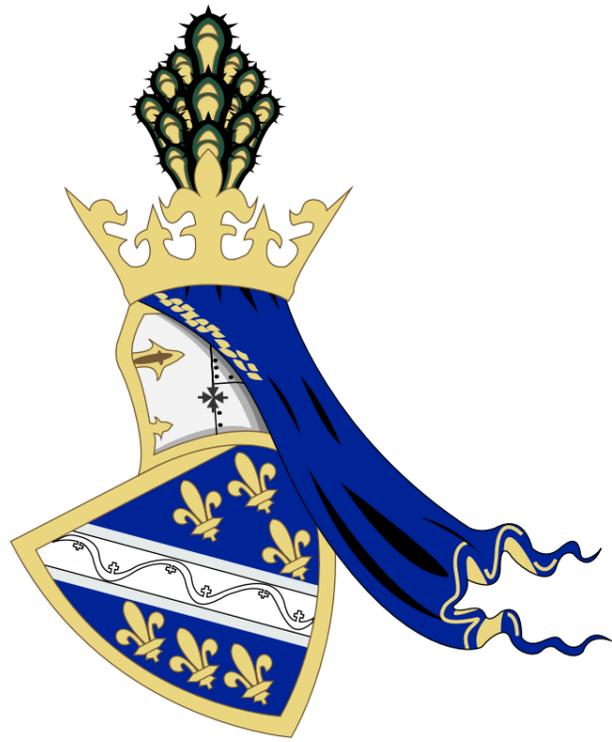
In addition to the wide range of programs offered, PRONI opens its doors to all young people and their ideas. This enables them to gain experience working both by themselves and with others in the implementation of activities that are in their own spheres of interest. This approach promotes them as young leaders and advocates for change in the community.

Those who have already taken advantage of this opportunity are the first to recommend that other young people join in with the PRONI Center’s activities in order to be able to do better things for themselves and for the people around them.

“The PRONI story is a story of inclusion. I am talking about the needs of all of us, especially the young. The need for our voice to be heard, for our ideas to be realized, and for them to be seen as examples of practical, positive drivers for our community. The need for coexistence, for living productively with those who are different. It is not just an abstract idea, but an imperative and an inspiration for a brighter future for young people in our country. Do you think it is impossible to meet all these needs? Just imagine, dare and ask – the PRONI team has the answer!” encourages Miroslava Milivojević.

The PRONI Center for Youth Development has years and years of recognizing the needs of young people behind it. Non-stop activities tailored to the development of youth potential show that this organization really sees young people as invaluable.





THE INVINCIBLE ROYAL CITY OF BOBOVAC

Written by: Sajra Talarić
Photography: Armin Durgut

The Royal Town of Bobovac is located where the municipalities of Kakanj and Vareš meet. It was first mentioned during the reign of Ban Stjepan II Kotromanić in 1349/1350 and is considered one of the oldest cities in Bosnia.

This famous site has been recording an increase in the number of visits year on year. According to Visit Vareš travel agency, Bobovac is visited by just over 13,000 tourists a year. Expert on tourism in Vareš, Almir Čikmiš, says that this destination is the most beautiful in autumn, during September and October.

"This is one of the most popular locations for one-day visits and excursions. From experience, I can say that many of the tourists visit the Royal City of Bobovac more than just once. The breathtaking configuration on which the city was built, the mausoleum of Kotromanić with the tombs of Bosnian kings and queens, and a well on the location of the royal court all add to the popularity of the place," adds Almir.

Visitors, he explains, are most interested in the beautiful nature that surrounds the former Royal City. He also emphasizes that Bobovac is the most important historical site

and cultural-historical monument in Bosnia and Herzegovina. "Due to the importance of Bobovac, I would recommend a mandatory visit for primary schools, be it a history class in nature or a school trip," he adds.

Talking about Bobovac is a responsibility and it demands several points of view, says Emina Musić, a history teacher at the Mješovita middle school in Busovača. As a historian, she first mentions the position and natural fortification of the city and recalls how it stood out not only in the Balkans but also in Europe for its defense capabilities.

"It is often mentioned in the sources as 'tough' because it was practically invincible, which many Bosnian enemies confirmed with attempts to conquer. Another characteristic of Bobovac that sets it apart is its status and significance. As the seat of Bosnian kings and capitals, it was where archives and treasuries were located, and the Bosnian crown was kept," she explains.

In the late 12th century, attacks on Bosnia became more frequent, influencing the rulers' decision to seek protection in the surrounding hills. Ban Stjepan Kotromanić is credited with making Bobovac the military and administrative seat of the Bosnian kings. Professor Emina Musić says that the most beautiful stories from

her childhood are connected to Bobovac. She was born in Visoko, but her origins go back to Kraljeva Sutjeska.

"Like any girl, I loved stories about the castle and its kings and queens. Later, I became disappointed because the image of Bobovac in my mind's eye was not the same as reality. However, the more I researched, that old dilapidated city hidden in the greenery of the Bosnian hills was getting bigger and more impressive in my mind. For me, the whole locality is a holy land that testifies to Bosnian statehood, stability and sustainability. Our glorious history, which can be envied by the great nations of the world, is shrouded in oblivion, but if we take a look we will realize that we Bosnians have our own Rome, and it is called Bobovac." She recommends that everyone visit this city and says, "It generates a special energy, especially in autumn."

Her childhood was marked by legends, and one of them is about a hidden treasure that is located somewhere around the city or along the city walls. Historical arguments prove that the hidden treasure is in fact keys to the city handed over to Sultan Mehmed II Fatih by Prince Radak, and many have hoped to find them.

"Namely, the legend says that the Ottomans had tried to conquer the city for seven years. What they would demolish during the day, the defenders would rebuild at night. The Sultan pondered and sought a solution. He decided to tell Prince Radak that he would reward him richly if he handed over the city to him. It was tempting for Radak, so he betrayed his king and handed him over to Sultan Mehmed. Having captured the city, the sultan divided the people into three groups: the first group was left in the city; he gave the second to his pashas; and he sent the third to Constantinople. When Radak came and asked for a reward, the sultan was ruthless. He ordered a soldier to take the traitor out of the city onto a large rock where he beheaded him. That rock, which remains to this day, is called Radak's rock – Radakovac – so that, as the locals say, it would stand as a warning as to the fate of traitors," says Emina.

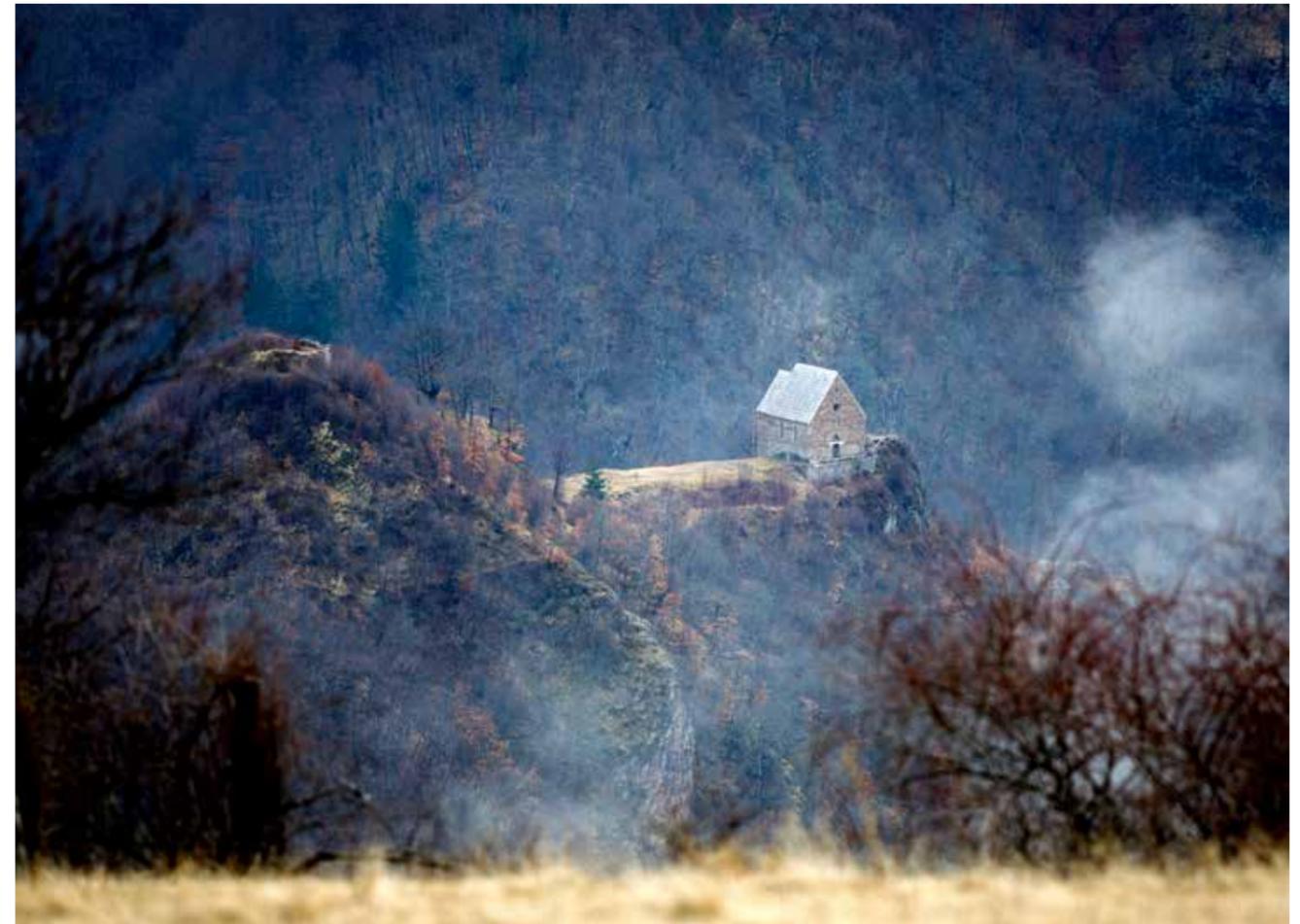
Those who decide to visit Bobovac and get to know the history, but also hear the legends, can find accommodation in several rural households.

The mayor of Vareš, Zdravko Marošević, explains that there are some obstacles yet to overcome, such as the improvement of the road and parking facilities.

"The problem with the expansion of this road is that there is an inhabited village where houses were built next to it and, if they expanded it, they would have to demolish a good part of that settlement, which is impossible. The municipality of Vareš itself cannot do anything about it. The responsibility for the roads is on the canton and the state, which have not done anything so far," says Marošević.

Although Bobovac belongs to Vareš, it was connected with Kraljeva Sutjeska, and many important events took place there. Precisely because of this connection, along with Bobovac, you should also visit Kraljeva Sutjeska. Marošević says that Bobovac is actually "an unfinished story, all the facts of which will take many years to reveal."

While waiting for someone to finish its story and bring as many tourists as possible, Bobovac defies time and, despite all the difficulties, is always busy welcoming those who come to learn about its long, glorious and difficult history.





IRVIN'S OASIS OF PEACE IN SREBRENICA

Written by: Edina Šečić
Photography: Ahmedin Đozić

Irvin Mujčić is a thirty-two year old returnee to Srebrenica, where he is trying to make his childhood dreams come true

At the age of only six, Irvin was forcibly expelled from Srebrenica to Tešanj with his mother, brother, and sister. In that small town in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they spent six months with their grandfather. From there, they managed to go to Croatia, where they lived in a refugee camp for almost a year. On August 9, 1993, they managed to board a ship for Italy.

"It was weird when we arrived, as we didn't know where we were going to live. Several cities had refugee programs. We ended up in a small municipality in the Alps, at 1100 meters above sea level," says Irvin.

He remembers being taken to that small place in the Alps by a driver and that when they arrived, the entire town greeted them on the main street.

"The local Philharmonic also played. They were preparing a huge table and a big lunch. It was all weird when you remember that only a few months ago, my mother had walked between seven and eight kilometers during the shelling to buy some flour to feed us."

Irvin remembers that in 1992 he did not want to leave Srebrenica, so on the day of their departure, he hid in the woods near his house. But they found him and he had to go into exile with his family. His father stayed in Srebrenica, where he was killed during the Genocide.

Irvin finished school in Italy, got a job, traveled the world, but eventually decided to return to Srebrenica. His motive was to help the local community through the development of rural tourism.

"Natural resources are being used brutally. Our air is completely polluted. Our rivers and waters are polluted. Our country and our food are polluted. Life moves fast, everything is consumed quickly, and everything grows quickly thanks to chemicals. It has become irrelevant how people feel and what their soul is like," says Irvin, who founded the Association of Friends of Nature in Srebrenica.

All of this, he believes, has led to people lacking empathy and distancing themselves from each other. "That is why I decided to leave this 'modern' civilization and return to Mother Nature."

When he returned to Srebrenica, Irvin started organizing tours around the municipality, mostly in the villages of Srebrenica, to show Italians and other foreigners the untouched nature that surrounds Srebrenica.

He then bought some land approximately 15 kilometers away from Srebrenica, in the town of Kasapić, where he built a unique "ethno-village" – a touristic settlement resembling traditional Bosnian villages.

"Our small oasis of peace is built between the Jadar River and the Kasapić Stream. Every civilization was born between two rivers. We are currently building four wooden houses. The goal is not to build a village for cool photographs and social media promotion. The goal is to try to build something environmentally friendly. Something that comes together with nature instead of destroying it," Irvin explains.

His wish is to bring back to life what is typical for this part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The idea is to connect the ethno-village to other parts of the Srebrenica municipality through walking or horseback riding tours. The construction of the ethno-village itself is moving at a slower pace than what would usually be expected because the construction is being carried out with minimal usage of modern machines. This is Irvin's goal – to return the skills and values of natural life to Srebrenica and to preserve the environment there.

"We are building it according to the principle of Osat's mimars (traditional builders from the town of Osat), traditionally called neimari. It is an old way of building from our region.



Unfortunately, there are only a few masters left who know how to do that. Today, it is easier and faster to build with blocks or order these wooden prefabricated houses from a false semi-shape. Building by this principle requires that most jobs be done by hand, because no machine can replace a man's hands, from carving to planning, and setting up one half-shape."

He adds that building and creating as a neimar requires vision and understanding for every single piece of wood used, as no screws are used in building. Because of these characteristics, houses built in this way are much more resistant to natural disasters, such as earthquakes.

"There is a huge difference in appearance and beauty, but also safety when you look at buildings constructed this way versus the modern

way. Through this way of working and building, we want to showcase all the beautiful aspects of our nature, our villages, and Bosnian hospitality," says Irvin.

When he decided to return to Bosnia and Herzegovina from Italy in 2014, Irvin was driven by a longing for the Bosnian people and their humanity. He discovered this during his trips through Bosnia and by meeting fellow citizens who were ready to help and welcome him. The traditional spirit of Bosnian people led this young man to dedicate the rest of his life to Srebrenica in an attempt to restore this local community's natural splendor.

To follow and support Irvin's and his association's work visit the Facebook page "Srebrenica – City of Hope".





JAJCE FORTRESS SYMBOL OF RESISTANCE AND GUARDIAN OF INDEPENDENCE

Written by: Medina Čarkadžić
Photography: Armin Durgut

"After 620 years, Jajce Fortress still stands as a symbol of the city and a silent witness to its turbulent history," recounts Slavica Drmić, history teacher at the Jajce elementary school in Kruščica.

The foundations of the god Mithra's temple testify to the fact that the birth of the town of Jajce dates back to the third century AD. However, Jajce rose to prominence during the time of the medieval Bosnian state, otherwise known as the Kingdom of Bosnia. It was during that period, more precisely in 1396, that Jajce was first mentioned in written documents.

The founder of the city was Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić, Grand Duke of Bosnia and Duke of Split, and it was under his rule that the city began to develop. It was then that the construction of the fortress began, and its walls still stand today as a reminder of the past. Then, with the coming to power of Stjepan Tomašević in 1461, the town of Jajce became the capital of the Bosnian Kingdom.

Franjo Leovac, guide at the Franciscan Museum, explains how Stjepan Tomašević's rise to power occurred when he was very young, and at a rather difficult time.

"On the one hand, he was about to take over a kingdom that, at the time, was respected throughout the whole of Europe, but on the other hand, the mighty Ottoman Empire was coming from the East with a rather large army and a desire to expand."

GREAT POWERS KNOCKING AT THE DOORS

Slavica Drmić explains that the fortress was built on a 470 meter-tall hill during a time of great conquests and territorial expansions in Europe. The aim of the construction was to preserve the independence of the medieval Bosnian state and to protect the power of the then ruler Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić. However, that purpose was not fulfilled.

After King Stjepan Tomašević refused to pay tribute to the Ottoman Empire in 1462, Sultan

Mehmed Fatih II undertook a military campaign in Bosnia. The following year, Bosnia fell under Ottoman rule.

"Some 70 years after the construction of the fortress, the royal state of Bosnia fell under Ottoman rule. But the fortress and the city of Jajce survived, and even after that year, the fortress stood as a symbol of resistance and guardian of the city's independence," says Drmić.

Precisely because of the fear that the Ottomans would start penetrating the Kingdom of Bosnia, Stjepan Tomašević had begged the European rulers for help, but help did not arrive. When the Ottomans began to occupy some parts of the kingdom, the king fled from Bobovac to Jajce, and then from Jajce to Ključ. However, when Stjepan Tomašević surrendered in Ključ, he was returned to Jajce, where he was executed by order of Sultan Mehmed II.

Legend has it that Sultan Mehmed II ordered King Stjepan Tomašević to be buried in a place where Stjepan could not see his city, but the city could see him. The tomb is located in Zastinje, near Jajce, where in 1888 archaeologist Ćiro Truhelka excavated the king's bones, and in 2004 the tomb was declared a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the remains of Stjepan Tomašević were briefly moved to Sarajevo, then to Vienna, and then they were returned to Jajce and given to the Franciscans to keep," says Leovac.

During World War I and World War II, the bones were moved from the monastery to the church to save them from destruction. In late 1995 and early 1996, the remains were in Split. It was not until 1999 that they were finally returned to Jajce.

THE STRUGGLE FOR JAJCE

The Ottoman victory in Bosnia was followed by a turbulent period, filled with wars and battles.

"Shortly after the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia, in the summer of 1463, military action was undertaken by the Hungarian king, King Matthias Corvinus, which succeeded in capturing most of northern Bosnia, including the town of Jajce. He

founded the Jajce banovina (province) with its headquarters in Jajce," explains Drmić.

Due to its favorable position, and the fact that trade routes to Split led through it, the struggle between Hungary and the Ottoman Empire around Jajce continued until 1528. As Drmić says, after almost 130 years of its existence, Jajce waved the white flag because neither the inhabitants nor the city could withstand the burden of war any longer. In 1528, Jajce came under Ottoman rule and became part of the Bosnian Sanjak.

"The fortress's founder did not succeed in his intention to preserve the independence of the state nor to protect his own power, but his success would be eminent in centuries to come. To this day, the story of these powerful world empires's struggle for one beautiful city on the banks of two rivers, the Pliva and the Vrbas, remains," says Drmić.

AN EXCEPTIONAL CITY WITH A LEGENDARY NAME

Franjo Leovac explains that Jajce is unique in the length of continuous habitation in the city: "Jajce is the only city that has a history starting from the Middle Ages, probably even earlier. From the Middle Ages and the Kingdom of Bosnia all the way up until today, people still live in the town of Jajce, which we do not have in other towns," he explains.

Numerous legends are associated with this city, and as many as three are connected with the name of the fortress and the city itself.

"The first legend has it that the fortress was built on the model of the castle in Naples, Castello dell'Ovo, which means 'fortress of the egg', and that the city was named Jajce after that. It is believed that at that time Hrvoje Hrvatinić had strong ties with Vladislav of Naples. Another legend claims that the city got its name because of its egg-shaped terrain on which the fortress was built. And the third legend says that, during the construction, the builders mixed eggs into the mortar in order to strengthen the structure of the fortress, and that that is how the town got the name it still bears today," concludes history teacher Slavica Drmić.



THE BEKTIĆ SISTERS: HORSES TEACH US NOBILITY, TENDERNESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

Written by: Dženana Salihović Dokara
Photography: Ahmedin Đozić

Sisters Čamka, Kadira, Fatima and Đeneta Bektić from the village of Jasenova became famous because of a photo of them galloping on horses through the snow-covered forests of Srebrenica. They say that they do not remember whether they first learned to walk or to ride.

Their parents returned to Srebrenica in 1999 with the two oldest sisters, Čamka and Kadira. The younger Fatima and Đeneta were born in the village of Jasenova, where they took their first steps.

"Horses played an important role in our upbringing. As we were learning about ourselves and getting to know the world, we were actually learning about horses. We like to say we don't remember if we walked or learned to ride first. Our childhood is full of memories with horses. They have always been a part of our home. So love for them was inevitable," says Đeneta.

The four of them were each other's coaches, inspirations and riding role models, and their love for horses sprung from the first touch – the braids they braided on their manes, the grooming, and feeding them sugar cubes secretly taken from mom's kitchen.

"It may sound strange, but horses know how to be good teachers. They teach nobility, tenderness, responsibility, and even wisdom. For us girls, horses were our plushies, part of our childhood, and now they are an inseparable part of our lives," adds Đeneta.

She believes that the behavior and nature of a horse depend on the treatment given to it, that is, how the horse is bred from the very beginning.

**THEY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN
A PART OF OUR HOME.
SO LOVE FOR THEM WAS
INEVITABLE**

"If a horse is exposed to physical abuse, there is a great possibility that it will become aggressive, restless. However, if you treat it from an early age as a living being with needs, if you give it love, and set aside hours and hours to spend with it, you will be more than happy with the horse in the end," says Đeneta. She adds that every horse has its own character and behaves according to how people manage to recognize its mood and adjust to it.

"Horses are very cute animals, and those that connect with them have a sincere friend for the rest of their life. They say a good rider can talk to his horse, but a great rider can hear his horse whisper. That is the magic of that relationship, between a man, a horse and the love they create," says Fatima Bektić.

Their father Emin Bektić is a horse breeder and has twelve horses in his stable. He inherited his love for them from his father and has passed it on to his daughters.

It often happens that, due to the accelerated pace of life, people like to escape from the crowds and the city into nature. So, the sisters and their parents entertain friends, acquaintances and relatives on their property. "In addition to socializing in nature, our guests can ride horses, which is especially interesting for the children. They tell me that I was always brave and courageous in that regard, I was not a step behind my older sisters. In my own way, I managed to stay on the horse, holding on tightly, to the mane, to the horse's neck... I don't remember having any fear. The fact that my parents allowed me to be so close to the horse means that I was very skillful," says Đeneta.



KASTEL: BANJA LUKA'S HEART OF STONE

Written by: Milan Sofrenić
Photography: Armin Durgut

Standing on a small hill along the left bank of the Vrbas, the Kastel Fortress in Banja Luka has always been a suitable strategic point. Continuous housing and constant construction activity in this area have destroyed traces from earlier periods. Nonetheless, the Kastel site covers an area of 26,610 square meters inside the fortress walls and about 21,390 square meters outside the ramparts.

Since 2004, Kastel has been one of the national monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This includes the fortress, archaeological finds deposited in the Museum of the Republika Srpska, and archaeological finds located elsewhere in the country in unexplored areas, as well as on the left bank of the Vrbas river below Kastel.

The curator and archaeologist of the Museum of the Republika Srpska, Ivana Pandžić, tells us that the oldest evidence of the existence of a settlement in the area of the Kastel fortress dates back to the Upper Paleolithic, which in this area is the period of the 14th and 13th millennium BC. It was the hunter-gatherer period, before large, permanent settlements began to be built.

"Research has revealed that the site of the fortress was the old Roman settlement of Castro with its road station and military camp. Since this settlement was located on a very important Roman road that connected Split (then Salona) and Gradiška (then Servitium), it shows that Kastel and today's Banja Luka, even in ancient times, were recognized as an important strategic location," said Ivana Pandžić.

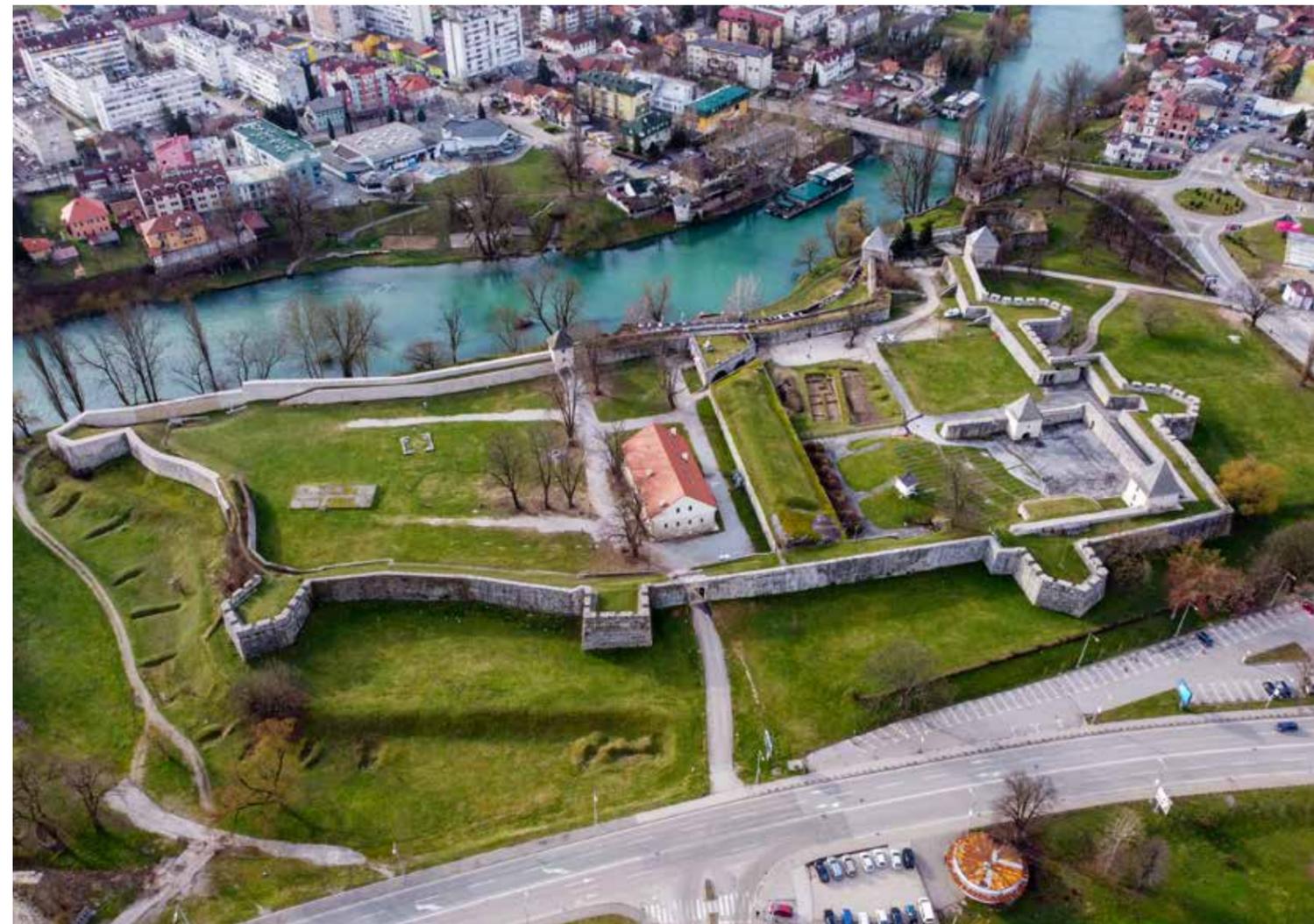
The construction of the Kastel fortress, as we know it today, is attributed to the Ottomans. They paid particular attention to Banja Luka

and Kastel's great strategic importance. During their rule, Banja Luka was composed of two parts, Gornji and Donji Šeher, and the fact that Banja Luka was chosen as the seat of the Bosnian pashaluq, which was founded in 1580, speaks of the importance of this area for the Ottomans.

THE OTTOMANS ARRIVE

"All-out construction of the Kastel fortress began in the penultimate decade of the 15th century, during the Turkish occupation and the reign of Ferhat Pasha Sokolović, who in addition to this fortification built other buildings in the Ottoman style. Ten years later, the tophana, or armory, would grow into a real fortified city with towers and bastions," she says.

Since the fortress is located on two rivers, two bridges were built from the fortress. One stretched across the Vrbas, and the other across the Crkvena river.



"The bridge over the Vrbas has been preserved only in one old engraving. Vrbas and Crkvena were connected by a large moat, so that the fortress was, in fact, a fortified island surrounded by the waters of two rivers. In the walls of the fortress, there was also a large wooden inn overlooking the Vrbas, as well as a series of masonry buildings from the Austro-Hungarian period. The fortress, but also the city of Banja Luka, gained special importance during the Ottoman-Habsburg wars as an important geo-strategic center," says Pandžić.

The Ottomans take the lion's share of the credit for how the fortress looks today as it was during their reign that Kastel gained its present form, and it is one that has lasted for centuries.

"During its reconstruction during the reign of Numan-pasha Ćupričić in 1712-1714, the fortress got its final outline. From an anonymous description, written around 1785, there were 50 cannons in the fortress. The last repair of the fortress was in 1868. With the Austrian occupation, there was one battalion in the fortress. After World War II, until 1959, the Kastel Fortress continued to serve military purposes. From the 1960s onwards, the Kastel area was used for various purposes," emphasizes Pandžić.

After the cessation of its use for military purposes in the 1960s, the Kastel fortress became the responsibility of the city administration of Banja Luka. In its hands, Kastel has become a venue for numerous events in the city. An opportunity for more detailed archaeological research has been created as well.

TRAGIC LOVE AND THE HEART OF STONE

There are two legends connected to Banja Luka and the Kastel fortress. Both speak of unhappy love between two young people. The first version of this legend dates back to the 16th and 17th centuries. According to it, Safikada was a beautiful granddaughter of the famous Ferhat Pasha Sokolović, known throughout the region for her beauty. At that time, girls born into rich families had their future secured because their parents could choose the best of all suitors for them.

However, on one occasion, the young Safikada noticed one of the vizier's soldiers who served at the Kastel. It was love at first sight, so strong that the two dared to go against all the rules and customs of the time. They met secretly to declare eternal love to each other, and when it became inevitable that Safikada's parents would soon choose her future husband, they decided to flee. Their plans were disrupted by him being sent to the front. Shortly after his departure, news reached Safikada that broke her heart. Her soldier had died. Not wanting to spend the rest of her life with someone of her parents' choosing, she decided to kill herself. Dressed in a wedding dress, she stood in front of cannon at the Kastel, whose blast was about to mark noon. Her last words were "I will be faithful to you".

The second story, though different in some details, is equally touching and sad. It places Safikada's destiny in the 19th century, when

Austro-Hungarian soldiers had barracks on Kastel. She was the daughter of a prominent Banja Luka merchant, known for her beauty far beyond Banja Luka. As in the previous story, her life was predestined.

Safikada noticed one Austro-Hungarian soldier while walking around Kastel, and two of them fell in love at first sight. It was unthinkable for a Muslim family at that time to allow their daughter to marry a non-Muslim. The girls were not allowed to move unaccompanied at that time, so Safikada and her soldier saw each other secretly, most often when he was on guard. As in the previous story, Safikada and her beloved had decided to flee, which was prevented by him going to the front. When the news of his death reached Safikada, she decided to keep her vow of eternal love and went to her death by disobeying the order of the Austro-Hungarian soldier not to approach Kastel. After she continued to walk towards it, the soldier shot and killed her at the exact spot of her and her lover's secret meeting place, thus making her a symbol of eternal love.

Safikada's grave is located in the immediate vicinity of Kastel, more precisely between the fortress and the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, where, according to the first legend, her body fell after being shot by the cannon. For years, this place has been a shrine to love, where citizens light candles and pray for happiness in love. Thus, Banja Luka's heart of stone hides a touching and tragic side too, a monument to undying love.



RELIVE MEDIEVAL TIMES AT VRANDUK

Written by: Amra Ćatić
Photography: Armin Durgut

Located 14 kilometers from Zenica, Vranduk Fortress is one of the most important sights of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Once a royal city, its impressive appearance testifies to life in the medieval Kingdom of Bosnia.

Although it was built in the 14th century, the most significant period in Vranduk's history was a century later, during the penultimate king Tomaš's reign. He paid special attention to the development of this fort. Today, the fortress is a national monument of BiH.

The director of the Museum of the City of Zenica, Adnadin Jašarević, highlights the many ways in which they have taken full advantage of the fortress's potential. Visitors can see the blacksmith's workshop, dining room,

scriptorium, shooting range, kitchen, and even a pillory (the old execution device with holes for one's head and hands). They also hold medieval music concerts, festivals for medieval cuisine, and visitors can even try their hand at medieval games such as archery. All of the events evoke the ambience of the medieval Bosnian state.

"The final step is its digitization, which we were able to do thanks to the European Commission, through the Fortress Reinvented project. In addition to three-dimensional rendering, it includes digital content such as music and movies, and exhibitions, which complete the image of the fortress and the medieval Bosnian state," says Jašarević.

Financing is a big issue, and Jašarević says that funds for construction work are at an all-time low. The fortress, which is more than six hundred years old, needs regular maintenance and restoration.



VRANDUK FORTRESS RECORDS 3,000 VISITS A YEAR DESPITE INADEQUATE SUPPORT, WITH MOST VISITORS COMING FROM WESTERN EUROPE

"Our problem is the one-sided and inappropriate work of tourist boards, which are guided by interests that have little to do with the promotion of cultural heritage for tourism development. They are only interested in profit, not the benefits for the state and its citizens. So, we turned to international funding networks, such as the European Commission, European Cultural Heritage, and Western Balkans Funds," emphasizes Jašarević.

Vranduk Fortress records 3,000 visits a year despite inadequate support, with most visitors coming from Western Europe. When visiting the fortress, tourists can see three floors, and on each of them, authentic objects and replicas that take visitors back to the Middle Ages. On the first floor of the fortress, you can find arms from that period, like rifles and shackles. On the second floor, visitors can see two large royal tables and some royal attire on display. On the top floor, visitors can view the office and the clerk's suit.

Vranduk Fortress has withstood time and wars for more than six hundred years, despite numerous attempts to demolish it. Derived from the word branduk, which means "to defend," today it seeks to defend the cultural heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



BE YOURSELF. BE BRAVE. BE DIFFERENT. BE PROUD.

Written by: Anđela Knežević
Photography: Jasmin Agović, Edvin Kalić



Their dream was to create something unique and 'Made in BiH'. Together, sisters Nermina Hodžić and Emina Hodžić Adilović, formed designer label Kaftan Studio, whose quality pieces are known for their recognizably expressive designs.

This pair knew no obstacles to making their dream come true. The initial idea was the fruit of their education at the Academy of Fine Arts, where they both chose to specialize in fashion design from their second year of college. They began to create unique pieces whose

owners would comment on their beauty and uniqueness. Through their work, they have met wonderful women. Mothers, sisters, daughters: women who have become new friends. They have felt the beauty of communicating with an equally passionate and caring public.

"Our beginning was not much different from any other beginning. The idea to design was the result of many years of education and the desire to make designer products that could authentically carry the 'Made in BiH' label," they tell us.



But these modest designers have achieved great international success. Their pieces have been worn on the red carpet at the Golden Globes and at the Oscars for two years in a row now. Kaftan Studio creations have also been featured in numerous fashion and lifestyle magazines such as Vogue US, Elle, Cosmopolitan and L'Officiel, and been worn by singers Chaka Khan and Tiffany Young, in Variety magazine and Schon magazine respectively.

"Since the beginning of Kaftan Studio, we have cooperated as much as possible with local brands and, through our work, we have always tried to support other producers in the form of joint shows or promotion through our social networks," say the Kaftan sisters.

Inspiration is a broad concept for them and something that comes through continuous work. You have to constantly be on the move, be curious, and must not set limits in creative thinking. Their creative journey has consisted of lots of brave baby steps, leading them to their greatest success – a quality design product. They are careful never to become complacent in the creative process, returning to the very beginning of the process every time they finish a new collection. Success, they say, can easily lull the creative into complacency.

The Sisters collection, Emina and Nermina tell us, was inspired by unique and brave women. It presents their own differences – two authentic visual expressions that, although seemingly different, complement each other in their own unique way. Given that their muse was every bold and imaginative woman, the pieces from this collection are for those who want to be their own woman, without having to mold who they are to others' acceptance or love.

In fact, freedom of choice, tolerance, respect for diversity, mutual understanding, love and acceptance are some of the noble qualities that Kaftan Studio embodies through its artistic work in the field of fashion design. For the sisters, their work is something of a manifesto for freedom.

The design duo are also part of the "JaSamBalkan" regional initiative, through which they have sent a strong message throughout the global pandemic that we are all in this together. They have sent a message to show us how important we are all individually, and how we are all equal and reliant upon each other as a human race.



BOSNIAN JEWELLERY AT NEW YORK FASHION WEEK



Written by: Andrea Aleksić
Photography: Tekne, Suzana Duljić

After completing a course in ceramics, fine artist and painter Jana Kunalja was asked by everyone where she bought the jewelry that she had in fact made for herself in the workshop: the idea for Tekne jewelry was born – her jewelry is sold in Banja Luka, Sarajevo and Zenica, and New York and Dubai, as well as through the Tekne website.

The brand was born in 2019, when Jana, after several years of working with oil on canvas, wanted to try her hand at a new medium. Over time, the concept of her work and technique have evolved, so that the offer has now expanded to household accessories. Everything is made in the Tekne studio in Banja Luka.

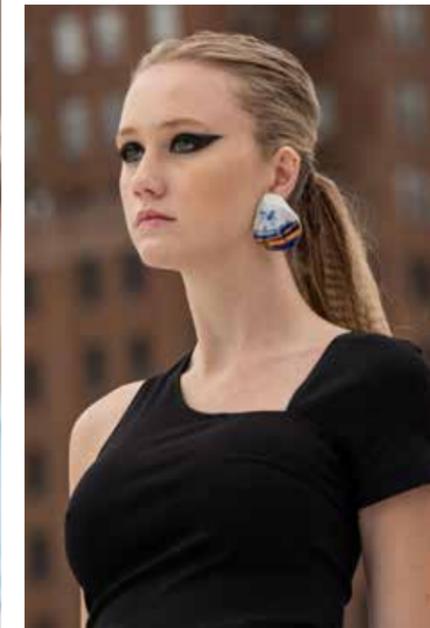
Jana says that she has always been interested in different ways of making, so ceramics and jewelry making came quite naturally. Tekne jewelry was chosen as one of three jewelry brands that had the opportunity to present their new collection for Fall/Winter 20/21 at New York Fashion Week.

"I have to admit it was really amazing that we participated in New York Fashion Week. Like a lot of things in life, it happened quite suddenly and was unexpected. Seeing my jewelry, the jewelry that I not only designed, but developed and eventually made with my own hands, on the runway models, is a great source of pride. Unfortunately, due to the situation we have been in for the last year, we were prevented from attending the show ourselves and bowing on the runway. However, we followed the event and all the preparations as much as we could with the help of our dear friend who represented us there," says the artist.

JEWELLERY AS A CANVAS

Having graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade, and then going on to make jewelry, for Jana, her jewellery represents a piece of art but in a much smaller form.

"Like any artist, I have always been interested in different means and ways of expression. Ceramics came completely naturally to me. I don't see much difference in my expression in pottery or on canvas. The jewelry I make is just a small canvas for



me and I approach it with the same care as any canvas. The pottery is very exciting. It takes a lot of patience to make it, and until you finish the whole process, you don't know if you have succeeded in your plan," she explains.

Replacing a large painting canvas with small pieces of pottery was very easy for Jana.

"It is quite similar work, you make the canvas you want and then paint on it the way you want, follow the rules of technique, and experiment. The big adjustment, of course, was to learn a new technique. After years of painting, I decided to try a technique I knew nothing about at first. I had a lot of help from some fellow potters and a lot of chatting on the net. I realized that the most you learn is by making mistakes, but you have to be persistent. I am still at the beginner level in making ceramics, I would say, and I still have many years of learning ahead of me, but I am looking forward to those years," says Jana.

After only two years, her jewelry has become very recognizable and is sold across the globe.

"I believe the key to the success of Tekne products is, on the one hand, that I didn't want to compromise on design for what is





ECOLOGICAL JEWELRY

In making her jewelry, Jana also pays special attention to ecology, so everything she makes is made from one hundred percent renewable sources.

“Dealing with ceramics is quite rewarding from an ecological point of view. Any earring or bowl that fails for some reason can be recycled. In addition, due to the specific location of our studio, we do not use water from the city water supply. For now, we still need to solve the electricity supply. We want to switch to solar energy as soon as possible, but like everyone else, this year has slowed down our plans and postponed them a bit,” she says.

When she talks about presenting her jewelry at NY Fashion Week, she says she feels like she’s dreaming. For this artist, that process was really quite surreal.

“I have to admit, when I saw the first models coming out on the runway, I didn’t immediately register what was happening. Like... it took me a while to believe. The preparations for the show were chaotic and quite different from what we imagined, but with the experienced

hands of the main stylist and organizer, everything went perfectly! We followed the event in a circle of friends in the garden of our studio and I must say that it was wonderful. We had a small party and it was even more charming for the fact that such events were rare occurrences last year,” she recalls.

In addition to jewelry, Jana has recently been making homeware, for which customers have shown great interest. The most popular products are cups and coffee sets.

“We use several different motifs on our ceramics, some are abstract, and some I paint in a more traditional manner. However, they are also inspired by some motifs and images from childhood, and not randomly selected. At the moment, I am enjoying making ceramics on the potter’s wheel and in the future we will have more and more offerings of such items,” she adds.



currently modern. The jewelry and ceramics I create are my personal artistic expression. I also think that it helped me a lot that I quickly found colleagues who help me a lot and without them I would not have been able to do a lot of the things we have done so far,” she reveals.

All the jewelry Jana makes is unique and made of high quality French porcelain. This allows her to make thinner and lighter pieces than she could from clay.

“Also, porcelain gives it a distinctive white background. We use special colors for ceramics that are then baked together with the porcelain at high temperatures and gilded with 24 carat gold. We sometimes use clay in the jewelry, it being a material that is also of high quality, but it does not allow so much delicacy of production and has a different color,” explains this artist.

On the question of where she finds inspiration, Jana insists this is one of the most difficult questions for any artist, and that hers is hidden deep inside her.





FOR DESIGNERS OF THE WESTERN BALKANS, A LOVE FOR CREATION IS PARAMOUNT

Written by: Mirnes Bakija
Photography: Rale Radović, Vanja Lisac,
Angela Stefanovska

Fashion designer Ljiljana Majkić discovered her interest in unique clothes while growing up in Sarajevo. Her interest in creative and artistic expression has led her into the world of fashion design. She finds it extremely satisfying that she has been able to express her inner talent and that it has taken her in the right direction.

"You could say that I was lucky, but it also required a lot of courage to do what I love. When you are wholeheartedly in what you love to do, then success is not far away. I have won seven prestigious awards for collections and fashion design, been recognized as a prominent artist of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and had eight solo exhibitions and fashion shows," says Ljiljana.

What is noteworthy in her work is that she prefers to present her designs as works of art with their own permanence and authenticity rather than to organize fashion shows.

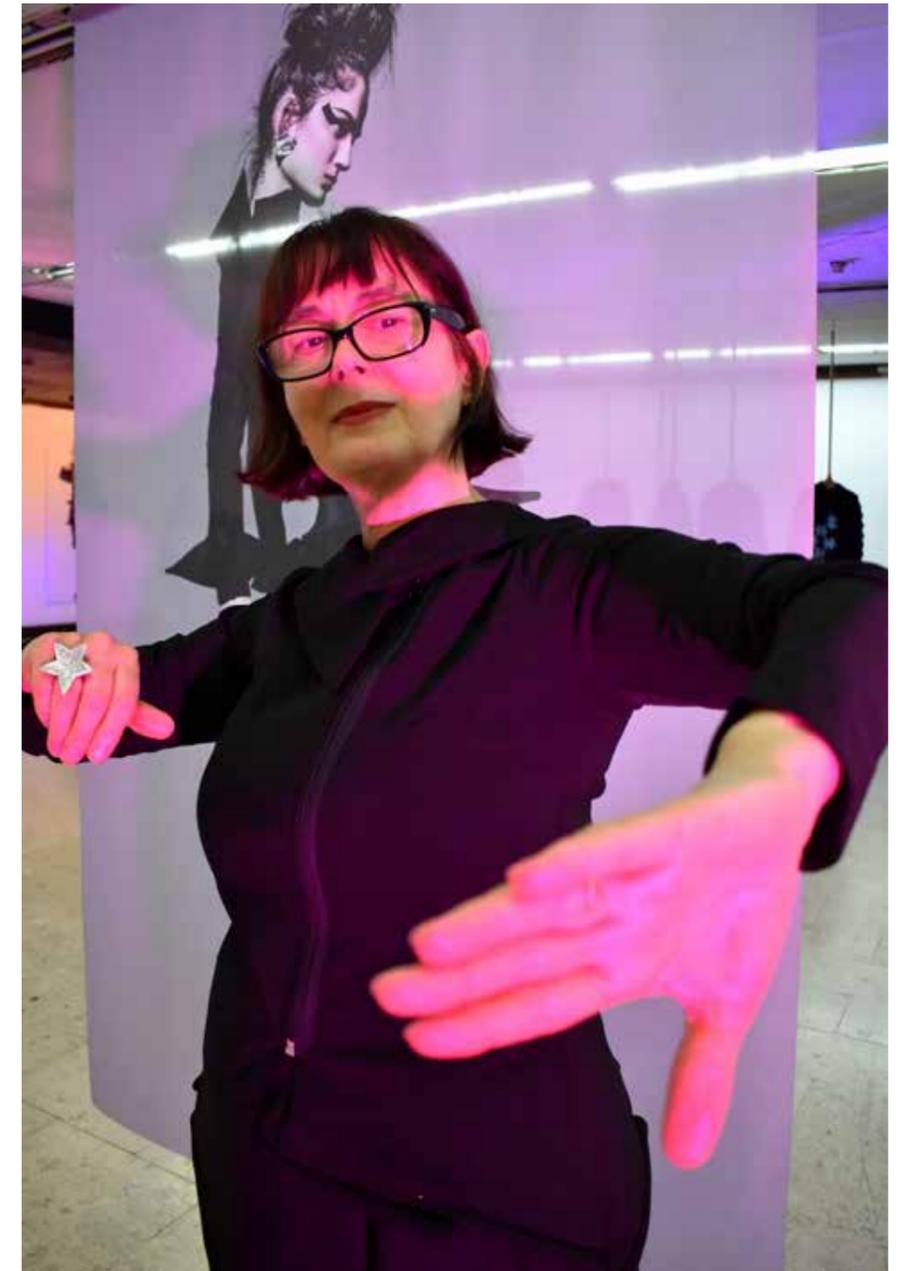
"I try to present my creations as small sculptures representing a combination of fashion, architecture and art," explains Ljiljana.

She is inspired by many things, including musical instruments, architecture, facades of Mediterranean towns, sculptures, floral forms. She says that new ideas about form excite her, but another very inspiring part of her creative process is the choice of materials.

"New inspiration always brings new joy and new pleasure in business. And, to my great joy, there is never a shortage of inspiration," says Ljiljana with a smile.

The biggest challenge for fashion designers in BiH is the limited selection of materials, because only a few importers operate in the country. She adds that with such a limited choice it is very difficult to make something from a material that will not be used by other designers.

"That's why the choice of materials is one of the most important steps for me," explains this fashion designer.



ORIGINALITY COMES FIRST

Ljiljana likes to make more avant-garde creations and adds that such pieces of clothing are harder to place on the market. She does not follow world fashion trends and what is imposed on us but has her own direction and builds her own trends.

"Our market is not large, and amongst such an enormous offer of commercial items, the work of local designers is refreshing. My customers are first and foremost people who love and respect my work. What I create is between fashion and art, so it takes boldness and audacity to wear my creations. People who like to wear my creations are very unique and interesting people," says Ljiljana.

She advises young people in fashion to listen to their instincts and remain consistent in their values. She believes that authenticity and originality are the most important qualities in the fashion business. For Ljiljana, every obstacle should be perceived as a challenge and an opportunity for professional growth and improvement.

Similarly, architect and interior designer Angela Stefanovska says that if you are engaged in any art or creative profession in the Western Balkans, the most important thing is to be unique and do what makes you happy.

Angela studied in Skopje, where she currently lives and works. She owns the Anngo studio, which specializes in interior design, wood handicrafts and furniture. She says that even during her studies, her focus of interest was on detail, art, the harmony of colors and materials, and a desire to create spaces that exude lightness, beauty and comfort.

"I think I'm still new to this field, but I'm learning every day, expanding my knowledge and following new trends in design and architecture," Angela explains with a smile.

She finds inspiration everywhere, most often from everyday life, and it also emerges out of spaces she has previously designed and arranged. Her present studio consists of an apartment of approximately one hundred square meters, unexpectedly set against mountains and lush greenery.

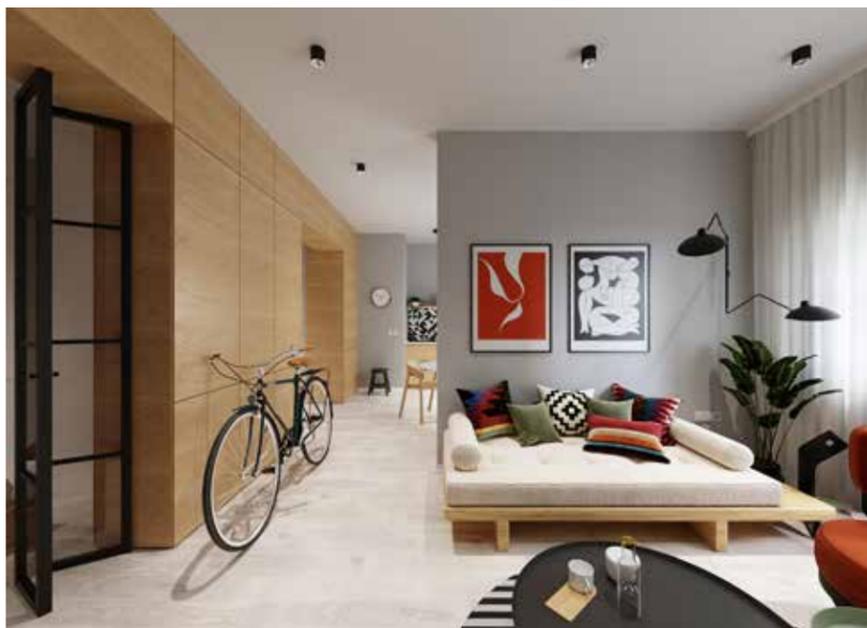
"I have a lot of new projects because the pandemic period created lots of opportunities for working on interiors, especially renovating houses and designing home offices," explains Angela. One challenge for this designer is the contrasting requirements of clients who are often seeking a space that expresses both traditional spirit (a sort of Wabi-Sabi imperfection) and aesthetic perfection at the same time.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Designer Ljiljana Majkić explains that it is very difficult to be and remain socially responsible in BiH. "I know that the fashion industry is one of the biggest polluters of the environment, and 'fast fashion' is the main culprit. These clothes are most often sewn by workers, often minors, working in inhumane conditions. This is how many well-known companies operate," Ljiljana adds, discussing today's production processes.

She tries to produce smaller series of clothes, which are very often unique pieces. She says that she always tries to use natural and biodegradable materials, and her new project will be based on sustainable fashion.

The most common problem and challenge that Angela Stefanovska faces while working





as an interior designer in Northern Macedonia is the low purchasing power of the population. Angela says that everyone strives towards high European standards, but most clients have a limited budget at their disposal, which limits their wishes and choices.

"The interior design market in Northern Macedonia has been growing more and more in recent years and I am glad that people are choosing to entrust their home to professional hands. The number of designers who have focused on interior design in Skopje is growing, and I am especially happy that my clients are young people who are furnishing an apartment for the first time and want to bring something new and fresher into their living space," explains the designer.

She says it is important for her to be socially responsible by using wood, natural textiles, ceramics, stone and other natural materials. What Angela strives for in her process of creation is to create spaces with lots of light sources that radiate warmth, and adds that it is very important to her that her clients feel comfortable in the new space.

QUALITY WILL ALWAYS BE RECOGNIZED

Stylist and fashion designer Bojana Ugrešić from Serbia has been creating in the Western Balkans for the past 14 years. So far, she has worked on promotional videos, music videos, and collaborations with many celebrities from the region and from around the world, for a number of national and international brands.

Primarily as a stylist, and then as a designer and creative director, she perfects her knowledge in these fields every day. She is currently creating and working in Novi Sad, and for the last five years her focus has been on building the 'Bojana' brand.

Bojana finds inspiration in everyday life: "Everything in the field of mind, body and soul, as well as the connection of these three aspects with nature, is eternally inspiring to me."

According to this stylist and designer, it takes a lot of courage to do this job in the Western Balkans; it requires a lot of dedicated work because the market is relatively small. Bojana loves to travel and adds that she would love for her brand to do business worldwide. Thanks to developments in technologies, she can now create an online store and be recognized worldwide.

"If there was more promotion of this type of occupation through the media, as well as more help from institutions, I think that the situation would be much better," she comments.

She tries to live by and apply the concept of social responsibility to the maximum through her work because, in her opinion, it is extremely important that designers have this direction in their work. If they work well, Bojana adds, clients will recognize this over time. Despite the prevalence of mass production, she is convinced that people at the local level are increasingly focused on supporting small businesses that are really worthwhile.

"My customers are mostly businesswomen with a penchant for minimalism and a dose of casualness, and who take care to choose quality clothing items that are worth investing in," says Bojana.

Fashion design, styling and interior design are creative professions by which few can live in the Western Balkans, where it is often difficult to make ends meet. Women in these jobs often

face additional challenges, and taking into account the difficulty of finding customers in this area of mass production, staying true to your art and creating unique products, earning a living in these fields is indeed a great achievement.

Although women in the Western Balkans in these creative fields face various problems, these three brave women prove that it is

possible to achieve success with work and effort. Doing what you love and what fulfills you is a big challenge, but only then is it possible to reach your full potential.





DAWOOD: WOODEN GLASSES CONQUERING THE WORLD

Written by: Sanela Tufekčić
 Photography: Ahmet Ertem, Edin Bukva,
 Rijan Hamidović

In his quest to craft wearable, functional glasses frames from solid wood, Damir Bajraktarević from Sarajevo has discarded more test frames than he can remember. Five years have now passed since he perfected his frames and the result today is his Dawood brand of recognizable wooden glasses and sunglasses.

Damir loves to be out in nature, especially cycling, and he was a professional guitarist until recently. Now, music is just his hobby, but in addition to the production of wooden glasses, he also makes guitars.

"I was looking for a unique wooden product that could be packed in an envelope and sent cheaply to the end of the world. The original idea of making guitars was not going to be profitable due to the weight of the instrument and the cost of transport," recalls Damir.

Progress has been slow and difficult, but he has had the privilege of meeting every one of his customers. Damir tells me that learning how to use new machines to craft his frames was an unforgettable experience, but a painful one

too. He learned quickly that there is no hurry when working with wood, because otherwise you could be left without your fingers. In the Dawood workshop, the glasses are made of solid, quality wood, which is one of the most important differences compared to most manufacturers of wooden glasses.

"Due to the sensitivity of wood, many manufacturers are not able to make glasses from solid wood. They lack sufficient knowledge of the structure, hardness and elasticity of types of wood, amongst other things," says Damir, adding that he spent a year testing the product.

Creating a single wooden frame involves more than ten phases, each of which is tested at the end. If defects are noticed at any stage of production, the frame is discarded.

"We pay the greatest attention to the final fine processing of the frame. We often hear the same comment from customers who try our products for the first time: they can't believe how comfortable and light Dawood glasses are. They expect the wood to be heavy and uncomfortable on the face," he points out.

Among the greatest of his successes must be the brand's survival on the market in such unstable conditions. If the situation with the

pandemic calms down, the plan is to expand production. He adds, however, that in the current circumstances, it would be ungrateful to predict anything.

"In BiH, it is difficult to succeed in anything so we are proud of what we have done so far. Dawood has also welcomed another member, business partner and top designer and artist, Ahmet Ertem. A few years ago, we had the honor and privilege of starring in the e-Golf commercial for the regional market. The quality of the Dawood frame was recognized outside BiH's borders, resulting in some manufacturers sending us offers for collaboration," says Damir.

However, he believes that it is not fair to sugarcoat anything to young, educated people, instead warning of the reality of the working environment for those starting their own business.

"The situation with the pandemic has shown us the disorder of this country and the negligence of the authorities towards their citizens. Many small businesses have failed or will soon fail due to the impossibility of earning money. The state has imposed restrictive measures without lifting, suspending or reducing our financial obligations and charges to it," he warns.



CLOTHING INWROUGHT WITH LOVE FOR THE HOMETLAND



“We faced problems and obstacles, but what has guided us is love for our homeland and the desire to promote this country in the best possible way. And therein lies the secret to our success,” says Vedad Kičević, one of the founders of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian brand Bosnian Kingdom Clothing (BKC).

Written by: Armin Halilović
Photography: Paul Lowe

Being aware of the exodus of young people from the country, Kičević, together with his friends, decided to take the matter into their own hands and build a path to a successful business for themselves. They opened a clothing store in Sarajevo which sells, and produces, clothing inspired by the patriotism in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Their customers are proof of it.

They say that their mission is to promote BiH and its rich culture, history and traditions, whilst also emphasizing that we cannot live in the past. They say that the past should be “a pillar and motive for further development of Bosnia and Herzegovina into a modern and contemporary state.” Another one of their goals is to motivate young people.

The idea itself was born in 2009 and the Bosnian Kingdom Clothing store opened its doors three years later. They say they are especially proud of the fact that currently 60% of their team are women, of all ages.

Social networks have without a doubt impacted clothing trends and are one of the leading tools in product promotion and sales. At BKC, they say that social networks on the one hand facilitate business and on the other create greater accountability, which in turn means that it takes much more effort to build trust with customers.

“Social networks have laid the foundations for small businesses, thanks to which some have grown into serious brands, including BKC. Of course, there are people who did not support our work, but there are many more that did and, for that reason, we should just ignore

all the negative things and negative people,” explains Kičević.

Over the years, Bosnian Kingdom Clothing has grown from a hobby into a serious business and a high quality, recognizable Bosnian product. The team knows that they operate in rather unstable market conditions and they work hard to maintain a business that is as stable as possible.

“Our long-term plan is to grow our business internationally. This firstly implies expansion in the region. Thanks to our large diaspora, which has supported our work from the very beginning, we can say that our garments are already worn by people all over the world,” says Kičević.

The motifs and symbols of BKC's products are closely connected with the reign of King Tvrtko I Kotromanić and other rulers from the time of the Bosnian kingdom.

“We use motifs such as tombstone stela (stećak), Bosančica (Bosnian Cyrillic), and other relevant motifs from the history of BiH. The most sought-after products are those with the motif of Tvrtko I Kotromanić, during whose rule Bosnia and Herzegovina was the most dominant power in the region.”

Bosnian Kingdom Clothing, as a budding brand, is always looking for ways to improve its products to meet the needs and wishes of customers. This means providing quality materials. Kičević says they work with the best local textile distributors. One of BKC's biggest obstacles at the moment is finding quality materials here in BiH, which makes it harder for them to make clothing which is one hundred percent Bosnian.

“We try to make our clothes 100% local, which includes materials from BiH distributors. This strengthens the network of employers and businesses in our homeland,” he explains.

The Bosnian Kingdom brand has been supported and worn by many famous athletes and



entertainers. BKC say that they owe a huge debt of gratitude to everyone who supports their brand. They are also glad when new domestic brands with new ideas appear on the market. Rivalry is, they say, only an additional motive to improve their products.

“Of course, every beginning is difficult and we have faced many problems, but we managed to overcome it with joint effort and hard work. The market opportunities are unpredictable, but the love for the work we do is so strong that it gives us the strength to move on.”





THE CREATIVE DUO THAT PRESERVES CULTURE THROUGH UNIQUE JEWELRY

Written by: Kristina Gadže
Photography: ELIRD

When different cultures unite to create a work of art such as jewelry, that jewelry acquires a unique dimension. Such jewelry saw the light of the day in 2016 when two friends, Ena Mulavdić and Ebrahim Mohammadian, created the ELIRD jewelry studio in Istanbul.

What distinguishes Ena and Ebrahim's jewelry is their approach to design and creation. They do not limit their jewelry to the simple matter of adornment. Rather, they approach the design with the desire that the harmony of shape, size, materials and colors has a beneficial effect on those wearing their jewelry. Such jewelry makes these two artists caretakers of cultures, something that arouses the interest of many customers.

THE CREATIVE BEGINNING

They met in 2013 when Ena came to Istanbul from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as a master's student in Industrial Design at Mimar Sinan University, and Ebrahim from Iran to work as a freelance sculptor and painter.

"It started with a sincere friendship and a desire to create art. Different cultures, languages, customs, thoughts were our inspiration to start working on our brand of contemporary art jewelry, ELIRD, at the site of the most intensive meeting of many cultures," they tell me. Following the beginnings of their creative journey in Istanbul, they moved their studio to Sarajevo.

The duo point out that jewelry has always mirrored social status and power, but it has also always expressed passion and the ever-present need for beauty and decoration. Their jewelry originated as a response to finding their own inspiration in life. They describe life experience itself as being a "sensation" and "an endless field of experience that is always a great inspiration for creating new worlds". In terms of inspiration, they are currently attracted to the Russian contemporary jewelry scene. For Ena and Ebrahim, a piece of jewelry does not make a mark on its own but lives its life only through the body of the wearer.

Starting a business was not easy – it required money, time, and a lot of research to, in their opinion, master all the necessary techniques.

"Ever since there was man, there has been jewelry. We are especially glad that contemporary art jewelry has found its audience and for the last forty years in Europe it has been considered equal to all other art media and disciplines. Ultimately, hard work and dedication, along with focus, patience, gratitude and great love, can overcome all obstacles," they tell us.

THE PROCESS OF CREATION

The manufacturing process can take up to four weeks. They most often work with metals such as silver and bronze. For the duo, there are no bad materials and they often experiment, but stone is an integral part of most of their work, as well as oil paints for miniatures. Customers can also be the initiators of the design for their piece of jewelry, either as inspiration or in terms of bespoke designs.

"As each person is unique, the piece of jewelry that person wears must be designed and adapted to that person. The client does give guidelines, but just as a doctor prescribes medicine to a patient without consulting the patient, so we do the design process independently," Ena



and Ebrahim point out, stating that a distinction should be made between craft and art products because contemporary art jewelry is an established art discipline. As such, as Ena emphasizes, every piece they make is unique and one of a kind.

When creating jewelry, they never make sketches or drawings of pieces. Instead, they play around, starting with modeling in wax before the final model is then cast into metal.

"Sometimes when we have time we make miniatures in oil paints and make sculptures in stone, most often using the inlay technique,

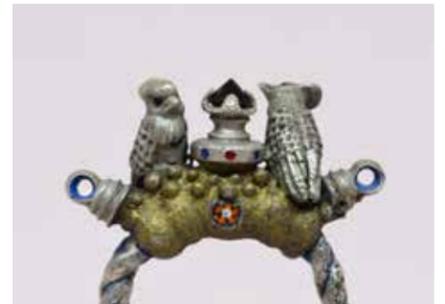
which is characteristic of royal collections. This technique is used to make sculptures inside a transparent semi-precious or precious stone, in such a way that they are carved into the stone from bottom, so when the stone is turned to the 'right' side, it looks as if the sculpture is inside the stone," Ena and Ebrahim say, as they describe the basic steps in the process of making one piece of jewelry.

WORLD RECOGNITION

Their clients are most often people who appreciate art and originality. Their work is recognized around the world and has been featured in many top magazines such as Glamour UK, Vogue UK, Vanity Fair and others. As well as this, it has found its place at numerous jewelry exhibitions.

Their work is not limited to jewelry and they have recently also been making sunglasses and watches. Ena and Ebrahim are members of the Association of Applied Artists and Designers of BiH and the British Association for Contemporary Jewellery. In the upcoming period, they plan to work on establishing closer collaboration with contemporary art jewelry galleries and museums.

The duo feel honored by the recognition they have achieved: "We believe that every hard-working person whose work is done with love will always be recognized in their own way, sooner or later. We are happy that the community we live in has recognized our jewelry and our brand as a quality brand. This is extremely important to us, because it is an honor to do something that represents and improves our community and state in a useful and impressive way."





ART KNOWS NO COMPROMISE

Written by: Alma Mustafić
Photography: Igor Husbašić, Armin Čolo,
Hamza Kulenović

He chose fashion design as a calling at the age of fourteen. Creativity has always been a part of him but he did not have a clear vision of how and where to direct it. Now, Bosnian designer Milan Senić is known for his numerous innovative collections and last year received the SEE Award for Best Fashion Design.

The award, from Slovenia-based BigSEE, is recognition of which he is very proud.

"I am glad that my work has been recognized and highly regarded by professionals in the field. This is my first award and it will probably remain my favorite, mostly because it's the first. This kind of recognition reflects my motivation, but also my responsibility toward future projects and toward my audience," he points out.

Like many creatives, Milan was not taken particularly seriously at the beginning. His love for fashion was perceived as a passing phase.

"I have always been interested in so many things that involve creative and research processes. Fashion design has actually united all of my affinities and talents, and I have realized

that through this medium I can express myself best. Some people from my life thought of this as a phase and that rational decisions would prevail when choosing a profession. Little by little, small successes began to come in the wake of my work, which left no more room for dilemma and doubt about what my professional path would be," he says.

Milan believes that art is a vocation without compromises, and that it does not welcome those who do not approach it sincerely and with an open heart. His belief is that, in art, it is very important to have a dose of curiosity, a touch of positive madness, and a willingness to take risks, emphasizing that where your inspiration might come from is totally unpredictable. It is important to be able to recognize it and direct it within the research process.

"I design clothing that is wearable, but at the same time representative of my interpretation, which is a creative take on classic pieces like the white shirt. New pieces are often born by simply starting to cut whatever material I have at hand at the time," says Milan.

So far, he is most satisfied with his Intuition collection. The work on it was complex and involved a lot of re-examination, but it is the collection that the public has been interested in the longest.

"It is interesting because it represents a turnaround for me in terms of color choices. Until the Intuition collection, I was known as a 'dark designer', which simply means someone who designs black and white clothes," he recalls.

He believes that people who dedicate themselves to creative expression and creative work should be accountable to their public and to the profession.

"It is up to us to create a space for ourselves. This does not mean that the content we present should follow the principle of 'bread and games', in other words being a slave to basic demand, but to work and act according to the ethical codes of the profession," he emphasizes.

Over the past year or so, the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed him out of his comfort zone and toward finding new solutions in his work. The creative development has not stopped, nor has the audience's interest in his work, since most of the work and communication with clients has moved to social networks. Milan is now developing a new website where an online store will be available, for more efficient and simpler communication with his clients.

TREEHANA: SPREADING LOVE THROUGH CLOTHES



Written by: Andrea Aleksić
Photography: Suzana Duljić

This young designer's love for fashion and creativity developed at a very young age, from when she redesigned and sewed new clothes for dolls with her mother and grandmother. Now, Tihana Todić's philosophy as a designer is to be totally dedicated to each and every customer, as to the dolls of her childhood.

From those early beginnings, Tihana's mother then taught her to sew on a machine, but a more serious interest arose only when she enrolled in textile and clothing design classes. She then learned everything there was to know about sewing, as well as tailoring, both of which were still only improved with lots of practice. Out of a love of fashion and the creation of new garments, the idea for an entrepreneurial idea was born.

"It all started out of a love for fashion and the way we dress. I wanted other people to feel that love too. Nowadays, a lot of the clothing offered to us is the same, and that's just not for me. So, my private and professional interests merged to create Treehana," she says.

She explains how she works on her creations wherever she goes, that is, whenever and wherever the inspiration strikes. There are no rules – it can come to her while she is working on existing clothing items, or while reading, listening to music or out walking.

Now that her pieces have moved into the virtual world, so to speak, they have become available to whichever customers might like her work and want to wear her clothes. But getting going online was not easy.

"My biggest challenge was using social networks that, up until then, I had used exclusively for fun. I now had to look at the entire online world from a different perspective. I did this all by myself because I wasn't coming to an established company with a developed digital marketing system. You can overcome such obstacles only through research, learning and perseverance," she explains.

Tihana emphasizes, however, just how important social networks are, not only for small businesses, but for all businesses.

"In a relatively short time you can reach clients from all over the country and the world, depending on the target group. If you do

something out of love and not just for money, something that is unique, your modest efforts will be very well recognized on the market. People love hand-made products that are not mass-produced. Of course, your product needs to be of high quality to make an impact and be recognized," says Tihana.

This young designer gladly dares to interact with her audience and uses social networks for new ideas. She recently asked her followers on Instagram what they want to see in her new collection.

"I asked them because buyers should always be listened to, but I should definitely incorporate their needs in accordance with my ideas and aesthetics. That's the happy medium. Customer relations are very important. I try to dedicate myself to each client individually, to suggest some ideas to them, to listen to their suggestions and desires for a piece. That is the philosophy of my business, to dedicate myself to each customer individually, to sew things for each customer exactly according to their body measurements," she explains to us.

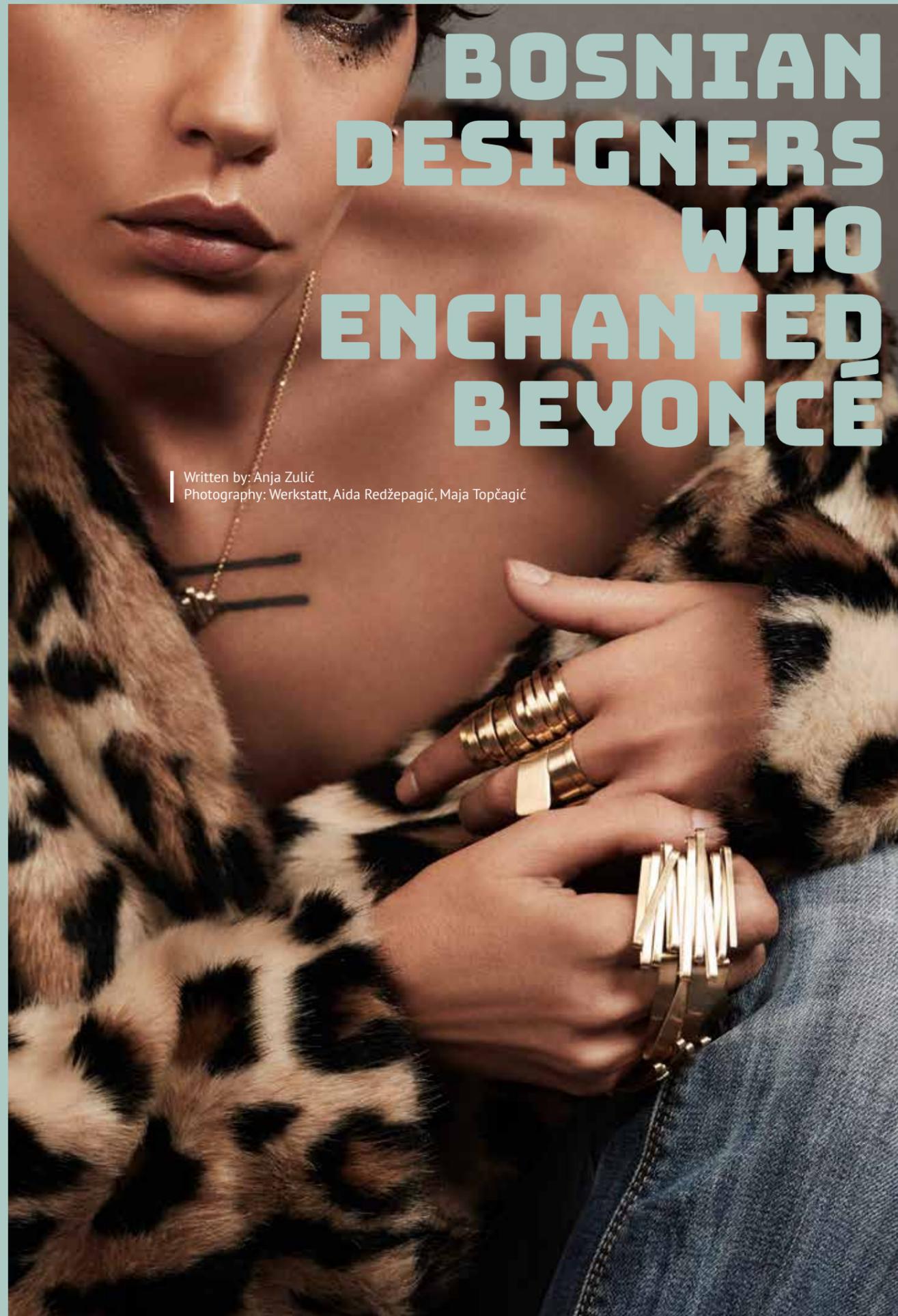
She notes that her customers prefer comfortable and practical items that stand out for their design.

"Usually, I make a piece as if it were for me, without thinking about whether it will be too much. Sometimes I just cut the material with scissors, sew it, and in the end I have a great result. I don't always need to make special cuts and sketches, choose the material especially, and so on. The more unusual an item of clothing is, the better it sells," adds Tihana.



BOSNIAN DESIGNERS WHO ENCHANTED BEYONCÉ

Written by: Anja Zulić
Photography: Werkstatt, Aida Redžepagić, Maja Topčagić



Graphic designers Lejla Nuhić and Ajla Šarić have incorporated their love for graphics into well-known jewelry brand Werkstatt, recognizable for its minimalist industrial style. Their pieces are designed for authentic women and have been worn by none other than Queen B.

After graduating from the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo, Lejla and Ajla worked for many years as graphic designers. They would print their own graphics in their free time, all the while dreaming of their future. For years, they equipped the studio and waited for the right moment. That moment came in 2015 when they decided to start designing and making jewelry together in addition to graphics. So began their Werkstatt story.

They chose the German word *werkstatt*, meaning 'workshop', for the brand name as it describes their common workspace. As is usually the case, the beginning was not easy. Initially, they were making jewelry for themselves, simply satisfying their own aesthetic desires, but, after a while, their jewelry began to attract the attention of others.

"The orders started to come in. Since we both enjoyed creating and producing, we realized that it was necessary to decide in which direction to continue with our work, especially since we both had other jobs at the time and we felt it was very important to be honest with ourselves and others," they say.

FROM HOBBY TO PROFESSION

The growing demand and positive reaction to their jewelry helped them to make the final leap and to move from the 'hobby' phase to the 'professional' one. It was not easy to start their story of a handmade jewelry business in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The dynamics of brand creation, production and development required a lot of time. At first, they tell us, they were unaware of how important serious promotion is for brand development and market positioning. It turned out that after

product quality, promotion was the second most important factor.

"Fortunately, we did not hesitate to research, listen and seek the support and advice of others with more experience in entrepreneurial design and branding. We had a mostly positive experience with the reactions of others, starting with people in Sarajevo," they recall, reflecting back on how it all looked five years ago.

The support that the designers received from people in the fashion and art worlds helped them immensely in growing Werkstatt. The help and guidance of all those who have supported their work has been indispensable.

"Social networks came in handy when it came to the positioning of Werkstatt as a brand, and

increased the interest in our work, more or less overnight, primarily in the media." Their jewelry was worn by Beyoncé in the "Spirit" video, which was created as the soundtrack for the movie *The Lion King*.

Consequently, Lejla and Ajla received dozens of requests for interviews, which built more brand recognition around Werkstatt, as well as of course increasing demand and interest in the pieces that come out of their workshop.

"Working with Beyoncé has helped us to better understand our capabilities, fears, and imposed or self-imposed limitations. It has helped us to accept that it is OK to work and hope for great successes and results, which is especially important to us because sometimes it seems that our community values a kind of lack of ambition," believe Lejla and Ajla.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF DIFFERENT WOMEN

Werkstatt jewelry is made of brass and zinc, and for necklaces, earrings and bracelets they use silver accessories. As with any art, jewelry making needs inspiration, and Lejla and Ajla look for it in their graphics. "What makes our jewelry different are the mini graphics that you can see on each piece. And what stands out in these little graphics is the contrasting effect of the *intaglio* printing," say these creative designers. They play with textures, colors and lines from both everyday life and all kinds and forms of art. But in the end, their biggest inspiration is working together.

When designing and making a new piece of jewelry, they always have a certain woman in mind, from their own environment or public life. Such a broad field of inspiration means that they offer a wide range of jewelry where each fan can find something that suits them.

"This is how we gained the affection of women of different ages and different styles, such that, for example, our



they helped our visibility and recognition outside of Sarajevo and even the region itself. At the same time, we tried to expand our network of retail partners, trying to base these partnerships on important aesthetic and business criteria," they tell us.

WORLD-CLASS COOPERATION

Four years later, the jewelry created by these two girls caught the eye of one of the most famous musicians of today, Beyoncé. The collaboration with the famous Queen B came in July 2019 through the designer Boris Kargotić and his Brand Demode Couture.

"Boris invited us to make jewelry that would go with one of his *Lion King*-themed Beyoncé creations. Whether any of these creations would be in the shortlist was very uncertain. In the end, the project lasted 10 days, during which we worked intensively. The cooperation radically

increased the interest in our work, more or less overnight, primarily in the media." Their jewelry was worn by Beyoncé in the "Spirit" video, which was created as the soundtrack for the movie *The Lion King*.

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NEMANJA MIJIĆ'S UNIQUE KNIVES TRAVEL THE WORLD

Author: Snježana Aničić
Photography: Nemanja Mijić

Nemanja Mijić says that knifemaking is a love that was born quite unexpectedly. He started with the intention of simply crafting something for himself and today he can proudly call his knifemaking a business.

Throughout his formal education, handcrafting was always Mijić's hobby. He is a medical

laboratory technician by profession, but he did not stay in the field for long. Instead, he decided to make knifemaking his primary occupation. He admits that at the beginning, not everyone reacted positively to his decision, but he ignored the negative comments and proved to himself and others that this was the right decision.

"Most of my acquaintances did not understand it as something that people, especially abroad, value as a handicraft. Of course, there were also

those who fully supported me and encouraged me not to give up. They helped me in various ways, from sharing my posts on social networks, and so on. Now that people have realized that my hobby has actually become something serious and significant, every comment I receive is positive," says Mijić.

He cannot recall the exact number of knives made, but estimates that it is in three digits, and adds that he has made about 50 in the



past year. He crafts every blade and handle himself and prices vary depending on customer preferences and ideas, such as the addition of three-dimensional engravings. His knives have even found their way to other continents and are known among masters of the craft.

Mijić believes that improvement in one's craft will happen at a different pace for everyone. For him, the key to success is the courage to try something new and to accept what you have not yet mastered as a challenge, not as an obstacle.

"It all depends on whether someone has the will and talent for those things at all. The most important thing is to maintain continuity and to spend as much time as possible in the workshop, which is the same thing as with any other occupation. Personally, it took me several years to master the craft."

Knifemaking brings in money for him, but it is not yet enough. Being able to earn a better income will take time. As with most things, the COVID-19 pandemic has made the situation more difficult. He plans to participate in fairs and exhibitions in which he has appeared before, but everything depends on the pandemic situation.

"The situation with the pandemic did not affect the number of orders, however. At one point, I noticed an increase in orders, probably because a lot of people spent a lot of time on the internet during various restrictions and relied on online shopping," says Mijić. In fact, Jürgen, one of Mijić's customers from Germany, found Mijić's work on the Instagram and Facebook pages of one of the hunting groups he follows. "I am very satisfied with the workmanship and

would recommend Nemanja's work to anyone else interested in knives," he adds.

Given that he orders a lot of materials from abroad, the pandemic also made the sourcing aspect difficult. However, although everything is especially chaotic at the moment, he manages to cope for love of his craft.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was in fact the home of numerous artisan crafts in the past. Today, many see them simply as part of the past and dismiss them.

Mijić, however, believes that some crafts are becoming popular again. "I think that the popularity of handcrafting is spreading thanks to the influence of social networks, because creative people use it to showcase their work, and it catches on."



SOCIAL CHANGE WITH PROPULSION

Written by: Milan Ilić
Photography: Danijel Rakić

Expertise in socially engaged campaigns and projects is what sets Propulsion agency apart from others. With offices in Belgrade, Sarajevo and Podgorica, this communications agency operates in as many as eight countries. They have a 200-strong team that collaborate in the creation and implementation of their campaigns, which most often concern human rights and equality, citizen participation in decision-making, public health, media and digital literacy.

Propulsion is working to implement a media and digital literacy program in partnership with USAID by 2023, with the ultimate goal of encouraging critical thinking among citizens. The plan is to encourage citizens to participate effectively in everyday economic, social and political life by promoting media and digital literacy.

"It is no secret that new literacy is our primary focus, not only when it comes to this program, but in the sense that all the programs that Propulsion is currently implementing are really a question of new literacy," says Vildana Saračević from Propulsion.

They are a company with a varied portfolio, and they highlight that the task of their programs, projects and individual activities is always to initiate or achieve some positive social change.

"And we all know that this is exactly the challenge: constantly listening to society and inspiring the community to start changing things by focusing on topics that society may not be ready or willing to argue about," they said.

"IT'S NOT LIKE THAT"

Propulsion recently released a series of videos under the title "It's not like that" (BCS: "Nije to baš tako"). This is a socially engaged campaign that examines the migration process and the relationship that migrants from the former Yugoslavia have with migrants from Africa and Asia. It was implemented under the Resonant Voices Initiative in the EU (RVI), in collaboration with the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA) and the Balkan Research Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIRN).

"Within various communities in Zagreb, Vienna and Berlin during the summer of 2019, we asked in a series of focus groups which topics are relevant when we talk about misunderstanding, online radicalization, creating narratives of hate speech, spreading misinformation and so on. In

all the groups, the topic of migration and attitudes towards migrants stood out," they tell us.

These conversations led to a series of videos that compare the migration experiences – whether due to wars or economic reasons – of people from the former Yugoslavia, with what is happening now to people from Africa and Asia. Creating the campaign resulted in 4,500 kilometers travelled, 16 interlocutors interviewed, 104 episodes in various formats, and 1,200,000 people who watched this series in half a year.

MISSION: OXYGEN

Their rich portfolio also includes MISSION: OXYGEN, a program for the prevention of tobacco use among children in Serbia. It was supported by AstraZeneca, and includes work with institutions, children aged 10 to 12, and a campaign targeting children and the general public. They have established cooperation with the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia, the Clinical Centre of Serbia, the Republic Commission for Tobacco Control, as well as other important institutions, in order to improve the legal framework for the prevention of smoking and tobacco control. For Propulsion, working with children means strengthening their critical thinking and

media and digital literacy, and encouraging involvement with artistic and sporting activities.

"We held workshops with children in a number of schools throughout Serbia, but also with interested teachers, so that health literacy might become part of every curriculum, with interdisciplinary competencies being included in everyday schoolwork. The preparation of an online training program for teachers and children along these lines is underway. It will be presented in the fall," the agency has announced.

The campaign aimed at children and the general public involved working with influencers as transmitters of important messages promoting healthy lifestyles and smoking prevention. It was awarded the recognition of the Association for Serbian Market Communications in the category of Socially Responsible Campaigns, as well as the Disrupt award in the category of Communication – Health and pharmaceutical industry.

IT CAN AND SHOULD BE BETTER

They add that they try to do things that they personally care about and that they really sincerely, as a team, recognize as socially important.

They are always on the lookout for people with the right aptitudes who will bring this kind of commitment to their work. "And they wait for the right moment to develop and succeed, and that is exactly what we are counting on in our daily work. If we care, then there must be more people who want to give, personally and professionally. We all must give our best to push our ship forward," said Vildana Saračević.

Preparation is, they tell us, the most important element. Research on the topic or local context is crucial before elaborating the implementation plan of a project.

"The biggest challenge that everyone working in the field faces is how to measure the results

of their work and how to monitor the change they want to achieve. In our work, it is inevitable that we constantly re-examine whether we are good enough, whether what we do is actually important, whether someone has benefited from what we do. It is an ongoing process and thus every conclusion is the same – it can and should always be better," the team tell us.

Propulsion observes the public interest from two perspectives: the interest of citizens and competent institutions, and the interest of the government and other relevant actors in society.

"We are witnessing how fast most societies are changing, and now we have a situation where civic activism and engagement is experiencing a new rise in the entire region. Fortunately, people are becoming aware that they have the right not only to think about problems that directly affect them, but also to actively participate in finding solutions. This certainly changes their agenda of priorities, taking into account, above all, the interests and rights of the community and the individual."

THE CHALLENGES OF THE PANDEMIC AND FAKE NEWS

The questions that have surfaced over the course of the recent crisis have resulted in the spread of misinformation, false news and conspiracy theories. This year, Propulsion launched the Support to Media Initiatives and Partnerships project, and they shed some light for us on the most effective ways to combat these issues:

"Trust in the media is badly broken. People are keeping their distance from the media and social platforms. That is why this program actively works with citizens, the media, businesses, the education system, influencers, and the state

administration in order to find best practices in media, information and digital literacy, as these are among the foundations of our society."

This program aims to contribute to the creation of a society of media- and digitally-aware and responsible citizens. The set of skills, they explain, that we must introduce, nurture, develop and strengthen in order to go through life better, more responsibly, and more conscientiously, and making more informed decisions, can be called 'new literacy'.

"We live in a time when we do not lack information. It is easily accessible, but we still fail to use it systematically and to critically choose what is necessary and useful for us at any given moment. The current pandemic and consequent 'infodemia' can be an opportunity for all of us to sharpen our thinking and start to receive information with a dose of skepticism, especially that which might endanger our health and the lives of our loved ones," warns Vildana Saračević.

At Propulsion, they work with brands, development actors and governments on transformative campaigns worth more than a million dollars a year. Through their campaigns, they encourage critical thinking, problem solving, digital and media literacy, and the prevention of radicalization, and they work on other key communication skills and programs for an ever-changing world. They firmly believe that communication has the power to change the world, which is why they want to be part of the changes that are possible. And sometimes, they enjoy the benefits of those positive victories, which do not happen overnight.





ART AS A TOOL FOR BUILDING LOVE, PEACE AND TOLERANCE

Author: Amina Cerić
Photography: YIHR Archive, Bashkim Hasani

Gathering musicians, actors, writers and other artists from Serbia and Kosovo, the “Mirëdita, dobar dan!” (‘Good day’ in both Albanian and Serbian) festival has been entertaining all those who stand for peace and tolerance ever since its founding in 2014. The goal of the festival is the permanent normalization of relations between Serbian and Kosovo society, as well as the presentation of the Kosovo art scene in Belgrade.

The organizers of the festival are the Youth Initiative for Human Rights and the Civic Initiative from Belgrade, and Integra from Priština. The festival lasts for three days and all facilities are free, with visitors simply required to register in advance. There are plays, exhibitions, book readings and launches, debates, and film screenings. During May and June, these events are organized in Belgrade, and then in the second half of the year they move to Priština. Bekim Fehmiu – famous Yugoslav Albanian, Kosovan, Sarajevo, Belgrade and world actor – served as the inspiration for the festival as a symbol of unity and hope in re-establishing cooperation and uniting these two cultures.

“Maybe I could show off about the number of visitors we get, or how we’ve expanded the target group of visitors, or all the media coverage, but what makes my heart skip a beat are the friendships and connections that remain after the festival. What it means to ‘normalize relations’ I would leave to officials from Belgrade and Priština, but we will continue to support these efforts with activism and constructive debates,” explains Fiona Jelić, on behalf of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights from Belgrade.

She first participated in the festival as a volunteer, and later joined the organizing team. She is a lawyer and a human rights activist by profession, and she describes the festival days as those where she finds herself living her life to the fullest. Fiona believes that activism is a weapon that we should use in the fight for peaceful and happy coexistence.

A significant proportion of the youth, especially the generation that escaped the trauma-filled life of the 1990s, has imbibed hatred and intolerance. All of this is caused by hearing poisonous war stories and parents’ conversation about various war-related events. The line between informing and imposing subjective opinions is often blurred, so young people’s opinions end up sublimated by the so-called “truths” that others

impose on them. Fiona is acutely aware of this reality, despite seeing an increase in the number of visitors to the festival.



“A baseless appetite for nationalism, fear of diversity, and hatred towards our closest neighbors are all rife. The only solutions I can offer are non-formal education and the use of art for the purpose of reconciliation, with the hope that one day we will reach that utopian scenario in which we all respect each other, are all equal, and are united in our differences,” she says.

How informed someone is can best be seen in discussions with people of different opinions, attitudes and ideas. Participants in the debates at “Mirëdita, dobar dan!” are experts in their fields, and their presentations and arguments are backed by established facts. Unfortunately, the same cannot be attributed to all members of these societies.

“I do not think that the members of our societies are well and accurately informed, and the mainstream media outlets do not help. Many of them violate the code of ethics and report in an unethical way. They use hate speech and unverified facts and allegations. It is the responsibility of all of us not to mislead citizens with our work. No, Kosovo artists did not come to Belgrade to advocate for Greater Albania, but to show a piece of their art and their universe in neighboring Belgrade, and to get to know Belgrade and its cultural scene. No, the image of the soldiers of the Kosovo Liberation Army does not mean the glorification of the same, it serves to present historical facts, and satire and criticism are not foreign in artistic expression,” explains our interlocutor.

The people who created problems in the first place have, for years, hampered the mission of developing peace. Respect for the law and a ban on hate speech is something Fiona believes we really need. As this is a topic that can be characterized as ‘sensitive’, it is no wonder that antagonists often hold protests.

“It is no secret that the festival has a bad reputation. To my endless regret, even journalists prefer to write about its reputation instead of about the content of the festival, because people like to read that. Invasions are rare, but protests by groups that ‘do not agree with the festival’ are more frequent. Those groups, the same ones every year, are sometimes emboldened by some new, eager persona. They sometimes gather a handful of new people, skillfully abusing someone’s national feelings and their emotions resulting from personal losses, all

in order to collect their political points,” says Fiona, adding that, were they to truly “invade” the festival, they would be dumfounded by what they would actually find in this festival that they oppose without understanding at all.

When asked about the future, Fiona says that we should not simply forget about these disagreements, but emphasizes the need to be aware that there are certain values that are not up for debate: “Equality, democracy, and respect for human rights, the rule of law and human dignity... We must not have disagreements here, but a passionate discussion about film, theatre or music is always welcome at the ‘Mirëdita, dobar dan!’ festival.”

The Richness of the Cultural Architecture
Škumbin Tafilaj is a contemporary Albanian artist. One of the few who has dedicated his career exclusively to supporting cultural and social development. He is a prominent philanthropist and uses every opportunity he has for activism and to support the achievement of important social and cultural goals. He is the founder of the Škumbin Tafilaj Foundation for Contemporary Art, which focuses on the promotion of contemporary art and of connecting up different artists. His contributions to education at the Hasan Priština University of Priština are also significant. He has written songs about social issues and, through his art, he regularly deals with taboo topics in order to break down social stereotypes. People and their stories are his greatest motivation and he is convinced that art represents a light at the end of the tunnel. He says that the “Mirëdita, dobar dan!” festival should be considered a jewel of the cultural architecture of a metropolis such as Belgrade.

“It is such a noble and at the same time ingenious idea to remember the past, face the present, and build the future of the two nations through art. It is a unique way of

communication. The ‘Mirëdita, dobar dan!’ art festival is a real confrontation that makes us realize how much we cannot be without one another, how we need to take and give energy to one another, and how harmful the violation of neighborliness is. If I could somehow encapsulate the emotions, meaning, mission and impact of this festival in one phrase it would be ‘colorful fresco’,” says Tafilaj, adding that this festival should become part of the cultural memory of the Western Balkans and the international audience.

Tafilaj appeared at the sixth festival with his Let’s Make Love! exhibition, which is a unique evocation of the power of love – love that can overcome the past and its sadness, and awaken peace. He chose activism as a means of communication with the Serbian audience and activism is the basis of all of his work, including his conceptual art. The key elements of the exhibition were the artistic identity of the work itself, a video installation, and a Let’s Make Love! book. For this artist, art can help us understand what is greater than ourselves.

“Our planet is marked by a past of sorrow and pain. Our story from 22 years ago is no less sad than what happens in the world today and what is predicted to be part of the future history of our planet. Stories of life and of survival have taught us an extraordinary lesson. With love, the world has grown and only love can recreate our future, a story to be admired,” he emphasizes.

The key to a secure and tolerant future for future generations lies, in his opinion, in mobilizing all forms of cooperation without exception. We must cultivate respect towards the common cultural past, towards memories, towards examples of outstanding artists who lived artistically and freely in the period of the former Yugoslavia, all of which has left us with a precious legacy.





LGBTI+ community and the legal normalization of the position of LGBTI+ people, but we also celebrate our diversity and the fact that we are alive, despite everyday difficulties," Marko points out.

However, it is very important for activists to show solidarity against the constant discrimination to which many other marginalized groups in our societies are exposed.

"The marches are a space of solidarity, an inclusive and free space for all people who are not well in this socio-political framework. And that is why this is a protest and a fight that will not stop. We hope that with the changes there will be more reasons to celebrate, so that in the future the marches will change their aims," emphasizes Dajana Bakić, member of the Organizing Committee of the BH Pride Parade.

The struggle for Visibility and Change Over Two Decades

The first pride marches in the region were held in 2001 in Slovenia and Serbia, followed by parades in Croatia (2002), Montenegro and Albania (2013), Kosovo (2017), and Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia (2019). These events were historic for activist communities in the Western Balkans and for the fight against discrimination and marginalization. Yet the struggle for visibility and change remains difficult, with many challenges posed to the organizing committees of the marches.

In the summer of 2001, LGBTIQ activists attempted to organize the first Belgrade Pride, hoping that Serbia was ready to fight for the human rights of one of the most hated minority communities at the time.

"What awaited the activists was brutal violence by a large number of hooligans and



FIGHT FOR LOVE AND EQUALITY



Written by: Azra Berbić
Photography: Regional PRIDE organizations (Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb)

This year in July, the first same-sex wedding in Montenegro was concluded before an authorized civil servant. In the Parliament of Montenegro, the Law on Same-Sex Life Partnership was passed on July 1, 2020, representing significant and encouraging progress in reducing discrimination against the LGBTIQ community in this part of Europe.

Same-sex partnership in the region is only legal in Croatia. So, while the LGBTIQ community in the rest of the region is still waiting to adopt the same-sex partnership law, the activist community is committed to a common struggle for freedom, equality and love in public space. By organizing protests, they aim to raise the visibility of the needs and problems that LGBTIQ people face daily, in their families, at work, in health care facilities, schools, government institutions, and the public space.

"Many allies and some members of the LGBTI community are unconvinced that it is necessary

to organize Pride. What difference does it make? Many of them do not understand the reality of growing up in the closet, hiding, having feelings of shame and fear intertwined with everyday existence. Pride means to be proud – irrevocably proud of who you are and who you love. Love knows no boundaries, and love is always the answer," says Antonio Mihajlov, a member of the Pride Organizing Committee, Skopje.

The discrimination, homophobia and transphobia to which the LGBTIQ community is exposed in the Western Balkans are still at a high level. These are present in the media, in

public speeches of politicians, in comments on social networks, on the street; on the flip side, the level of understanding of the issues faced by this community is still low. That is why the need for protest, and discussing these issues in public space, is even greater, which is also emphasized by Marko Mihailović, a member of the Organizing Committee of Belgrade Pride.

"For this very reason, we organize Pride once a year; we symbolically continue the struggle for better treatment of the LGBTI+ community that lasts every day throughout the year. Belgrade Pride is guided by the slogan 'We celebrate - we demonstrate.' We fight for the acceptance of the



extreme right-wingers, as well as the police, that was insufficiently ready to protect them," remembers Marko.

The next successful attempt to organize the Belgrade Pride happened in 2010, when the Pride parade successfully marched through the city. On that day, the participants in the procession were protected by 10,000 police officers who clashed with a large number of hooligans. The clash between the police and the hooligans resulted in destruction throughout Belgrade and a ban on organizing Pride for the next three years. Although the Serbian Constitutional Court ruled that the ban was unconstitutional, authorities maintained the ban.

The first peaceful Belgrade Pride was held in 2014 and has been held continuously since then.

"From then until now, every year (except 2020 when we were prevented by the Covid-19 pandemic) we proudly marched through Belgrade and fought to be accepted as normal people who deserve the same access to rights and the same opportunities for a good life as everyone else," says Marko.

The organization of the first BiH pride parade lasted eighteen months. A number of challenges were set before the organizing committee. Namely, the institutions demanded from the organizers that they finance additional security measures such as anti-terrorist concrete blocks, metal fences, and the engagement of security

guards. In this way, they directly transferred the responsibility to the Organizing Committee, to protect themselves from homo / bi / transphobia and potential violence.

"It speaks of the reality in which LGBTIQ people live and in which the BiH Organizing Committee works, and the same goes for organizations that today deal with LGBTIQ activism in BiH. In a society where LGBTIQ people are invisible and exposed to daily discrimination and violence, LGBTIQ organizations and parades are becoming safe spaces for work and struggle and therefore need to be strengthened and systematically supported in the mission to make societies equal for all," says Dajana.

The first BiH pride parade was held under the slogan "Coming out" ("Ima izać"), and the event passed without incident. Due to the bad epidemiological situation and the measures that were in force due to the coronavirus pandemic, a series of street actions and online activities were postponed until the following year, with the slogan "No life within four walls". Another BiH pride parade was held in August 2021, with the slogan "Resistance from the Margins". Just before the first and third pride parades, counter-protests called "Anti-LGBT" were held.

As in BiH, the first parade in Northern Macedonia was held in 2019, organized by Skopje Pride, while the second was held

in June 2021. In addition to the parade, the Skopje Pride Organizing Committee promoted a series of announcement activities and events, which was a great challenge because, as in other countries in the region, they were a small group with minimal resources. However, the support they received from the community in organizing the procession was above their expectations.

"We have exceeded our expectations in terms of the number of participants in the pride parade itself. We did not have to run a media campaign, because during both May and June, the media – domestic and international – regularly reported on Skopje Pride. We encountered a counter-protest of only 200 participants, which in no way hindered or hampered the organization of the first Skopje Pride, thanks to the great professionalism of the police," recalls Antonio.

LOVE ALWAYS WINS

Aware that significant change cannot happen overnight, the Pride organizations are determined to persevere in their struggle. It is the only way for decision-makers to start initiating legislative processes that will allow all LGBTIQ people to live a dignified life beyond the margins.

"Our marches on the streets are necessary to make significant and lasting changes in the

state of rights and lives of LGBTIQ people, because like all marginalized groups, and most citizens in this country, we live in a difficult economic and social situation, but with added daily discrimination and violence because of who we are. But, it is not just one day when you march, the continuity of the fight is important every day, because there are many problems that must be worked on intensively," says Dajana.

Regardless of all the obstacles they encounter in everyday life, but also as activists, they believe that by working together they will still win their fight for love and equality.

"We have to hope, be optimistic, and do our best in that fight. We have no other choice. Fortunately, over time, support and alliance grow, and LGBTI people can live more openly and authentically," says Antonio.

"Love always wins – even when it doesn't look that way. When Belgrade Pride was banned, we managed to win over many people who showed solidarity with our community. Even when we are in a dark period, the desire for freedom is something that no oppressive regime can take away from us. That is why I think it is important that as LGBTI + people we continue to nurture the spirit of togetherness because together we will win faster than if all of us fight on our own," concludes Marko.





KILIM, SEVDALINKA AND BAKLAVA IN A NEW DIMENSION

Written by: Vanja Šunjić
Photography: Creative Europe

Together, non-governmental organizations, businesses and cultural institutions from across Bosnia and Herzegovina have received approximately four million euros from the Creative Europe Fund over the past six years. This fund is a great opportunity for local cultural workers to meet and collaborate with their colleagues from all over Europe, improve their work, and produce high-quality international programs.

The Creative Europe Desk in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been operating since July 2015 and is led by Aida Kalender, electrical engineer and Master of Cultural Management and Cultural Policies. Aida has been working in the cultural sector for 20 years. She was responsible for the "I am the Museum" campaign, which opened the National Museum of BiH after it was forced to close for three years. The campaign was awarded the Europa Nostra award – the largest European award for cultural heritage – in 2016.

Creative Europe is a European Union-level fund for financing projects in the cultural and

audio-visual sectors. In the period from 2014 to 2020, the Fund disbursed 1.36 billion euros to projects across the continent.

"These funds are distributed to applicants in Creative Europe member countries. These are EU members and neighboring countries that have signed an agreement with the European Commission and entered the Creative Europe program. The funds are distributed through the more than 20 open calls and competitions that are announced every year," explains Aida Kalender.

In addition to the largest and most relevant cultural events, Creative Europe also helps small cultural institutions in underdeveloped countries. Applications are evaluated by international experts based upon the quality of the project, its European dimension, and the extent to which the project fits into the priorities set by Creative Europe. One of the main priorities is audience development, as well as working with children, youth and marginalized groups.

"It does not matter if projects are from small or big towns, the only thing that is valued is the quality of the project! So far, BiH organizations have received approximately four million euros

from the Creative Europe fund, which is a very good result," says Kalender.

Through its projects, Creative Europe aims to direct the cultural sector towards professionalization and modernization, so that cultural production appropriate to the 21st century can be created.

"Of course, that does not mean neglecting cultural heritage. On the contrary, the promotion of cultural heritage is very prominent in the Creative Europe calls, but with an insistence on new forms of representation and interpretation. The goal is to bring it closer to a younger audience, one which is already growing up on new technologies. So, the kilim, sevdalinka and baklava, when brought into the context of, say, artificial intelligence, can take on a completely new dimension," explains Kalender.

SUPPORT FOR FILM AND THEATRE

The head of the MEDIA desk of Creative Europe is Zoran Galić, a film producer from Banja Luka. He is the founder and owner of Wizart Production, which has more than 30 feature and short feature, documentary, and animated films

in its portfolio. He is a member of the European Film Academy and a European expert on projects in culture and cultural policies. He says that BiH has been an area that has been active in the film industry since the late 1950's.

"This all stopped during the 1990's, but with the films and awards that came in the new millennium, we have returned to our rightful place. Bosnian film is our most important and largest export product, and the MEDIA sub-program (part of the Creative Europe program that finances film and complementary activities) has, since 2014, become an important way of financing many film projects," he explains.

During the last six years, more than one hundred projects have been co-financed by this program, thanks to which we have also been able to see many European films in BiH cinemas.

"We have developed our most important films with the MEDIA program, and the Sarajevo Film Festival and CineLink Industry Days have been supported from the beginning through every call for support to festivals and markets. For this success in gaining sustained support from the MEDIA program, we can thank the agile film producers who used the opportunity offered by this pan-European fund in the best possible way," explains Galić.

In 2018, the SHIFT KEY project received the support of the Creative Europe program. The lead organisation on the project is the MESS International Theatre Festival from Bosnia and Herzegovina, with partner festivals from the Netherlands, Spain, Great Britain and Italy.

"The festivals selected 12 young companies and artists to support. The project thematically treats the fluidity of European identity and celebrates the richness of diversity. All artists who are part of the project originate from several European countries or were born in one country and live and work in another. Everyone is a migrant in some way or another," says the director of the MESS festival, Nihad Kreševljaković.

Kreševljaković sees the Creative Europe Fund as an important opportunity for the implementation of ideas and projects. In addition to financial assistance, he emphasises how it also enables those supported to gain valuable experience.

Aida Kalender believes that BiH does not lag behind Europe in terms of ideas and creativity, but that it lacks a systematic approach to culture, including transparent financing of culture, a focus on quality, systematic support for young talent, audience education, and overall professionalisation of the cultural sector. In short, contemporary cultural policy.

CANDIDACIES FOR EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

Kalender sees the candidacies of Mostar and Banja Luka for the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) as extremely important for the cultural sector of BiH. Firstly, the candidacies meant that for the first time the city administrations became interested in supporting a long-term development project in the field of culture. Secondly, the initiative came from the culture sector itself, where cultural workers were empowered to try to persuade their cities to enter this very complicated application process.

"The processes took a long time and an atmosphere of togetherness was created among cultural actors who are usually fragmented and divided. And finally, for the first time since Dayton, the two Bosnian cities wrote down their cultural strategies, which represent a vision for



cultural development over the next 10 years. That is a huge success," she tells us.

She believes that it is a huge success that both Mostar and Banja Luka were shortlisted for the ECOC and that they "defended" their applications before a European expert commission.

"What was clear to the members of the commission, however, was that neither of the two cities could give guarantees that the financing of such a large program would be truly supported by local actors from BiH, which is the obligation of every city that carries the title of ECOC," adds Kalender.

As explained, if it happened that any of the BiH candidate cities were elected, an agreement on the implementation of the ECOC program would be signed, which is binding for the city. In the case that the planned budget commitment was not fulfilled, the city would get into financial problems, such as was the case with Maribor.

"The decision that neither Mostar nor Banja Luka would receive the title of ECOC is probably still a true reflection of our realistic capabilities, but not our wishes," concludes Aida Kalender.





SUPPORTING MARGINALIZED GROUPS WITH LICEULICE MAGAZINE

Written by: Danica Novaković
Photography: Sara Ristić

Eleven years ago, a group of people in Belgrade learned about the concept of a street newspaper. Seeing how much the sale of these newspapers helps socially and economically disadvantaged people, especially the homeless, they decided to launch a project in their own city.

The International Network of Street Papers helped the group acquire new knowledge and skills and linked them to similar initiatives in

Europe. More research was then done on the development of the media and distribution network concept. They started out as an informal coalition of civil society organizations and individuals and, in July 2010, founded a non-profit organization called Liceulice (The Face of the Street), headed by Milosav Marinović. From the beginning, the organization has been committed to supporting marginalized groups and the aim has always been clear – to improve the social and economic position of the most vulnerable people in society.

“The very idea behind street newspapers is not new. There are currently about 125 street newspapers in 35 countries in the world. We have made a step or two further than most others with the editorial concept and quality of the magazine itself. Many street newspapers in the world are at the level of fanzines. We wanted something bigger from the very beginning. When I presented the concept to some professionals ten years ago, many of them did not believe that such a thing was possible. We wanted to write interestingly about ‘boring topics’, to be serious but accessible, to write about problems without looking for culprits but possible solutions,” explains Milosav.

In addition to the quality of the written content, Liceulice is also dedicated to high-quality visual presentation. They have worked for years to establish and enhance a network of designers, illustrators and artists, principally through competitions and open calls that invited them to think about socially responsible topics.

“While in the initial phase we published irregularly and a much lower number of copies, Liceulice has been published ten times a year for several years, and we recently published the 70th issue. Currently, more than 180 sellers are active in Belgrade, Kikinda and Novi Sad. For all those who want to read Liceulice and are not able to meet our sellers, there is the possibility of subscribing to either the paper or digital version. Liceulice is read today in Australia, Norway, the Emirates and many other countries,” Milosav tells us.

The Liceulice team decided to dedicate a substantial amount of magazine space to socially sensitive content, focusing on fact-based stories that offered different perspectives and opened up dialogue with the reader, all discussed and presented in an accessible way. Subject matters of public interest such as ecology, the fight against discrimination, and the improvement of public space receive particular attention. As well as this, every issue contains the sellers’ stories, from their own personal perspective and, occasionally, the literary or artistic contributions of their readers.

“We are happy that Liceulice has become a respected member of the International Network of Street Papers, which has nominated us for the best texts, cover and design eight times so far, and awarded us the prize for the best cover. That particular cover was designed by our associate Sanja Stojkov in 2017, for an issue dedicated to the fight for women’s rights. Three years ago, we received the medal for Feminist Alliance in Media from the BEFEM festival,” says the editor.

However, the most important element of Liceulice is the sellers themselves. The magazine’s street sales network consists of members of various marginal and hard-to-employ groups, such as the homeless, people with disabilities, users of psychiatric services, Roma, and the elderly. Liceulice hires people facing poverty and social exclusion, offering them a chance to work, earn and gain knowledge, skills and motivation. Half of the earnings from each copy sold are paid to the seller.

“By applying the ‘hand up, not a handout’ approach, we are working on building up the capability of our sellers towards gaining their independence, return to regular social life, and inclusion in the labor market,” says Milosav.

In addition to the earnings, communication with buyers and passers-by is very important to sellers. The uniqueness of street newspapers lies precisely in the fact that they build connections between sellers and readers, because sales are done face to face. This interaction helps build bridges between those on the margins and the general public. It also helps everyone understand the key issues of social exclusion and see that we are all the same, we just have not had the same chances in life.

“Over the past ten years, we have been able to do so much to help our sellers. We regularly produce specially designed collections of Liceulice t-shirts. We have also launched the Vreva street festival of activism, the My Homeless Neighbor online initiative to help the homeless, and the For Good Reasons platform for the promotion of socially-engaged design,” explains Milosav.

To help its associates, Liceulice provides the sellers in Belgrade with support from their in-house professional team; Novi Sad sellers are taken care of by partners from the Patrija association; and the sellers in Kikinda are supported by the local center for the provision of social protection services. This support refers to general consultation, helping with individual financial planning, assisting with sales plans, and sometimes solving acute problems. In addition, vendors who need it are included in psycho-social empowerment groups.

“During the pandemic, sellers’ support was somewhat different than in regular circumstances. Our team was in regular telephone contact with all vendors, who found this loss of routine extremely difficult, and, during the same period, we distributed aid packages to them several times. We also helped some sellers by obtaining special permits for them to go out during curfew, helping them to find accommodation, or in other ways,” Milosav tells us.

With the help of the money they earn and the support provided, many Liceulice magazine sellers have managed to finally find adequate accommodation, often overcome alcoholism or drug addiction, and, most importantly, gain their independence. Their touching and inspiring stories can be found at: <https://liceulice.org/>





MIXED MARRIAGES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA DON'T ANSWER TO DIVISION

Written by: Vanja Stokić,
Photography: Armin Durgut, Mitar Simikić

Like any one living in a disorganized state like ours, these couples wage existential and systemic battles. Their love and respect for each other can serve as an example to all those who persistently try to separate 'us' into 'ours' and 'theirs'.

The social perception of ethnically mixed marriages in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has changed significantly and few decide to start such a relationship. Fear of condemnation from family, the neighborhood, and society as a whole, as well as the difficult war legacy and transgenerational traumas, can affect one's choice of life partner. However, there are those for whom all that matters is love.

In 2018, Prime Communication Agency published a survey of the attitudes of BiH citizens towards mixed marriages. The results showed that 38.7 percent of citizens oppose this type of marital union. According to the data of the entity statistical institutes of the Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH, more than 18,000 marriages were concluded in BiH in 2019. About 600 of them were nationally mixed.

Married couple from Sarajevo, Zlatica and Muhamed Kljuno, are celebrating 28 years of happy marriage this year. They believe that their different religious affiliations have brought a

lot of richness and happiness into their lives. They see the key to the success of their marriage in the fact that they complement each other in their differences.

"I just love this marriage and this life. I don't even have the feeling that I'm missing anything. And Zlatica's different religion makes our lives more prosperous," says Muhamed.

"We are enriched by that," adds Zlatica proudly.

Zlatica and Muhamed have known each other since childhood. Although, they say, they are very different in character, they believe that this is what unites them. Their differences create balance in their marriage. They both point out that from the beginning they had the support of their parents and friends because they grew up in a society where national and religious affiliations were neither noticed nor discussed.



"These differences were not thought of at all, nor should they have been thought of. We were not brought up that way, and nobody knew what your religion was, nor did anyone ask. You were never called out for who you were. We are the generation of the 60's that lived the most normal life and we did not care about religious differences," recalls Zlatica.

They married in 1992 with the full support of their parents. Their son Benjamin and daughter Benina will also be part of 'mixed' marriages and this makes them happy. Before the war they celebrated all the holidays together, but today that is not the case. Muhamed's parents are no longer alive, and Zlatica's parents live with her brother in Israel. Still, they hope that this tradition of family gatherings will now be continued by their children.

Zlatica and Muhamed believe that love is not only strengthened in beautiful moments, but when life is difficult, which is when partners must be supportive of one other. For Zlatica, it is respect that must underpin everything.

"And we do fight, but smartly, with arguments. It is all about understanding, love. Money is spent, youth passes, and beauty is fleeting. Here we are, the children are gone, and I have my Zlata by my side," concludes Muhamed.

LOVE, RESPECT AND COMPROMISE

Olga and Zijad will celebrate 40 years of happy marriage this year. Despite being born in Banja Luka, their marital bliss and commitment to bringing up two daughters have not been broken by ethnic and religious divisions, not even by the war. The key to the success of their marriage is, they say, love, respect and compromise.

The two met in the 1970's at a college disco. "He asked to dance and that's how it started. I wanted to teach him to dance professionally, because that's what I do, but it didn't work out," says Olga with a smile.

She says about Zijad that he is reliable, protective, determined and honest, and that this is the most important thing for her. Zijad jokingly adds that he is also a nervous person, and says that his wife is honest, fair, virtuous and hardworking.

"Everything a woman should be. She's beautiful as well," he adds, glancing lovingly at Olga.

At the time they met each other, being in a so-called 'mixed' relationship or marriage in Banja Luka, or anywhere in BiH, was neither unusual nor odd. They believe that today there



are few in BiH who promote peace, coexistence, tolerance and compromise within society. But in their family, they have always tried to do just that. They raised their two daughters – 37-year-old Maya and 28-year-old Melanie – on these values.

Although they say that they are atheists, all the religious and other holidays are celebrated in their house. They believe that religion is a totally private matter. Everyone should decide how they will treat religion and faith. It should not be imposed on anyone.

"WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER AND THAT'S IT"

Adisa and Vehid Ahmetović have been married for 27 years. They say it feels like they have been married for at least twice as much. They work together, so are always by each other's side. They were both born in Kakanj, where they still live today. As they themselves point out, they got married very young. Vehid, known as 'Crni', was 23 at the time, and Adisa was 18. They got married during the war in 1993.

Crni is of Roma ethnicity and points out that he does not mind his nickname (meaning 'Black' or 'Dark') at all; for him, it is simply a term of endearment, a name by which he has always gone.

"With our love for our job and for one another we can overcome every obstacle. And that is the best formula for young people. Love conquers

everything. We were very young, but much more mature than many today. We were very positive and were always three steps ahead," says Crni.

Adisa believes that it is much easier today to marry someone of another ethnicity than it was during the War. Nevertheless, she is not sure whether people have ever supported such relationships sincerely.

"Our friends supported us while we were all together, sitting at one table, but as soon you turn around, you could sense the real mood. Some of those who said, 'I could never' found themselves in the same situation. But we just loved each other and that's it. Today we live together, we work together. We know it was destined to happen this way," says Adisa.

Their ethnicities meant nothing to either of them back when they met, and they have never highlighted nor tried to 'explain' their ethnic differences to their children. Adisa explains how this has led to the odd funny situation, especially for their son Deni.

"Deni was eight or nine at the time. He was playing football outside and when he got home, he said, 'Mom, Crni played against Bijeli. I was in team Bijeli! Then I added jokingly, 'You could play on both teams.' He asked, 'How come?' I said, 'Well, you see, your father is Crni! And he simply said, 'Oh, yes. I forgot!'"

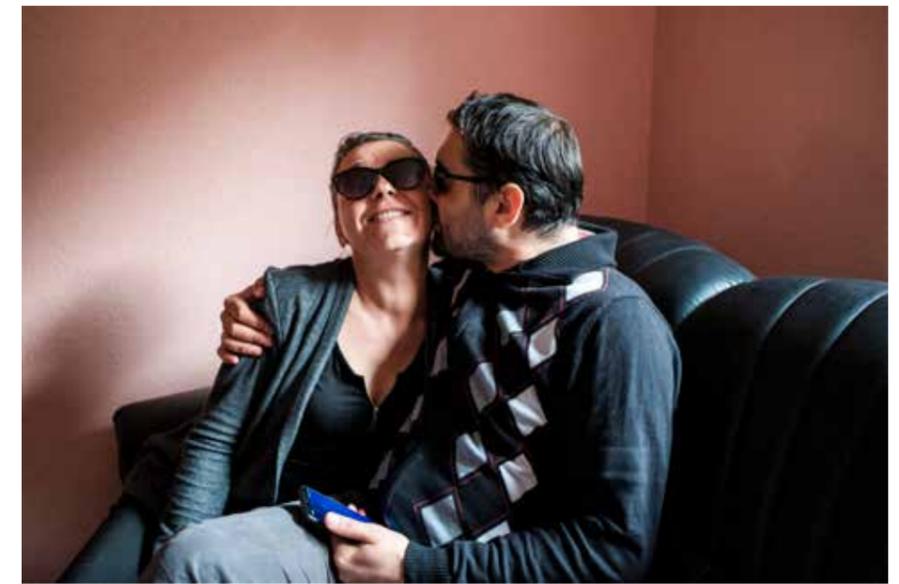
"What Matters Is What We Have"

Ajla Lović and Darko Karać from Banja Luka met five years ago in a club. In all that noise and across the large crowd of people, they noticed each other. Darko is six years older than Ajla, but as he himself tells us, he has matured with her. He points out that, after they met, he knew exactly "what" Ajla was. "Her name said enough about all that. If I had anything against it, I would not have wanted to look at her or meet her."

Darko comes from an Orthodox family, and Ajla from a Muslim family. "Your ethnicity is not written all over your face. I didn't know 'what' he was. I saw him in the club. I saw a handsome guy. I fell in love with him," says Ajla.

She considers herself lucky that she was born after the war and is grateful to her parents for raising her the way they did. "My parents stayed here, I grew up with Orthodox people. We are all equal, and so we treat our friends like that. You can have your religion, but you respect others," says Ajla.

Their families celebrate their own religious holidays, and Darko and Ajla sometimes imagine what it will be like for them in the future.





"Ajla once said, 'Well, Darko, for God's sake, when we start our life together, how will we manage all of that?' I told her that we will celebrate everything," Darko tells us with a laugh.

"It honestly doesn't matter to me. What I have with him and what I will build with him are what's important to me," Ajla tells us.

"I do not care about other people's comments. I care about our future. We are not divided by ethnicity, religion. We are divided by people and the wrong ideals, and that is what is worst – the ideals of the older generations. Especially the ideals of the generation that once lived in 'brotherhood and unity,'" concludes Darko.

They both believe that the most important thing today is to have people with you with whom you share the same value system, and to try not to pay attention to the negative influences that come from outside. Darko and Ajla are currently waiting for their financial situation to improve so that they can start living together.

"LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL WHEN YOU ARE IN LOVE"

Arijana and Marko met three years ago, and ever since then their life has been colored with new meaning. The love they have for each other gives them strength, will and faith in a better future. They both have disabilities, but their blindness does not hinder them from setting life goals which they bravely pursue.

When Arijana got her first assistive phone for the blind and visually impaired, she didn't know how to use it. Someone recommended she talk to Marko, who had been using an assistive phone for some time. After several meetups, they decided to start a relationship. She says life is very beautiful when you truly love someone, and as soon as she met Marko, she knew he was the one.

"He is a great gentleman, and all my life I was looking for someone like him. Everything I've ever wanted I've found in him. He is good, honest, sincere," adds Arijana with a smile.

After the third date with Arijana, Marko knew that she was the person he had been looking for all of his life. He says that she is special and unique. "You don't have to go anywhere to look for love. It knocks on your door by itself. Arijana exceeded my expectations. All I needed was her."

Despite his acceptance of differences, more than 90 percent of his loved ones were against his relationship with Arijana because she is a Muslim, and he is Catholic. Still, his principles prevailed, and he was willing to fight for love. Arijana's situation was different and she didn't

even think about nationality. Her sisters are also in mixed marriages.

Marko points out that the unfortunate war in our region has brought division among people, and many have developed prejudices and misconceptions. Parents and relatives exert an extraordinary amount of pressure on young people when it comes to choice of partner, Arijana believes. She says it rarely happens that a young person has complete freedom in choosing the partner with whom they want to spend their life thanks to being brought up in a divisive atmosphere.

"MY BEST FRIEND"

For A from Sarajevo and D from Čačak, their love, and each other, can be defined by the word 'respect'. For two years now, these two 23-year-olds have been building their love story on this, resisting all obstacles and prejudices. They met, they say, out of boredom on a gloomy autumn day in Tuzla.

"D had a friend in Tuzla who had been begging her for a long time to come to Tuzla, but D never wanted to. So, the friend literally started the car, went to pick her up in Serbia and brought D to Tuzla. She basically kidnapped her. I lived in the center of the city at the time, and, literally two days before, for fun, I installed Tinder for myself," recalls A.



"I was on Tinder because I travel a lot. I'm always out of the country and that's how I meet people," adds D.

They say that they did not have any romantic interest in each other during their first meeting, but they continued to hang out and get to know each other. Their relationship started after some time. "She stayed longer in Tuzla because of me. And so I immediately went to Čačak with her. I just packed up and left," says A.

Soon after they started their relationship, they met with each other's families. They are happy because they have the support of their families. They are aware that this is not a common case for members of the LGBTIQ community, each one proudly pointing out that their parents love the other too, and that they all hang out together. This, of course, was preceded by getting to know each other and gaining trust.

The two of them try to get to know the culture and customs of the other as much as possible and share them with their families. But they point out that society is still not open to differences, primarily because of wartime traumas. Being a lesbian only further complicates their position in society.

"D and I learn everything from each other regarding our traditions and religions. I asked her what the Christmas customs are. Once, her relative asked me if women in our country are circumcised at birth, as men are. I was shocked by the question, but I don't blame her. I mean, I was the first Muslim woman that her family had met," says A.

Although they are currently together in BiH, they say that they will leave if the opportunity comes because they still cannot fully enjoy all their rights and live freely here.

"We cannot get married, cannot have children. If we want these things, we have to leave Bosnia," says A.

"If given the chance, we would leave," adds D. Until then, A. and D. are hoping for a better future in BiH. Because what they don't want to do is run away from their love.



SHADOWS OF THE PAST UPON PEACEBUILDING

The wartime past of the region is still part of the present for many of its inhabitants, due to trauma, glorification of war criminals, and divisions on national grounds. As a result of the proliferation of false narratives, the unresolved issues of the past remain an obstacle to a more stable future.

Author: Amina Sejfić
Photography by Barbara Blesin

A serious and objective history of the 'brotherhood and unity' that was destroyed by the war was buried along with those who unjustly lost their lives. In the countries of the region, official historical narratives are often completely contradictory. Vesna Teršelič, a peace activist, feminist and leader of Documenta - Center for Dealing with the Past, Croatia, says that in democracies it is normal for the same historical events to be interpreted in different ways.

"It is normal to have different interpretations and narratives. I think it is legitimate to interpret the same facts in different ways, but there is a limit to that as well. Denial of facts about war crimes should be inappropriate, and denial of the worst crimes such as the Holocaust and genocide should be prohibited by law. In addition to the prohibitions, which are unfortunately a necessity in the region, the most important thing is responsible media, because the prohibitions themselves cannot 'erase' different narratives," she explains.

Different interpretations and narratives of the wartime past should be approached with a dose of caution, as they often lead to a deepening of intolerance and the spread of hatred. For this reason, is extremely important to deal with the past in a healthy and objective way. For Nataša Maksimović, president of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Network for Building Peace, dealing with the past is extremely important for the future.

"To build peace means to be aware of yourself, but also of everyone around you. Accept them all with all that they are and do not judge. It is important to step into other people's shoes, it is important to get into all those narratives, to feel them, to understand why they were created, what feelings are hidden behind it," she says.

AS COMPLEX AS IT IS INDISPENSABLE

Dealing with the past is a difficult but indispensable part of peace building. Vesna Teršelič points out that the research work itself is a very complex process and that publishing research

results is also a challenge due to the sensitivity of the topic.

"We talk about the layering of historical events every time we publish new research and publications, thus creating new interpretations, not only of the war events of the 1990's but also of other controversial periods of the 20th century," adds Teršelič.

The opinions of young people are colored by the experiences and memories of the elderly, which, when war crimes are denied and their perpetrators celebrated, becomes problematic. Both young and old have become hostages of the past, which is so deeply intertwined with the present. Nataša Maksimović explains that we have been growing up for centuries with the idea that war every 50 years is a normal occurrence in this region.

"We pass on so many of these wartime traumas from one generation to another. In a way, we live in the past, not the present, and we don't seem to have a future. Precisely for the sake of having a present and a future for new generations, it is important to deal with the past and start building peace," elaborates Maksimović.

According to available data, between 130,000 and 140,000 people died in the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Of which, more than 100,000 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, more than 20,000 in Croatia, and more than 13,000 people in Kosovo. Approximately four million people became refugees due to the war, and 2.2 million people were displaced in Bosnia and Herzegovina alone.

In the post-conflict societies of the former Yugoslavia, more than two decades after the wars, conflicts have been waged with the sharp swords of inaccurate information. There is more talk about other people's crimes and one's own victims than vice versa, and emphasizing the facts of the war is often a thorn in the side of those who ignore the truth.

Truth is often seen as an attack on identity, on 'nationality'. That identity – religion, nation, prejudice, propaganda – is a wall built to block out the facts.

FOR JUSTICE WE NEED TRUTH

An objective history of the events of the wars of the 1990's is crucial for the prosperous development of society. Its denial means that divided communities will not accept it. The basis of justice is truth, and to ignore the judicial truth means to rekindle the war mindset.

In this way, victims are diminished and what appears is a false sense of patriotism and an ideology of denialism. When patriotism, nationalism and denialism are combined, not only what is essentially true is contradicted, but also a new dimension of truth is created contradicting all laws of logic. Nationalist-oriented politicians who reject the verdicts of the International Criminal Court contribute to all of this.

Those who resist false narratives, however, are paving the way for a brighter future. They build that path with facts, love, knowledge and tolerance. They accept the facts and defend them no matter what.

"I don't let discouragement swallow me up. I always try to look for the potential in people," says Vesna Teršelič. Teršelič and those like her are driven by, as she puts it: "hope for change and inexhaustible optimism".



COMMUNITY RESILIENCE & THE FIGHT AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

Written by: Tatjana Milovanović
Photography: Aldin Fafulović,
Vedran Živković

Three and the 'Others.' This notion summarizes the way the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has responded to minority rights since the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995. Institutions, offices, laws, and regulations all primarily pertain to, and are aimed at, securing the rights of the country's three main ethnic groups. All those on the outskirts are considered the 'Others.'

According to the OSCE Mission in BiH, approximately 50,000 Roma are living in the country, making them the largest national minority group in BiH. They are also among the most socially, economically, and politically marginalized. There is a pressing need for a balanced and sustainable approach which combines human rights objectives and domestic social policies to break the endemic cycle of Roma exclusion. Furthermore, giving Roma space to tell their stories has enormous potential to change the underlying stereotypes and negative perceptions which have become ingrained not only in Bosnian and Herzegovinian society, but across Europe.

With this in mind, the Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC), supported by the OSCE Mission in BiH, developed "On the Margins" – a

multimedia and educational program aimed at challenging negative stereotypes about BiH's Roma community by giving Roma a platform to share their stories. Some of these stories are featured below.

ZAHID FAFULOVIĆ, MUSICIAN AND USED GOODS SALESMAN

"It's a common misconception that if a Roma person is practicing music and singing then the only thing they do for a living is perform at weddings



and parties. That is prejudiced towards the Roma people and our music. It's a shame that culture and music are not more highly valued in our country. My family loves music and we consider ourselves talented, but we don't play music professionally as it does not pay enough to make a living. We sing and play for our own enjoyment."

ADELINA HUSIĆ, HAIRDRESSER

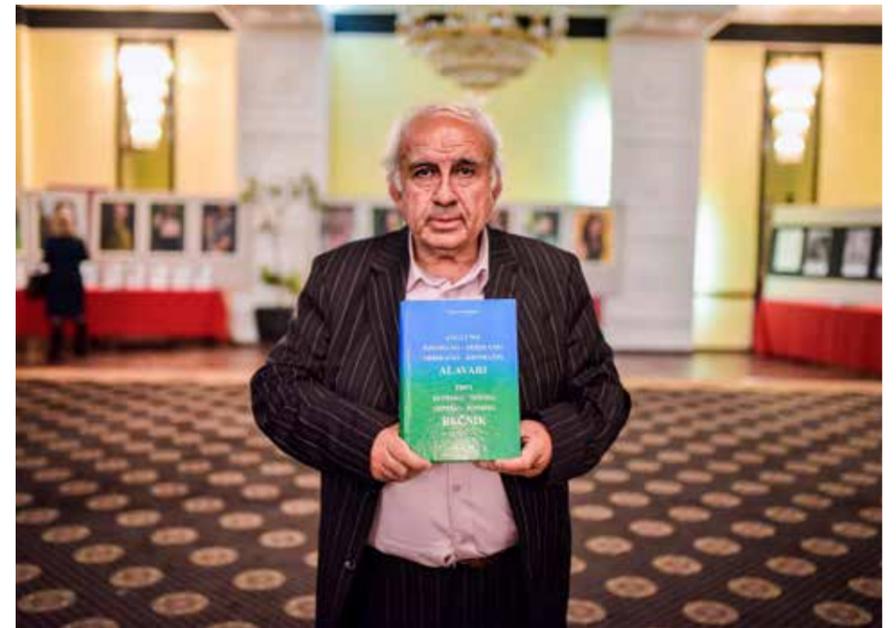
"I know that, as a Roma woman, only school and work will help me live a normal life. I hate it when people connect Roma women with dirty things as if we were street beggars or prostitutes just trying to make easy money. These things are not true and I want to be an example for young Roma women that you can make a living by being honest and working hard. I appreciate education and I want to work honestly in my field. It is my goal to open my own beauty salon where I could show all my skills and talents."

ERVIN HAŠIMOVIĆ, STUDENT, PHOTOGRAPHER, AND BASKETBALL PLAYER

"Kids used to tease me for being a Roma person, but then they said that I wasn't like other Roma because I was well dressed, modern and always clean. I tell them that I'm not the only Roma person who is like that and that I have a lot of Roma relatives and friends who are the same as me and that we dress like everyone else in school does. I would like for people to stop saying that Roma people are dirty and that they don't know how to dress. It's not nice to say bad things about other people. My mom always tells me to look at others without prejudice and that we are all equal. So, I want to tell my friends that Roma people are the same as other people."

ALIJA KRASNIČI, AUTHOR, PLAYWRIGHT, AND POET

"I am a collector of Roma folk creations and I designed, arranged, and published the first Romani language dictionary. I have always felt it was my mission to collect the rich heritage of the Roma culture. I'm proud of my work and of my Roma community. The rich language and culture of the Roma people demonstrate that we have our own special heritage and that we are not just nomads who wander the world without any purpose or goals."



ALDINA DENIĆ, HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST AND PRESIDENT OF THE YOUNG ROMA ASSOCIATION

"There is a prejudice that all Roma are criminals, drug dealers and drug addicts and I wanted to combat the prejudice by volunteering for this association so that I could show people that these are sporadic cases involving young people who are sick and need our help. These cases exist in every society, but the Roma have been stigmatized as a population of drug addicts, and criminals. In 2011, I founded the Young Roma Association for which I serve as the president. The association's mission is to fight prejudice and discrimination against Roma children and young people. The association also aims to protect human rights with a special focus on the rights of Roma women."

When non-Roma individuals begin to re-examine their own beliefs and behavior toward Roma, they sow the seeds of a wider cultural and behavioral shift that can lead to a more inclusive society for all.





HISTORY MUSEUM OF B&H: DEFIANT GUARDIAN OF HISTORY

Written by: Amina Sejfić
Photography: Esad Hadžihasanović

In times of unpredictability, museums defiantly safeguard history. The History Museum, which is dedicated to the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina from its first mention until today, is no exception.

Due to the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the four leading state museums (History Museum, National Museum, Museum of Literature and Theatrical Arts, and Art Gallery of BiH) are in an unenviable situation. Instead of being institutional pillars of culture, developing, proposing and showcasing positive cultural policies, these museums simply survive.

The History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina was declared a national monument in 2012, but this unique national monument – which enjoyed a golden age during

the 1960's – suffered a great defeat after the last war. The state renounces it, abandoning it to the fate of being "nobody's museum". The museum has been left to take care of itself for years. Authorities at every level, from cantonal, to entity, to state, have abandoned this cultural institution, refusing to provide it with regular funding and legal status.

"We are surviving because we have imposed a sense of the museum's importance on ourselves and we are trying to raise awareness of that importance among the community. That is why we believe that we are here: not because of some unconditional state of being, but precisely because of the community and individuals in the museum," says Elma Hašimbegović, director of the History Museum.

Searching for alternative solutions, the History Museum has become a symbol of defiance and one of the few cultural institutions

that manages to survive without state aid. It is a reflection of the strong will of its employees, who did not succumb to the burden of state indifference even in the most difficult times. The History Museum strives to present to its visitors a different angle on stories of Bosnian pride, defiance and the desire for life.

MORE THAN 70 YEARS OF EXISTENCE

The History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina was founded after the end of the Second World War, on November 13, 1945, as the Museum of National Liberation. It was originally located in the Sarajevo City Hall and, in 1963, it was moved to a purpose-built building at the Marijin Dvor. Its architectural structure makes it one of the eminent examples of the architecture of the former Yugoslavia. It was then that

it experienced its golden age, which lost its luster at the beginning of the last war in BiH.

It was renamed several times, along with which its thematic structure was also changed. From 1967 to 1993, it was called the Museum of the Revolution of BiH, and in 1993 it was given its current name – the History Museum of BiH.

As the principal institution for the study and archiving of the history of BiH, the thematic structure of the museum includes the period following the arrival of Slavs on the Balkan Peninsula, the creation of the first medieval South Slavic states – in particular the medieval Bosnian state –, Bosnia and Herzegovina under Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian rule, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the periods from 1918 to 1945 and from 1945 to 1990.

The Museum is home to approximately 400,000 artifacts, and its specialist area of research is the period from 1990 until today. The museum is the guardian of several permanent exhibitions, the most popular of which is Besieged Sarajevo, which testifies to the life of Sarajevans from 1992 to 1995. This setting tells the story of the perseverance of Sarajevans who lived under a siege for 1,335 days without electricity, heating, drinking water and, very often, food.

Melisa Forić, senior assistant in the Department of History at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo, believes

that with the help of the History Museum of BiH, this society can explore its past in a "visual, meaningful and interactive way in accordance with the results of modern historical science and museology".

"Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past," wrote George Orwell in 1984. The novel also raises the question of where the human past is located, whether in physical or mental form, and this sentence in particular has a symbolic meaning for BiH – a country where the process of memorialisation is tailored to national group narratives.

We are always hearing about the importance of history for the survival of each national group, or for the nation as a whole, but this comes accompanied by a contradictory stifling of the real history that is housed within the walls of the History Museum.

On the importance of preserving the history of a country for the future, Elma shares that, for her, it is devastating when young people say that history does not concern them.

"And that is a devastating thing to hear because they are obviously not aware of how much the war past and the fate of post-war society is a responsibility that new generations have to deal with. But, on the other hand, it is a completely normal reaction for young people whose mental and public space is poisoned by

those who impose on them what and how they should think, what history is, and how and what to remember."

INFORMAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

Pedagogical activities are an important part of regular museum work, and they play a significant role in shaping awareness of different narratives. Modern information technology has caused the development of museum pedagogy in BiH to be neglected.

"We know that good education is the foundation of a healthy society, and we are aware that Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have this foundation. This is where we see our chance. Our aspiration today is for the museum to be an educational institution, but for us to teach young people to critically question the past and other issues, that is, to think for themselves. We believe deeply that this is possible if we work continuously, thoughtfully, and in step with new trends," points out Elma.

Melisa Forić highlights the dedicated work of the History Museum in the field of education. They regularly interact with young people and educational institutions, turning this Museum from "nobody's" to "everyone's". It is a museum that is open to all.

In a conversation with young people, museum director Elma Hašimbegović noticed that they had become saturated with stories about the war. "Unfortunately, beyond the main discourse and official policies, there is little room for a constructive dialogue about the past, which the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been trying to offer for years. Museums preserve and remember history for much longer than the lifetime of the political systems in which they were built, systems that try to create memory policies and control what and how we remember. Even when the museums themselves are built for those systems, they usually outlive them," she explains.

And indeed, for all those who appreciate history presented in a different way, this museum stoically safeguards just that. The History Museum survives thanks to the enthusiasm of a valuable group of people who refuse to allow any authority to relegate it to the position of silent, irrelevant witness.





WOOD SURGERY BREATHING LIFE INTO OLD FURNITURE

There is a workshop in Zenica called “Wood Surgery” that has been operating for the last seven years. It developed quite spontaneously and out of pure love and the need to create.

Author: Melani Isović
Photography by Wood Surgery

Lejla Selimović, a law graduate, has always been creative. As she was arranging her own living space, she realized that fantastic pieces could be made from old, seemingly dilapidated pieces of furniture.

“I did some research and learned about wood and design. I started perceiving things differently. I made inquiries with professional carpenters, then started buying tools and equipment that I hadn’t know about before. That is the story of how I began with all of this, and this workshop from which hundreds of restored pieces have come out so far... and new orders arrive every day!”

Retro style furniture is very popular. For her, the challenge is to create a balanced space between the opposite worlds of past and present. Her “surgery” for the repair, restoration and re-design of old furniture is designed primarily as a workshop where clients bring pieces of old, dilapidated furniture they want to save from oblivion and thus give them a new chance.

“As a lover of well-designed old pieces of furniture, I find such pieces myself and repair them. Of late, these have been mostly armchairs and chairs, because the market has shown that such smaller pieces are the most sought after, although a large number of chests of drawers, cupboards, nightstands and tables have been repaired in our workshop too,” says Lejla.

She also repairs furniture to give it a new function. She makes stools from coffee tables, desks from chests, and the like.

“Actually, the whole story revolves around motivating people not to throw away old pieces of furniture, but to give them another chance,” she points out.

She tells me how inspiring it is to compare the two extremes of the place where a piece of furniture was found and where it ends up. It has happened that some furniture intended for landfill ended up in a modern hotel.

“The pieces I work with are most often pieces that people plan to throw away due to wear and tear or old age, not knowing what potential is hidden in them. I’m lucky to be able to visualize things very well, so as soon as I see some piece

that most people see as garbage I know what I can get out of it and what it will look like. I can freely say that I have ‘saved’ more than a thousand pieces so far. My favorite piece of furniture is a well-designed chair. I love to find some amazing piece and then bring it back to life. Nothing fills the space like a good chair, does it?”

The beautiful chairs of the famous Slovenian designer from the sixties, Niko Kralj, are Lejla’s favorite pieces of furniture, and also the most sought after for restoration and redesign.

“I restore a lot of them and not one of them, it seems to me, is the same. Absolutely every time I am surprised by the possibilities and combinations that I can get by restoration and redesign. The pieces that are very demanding to work with are veneered pieces, from which large cabinets, chests of drawers, showcases, nightstands were made... I have a lot of inquiries to work on such pieces”, she tells me.

The time required for restoration depends on the condition of the piece, as well as the requirements of the clients. It usually takes four to seven days if she works in parallel on other pieces of furniture.

“In addition to sanding, staining, gluing and reupholstering, armchairs can require complete disassembly and re-gluing, carpentry, changing springs, even treating wormholes. If there were several layers of different colors on the

old wood, which is very often the case, then everything will last much longer than when the armchair is in its original condition,” Lejla emphasizes.

Her day begins by replying to messages and arranging orders, then she puts on her boiler suit and goes down to the workshop. In addition to procuring furniture and materials and creating a new design, she also does the minor repairs and painting, as well as photography, advertising, and arranging transport to the customer. The workshop can only function on great organization.

“I’ve also done some interior decorating with a combination of old and new pieces of furniture. I really like that creative type of work. The part of the job that I like the most though is working in a workshop. It is an indescribable feeling to see the results of your own handiwork. Especially when you have given something that should have been thrown away a new chance, like when it ends up in the interior of a nice apartment on the sea or in a fancy hotel,” says Lejla.

She laments that consumerism has taken its toll and that people are finding it increasingly difficult to resist it. They determine their self-worth based on the things that they buy.

“Doing this, I became aware of the quality of old pieces of furniture in comparison with today’s. The carpenters and upholsterers were indeed artists and I can’t even imagine how much time and effort was once invested in one seemingly ordinary piece. That’s why it’s not surprising that so many of such pieces still last and hold up better than the chair we bought half a year ago at a discount,” she points out.

All the clients who order pieces from Lejla’s workshop are proof that there are people who appreciate quality and good design.

“We should raise awareness about the durability of such pieces, that by buying renewed and recycled we also partially protect the environment. Pieces in which someone has invested days and days of patient manual work, and adapted them to the client’s wishes, are worth more than a new mass-produced piece. These are all small steps that can improve the popularization of this type of work.”





THE ARCHITECTURE OF YUGOSLAVIA - MEETING OF EAST AND WEST

Written by: Alma Mustafić
 Photography: Jennifer Boyer, Marcin Szala & private archives

The region of the former Yugoslavia (1945-1991) is where both East and West, and North and South meet, and where turbulent, bloody plots have intertwined. But it is also a region rich in nature and the kindest people, and certainly not lacking in periods of prosperity. This is how Tatjana Neidhardt, architect and daughter of the legendary architect Juraj Neidhardt, begins her story about architecture in the former Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia, she says, was a successful experiment in state-building aimed at ensuring the well-being of all its peoples. The Yugoslav state

was built with great enthusiasm, hope, trust, togetherness and solidarity. The basic goals of Yugoslav development were the education of the population, public infrastructure, housing, a planned urbanization process, and employment.

According to Neidhardt, the conference of Yugoslav architects in Dubrovnik in 1950 marked a turning point in the development of Yugoslav architecture, where rigid socialist realism was rejected. They called for full creative freedom. The government of the former Yugoslavia understood the importance of design in rebuilding the country. Competitions were announced for each major urban and architectural project, and residential areas always came with an accompanying social infrastructure, which indicates the importance of social

life to the architects, the state, and the population in general.

"All of this led to unique regional modernism with a pronounced pedagogical dimension, which differed from region to region depending on whether it favored Western or Eastern influences, the strength of the traditional and religious influences, the quality of education of the architects, and their imagination. Yugoslav post-war architecture was at the core of modern architecture," Neidhardt asserts.

This regional modernism achieved great things in the context of world architecture – achievements which are exemplified by two large Yugoslav public competitions. The first of which was the competition for the reconstruction of the former Jewish synagogue in 1951, carried out by Zdravko Kovačević and Milivoj Peterčić. The original synagogue was designed by Zagreb architect Rudolf Lubinski in 1930 and destroyed in 1941 by the occupiers.

The second competition, in 1955, was for the urban solution to the Sarajevo settlement of Marijin Dvor and the nearby National Assembly, and was implemented by Juraj Neidhardt and associates.

During this period, the first significant residential architecture renovation was the Džidžikovac

residential complex in the center of Sarajevo, built-in 1947 – a project of the Kadić brothers.

There have been many successful projects by Sarajevo architects in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), but also by those from other parts of Yugoslavia. As early as 1958, in the competition for the Museum of the Revolution (today the History Museum of BiH), the first prize was won by Zagreb architects, while the other prizes were won by Sarajevo architects.

Media coverage was an important element that contributed to the publicity of these architectural projects. In addition to bringing public attention to the results, media articles developed discussion among architects and citizens, as well as giving birth to some new exhibitions.

In 1965, Borba, a daily magazine from Belgrade, introduced an annual award for the most successful architectural achievements, signaling the importance of architecture and the shaping of space within other creative activities and city life. "Urban designers, architects and landscape architects were much respected citizens at the time," says Neidhardt.

The conceptual design for the Bare city cemetery, among other significant winning projects, was one of the first Bosnian-Herzegovinian architectural projects to receive the Borba award. "Bare Cemetery in Sarajevo, designed by landscape architect Smiljan Klaić, connects Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish and atheist chapels, and is an extremely successful creative solution in an area with mixed ethnicity," says Neidhardt.

FROM UNIQUE DESIGNS TO NEGATION AND MYTHOLOGY

The construction of the Skenderija Cultural and Sports Center in 1969, which also won the Borba Award and was designed by Živorad Janković and Halid Muhasilović, was a unique architectural and multifunctional spatial solution bringing together culture, sport, trade and dining under one roof.

"As well as several large and successful interventions from local Bosnian architects' rich opus of residential architecture and public buildings, there were numerous successful projects throughout the former Yugoslavia. If we include the school facilities built within the framework of the 'A Thousand Schools' educational project, then industrial and hydro plants, commercial facilities, sports facilities, cultural facilities, tourist facilities, and monument complexes, we get the full picture of the land that rose from the ashes," explains Neidhardt.

After the Second World War, voluntary work actions for the construction of railways were organized in the former Yugoslavia, and the young people who were involved achieved extraordinary results in record time.

"After the fall of Yugoslavia and the 1992-1995 war, the inability of post-Yugoslav society to critically reflect on the era of the former Yugoslavia and the legacy it left behind created two conflicting views – on the one hand, a complete negation of that legacy, and, on the other, a nostalgia and romantic mythologization that also uncritically observes the period," states Neidhardt.

In fact, in Neidhardt's opinion, all of the heritage of the former Yugoslavia is collapsing and disappearing because the conditions have not been created for building a better, more progressive and more just society.

"It is becoming increasingly clear that the Yugoslav model was the only possible model



for the benefit of all peoples in this area, especially in BiH, with its mixed ethnic communities. It found itself in the middle of the divided states of the former Yugoslavia while the national governments continued to pull them apart, systematically killing the spirit of togetherness," adds Neidhardt.

FOLLOWING IN HER FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

Tatjana Neidhardt's initial wish was to study painting. However, at that time, there was no Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo and going to another place was too much of a leap for her, both emotionally and materially.

"Although as a child I would peek behind my father's desk to admire his sketches and work, I also noticed the other side of my father Juraj Neidhardt's success. Work, work, work. Days and nights of hard work, colored with often dramatic upheavals in life and career. Our family life also suffered, but we all knew that his goal was always the perfection of his vocation: the fight for humanity through urbanism and architecture, fighting for the life of people in the city and the villages," she recalls.

She tells me how, whenever he was working on a competition, with the inevitable deadlines that came with it, the whole apartment would be full of his colleagues, the floors covered with drawings, cardboard, models.

"I was invisible. They would put me in my room so I wouldn't bother them, and my mother, in addition to being my father's secretary and typing the necessary texts and letters on a typewriter, had to prepare meals for people who were there all day, sometimes even at night."

Tatjana enrolled at the Faculty of Architecture in Sarajevo, where her father was a professor. She says that everyone expected her to have her father's talent, but that did not happen. "Besides, I was very shy, timid, terrified of tests and exams," she adds.

She adds however that, thanks to her persistence and conscientious work, she finished college in four and a half years, and in the year she finished she got a job as a teacher at the Civil Engineering Technical School, where she remained for 25 years.

"I tried to introduce students to other fields beyond the profession as well. We would talk about all sorts of topics, and we attended various exhibitions and other cultural events. Later,

meetings with my students confirmed to me that my efforts were not in vain, their gratitude is my greatest reward," concludes Neidhardt.

PROMOTING OF THE CULTURAL VALUES OF SARAJEVO

Thinking about this city of hers, she emphasizes how four years of war left human souls broken, which is why she got involved in a series of humanitarian activities in order to escape the indifference.

Tatjana and her colleagues have tried to promote the cultural values of the city of Sarajevo – values that the grenades failed to destroy – through a collection of calendars, city maps, bookmarks, postcards and the like. The idea was born to make a booklet about Sarajevo: Sarajevo through time is a small-format booklet featuring watercolors and text covering all the historical periods of the city and all the most important elements of the cultural heritage of the city.

"We have been working on it for several years. We finally finished it. We promoted the first edition in Bosnian in 2004 and it was a great success, and editions in English, then German and French followed. We did not intend to do the French version, but one day, I met an elderly gentleman, Dr. Mustafa Hadžihalilović, who lives in France but occasionally comes to Sarajevo. He was excited about our booklet and offered to translate it into French free of charge. It took maybe two years, but the booklet in French stands next to the others in almost every major bookstore in town. With his engagement, the booklet was included in the UNESCO cataloging in Paris," said Neidhardt.

She finds it very sad that not enough attention is paid to maintaining architectural and urban heritage buildings, be they from the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian or modern periods. Ultimately, Neidhardt believes that they are all undervalued.

"Several attempts were made through various activities, but not enough was done in practice. It is sad to see dilapidated facades, upgrades where they do not belong, and the devastation of the city space by inappropriate construction in the Sarajevo valley. This has adverse effects in every segment of city life. For example, instead of respecting the ventilation corridors and planting trees, buildings are being built," she laments.



THE JEWISH CEMETERY OF SARAJEVO CULTURAL GEM OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

For more than five centuries, on one of Sarajevo's many slopes, one could find Jewish tombstones as a testament to both the dead and the living. The "sleeping lions," as Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić called them, make up the second-largest Jewish cemetery in Europe.

Author: Adela Mašić
Photography by Benisa Bibuljica

This unique sacral complex was created next to the medieval necropolis of *stećak* tombstones at the Borak site. Stone from the neighboring quarry on Šatorija was extracted for medieval *stećak* tombstones and Jewish tombstones, unique in their shapes and motifs.

Unfortunately, the exact date of the cemetery's establishment is unknown, so the year of its founding is estimated to be 1630.

"This is because the oldest tombstone found there dates back to that date – the tombstone of Sarajevo rabbi Samuel Baruch," explains Eli Tauber, advisor on the culture and religion of the Jewish community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Jewish cemetery can be entered through three gates, and it has approximately 3,800 tombstones that were first made of Sarajevo limestone and later of marble or granite. Within the cemetery, there is a cemetery chapel (*Ciduk Adin*), a memorial ossuary from 1952, a monument to the victims of Ustasha terror, and an Ashkenazi ossuary. The entire sacral complex was declared a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina on September 2, 2004.

"What is specific to this cemetery is the monolithic monuments that are associated with *stećak* tombstones. We do not see them in any other Jewish cemetery in Europe or the Middle East. Of course, since this cemetery was built next to a necropolis of *stećak* tombstones, it is

assumed that the idea to make such types of monuments came from looking at the *stećak*," explains Tauber.

SYMBOLISM IN THE JEWISH CEMETERY

Tauber points out that the decorative motifs on the stones have multiple symbolic meanings. In addition to these symbolic images, there are also geometric and plant ornaments.

"For example, a stick means a sacred face, an egg is a symbol of life and death, and a crescent is a symbol for moving towards the soul's final destination," he explains.

The exceptional value of Jewish tombstones lies in their epigraphy, which consists of the name and surname of the deceased, date of birth and death, a short text about the life and work of the dead, and sometimes verses and quotations from the Jewish tradition.

"The most interesting monument is certainly that of Zekko Efendi Rafaelović, who was educated in Istanbul. He was the main translator of the Turkish language in BiH and one of the founders of the Jewish cultural and educational society 'La Benovelencia.' His unique tombstone carries epitaphs in three languages – Bosnian, Hebrew, and Turkish

– the only one like it in the world. It is also unclear whether there is any other monument in a Jewish cemetery written in Turkish," Tauber explains.

Unfortunately, the cemetery is currently in very bad condition, and many of the tombstones are damaged. Some were destroyed during the last war, while many others fell victim to vandalism.

HOLY PLACES

In 1958, the remains of the Ashkenazi cemetery, which was located in Koševo, were moved to the old Sephardic cemetery. The cemetery was

closed for burials in 1965, and ever since then, Jews have been burying their dead in Sarajevo's city cemetery.

Jewish people consider their cemeteries holy places, calling them the 'house of graves,' the 'house of life,' and the 'house of eternity.' Their house in Sarajevo is a cultural gem of Bosnia and Herzegovina. "However, everything that is not maintained collapses and, over time, both physical and spiritual heritage starts vanishing. Preserving cultural and historical heritage in BiH is every citizen's," says Ensar Hadžić, a member of the Jewish Youth Club and a student of the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo.



NATAŠA PERKOVIĆ THE COURAGE, FRESHNESS, AND PRODUCTIVITY OF OUR DESIGNERS

Nataša Perković is a designer, aesthete, and nature lover who strives to make eye-catching products that are also sustainable and have a positive effect on the environment.

Author: Irma Ahmetpahić
Photography by Eldin Hasanagić,
private archive

Nataša Perković is a graduate of the Department of Product Design at the Academy of Fine Arts at the University of Sarajevo. Towards the end of her studies, she took part in an exchange at the Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto creative and cultural center in Italy, which, she says, really enriched her knowledge. After that, she interned at The Partners graphic design agency in London. There, she tells us, she learned how a design agency should be structured and about the important connections between design and business.

After this myriad of experiences, she returned to Sarajevo and started working with local companies. Her return to Sarajevo also marked the beginning of her academic career as an assistant to professors Zlatko Ugljen and Ognjenka Finci.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to learn how to encourage students to discover their aesthetic affinities and to realize their ability



as creators. I am privileged to have the opportunity to lead the course, work with talented young people, and influence them," says Nataša.

THE BIH DESIGN SCENE

Her academic career helps her to set the bar high for her practical work. She wants her projects to contribute to the profession. Therefore, she turned to local furniture manufacturers when searching for partnerships.

"At that time, the furniture industry was maturing. For the first time after the war, it was ready to develop its own products, mostly for the international market. To do that, they needed designers. It is precisely those companies that have the potential to develop a product that can contribute to the profession. Several companies have emerged that have realized the advantage of their own product and created the market conditions to follow that path. This is even more complex than it sounds. It's like heading out across the sea in the dark, in a small boat with a small engine, instead of staying on the shore. I think every Bosnian businessperson who develops their own brand is a brave adventurer. It is extremely interesting to be a part of that adventure," she tells us.

Nataša believes that furniture design in BiH has high standards, but only for individual product design work. According to her, the product design scene as a whole is almost non-existent.

"As far as I know, we do not have a single studio that deals exclusively with product design or furniture design. Designers are not professionally united; there is no culture of exhibiting designs in galleries or museums. There is no criticism. It would be good if more designers had the opportunity to work with more industries, not just the furniture industry, which is currently our most active. All this would be important for building a stable, sustainable market and from which the Bosnian brand can be built. All of that is possible. It just needs to be a strategic priority, and important actors would need to work towards the same goal," she points out.

She hastens to emphasize the brilliance of individuals who are creating excellent products, which she says can be seen in the designer exhibitions at ImmCologne, the International Fair in Cologne.

"I can't help but feel that our designers are brave, fresh, and extremely productive. For years, products in BiH have made up about half of my list of the ten most interesting products from the entire fair. My assessment is completely subjective, but experts from all over the world objectively recognize BiH design and production as innovative. Perhaps this emerging industry does not have much to lose, which allows for experimentation. It will be very important to continue to develop the industry and maintain its penchant for bold moves. And of course, to strategically develop all its elements," says Nataša.

She recalls that large state-owned companies would hire designers and architects to oversee product design during the eighties. After the war and privatization, the newly formed small

private companies did not develop their own product design, but worked as subcontractors for other companies. Now, the domestic furniture industry is being reborn.

"People who gained experience before the war in companies that developed their own products, like managers, engineers, and designers, are playing a very important role. They are the link – the transmitters of knowledge and experience. They have enabled us to reach such high quality in all aspects of the product. Of course, the role of the Product Design Department at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo is significant in that sense, too," says Nataša.

The term "designer furniture" came into use with the appearance of entrepreneurs who wanted to develop their own products and be competitive in the market.

"These entrepreneurs have recognized the strategic role of design in business development – that the investment pays off many times over. In the absence of large teams to assess the conceptual design and product development, these entrepreneurs give designers the freedom to work independently. As a result, the final product is honest, alive, and fresh – elements that the market values. This is not always the case in developed industrial systems, where the product goes through many levels of decision-making and sometimes loses its immediacy and freshness," she says.

ELLE – BEAUTIFUL DESIGN FOR THE EVERYDAY

A newly-dressed traditional style is now developing completely unbounded and unfettered. It is a combination style, what one might call "retro mahala," representing the kind of progress



for which humanity is always striving. Among these ideas, minimalism is the key to survival. It represents both beauty and sophistication in all fields of development and innovation. One such product marketed in recent times is the "Elle" collection, created by Nataša Perković herself. It was conceived of as the embodiment of sophisticated beauty.

"Elle is both sculptural and a fruit of the modernist approach to design. Each piece in this line is characterized by a complex shape developed through round curves and sharp edges but with simple silhouettes. In the aesthetic sense, Elle is on the border between personality and neutrality. It may be in the foreground. Its shapes vary when viewed from different perspectives, and any change in lighting reveals a wealth of detail. On the other hand, it is not too overbearing and can be an everyday item that responds to functional requirements. Parts of the collection can fit well in different interiors or in one home whose style changes over the years," explains Nataša.

She developed the design by hand-making many scale models from cardboard, paperboard, and Styrofoam materials. She believes that this approach makes it easier to understand different aspects of the product: shape, function, ergonomics, and proportion of parts in relation to the whole.

"I check the technical aspects of each new solution through the drafts and principles of the golden ratio. In the case of Elle, the biggest challenge was to physically thin the solid wood elements as much as possible while leaving enough space for solid joints. This meant I had to lighten the elements that had to remain thicker visually. After that, the engineers in the factory start working on the technical development," Nataša tells us.

As she points out, her dream is for the Elle collection to be presented in homes and for people to enjoy it for a long time. In addition, she hopes that MS & Wood, the company that produces this collection, will use it to provide jobs for many workers.

BOSNIAN MEDIEVAL TOMBSTONES OF PRIDE AND DEFIANCE

Written by: Andrea Aleksić

Photography: Paul Lowe, Foundation Stecak

Thousands of documents, photographs, manuscripts and books, which testify to the centuries-old existence of Bosnian-Herzegovinian medieval tombstones (stećak), are part of the cultural wealth preserved by the 'Stećak' Foundation.

Although its founder Senad Šabović has been dealing with Bosnian tombstones, as a national treasure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for ten years, the Foundation started working in March 2017.

"I have been working on medieval tombstones for 10 years and through all these years the focus has been on education. My first solo exhibition is actually the result of my efforts to make children better acquainted with stećci. Something remarkable happened on the opening of the exhibition which positively changed my life. We invited the daughter of our greatest researcher of medieval tombstones Šefik Bešliagić, Mrs. Atija Imamović Bešliagić, as a guest. On that occasion, she gave me a black and white photograph of the necropolis of tombstones from the vicinity of Kalinovik, taken in 1957. This opened a new dimension to my work in the field," recalls Šabović.

Research shows that there are 60,000 medieval tombstones in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). These are medieval tombstones that differ from other tombstones in their typology and decorations. They appeared in the second half of the 12th century, peaked in the 14th and 15th centuries, and ceased to be produced by the mid-16th century. The earliest known records of stećci are found in the travelogue of Benedikt Kuripešić from 1530, a Slovene interpreter in the mission of the Austrian Emperor Ferdinand I of Habsburg. He traveled to Bosnia on his way to Constantinople, and his travelogue describes stećak tombstones from the village of Lađavine, near Rogatica.

Over time, Šabović collected more and more archival material about these tombstones, and today his collection numbers about nine thousand archival units.

"Professor Besim Spahić gave me 700 slides of the most representative Bosnian medieval tombstones, and all this was done for the exhibition Narodne i borbene igre na stećcima (Eng.: Folk Dances and Medieval Tournaments on Stećci) from 1986, organized by the Museum of the XIV Olympic Games in Sarajevo. Unfortunately, we all know what happened to that museum, so this is the only preserved material from that exhibition," he explains.

The material is organized by funds. The largest fund is the 'Šefik Bešliagić' fund and it has about seven thousand units, followed by the 'Nada Miletić', 'Ranko Rosić', 'Tošo Dabac', 'Hidajet Delić'



and 'Čiro Truhelka' funds. Šabović says that there is no person who dealt with the tombstones without cooperating with him. He believes the stećak is a symbol of Bosnian resistance. For him, they are representative of Bosnian pride.

"The thought of tombstones evokes a sense of belonging to a country that has a long and glorious past. Few countries in the world can boast of so many preserved monuments from the Middle Ages. The tombstones were made by the people, as folk art, and they are preserved in such numbers because people were proud of their past and looked at them with great empathy, and that continues to this day," he adds.

The primary activity of the Foundation is the digitization of the archive collection, which is a

long and expensive process. The plan is to digitize the original pencil list of tombstones, which was written between 1960 and 1970. Given the immeasurable value of this list, digitization has already begun.

"In the three years of the Foundation's existence, three exhibitions have been organized, and this year we planned to open a memorial room dedicated to Šefik Bešliagić. We already have enough archival material, and the Bešliagić family has agreed for us to take some home and work furniture. In that way, recognition will be given to Šefik Bešliagić and we hope to open a new chapter in the work of our Foundation, which will probably be included in the tourist offer of Sarajevo," says Senad Šabović.

PRESERVATION OF MEDIEVAL TOMBSTONES

Stećak tombstones are the most numerous of the cultural heritage of BiH, and this places it among the countries with a high number of cultural and historical monuments.

"Although special attention is currently being paid to these tombstones, sometimes I think that we are not aware of the potential they offer us. By their very appearance in the Middle Ages, the stećak speaks volumes about us as a spiritually, culturally and materially rich society. In my opinion, the biggest phenomenon is how many of them are preserved to this day," explains Šabović.

Through the existing BiH institutions, and with suggestions and proposals of non-governmental organizations and other individuals, we try to do everything to preserve and protect these monuments. The Commission to Preserve the National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina issues decisions declaring certain sites national monuments, and prescribes protection and preservation measures.

"This should be the case in practice and there are such examples, but I think that the state strategy is crucial here, from the highest level to the local community. We are witnessing negligence and incompetence, and unfortunately this sometimes results in the partial or permanent destruction of a monument, even a stećak. Even more attention and energy must be invested in the preservation of these medieval tombstones, and the punishments for damage must be rigorous and without exceptions," warns Šabović.

STEĆCI: WORLD CULTURAL HERITAGE

Bosnia and Herzegovina has three tangible assets included in the UNESCO list, namely the Old Bridge in Mostar, the Mehmed-pasha Sokolović Bridge in Višegrad and, since 2016, the Medieval Tombstones. At the UNESCO summit in Istanbul in 2016, a decision was made to add stećci to the World Heritage List. The list includes a total of 28 necropolises, of which 20 are located in BiH,

three in Serbia, three in Montenegro, and two in Croatia. The first initiative for the nomination of the tombstones to the World Cultural Heritage List was initiated by Šefik Bešliagić.

"By including the tombstones on the UNESCO list, not only are the sites protected, but so is the phenomenon of the stećak, which is of exceptional importance. In this way, all tombstones enjoy at least some legislative protection. Citizens are certainly helpful in their further preservation; they can submit a petition to the Commission to Preserve National Monuments. Also, individuals and any other interested parties can, through local communities, religious communities, and non-governmental organizations, define certain program and project goals for the protection and preservation of stećak tombstones," says Šabović.

PROMOTION AND FORMAL EDUCATION

The promotion of cultural heritage is very diverse. The most common are professional promotions, which, through symposia or conferences, inform the world academic community about Bosnian medieval tombstones. Then there are tourist promotions and, finally, the activities of non-governmental organizations which, by organizing lectures, exhibitions or similar activities, introduce the general public to the stećak phenomenon.

"I am afraid that the activities so far are not enough. Although there is cooperation of official institutions with non-governmental organizations, that is not enough. I am aware of it because I am a participant and organizer of certain activities and I believe that it must be on a much higher level," said Šabović.

In 2013, he conducted questionnaires for primary and secondary school students in Sarajevo Canton. In cooperation with Education Builds BiH, the Ministry of Education and Science of Sarajevo Canton, and the Educational and Pedagogical Institute of KS, he surveyed about a thousand participants. Unfortunately, the results showed a gap in knowledge regarding stećci.

He believes that it is principally up to the pedagogues themselves to decide whether and how they will deal with Bosnian tombstones, and that this must not be a sporadic phenomenon but a systemically regulated practice.

STEĆAK AS A SOUVENIR

The technique of making the souvenirs is reminiscent of making real Bosnian tombstones, but of course in miniature.

"Everything which can make the craft easier or to get the desired shape is used. A mold is then made. Plaster with certain additives is poured into the molds, then it is dried and painted," explains Šabović, and he adds that his tombstones have reached all parts of the world.

Mostly people from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosnian diaspora decide to buy these souvenirs. There are far fewer foreigners, because, as he says, it is difficult to explain to them what it is about.

However, this is not always the case. One of his crafted tombstones is in the Museum of Innocence in Istanbul.

"During Orhan Pamuk's visit to Sarajevo, the then Minister of Culture of the Sarajevo Canton presented him with a stećak. It was quite surprising for him, he didn't know what it was about. After it was explained to him, he said that he would exhibit it in the museum," says Šabović.

When it comes to the representation of souvenirs, he faces the issue of great competition and cheap and mass production of souvenirs. "Those who are guided only by profit 'drown' those who make authentic souvenirs," concludes Senad Šabović.

The most famous necropolis of Bosnian medieval tombstones is in Radimlja near Stolac. Grčka glavica near Konjic, Dugo polje on Blidinje near Jablanica, Boljuni near Stolac and Ravanjska vrata on Kupres are also well-known. The most famous individual stećak tombstone is the Zgoščanski stećak, found in the vicinity of Kakanj, and today it is in the National Museum in Sarajevo.





THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF B&H: HISTORIC FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

Written by: Amira Banjić
Photography: Denis Ruvic

Since February 1st, 1888, the National Museum has struggled with financial problems. However, that has not stopped it from becoming one of the most important scientific, educational, and cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

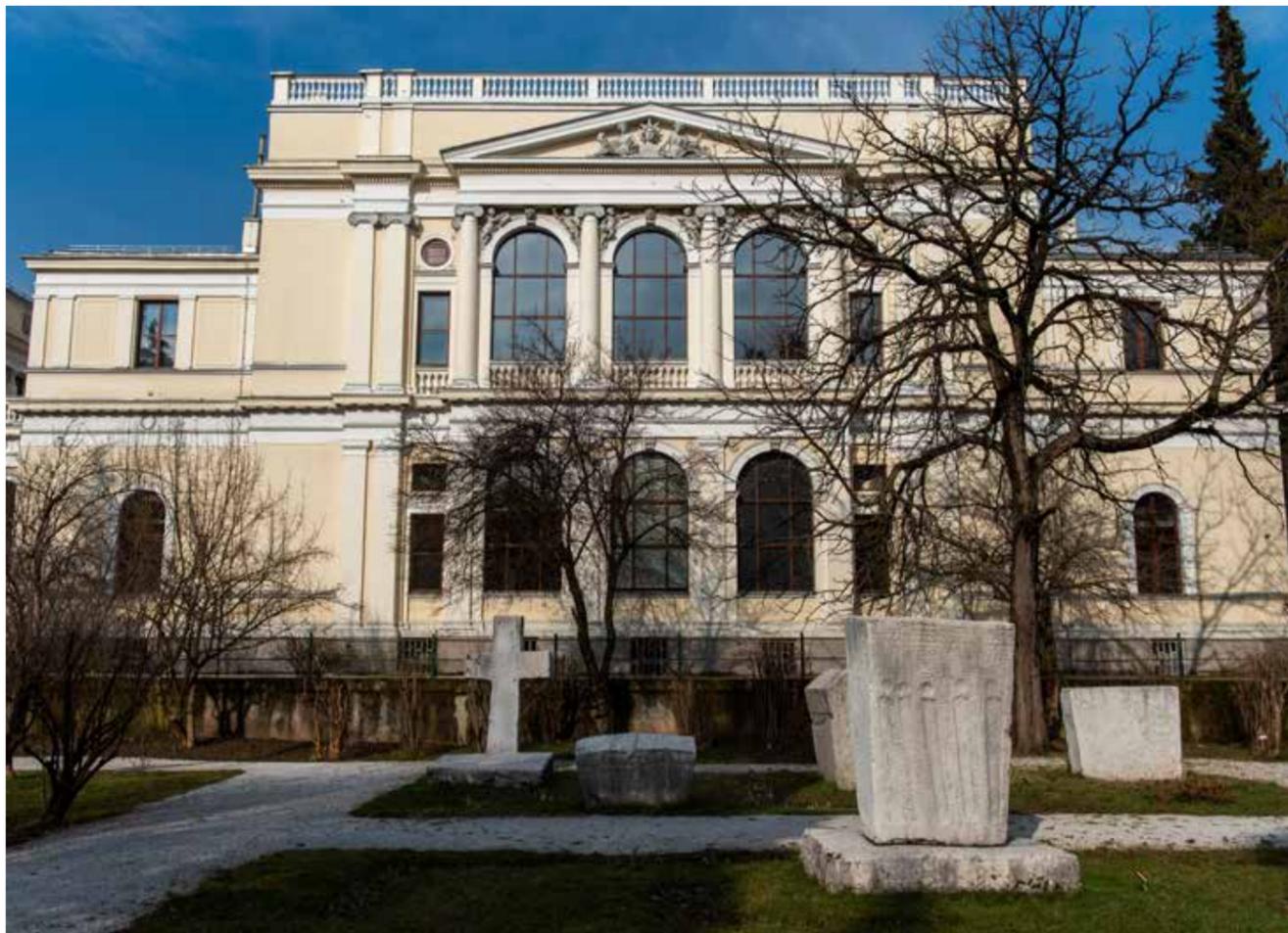
Many intellectuals in Bosnia and Herzegovina petitioned for a national museum for decades, finally leading to its establishment in 1888. Historian Semir Hadžimusić says that the political, strategic, and economic goals set by the Austro-Hungarian administration for Bosnia

and Herzegovina required European literacy levels and mass education. BiH was also a poorly explored Balkan country at the end of the 19th century, and it attracted many scientists' curiosity, particularly those from Austria-Hungary. Unfortunately, there were also several "quasi-scientists" interested in the region, and they removed or destroyed many cultural monuments during the first years of the occupation. As a result, more concrete measures were implemented in establishing the museum and preserving BiH's rich culture. The museum's first director was Kosta Herman.

"The state supported the museum in numerous ways, including providing material resources and collecting objects and research material for even the lowest-level state agencies. Within a year after its founding, the museum launched a publication entitled *The Herald of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (*Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja BiH*), which collected curators' and associates' research for public consumption. Following the Herald's publication, it became clear that there also needed to be a German-language museum publication to make the results of the work known to the

wider scientific community. This is how a parallel museum publication was launched under the title *Scientific Communiqué of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (*Wissenschaftliche Mitteilungen aus Bosnien und der Herzegovina*)," says Hadžimusić.

Today, the National Museum consists of the Library, the Department of Archaeology, the Department of Ethnology, and the Department of Natural Sciences. In addition, a significant area of the museum is occupied by a Botanical Garden, which was a very important element of European museums at the time of its opening.



Hadžimusić explains how the development of the museum in the Austro-Hungarian state took place: "It was necessary that the space for the museum be adequate, not only to ensure further fruitful work but also because it would be representative of the Austro-Hungarian mission in BiH. According to the famous Karl Paržik, a new National Museum building was built between 1909 and 1913. It was a complex with four pavilions interconnected by terraces, with an inner atrium for the Botanical Garden. Constructing the new museum facility cost nearly two million Austro-Hungarian Kronas (equivalent to about 18 million Bosnian marks today). It was among the first, and most important buildings in Southeast Europe built specifically as a museum."

Ana Marić, Head of the Department of Archaeology, says the basic task of the museum is to collect, care for, and present both cultural and natural artifacts. She also highlights the museum's pedagogical and social roles in society. In addition to permanent exhibitions in three departments, they also organize thematic collections and exhibition tours. Every year, International Museum Day and the National Museum's birthday are celebrated with lectures, children's activities, and similar special events. Since its founding, the museum has been publishing its own magazine entitled Glasnik ZMBiH.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has meant the suspension of almost all museum activities that involve inter-personal contact, some activities have been able to continue. This includes work on collections and exhibitions and scientific and research work.

"Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Prehistoric Period is the name of a permanent exhibition that has been underway for the last few years

and is probably the largest museum project since the last war. The last exhibition of its kind was opened to the public in 1988 to celebrate the museum's centenary. In addition to the two existing permanent exhibitions (covering BiH in the Ancient period and the Middle Ages), the completion of this exhibition will complete the picture of the cultural development of BiH from prehistory to the present day. World-famous material from the sites such as Butmir, Badanj, Donja Dolina, Glasinac, and others will finally be available to the public," explains Marić.

EXHIBITS AVAILABLE ONLY AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

One of the most significant exhibits kept in the National Museum is a copy of the Passover Haggadah, a Jewish illuminated codex known worldwide as the Sarajevo Haggadah (Haggadah in Hebrew meaning "story" or "narration").

There are invaluable exhibits about art and culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina in each department, covering a wide historical range. The Department of Ethnology, which is in its own separate building, contains two permanent exhibitions: Dioramas with Models and The Life and Culture of the Urban Populace in 19th Century Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the ground floor of the building is the thematic exhibition Sarajevo Fragments of Safavid Carpets from the 17th century. The first drawing from the Paleolithic period – an engraving on a rock from Badanj cave near Stolac – can be found in the National Museum. One can also find the 1380 Charter of King Tvrtko I Kotromanić addressed to Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić and the Charter of King Stjepan Tomaš from 1459. It is also important to mention the large collections of flora and fauna, consisting of half a million insects and nearly 130,000 plants. The National Museum also houses the richest collection of meteorites in the former Yugoslavia, while the



Botanical Garden contains several thousand endemic, indigenous, and exotic plants.

I AM THE MUSEUM!

Arguments over funding caused the museum's closure from 2012-2015. Civic action contributed most significantly to resolving this situation. Through the "Ja sam Muzej" ("I am the Museum") campaign, both Bosnians and internationals were reminded of the difficult situation in which the museum finds itself. The campaign was aimed at changing the public image of the National Museum, principally by pointing out the difficult situation in which the museum workers had found themselves.

The campaign's webpage says, "Through a series of philanthropic, symbolic and artistic actions, the public in BiH and beyond was

sensitized to the value and multicultural character of the collection that the museum preserves and, most importantly, we managed to get the National Museum back on political decision makers' agendas. The 'Ja sam Muzej' project consisted of artistic interventions such as a series of portraits of the Museum workers with insights into their work and life and a set of literary pieces about the museum by prominent BiH and regional authors, writers, and essayists. It was a campaign that involved all the relevant social actors and public figures, and all citizens, sending a message about the urgency of resolving the status of the National Museum."

After three years, the museum reopened. With all the richness of its diversity, the fight for the museum mirrors the struggle for Bosnia and Herzegovina's future.





figures, she singles out her project with the current ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Czech Republic, Martina Mlinarević, where, as she says, she took matters into her own hands and approached the shoot differently.

"Martina and her partner Goran came to the studio with the goal of photographing them together. We spent hours talking and I refused to do studio photography. It was too ordinary and planned for me. I wanted to catch them together. The essence of their story. Then I suggested that I spend a day with them in their apartment as they went about their daily routine, as if I wasn't with them. That is how such an honest photo story was created instead of a studio portrait," recounts Redžepagić. It was a series of photographs that won her first place at the Rovinj Photodays Festival.

RIGHTS OF PHOTOGRAPHERS IN BIH

The fact that being a freelance photographer is not easy is illustrated by a particular administrative flaw in the law system. As Redžepagić points out, in the Federation of BiH's official classification of professions, until this year, code 74.2 stated: "Traditional photographer without the use of digital technology", demonstrating administrative obsolescence and maladaptation to today's way of doing professional photography. However, she emphasizes that this does not necessarily reflect the situation on the ground, and that finding a job is not a difficult task.

This passionate artist is not just into photography. Ten years ago, she was in fact fashioning handicrafts with a needle and thread – something in which she says she could no longer imagine herself working. She advises young photographers who have yet to find their audience to not even look for it.

"Photography should be the only focus. The audience and clients will find their way to you. Even today, some of my favorite photos are the ones with the least 'likes'. It should never be a measure of your quality or success. It is very important to separate work from this aspect nowadays. It sounds selfish, but it is more important to listen to your instinct than to be guided by applause, likes and the taste of the audience," concludes Aida Redžepagić.

PEOPLE AS INSPIRATION, PHOTOGRAPHY AS A JOY

Written by: Kristina Gadže
Photography: Aida Redžepagić

Realizing that photography was her true love, Aida Redžepagić, a Kakanj girl with a Sarajevo address, left her job as a university professor and devoted herself completely to what brings her the most joy. Her first

artistic activities began in childhood, a talent she inherited from her mother. Nowadays, it is very difficult to leave a safe job and start working as a freelance artist, but, she says, she has not repented.



"Before I quit my job, I was just imagining 50 year-old Aida remembering how she used to love photography, but was afraid to leave her job, never daring to explore that part of herself. Just as I inherited a talent for art from my mum, I think I inherited good business sense from my dad, meaning understanding how to run a business with discipline and invest appropriately. These are very important components that artists often forget," explains Redžepagić, who describes herself as a "fashion photographer in love with documentary photography".

She has tried out a number of photography styles, such as product photography and wedding photography, but she is most attracted to working with people, because that is where she can express herself the most.

PEOPLE AS INSPIRATION

She says that her lectures allowed her to organize a photography course for students, where she recognized many talented young artists.

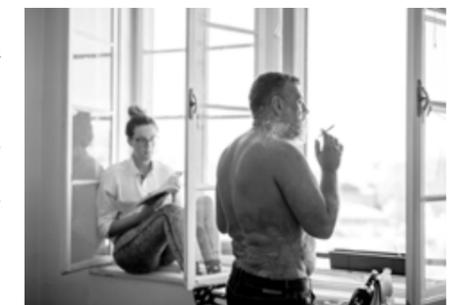
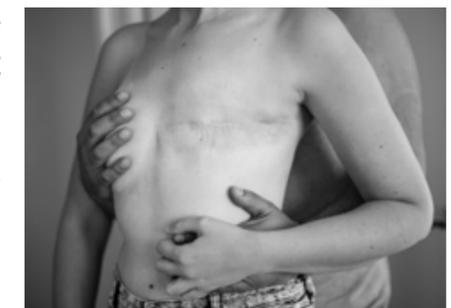
"It would be difficult for me to single out just a few of them, but what I can say is that rivalry is the best thing that can happen to any of us.

Every time I see an excellent editorial made by one of my colleagues, I rejoice with equal zeal, but I also get the desire to do something new myself. I think that with lack of healthy competition and rivalry, we would all be worse at the jobs we do," Redžepagić points out.

She believes that photography in general has flourished in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the last 10 years. In addition to participating in festivals like the Rovinj Photodays Festival, Aida is also active on social networks and has close to 15,000 followers on her Instagram account.

"Social networks have certainly increased interest in photography. People tend to have a negative connotation of photography on social networks, because we automatically imagine never-ending identikit selfies. However, I also see the beautiful expression of young people who photograph nature, food, portraits, documentary photography... They capture great moments and shots, and sometimes all the equipment they have is a phone camera," explains Redžepagić.

In her own photography, she likes to capture real, honest and unposed moments. Among her most intimate collaborations with public





JELENA & MERIMA: BALKAN SOUL EXPRESSED THROUGH MUSIC

Written by: Luka Čavar
 Photography: Miki Olabbarri Powell, Marko Ercegović, VTF Studio

As Jelena Milušić's rare contralto voice caresses the room, one of the world's most famous accordionists, Merima Ključo, accompanies her. They have both chosen music as their vocation and they call their collaboration destiny.

Their album *Lume* contains ten cover songs from around the world and five original songs inspired by the Romanian, Croatian, Kosovan, and Sephardic traditions.

A LABOR OF LOVE

Jelena speaks of how the song selection was an intense, but wonderful process. With some of the songs, they immediately knew they were the right choice, but with others it took a little longer. Both suggested songs, and it was essential for all the songs chosen to have the same arrangement and for the program to work together in harmony. Merima produced the album itself, and, for her, *Lume* really is the product of a wonderful collaboration.

"'Lume' means love. This album is all about that to me," she says.

For Jelena, working on this album has been a great experience, and it has enabled her to continue to learn and grow as a musician.

"We often forget that lyrics are the basis of interpretation for a song. We are too focused on accuracy, technique, and beauty, and in that process, we forget to convey the message that the lyrics carry. Merima pointed this out to me and helped me become aware of this very

important part of my creative personality. The entire process of making this album was amazing – from the song selection and preparation to rehearsal and recording, and above all the special feeling of getting to perform live with Merima," says Jelena.

Jelena says that the reactions to their album have been extremely positive and emotional.

"We had the opportunity to perform in the region and the rest of Europe, as well as in the US. Regardless of the region, the audience feels with us, and you can sense their admiration. We also receive compliments on the performance itself and the energy between Merima and me. Merima's composition is especially positively welcomed because it is full of surprises," she adds.

The duo has also revived Aleksa Šantić's fairy-tale poem, *Snowflakes*. It all started with Merima proposing to produce Jelena's solo album, which she gladly accepted.

"I really liked what was written because it brought me back to the carefree days of my childhood and revived Mostar from the most

beautiful memories. We decided to record audio and video for *Snowflakes* and announce my solo album with that song," says Jelena.

Merima adds that Aleksa Šantić's songs are very visual. "You just can see every word and thought he wrote, which inspired and encouraged me to create an image with sound," she says.

INSPIRED BY SEPHARDIC MELODIES

In their solo careers, they both find similar sources of inspiration. The adaptation of the hit classic, "Catch me in the suburbs," performed by Merima with the famous Croatian jazz musician Matija Dedić, was recognized with a Porin Award. Merima says that she enjoys the recognition of the other musicians, but she is especially glad that people from the region are not only familiar with her work, but have also recognized it.

Much of her inspiration comes from the region and Sephardic Jewish music, which can be felt on *Lume*. Her love for this music started at the age of fourteen.

"I was walking down the Sarajevo streets and as I passed by an instrument store, I heard a wonderful melody. The sound was somehow familiar to me, but different from anything I had heard before. I couldn't resist the urge to walk into the store and ask what kind of music it was. I was told it was Sephardic music. I was and still am fascinated by that music, so I did a series of compositions and arrangements on Sephardic themes. My composition, 'Sarajevo Haggadah: Book Music' was a great success, and five years after its debut and numerous performances, it is still performed all over America," says Merima.

Jelena and Attila Aksoj recently recorded their second album, *Yo Hanino, Tu Hanina*, which also takes listeners into the world of Sephardic music.

"Sephardic music is special and magical. People feel it even though they don't understand the lyrics because it is listened to with the heart. In addition, the Sephardic Jewish music is part of our cultural heritage. Given that there are not many artists in our country and region who perform Sephardic songs, I think it is very important to preserve this tradition," concludes Jelena.



ENIS ČIŠIĆ FROM BOSNIA TO MARVEL

Written by: Anja Zulić
Illustration: Enis Čišić

Enis Čišić is obsessed with his job. He is a freelance visual artist from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) whose first encounter with a pencil – inspired by pictures from encyclopedias, picture books and a favorite television program – began in the 1980s.

Although he absorbed ideas from various media, his creativity was mostly awakened after watching animated or feature films, after which Enis would take a pencil and try to reproduce on paper what he saw on the screen. Ever since then, the strong desire to express himself through drawing simply grew and grew.

“Proof of my interest in the visual narrative are the drawings I found in a photo album, probably made when I was six years old. They are scenes of a plane fight that I saw in a partisan film. I would set up the planes and start drawing their positions and the dynamics of the fight in the air until the paper was completely covered. It was all forming before my eyes as I drew. I did not separate it out through frames, but it was all one drawing until the paper became congested with lines, and the shapes of the planes could no longer be recognized. It was only later that I learned that image montage has a better effect, and that’s when my first comic was created,” Enis recalls.

BETWEEN AGENCY WORK AND FREELANCING

Before putting his career as an illustrator and comic book artist first, Enis worked in the advertising industry. However, he wanted a change and decided to leave his agency job. He was grateful for everything he had learned working in advertising, and from the people with whom he had worked, but the desire to dedicate himself to comics was stronger.

“The change happened when I got hired for Marvel Comics and it wasn’t possible to work in two places at the same time. My decision was

the right one and very important for my career, and if I hadn’t made it I probably wouldn’t be where I am now. However, I do that quite often. I change my course because I like changes and I try to get out of my comfort zone as often as possible,” he adds.

Enis is interested and motivated by lots of different things. So far, he has done illustrations for books, background illustrations for commercials, animation, and storyboards for movies. He collaborates with various artists, from

musicians to directors and writers. He says that he likes to cooperate and socialize with people who know more than him, and that he does not limit himself in the way he shapes his or someone else’s ideas.

THE COMIC SCENE IN THE BALKANS

Comics are part of a large industry and go hand in hand with the gaming and film industries. He collaborates with various artists, from

productive countries in the field of the ninth art, with an astronomical number of annual editions between them.

Enis explains that the Balkans had a long tradition of comics before the war. There were serious comics and an even more serious culture of reading them, but the situation changed after the war. The comic scene in the Balkans has started to develop again, but BiH has lagged behind.

“We don’t have a single comic book publisher, only a small number of enthusiasts who probably have to finance their own publications. The situation is much better in the neighboring countries because there are a lot of quality comic book publishers. Fibra is definitely the number one in Croatia, and there’s Darkwood and Happy Thursday (Veseli četvrtak) in Serbia,” he says.

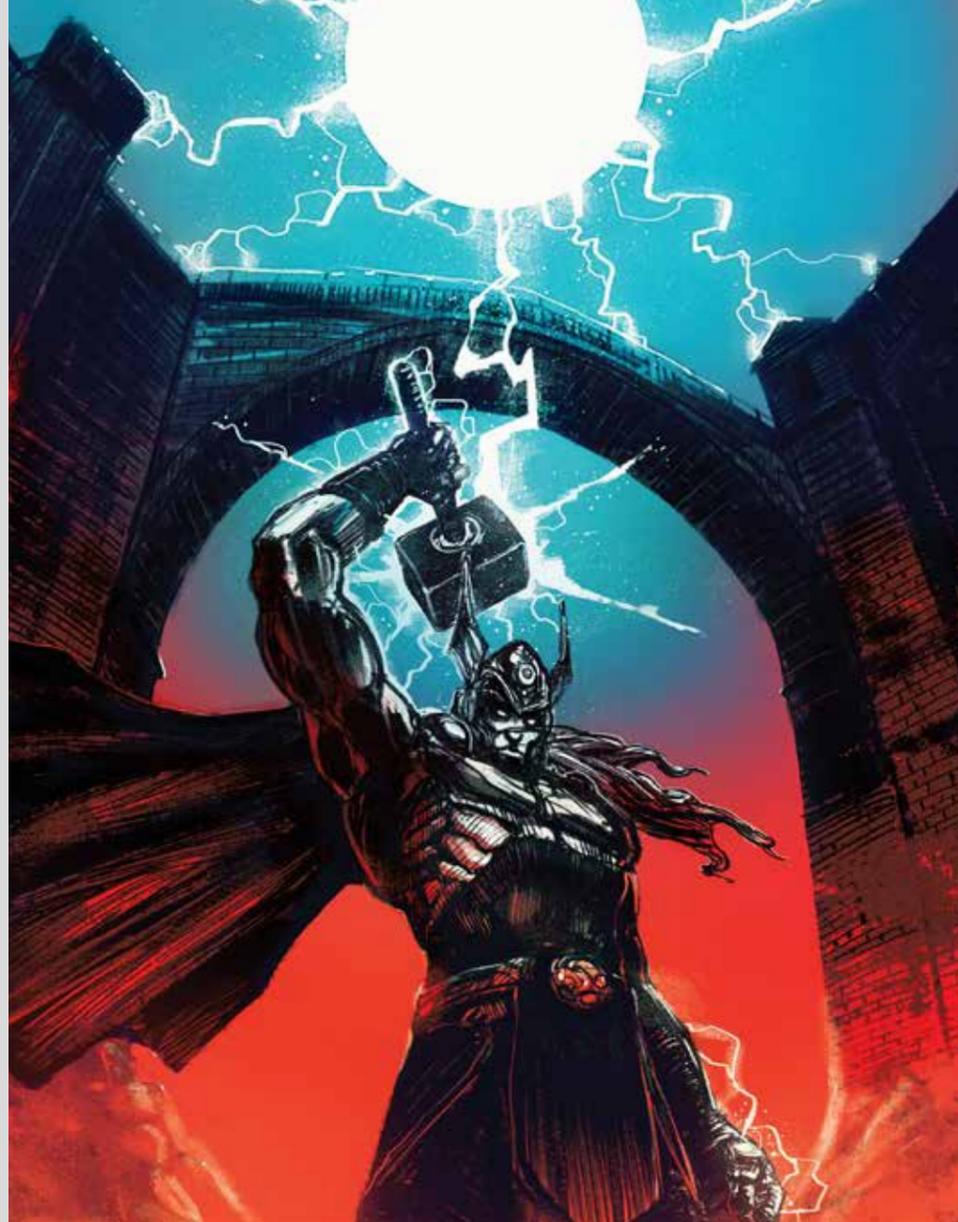
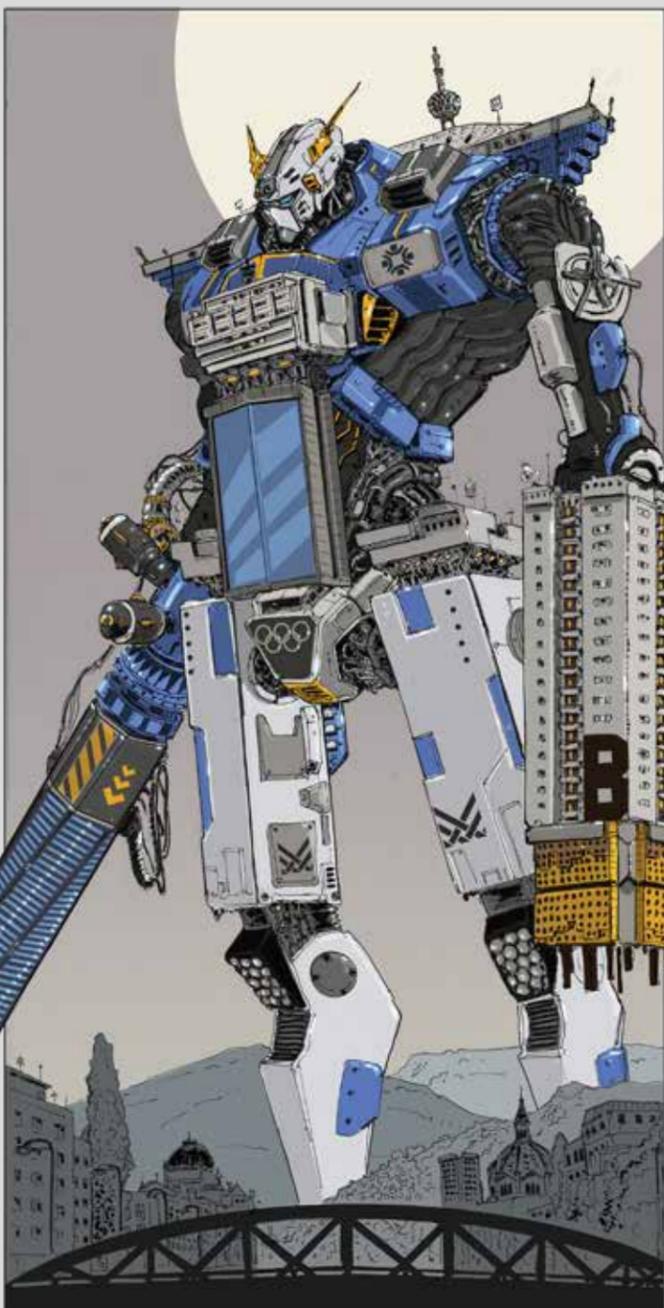
He adds however that BiH can boast of comic shops in several cities, as well as comic festivals. He singles out Salon stripa in Laktaši and Mostrip in Mostar.

“These people do a great job of promoting comics through exhibitions, forums, lectures, workshops and the like. There are interesting statistics that I have heard about, that there are approximately 47 comic book festivals in the former Yugoslavia, which is a larger number than in the whole of France, which has a very strong comic market. But again, all cartoonists are looking for a job with foreign publishers, because in the end there aren’t enough readers in this area to be able to make a living from the art,” explains Enis.

WHEN A LITTLE BOY’S DREAM CAME TRUE

Enis used to practice drawing by studying the works of Marvel artists. As a boy, he would copy John Busceme’s Spiderman, and then as an adult he was actually given the opportunity to draw characters like Spiderman, Iron Man and the Hulk. The work for Marvel Comics came as a result of many years of work on his portfolio, and a little luck.

“Luckily, Marvel Scout for Talents, CB Cebulski, came to this area in search of new cartoonists at the Mafest comics festival, which is organized every year in Makarska. It was a unique opportunity to show my work. There were a lot of cartoonists from the region and I honestly didn’t expect to get the job. After talking to Cebulski, I got a few rehearsal comic scripts and had to choose one of those scripts out of which I did six test pages of a comic. Following that, I got a contract and started working on my first project immediately.” And so his story with Marvel began.





RELIVING THE SIEGE OF SARAJEVO THROUGH COMICS

The public might also know this talented cartoonist through illustrations of the comic *The Secret of Nikola Tesla*, based on one of the stories from *The Secret of Raspberry Jam* (Tajna džema od malina), by the famous Bosnian writer and journalist Karim Zaimović (1971-1995) who tragically passed at the end of the war.

“Writer and journalist Aleksandar Brezar came up with the idea to turn one of the short stories from the collection *The Secret of Raspberry Jam* into a comic, so he got in touch with me. Working on that comic was very important to me because I got a chance to adapt a piece of what Karim had created. It was also an opportunity to revive his work through the medium that Karim loved so much. I brought a lot of

my memories from the siege period into the comic. I wanted to visualize the scenes of the city from that time and create a portrait of the city as I remember it. Karim wrote texts about comics as well as scripts for his future comics at a time when I was reading and dreaming about working on a script,” explains Enis.

HOW IS A COMIC CREATED?

All comic book lovers appreciate the work put into it and Enis points out how drawing a comic is actually a multidisciplinary job: a cartoonist must be a director of photography, character and costume designer, set designer, cameraman, and editor. Each bit of work on a comic requires extensive preparation and the amount of work to be done depends on the number of pages and the complexity of the story.

“A cartoonist who has practiced the craft well uses creative processes to translate the text into pictures and thus tell the story. With that story, you communicate directly or indirectly with the audience in the hope that you will awaken certain feelings in them, which is why comics are as important as any other art,” he says.

Enis’s work begins with reading a page of the script which he breaks into several pictures that describe the transition between the beginning and end of a certain sequence.

“After that, I draw a storyboard or a rough sketch of the comic page. It takes me three to four days to complete one page that has an average of 5 to 8 frames, while for example for Marvel I had to work one page a day due to short deadlines. I have my own rhythm by which I complete my daily tasks, depending on the project and deadlines, so I don’t really pay attention to working hours.”

Enis’s plans for the future are constantly changing, but his goals, he says, remain the same, and he wants to continue doing the things he dreamed about as a boy.

“Some of these dreams are difficult to make happen here, so my direction is oriented across the border. I try to connect my experiences of using different tools in visual art, be it comics, illustration or animation, because I think it is important to adapt today. Technology is changing, and so are the tools I use. What is more important is that ideas and concepts must be the pillar of everything,” concludes illustrator and comic artist Enis Čišić.



FREEDOM AND LOVE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE EYES OF ALMIN ZRNO

Written by: Adelisa Mašić
Photography: Almin Zrno



Almin Zrno’s love for photography started long ago, when, following his intuition, he knocked on the door of the famous CEDUS photography club. This introduced him to the world of his future profession. His career has been marked by various photographic expressions. Today, he finds his expression in nudes and portraits.

One of the most important photographers in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Almin Zrno has held 18 solo exhibitions in BiH and abroad. He is a member of the Artists’ Association of Applied Arts and Designers of BiH, is the author of two monographs, and is the winner of seven prestigious Collegium Artisticum awards for best photography. Zrno also has the status of a prominent independent artist of Sarajevo Canton.

He describes himself as a completely ordinary man, in love with life and all that life offers us. He does not like to be thought of as an art photographer, but a creator, or at least trying to be so. He draws inspiration from everything around him and transforms it into his famous achromatic works.

“Most of my photos are made in valerian achromatic colors so everyone could color them in their own way. Each of us, when faced with a work of art, should experience what he himself is. Such colors evoke the most empathy in me personally because my dreams are also made of such colors,” explains Almin Zrno.

He had been involved in documentary photography for a long time before one of his most famous works, *Mother of Srebrenica* (2001),



marked a turning point in his artistic work. Because of this work, he decided not to pursue the genre anymore.

"The photograph *Mother of Srebrenica* was taken in 2001. After I took it, I realized that I couldn't build my happiness on someone else's misfortune, because no war photo has ever stopped a war. We are constantly questioning the past and doing historical revisionism... but art's place is not there, it is somewhere else. If I continued to work in that direction, I would annihilate myself, which would lead nowhere," he says.

Zrno believes that art is a strong drive that a person has within oneself. His leitmotif is to love the art that lies within ourselves, not ourselves in art. His work has now taken on new contours, in the form of nude photography, which, he says, offers him countless possibilities for revelations and discoveries of both body and spirit.

Atypical for this region is Zrno's creation of his *Apology of Eros* monograph. It consists of 53 photographs divided into two cycles – 'Fresco' and 'Nude' – and two professional texts written by Professor Dr. Amela Hadžimejlić and Professor Dr. Fehim Hadžimuhamedović.

"It is not only about sensitivity toward the physical, the act, but also sensitivity toward the

spirit. We all have masks which we skillfully put on the minute we wake up. Therefore, my photographs are maskless, showing people naked and free and, at the same time, small and fragile. We need to dive into ourselves and find ourselves, because that is where the center of the universe and the center of all our problems and solutions are, and we can only do that if we are completely naked. This is my 'Apology of Eros'. It is my response to the world around me and a mirror of my reality," explains Zrno, addressing the underlying concept of his monograph.

He adds that his photography cycles, through certain gestures and poses, suggest certain emotional states, forcing us to celebrate love and freedom, thus counterbalancing the nonsense of the world we are surrounded by today.

Through the promotion of himself and his art outside Bosnia and Herzegovina, he also promotes the country he comes from. In this way, he tries to break down stereotypes about this area. "I try to raise awareness of certain taboos in our society and break down prejudices. The issue is that some people have limited art to what is dark, negative. They insist that art can only be of that realm, and we are all expected to follow suit. I hope that one day we will reach the level of freedom at which we can truly be free," he says.

Almin Zrno does not consider photography a job, but a love, and for him love is not possession but giving. In fact, this has become his personal maxim. "As soon as the desire to own something appears, it is no longer love," he says.





THE GUITARIST'S OFFICE IN BANJA LUKA

Written by: Nataša Tomić
Photography: Dragana Babić

All guitar owners know how difficult it is to find a luthier to repair their instrument. One 'guitar doctor' from Banja Luka can fix your stringed friend and his name is Dario Gajić – himself a musician who has played in several Banja Luka bands.

Dario Gajić started repairing guitars for one very simple reason: his own ones started to break down. At the time, there was no one to show him how to do it and he had problems with purchasing parts and equipment. He tells me that the most basic parts were unavailable back then, but that now a lot can be found here. Whatever he cannot buy in our stores, he orders online from other countries. As for learning, it is a gradual process and it all stems from need and curiosity.

"First, I wanted to fix my guitars and then I started fixing my friends'. After some time, people I didn't know started coming to me. Learning about these things did not begin consciously and intentionally, instead my interest and imagination were key. When you manage to achieve what you imagine, it pushes you forward. Over time, I decided that this was something I wanted to do for a living. And the learning doesn't stop. Ever."

In time, many people's guitars had begun to arrive at his door. The guitars of Dženan Lončarević, Goran Kovačić, Bojan Mikulić Mikula, Dragan Moconja, Arsen Čarkić, Jasmin Komić and many others have been fixed by Dario. He also regularly maintains the guitars of Nikola Pejaković Kolja. Last year alone, Dario 'cured' more than 400 guitars.

He points out that there is no easy or difficult guitar problem, but only repairs that are more time-intensive or technically demanding. The most common problem is wires placed high in relation to the neck, which can lead to instrument misalignment or intonation errors. In these cases, the instrument becomes uncomfortable and uneasy to play.

"First, you check whether the neck is in the correct position. Then, you check the height of the strings on the nut and on the bridge, which are different depending on the guitar model. Then, you check if the neck arch and the strings that follow the arch are properly placed. Each of these is optimized according to the manufacturer's recommendation or according to our personal experience. All these elements form one system. The better each of these parts is adjusted, the more successful the overall result. The final result is reviewed, and the whole cycle is repeated as needed. The intonation on the guitars is adjusted where possible, visually inspected, measured and listened to. It is a harmony between individual elements and the whole," explains Dario.

He is assisted by his brother Stefan. Dario says that Stefan nurtures similar values to him, so they are a good team. He also points out that a key factor of success in business is a combination of knowledge and trust.

"You do as much as you know and can, but you say what you don't know or can't do. And you



adapt to the requirements of the owner of the instrument who entrusted you with their precious guitar. As for music, I believe that the key to success is the ability to pack into a message what is going on inside your head, no matter if it is a feeling, a sound, a word or a picture," he tells me.

His learning and desire for knowledge and improvement took him to New York to esteemed producers and music masters: "I would probably have stayed there, if another dream hadn't come true and that was to play with Kolja and learn from the best. That experience was priceless. I never regretted that decision. New York is still there, and the people from the business are in it."

Since he has been surrounded by rock music and instruments since childhood, the choice of music as an occupation was a logical step. The music of Pink Floyd, The Allman Brothers and The Doors has been an integral part of his life since childhood. He got his first vinyl at the age of six and he still has it today. Although the owner of a music collection and hi-fi equipment, he was never interested in following trends.

"The first guitars available to me were mostly bad. The quest for better laid the foundations of what I do today. Since few people knew anything about it in my community it was not easy to get information. I managed everything on my own," says Dario.

He has played in many Banja Luka bands such as Karavan, Vizantijski sljedbenici, Carte Blanche, Metropolis, Hot Dogs Blues Band, Vanja The Frog and Moondance. As well as playing with Kolja and Grobovlasnici, he is also in charge of the sound at Kolja's performances. Dario is also currently a student at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, majoring in recording and sound design. He also collaborates with ARTIST Center for Musical Instruments and Studio Equipment.

His "Guitarist's Office" is in the process of renovation which is a step forward in his career. He is currently working on furnishing the interior and he says that he will also make the job official.

"I'm glad that this interview is happening during this period because it will record how it all started, which I believe will be good motivation for the future. Everything will be made official soon, which gives me great pleasure. As far as plans are concerned, currently the emphasis is on speeding up and facilitating some work procedures by applying more modern technologies, which will also improve the quality of the services. There are also two good contracts waiting for us which makes us very happy!"



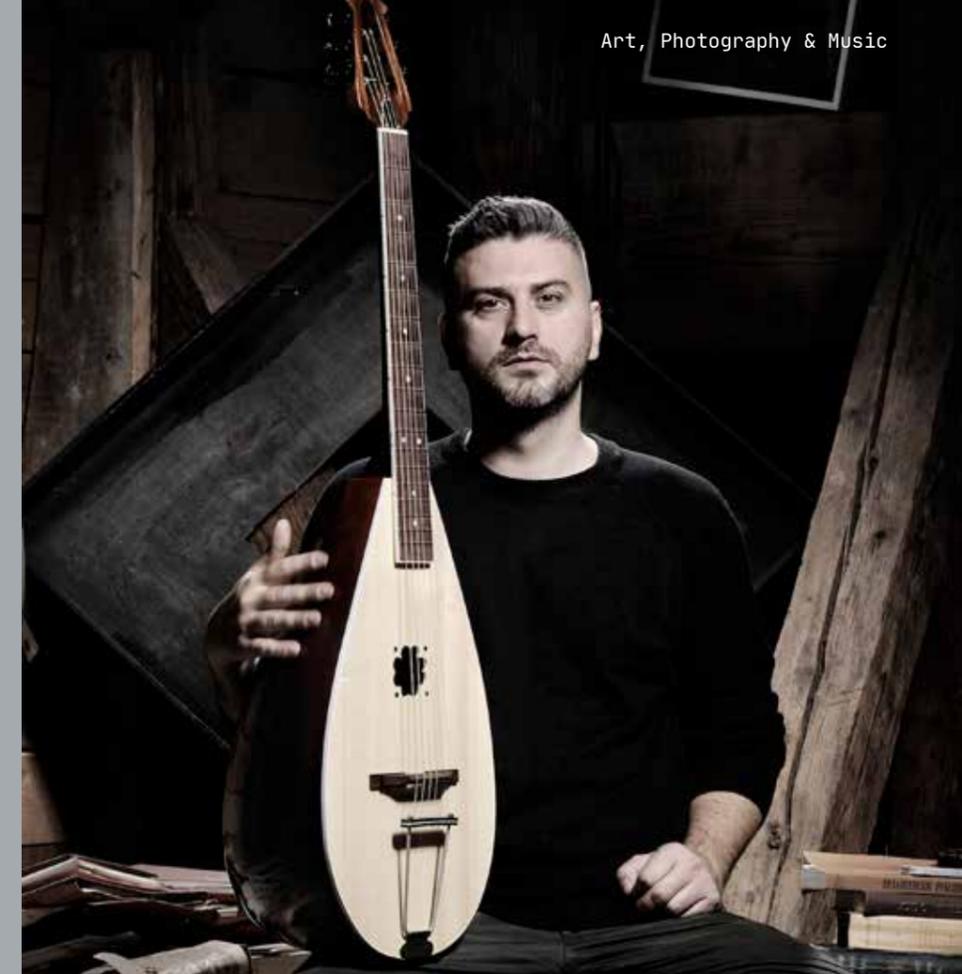
SEVDAH: THE PERFECT MARRIAGE OF PRESERVATION AND INNOVATION

Author: Bojana Radić
Photography: Private collections - Biljana Krstić, Damir Imamović, Dunja Bahtijarević, Vera Miloševska

Originally connected to Bosnia and Herzegovina, sevdalinka has crossed its borders and is now deeply rooted within the musical trends of the Western Balkans.

Sevdalinka (also known as sevdah) is the folk musical expression of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The word sevdalinka comes from the Arabic word sawda which means 'black bile' – one of the four bodily 'humors', which was believed to determine the melancholic state. In the Bosnian, sevdah took on the meaning of longing and of a zealous and sorrowful love. It is not possible to determine the exact period of the origin of sevdalinka, but it is assumed that it was created right after the Ottoman conquest of medieval Bosnia when the first urban settlements emerged. As they settled, the Ottomans brought with them certain musical traditions and melodies, which were representative particularly of the Asia Minor area. These melodies are part of a melodic system called makam and have their own characteristics, which the peoples of the Balkans adapted to their emotions with their singing. Sevdalinka is primarily an urban folk song of Bosniaks, but it is also popular throughout Southeast Europe.

Musically, sevdalinka is characterized by a light, slow tempo and rich harmony, which leave a melancholy feeling with the listener. They are very structurally complex songs and imbued with emotions, and they are traditionally performed



with a lot of passion and soul. Like any art form, the traditional music of this area has its laws, history and future, and many performers opt for more modern performances of older versions by adding their personal stamp.

"The sevdah I sing is a wonderful genre that combines poetry and music in a miraculous way. I see it as a field of new possibilities," reveals Damir Imamović, Bosnian musician, performer of traditional music, and singer-songwriter of sevdalinka.

He has performed in several bands and founded the Damir Imamović Sevdah Takht band in

2012. He also writes his own songs and says that nothing more than the inexplicable beauty of a text or melody will drive him to record a song. The song "Pjevat ćemo šta nam srce zna" (We'll Sing What Our Heart Knows) performed by Amira Medunjanin was written by Damir. The album Singer of Tales received the Best of Europe award after being at the top of the Transglobal chart for months. Of the 100 best world music albums, he took sixth place and the album was also declared the best in the category of traditional music by the German Association of Music Critics.





When talking about the best in the world of *sevdalinka*, it is impossible not to mention Biljana Krstić from Serbia. After a career in pop music, in 2001 she founded Bistrić band through which she promotes ethno-musical heritage. So far, they have released four albums: *Bistrić*, *Zapisi*, *Tarpoš* and *Izvorište*. *Tarpoš* featured in British world music magazine *Songlines*' 'Top of the world' selection, as well as winning French magazine *TRAD'Mag*'s 'Bravos' award for lyrics of the month.

In addition to many other numerous awards, Biljana Krstić and Bistrić received the 'Vitez srpske muzike' (Knight of Serbian Music) award in 2009, and in 2015 Krstić and Miki Stanojević won the Grand Prix award for the music from the film *Branio sam mladu Bosnu* (I Defended Young Bosnia).

"Those songs of distant ancestors both make me happy and heal me at the same time. When I just remember how much time I spent with old music and audio recordings, with archive and field recordings... I listened to them God knows how many times, analyzed them, and learned to sing them. The source of traditional texts is always clear and strong. Those beautiful songs strike directly into the heart and flood the banks of all your senses. You feel as if time has been suspended, which is complemented by immense satisfaction and joy," says Biljana.

For Vera Josifovska-Miloševska from Macedonia, traditional music is also a living, breathing thing. She is the vocalist of *Ljubojna*, one of the most prominent and most representative bands of traditional music. The band was formed in 2001 and in 2005, they recorded their debut album *Parite se Otepuvačka* (Money is Murder). In 2012, Vera Miloševska was chosen among the 12 best vocalists from the Balkans to participate in the Regional Cooperation Council project *Les femmes des Balkans*.

"What connects me to traditional music is love. These local melodies gain contemporary progression and expression through my singing," she adds.

Among the newer performers of traditional music, it is worth singling out the Zagreb ethno-group *Kazan*. It was formed in 2012 and their debut album *Ružo* was released in 2018. Singer Dunja Bahtijarević says that it is important for her that traditional music be reinterpreted within a contemporary framework.

"Although there are different approaches, I think that traditional music is preserved by putting it in a contemporary context through

adaptation and reinterpretation. At the beginning, I didn't even know where my desire for exploring traditional music came from. At first, the songs were just beautiful to me, and then I discovered the opportunity of marrying something very authentic in myself and something very universal, or even modern, in those songs. All the songs survived because people have found themselves in them," says Dunja.

For Dunja, as for the other artists, what is most inspiring is the dimension of time and the path that the songs have travelled from their inception to their current form.



While writing his first CV, he added 'photography' to the 'Skills and Interests' section, without ever having owned a camera nor taken a photograph. As luck would have it, he was soon invited to volunteer with an NGO in Pakrac, Croatia. His task was to teach black and white photography to children. This unexpected situation was the introduction to what would later become his life's calling, and thus also began Chris' long relationship and journey with the Balkan region and its people.

CHRIS' BALKAN JOURNEY

"My whole love of photography started in the Balkans. That journey also determined the path of my career. Documenting peace and the slow rebuilding of a destroyed city resonated with me more than anything," says Chris.

Many photographers became famous thanks to their images of the destroyed Yugoslavia. Many of them spent much of the war there documenting one of the darkest hours of human history. Later in the 1990's, however, the international community turned its attention to other instances of global unrest. While other journalists, reporters and photographers began to engage in other conflicts to fulfill the daily demand for dramatic reporting, Chris Leslie had no idea that this region – the one that had already played such an important role in his student years – would change everything for him.

"I arrived in Zagreb, Croatia with somewhat sketchy photography and darkroom skills and armed with a donated Canon FT QL – a vintage 35mm camera – and Serbo-Croat phrasebook. Croatia's capital Zagreb was in full late summer swing, packed out bars, restaurants, live music and cultural institutions aplenty. There was not a destroyed building or bullet ridden wall in sight. An hour or so into the train journey from Zagreb to Pakrac and this illusion of all being 'normal' was shattered as the landscapes and homes became increasingly bullet ridden and destroyed the closer the train got to Pakrac," explains Chris.

Chris' early photographs are raw and unfiltered, just like the war itself. In them, we see the consequences of lives that carried on despite being surrounded by so much evil. His photographs reveal people attempting to live normal daily lives whilst the damage to their homes attests to the other very real reality of their situation. We see places of worship reduced to rubble and streets and homes pockmarked by bullets and bombs.

On the subject of why he chose to do peace photography, Chris explains that, although it is war that most interests other people, for him, it is the new struggles that peace brings with it that are the most interesting, and the least talked about. "Once the war ended, most of the media left and Bosnia and Croatia were no longer in the headlines, and yet that was a time of enormous change and rebuilding. I was really interested in how people managed to pick up the pieces and move on, and these were important stories that needed to be shared. The war may have ended but many people were faced with new frontlines."

SARAJEVO CAMERA KIDS

The end of the war enabled a more peaceful life to gradually return to the streets of Sarajevo. The city was enjoying its long-awaited peace, but Sarajevans had no idea that some new battles awaited them.

CHRIS LESLIE'S PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY AS A SYMBOL OF HOPE AND RESISTANCE

Written by: Amina Sejfić
Photography: Chris Leslie

BAFTA Scotland (New Talent) Award-winning photographer and filmmaker Chris Leslie began taking photographs whilst volunteering in the Former Yugoslavia in 1996. This led to the development of his career as a photographer, filmmaker and communications manager for an international NGO documenting stories across Africa and Eastern Europe.

It all started when Chris graduated university in 1996 with a thesis entitled 'The Forces Behind Nationalism and Ethnic Cleansing in the Former Yugoslavia'. As he himself says, these were 10,000 words that only gave a vague insight into the conflict but that, more importantly, started his obsession with all things Balkan. Lacking ideas on where to start his career path, Chris decided instead to look into volunteering in the region about which he had read so much.



their neighborhood taking photos of the places where they played and hung out. Although, as he puts it, his “basic language skills did not extend to teaching the technicalities of photography”, the most important thing was that the classes were simple and easy to follow, and that the children had fun. “The intention was to provide a creative outlet for these children who had dealt with a near lifetime of war and siege,” he adds.

“The war was over and I think photography gave them something in a period when they had absolutely nothing. It gave them time, space and a new way to look at their city,” adds Chris.

Although many anecdotes, memories and stories of great friendships sprung out of the three years that Chris worked on the project, one story in particular stands out for him. “There are a lot of memories. Perhaps the most vivid and memorable was when a young Oggi Tomić came into the basement as my first student. He grabbed the brush that I was using to clean out the darkroom space from me and explained I wasn’t using it properly. He then explained that he could get me lots of children from the orphanage to take part,” he recalls.

SARAJEVO CAMERA KIDS EXHIBITION

More than two decades ago, Oggi Tomić, Dina Džihanić, Edina Hrnjić, Rina Trifković, Dženita Hodžić, Nusret, Muhamed Bošnjko, Jasmina Sabrihafizović, Amra Džihanić Barac, Senad, Mirnes Gagula, Sabina Demirović and Armin Demirović were experiencing the most devastating conflict in Europe since World War II. It attacked their city, their homes, and even their bodies. As children, they found respite in Chris and in photography.

As part of a project that includes the A Balkan Journey book, Chris Leslie opened the Sarajevo Camera Kids exhibition in Sarajevo on November 11 2021 in partnership with the Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC), with support from the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in cooperation with the City of Sarajevo’s Information Centre on the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. It is dedicated to Edina Hrnjić and the other children of the

Bjelave Orphanage. The exhibition testifies to the long-term consequences that orphanages and war have on the orphans themselves.

“I’m just glad the Sarajevo Camera Kids – now adults – will get a chance to see their work exhibited, and for all of Sarajevo to see it too. It’s an important documentation of a time in Sarajevo’s history,” says Chris.

Chris hopes that both the exhibition and book will show Sarajevans how special this city is and how much it has changed and been rebuilt since the end of the war. The road is long and the journey is not over, but the stories of these children must not be forgotten. Their story is not just theirs – it belongs to every child. Although the past cannot be corrected, it is in our hands that the future lies.

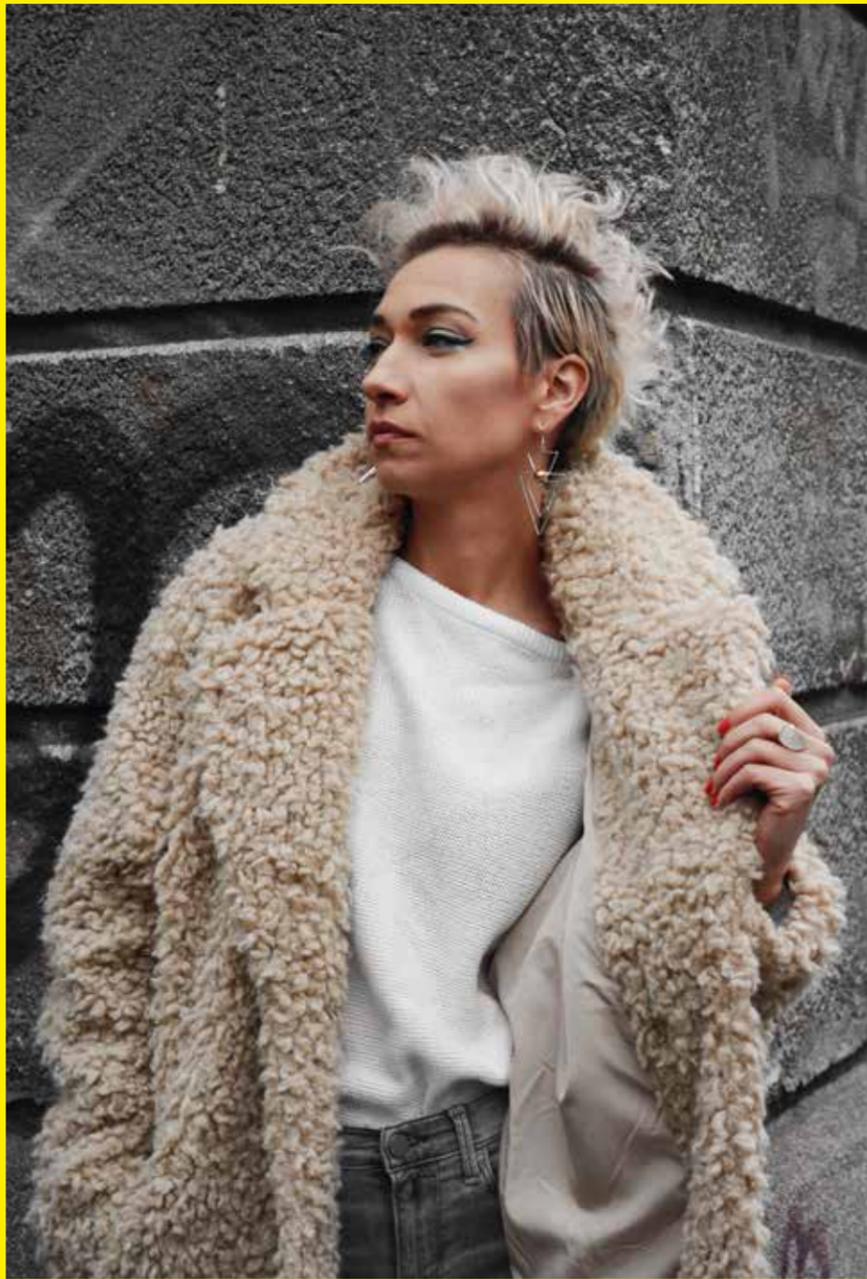


Although he spent four months in war-ravaged Pakrac, Chris emphasizes that nothing could really have prepared him for what he encountered in Sarajevo. “The destruction of the city was jaw-dropping, surreal and seemingly total: rows upon rows of broken, bombed-out high-rise flats; shell craters and explosion indents everywhere; hospitals, offices and factories all in ruins,” he writes evocatively in his essay A City in Ruins / Sarajevo Camera Kids. Chris recalls how a year later he would return to Sarajevo to start a project that would serve as a portal to a world that no longer exists.

Sarajevo Camera Kids is a photo project that was developed in the basement of the Sarajevo orphanage, Dom Bjelave, and the surrounding neighborhoods. Using equipment and resources donated by people from across Scotland, Chris worked with children aged 6 to 16, teaching them basic photographic techniques and film development.

Chris explains how he was a bit overwhelmed by the interest at first and how his classes were packed with children eager to learn about this exciting new technology, and to run around





BALKAN RAP: ACTIVISM IN MUSIC WILL NEVER DIE OUT

Author: Melani Išović
 Photography: Edo Maajka, Alessia Stelko, La Bagra, Who See

Music cares not for geographic and other boundaries. Fans and admirers of the same kind of music may easily find each other and be connected, ignoring everything that divides them.

Among the most popular musical genres of recent years is rap music, which is based on rebellion and addressing topics of social significance. The rap music of the region speaks about

the issues that are common to all the countries of the Western Balkans, so easily reaches its audience. Simply put, it speaks a language that everyone understands because it is street music.

Mirela Priselac Remi, fighter for women's rights and gender equality and a member of the Elemental group from Croatia, says that any kind of art can connect not only the Balkans, but also bring the Balkans closer to the international audience.

"One of the advantages of art is its universal language, even in cases when we do not understand the language, as is the case with music

in the Balkan languages. I believe that in music in the Balkan languages, there are universals of messages and feel that make it understandable not only to the Balkans, but also to international audiences," explains Remi.

What must be singled out about rap is that its popularity is growing; interest in rap is resounding and reverberating throughout the region.

"Its popularity further contributes to the opportunities that rap as a – potentially – engaged genre has. In the case of engagement, its role and impact are enormous – it can serve as a pan-Yugoslav link among nations for which



cultural cooperation should be a priority, for a number of reasons. One of them is certainly the fact that the music markets individually do not have a particularly wide reach, but joint efforts can create such a significant territory for the presentation and harnessing of art," said Remi.

She believes that the Western Balkans have not yet realized the importance and capacity of rap, because of which no one has paid enough attention to the analysis of rap and trap music.

"I would say that due to the lack of a more serious sociological or musicological analysis, the public – and to a large extent, the protagonists of the scene – are not even aware of the huge potential influence of local rap and trap. There has been no more serious approach to these two genres in the Balkans, except for a few articles that dealt with comparative analysis at the level of 'Is trap the music of the future?'. Such an analysis has been simplified, already seen, and indicates a complete lack of interest in a more serious study of new genres," she states.

Remi was inspired by the protagonists of the African-American rap scene in her early teens, but they were not the reason she started making music.

"In fact, it is quite difficult to determine the exact reason. Maybe I was just responding to a desire to express myself creatively in a genre that I thought was the least restrictive. Despite the image of a macho musical direction, rap as a genre attracted me with its engaged nature and interesting rhythmic patterns, offering me the opportunity to express myself textually beyond the classical constraints of pop music," explains Remi.

The full effect and influence of this genre are insufficiently utilized for social change. The full potential of rap, as a conscious mechanism, is often not even realized.

"Those who exploited it the most are mostly from the marketing sector, where we often



find rap music in promotional videos of various brands. Civil society organizations, activist initiatives and platforms, or prominent individuals may use it as a training ground for raising awareness and social change. Socially or politically engaged artists are much more than mere rebels – they are people with an agenda and a plan whose primary task is to raise awareness but then to act in the arts and the public, with a call for concrete change. It is much more than rebellion, sarcasm or provocation," she emphasizes.

MESSAGING AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Dejan Dedović Dedduh, a member of the group Who See from Montenegro, says that music is mostly divided into good and bad. The only difference is that good music is listened to for much longer.

"Rap is widely known as a narrative genre, with the text often being the most important part of the composition. The message is delivered to the listeners directly. Later, it is up to the end consumer to digest that amount of information exactly as they would digest a movie or television show. Messages are sent in various ways, through all types of media, and we never know when they affect someone. I guess that due to geography and history, not even some rap songs affect every Balkan person in the same way," explains Dedduh.

He further states that rap music contributes to the fact that some things are not forgotten, despite our tendency to do so.

"Let's take into account that rap started from rebellion. We can easily conclude that it is an

important part of social engagement. I am not in favor of telling the same story non-stop, but of telling that story once and for all. The great names of Yugoslav music have described some important socio-political moments and events and rap will contribute to not forgetting some things. And we are prone to forgetting," emphasizes Dedduh.

THE MERGING OF GENRES

Music has changed in recent years by merging different genres and thus increasing the audience of rap music in the Western Balkans.

"We rappers have a unique way of expressing our views on life. Music has changed in the last few years and got a more modern sound. And when turbo folk singers started working with rappers and with trap rhythms, they raised the popularity of hip hop to number one," explains Benjamin Mujadžić from the Slovenian group La Bagra.

He highlights the fact that the Western Balkans has gone through wars and recession, people have been out of work, and have gone through all kinds of struggles.

"Our music is the streets' music and it belongs to the people. They can feel and understand what we write, as well as it motivates them not to give up on their dreams. We are not on our own. That is a very important message," emphasizes Mujadžić.

A TOOL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Bosnian rapper Edin Osmić, better known as Edo Maajka, points out that music and art in general can connect up this region and connect different people who have similar problems.

"I became convinced of that with the work of my entire generation of musicians, and older ones as well. In the most difficult times, there have been musicians who, through their songs and performances, bring harmony and madness out of people's heads, at least for some period of time," says Edo Maajka.

The importance of rap music is great and can serve as a tool for young people against the social problems they face every day.

"It is important as it serves as an icebreaker. It encourages communication and cooperation. Also, rap is a tool and a medium in which you can say a lot in a short time, it is an outlet for young people in times of injustice, corruption, social problems, etc. Rap is definitely important for the Western Balkans," says Edo Maajka.

He points out that there is no generation without problems, nor a perfect society. Rap music can make people aware, but it is questionable how much it can actually change things. Although raising awareness alone is a great success and a great victory in itself.

"In music, punk and rap are very similar to my mind, in terms of consciousness among listeners. I have to add, though, that the new generations are a little saturated with this awareness in the songs. It is felt in the newer trends. One guy told me that he was tired of being bombarded with reality, with content from portals, television and radio. Such songs are too tiring for him. I fully understand him. But I think that activism in music will never die out," states Edo Maajka.

SARCASM AS A WEAPON

Macedonian Rap Skillz member Jordan Ivanov explains that sarcasm and rebellion are key in rap music. It all started with social upheavals.

"Specifically, the Western Balkans are inhabited by people who have the same socio-economic problems that transcend them and form the same framework through which we see the world. That is why cooperation among artists from the countries of the Western Balkans is important and can contribute to the rapprochement of cultural differences between nations, enabling the artists themselves to break into another scene outside their country. It is important from the aspect of developing critical thinking and highlighting all the issues in society, and to give the younger generations a different perspective, that is, the prism through which the world is observed," he says.

Rap music has influenced other musical directions as well. Merging with other genres in the last few years, rap music is getting closer to a wider audience.

"Rap music is certainly a driving force and a key factor in both music and pop culture. At the top of the music industry for several years now, we have mixed music genres that include genres like trap, followed by pop and folk music. Rap has definitely been more and more present in the last few years and although the focus of some artists is on other genres, they are trying to incorporate it or collaborate with rap artists in order to expand and gain a wider audience," says Ivanov.

He calls his audience 'followers' and 'supporters', not fans. He believes that as a group, they have positively influenced many people who, through their music, first encountered the culture of rap.



ZOSTER: LEARN, WORK AND LISTEN TO THE VOICE WITHIN

Author: Kristina Gadže
Photography: Denis Ruvčić

Zoster was born in Mostar, but it exudes a world sound. They are a band who has had a rather successful path after being founded at the beginning of this decade by Mario Knezović and Dražan Planinić.

The name of the group has an authentic meaning, because it describes the virus that frontman Mario Knezović was treated for. They claim the group was born as a result of the decline in society's immune system.

"This decline is connected with the question of what we would be like if there were no war, because it has affected who we are. Maybe we would be completely different people and do something else. But, it is important that it makes us stronger, that we create new values and that we live life to the fullest," says Knezović.

The current group members are Mario Knezović (vocals), Atilla Aksoj (guitar), Adis Sirbubalo (keyboards), Nikola Galić (bass) and Goran Rebac (drums). Zoster have released four albums so far: Ojužilo (2005), Festival budala (2007), Imači kada

(2012) and Srce uzavrelo (2014). A new album called Najgori is about to be released and win fans' hearts.

"We usually release an album every four years and each one builds on the previous one. They represent the epochs of our creation, which can be felt in our sound. The sound we create requires the passage of time. Over time a man changes, and we apply these changes in music," continues Knezović.

He points out that there is no nationalism in music, although nowadays everything is politicized.

"I do what I love and there are people who like it, and those who don't. I don't feel pressure nor fear when I write lyrics, because we are not an explicit type of group that will call out others," he explains.

For Knezović, creating songs does not start with a theme but with chaos, and he does not write songs about things that bother him because he does not solve problems through music.

He adds that music can trigger activism but that one should then be careful and confident in what one is representing. "Music is a weapon but I don't want to use it that way because the

essence of my existence is not to fight others. It is a joy and I would not want to manipulate it," says Knezović.

The album Najgori, which was announced with the single "Kuda idu svi ti ljudi" (Where Are All These People Going?), was created after they signed a contract with Croatia Records for the release. It was recorded at the Pavarotti Music Center and the Baraka studio in Mostar.

"To understand the meaning of that song and understand why it is the first single, you need to listen to the whole album. There will be ten songs on the album, and it was inspired by the period that has passed since the release of the last album," he states.

They have performed in major cities such as Barcelona, New York and London, and are announcing new concerts after the release of their new album. As a message to young groups and those yet to emerge, Knezović advises them to listen to their inner urge that tells them what to do.

"You need to learn, work and follow that inner voice, then you will be able to live life to the fullest," he concludes.





SASSJA: WE ARE ALL DIFFERENT PEOPLE, BUT WE HAVE THAT COMMON THREAD

Author: Slobodan Blagovčanin
Photography: Denis Ruvic

We know Sanela Halilović Sassja as the lady of the Bosnian rap scene, with a recognizable voice and attitude. In her private life, she is first of all a mother, then a graduate with a Masters in pharmacy, and a

workaholic. She is someone who has a lot of energy and is constantly looking for positivity around her.

Sassja was born and grew up in Tuzla – a city known for its interculturality. She says that she did not think much about how Tuzla had influenced her, about its uniqueness, until she started traveling.

“I love Tuzla, but above all I believe in it. There are good and bad people everywhere, but there is simply a sense in Tuzla that your name does not matter at all. If the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina were not as it is, Tuzla would not be written about as unusual. I didn't think much about Tuzla in that way, until I started traveling and touring other cities in BiH,” Sassja tells us.

She tells me that interculturality is not imposed on you nor something you learn, it is simply how people live in Tuzla. She gladly points out that she celebrates all the holidays with her family and friends: “My friend had a new girlfriend and we all asked him who she was. Instead, he answered: She celebrates everything. Just like a true Tuzla girl.”

The city known for its urban culture and numerous bands inevitably influenced Sassja musically too.

“Maybe that's why it affected me. I think that Edo Maajka once said that it is unbelievable that such a small town has so many rappers, break-dancers, song writers... Maybe now it is a little diluted, because we all found our way somewhere else, but at some point it really was so. Everybody is doing something and they are really good at it,” says Sassja.

She says that her mother is to thank for the beginnings of her music career. It was her mother who bought her a synthesizer on which she started learning notes and playing songs. Growing up, she says, it was not easy to get to new music as everyone just listened to what their parents listened to.

“At the time, I couldn't know if Dino Merlin stole the song from Michael Jackson or vice versa. Who took it from whom? Those were the times! I was little, I didn't know what was going on there. An older neighbor, Melika, used to play Michael Jackson for us. It was the highest quality music. I listened to everything: rap, rock, metal, whatever I could get my hands on. Nobody had to tell me who Bob Marley was,” recalls Sassja.

In the absence of music and material for creating new sounds, Sanela would record and compose music by using bits and pieces of Michael Jackson's songs. She was in elementary school when she started creating new beats and sounds for herself.

“My playtime included playing synthesizer, singing, writing. At that time, I still didn't know about rap. I also wrote poetry. Once at school we had homework to write a poem about our mothers, which I did, and I quite liked it, and then I started writing poems about everything,” she recalls.

Her other great love is graffiti, which she became familiar with for the first time in elementary school. After seeing a friend draw something on the table, Sanela, being a curious child, immediately started drawing graffiti in her notebook. Walking through the city, she began to notice graffiti on buildings, but she did not like it. Only years later would she understand why.

“Later in high school, I would meet a guy who drew graffiti, and only then would I find out that it is illegal, and that is why they are so ugly

– they are always in a hurry, so no one sees them drawing on buildings. Later I started to draw them, but in legal places,” she says.

Regarding Sanela's personal development, she highlights two things that shaped her and directed her on the right path while growing up: Telex, the Tuzla Youth Center, and positive role models like local artists, Defence and Edo Maajka. Without them, she says, she could have very easily ended up “on the streets.”

“We started gathering there and my mother took me to English classes there too. They even had computers. Then I saw that some bands had rehearsals there, so I learned to play the guitar at Telex. At the same time, I went to the Youth Theater, where we acted in the play I will wait for you. Later, the Tuzla Youth Theater opened. Although I almost ended up on the street, the theater directed my creativity to the right track. I knew what I needed to do and what I needed to not do to be one of the socially engaged young people. I hung out in Telex, played, sang. But I always knew where the limits were, so I would be given the opportunity to be in that play I really wanted to be in,” says Sassja.

The discovery of Defence and Edo Maajka was important for the beginning of her music career, leading to her recording her first song, which she paid for in three loan installments.

“At FM JAM I first heard Edo Maajka and I stuck to him. Then I heard about Defence, and boom! Their gigs, that kind of madness, the silence, hugs, then the reggae sound, were all things I started to make sense of. As I hung out with these rockers here, the only logical thing was to make a real reggae band. However, I didn't know how difficult it would be to gather people who both wanted to do it and knew how to do it. So, we'd rehearse the first, the fifth time, this one can do it, this one can't, this one doesn't know, and then I wrote the lyrics... and then I discovered the Internet. I found reggae instrumentals which could be downloaded for free. Then I was told about a studio nearby, and that it only cost 50 Bosnian Marks to record. So I did it. I recorded my very first song “Leave it burning” (original title: Ostavi da gori). I paid for it in three loan installments. There just wasn't a lot of music I could listen to so I made my own music,” recalls Sassja.

When they played Sassja's first song in the famous Tuzla cafe Sloboda, she could not hold back her tears of emotion.

“I uploaded my first song on the internet. About ten days later, it happened that Defence was performing in Sloboda so of course I went, only to hear them play my song. I just froze. DJ Soul playing my song. I just stood there crying. I went there with my friends to enjoy the gig and they played my song. Unfortunately, that was the last Defence concert in Tuzla.”

The Sassja we know today is part of the FM JAM music movement, which has been working on the promotion of music and culture since its inception in 1999. They are based in Tuzla.

“FM JAM is a new culture. FM JAM is full of different people, but we have something in common. I can't describe it. We just see it in some of the people who come and talk to us. We simply know when we feel that spark in others. It's like ‘Oh yes, he is one of us,’” says Sassja.

She emphasizes how only men played her kind of music at the beginning of her career. But if she had been discriminated against at all in that environment, she would not be where she is today.



“There is a slight kind of bias, but I don't think it's intentional, because when I started, it really was only men that were involved in this music,” she says.

Sassja announces her plan and desire to return to her reggae sound, although she

points out that it is not easy at all, because she is the first woman to do it in BiH. “I think people are ready for that music genre now,” she says with joy, because, as she says, it was reggae that made it all happen for her.



WAR CORRESPONDENTS WORKING TO EMPOWER BOSNIAN YOUTH

Author: Kristina Gadže
Photography: VII Academy

VII Academy's goal is to create works dealing with complex social, economic, and human rights issues, as well as creating the media space for them. This independent non-profit organization emerged from the VII Foundation, founded by world-famous photographers Ron Haviv and Gary Knight in 2001.

"The VII Academy is working to diversify photography and journalism by funding tuition-free long-form visual media education in underrepresented countries around the world," explains Hasnija Zulić, Operations Manager at Academy VII Sarajevo.

Many young creatives have been given the opportunity to develop professionally and bring their ideas to fruition, thanks to lectures by experts in the field.

"Our work includes funding three- to nine-month-long media courses online, from Boston to Vanuatu, Mosul and Dhaka, to train a new generation of visual journalists, and funding postgraduate scholarships to train a new generation of lecturers," she adds.



The lectures, explains Zulić, are held in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Bosnian, and Russian. They also train men and women working in very difficult conditions, such as asylum seekers in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and photographers in Myanmar.

THE ACADEMY IN SARAJEVO

With the support of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network Advisor Jennifer Stengaard Gross and her family, the Academy was founded by Gary Knight in 2018, but photographer Ziyah Gafić initiated the arrival of the Academy in Sarajevo.

"Gary and many members of the VII photo agency have a strong connection with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Two of our photographers – Ziyah Gafić and Paul Lowe – live in Sarajevo, and many of the VII Foundation founders, including Gary, Alexandra Boulat, Ron Haviv and Christopher Morris, worked in Sarajevo during the war," Zulić tells us, explaining the strong connection between the Academy and BiH.

Photographer Gary Knight points out that each one of the programs that they run is an opportunity for young people to acquire new skills and work together to solve problems. The programs are incredibly popular and the participants always talk about just how fascinating and special the opportunity is for them. Such programs that include the arts can significantly impact positive changes in society. The secret, as Knight states, is working with the right people.

In 2019, the Academy hosted the 'VII in Sarajevo: Festival of the Image'. The festival program included a look at the state of the media in the Balkans, talks with photographers from the VII photo agency, and the Her Take: (Re)Thinking Masculinity exhibition that showcased the work of seven of the agency photographers. The next festival is on hold until 2022 due to the ongoing pandemic situation.

The festival and events like it motivate young people to further their training in the field of photojournalism.

"Large public events like these are very useful for students to network and, from our perspective, it is an effective way to simultaneously transfer a large amount of knowledge to a large number of people. I see them as active citizens who, by asking important questions, try to cross artificial divisions by working together to create a better, fairer, more open and more transparent society – a society they deserve and which rejects the weight of inherited history," continues Knight, who describes all the young people he works with as very impressive, smart, engaged and active.

COOPERATION WITH THE POST-CONFLICT RESEARCH CENTER

Through youth project programs, Balkan Diskurs Journalism, and the Srebrenica Youth school, the VII Academy has achieved very successful cooperation with the Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC). One of the lecturers of the VII Academy, Dr. Paul Lowe, has led training sessions in photojournalism, visual literacy and portrait photography, in Sarajevo in 2019 and Vitez in 2021.

"Participants learned how to use portrait photography to tell intimate stories about each other and about the people they would interview. I also led a workshop on photography and the Holocaust at the Srebrenica Youth School in 2021. The trainees in 2019 also participated in the BOLD project and, with the help of some donations, brought several projects to fruition," says Dr. Lowe.





During the Srebrenica Youth School, PCRC awarded Dr. Lowe the Ordinary Heroes Prize for Moral Courage for his work on the fight for human rights in the region. Knight is also passionate about the fact that photography and visual literacy are important in building up young people's critical thinking, and he adds that the use of visual media is part of the process of social control, but also of transparency.

CHALLENGES AND THE FUTURE

In an unstable society, such as BiH, young people have a harder time encountering non-formal education.

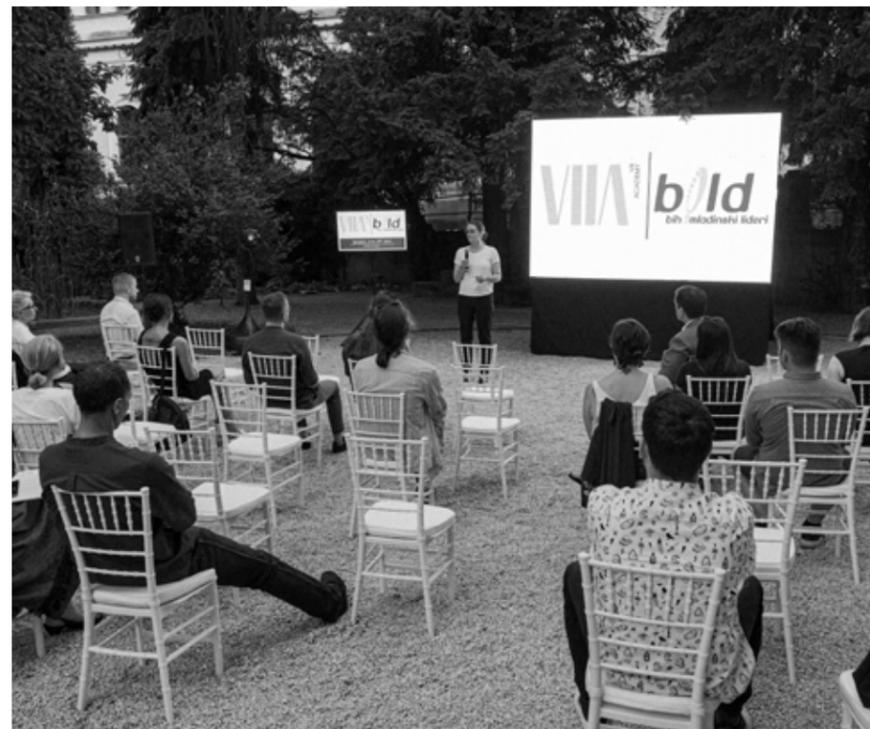
"From an outsider's perspective, BiH seems to be plagued by poor political leadership, corruption, kleptocracy, nepotism, lack of justice, lack of transparency, poor accountability, a large diaspora and very limited opportunities for significant employment. Foreign remittances amount to between 11% and 14% of GDP, which is one of the largest in the world and the education system is neglected and underfunded, making it one of the weakest in the region. This is a very challenging environment for young people and their future," says Knight.

Even during the coronavirus pandemic, however, the VII Academy, with the help of the VII Foundation, were able to offer online education and advanced professional development to anyone with an internet connection, through 'VII Insider'.

So far, they have taught a significant number of young people in the country and, as Zulić points out, built strong relationships with

local institutions. For example, they worked with IOM on a project to help migrants, and with the U.S. Embassy on their BOLD project. The National Museum will also host an

exhibition dealing with post-conflict societies, in collaboration with the Academy. All that is left is for the young people of BiH to join in and become part of this creative atmosphere.



MAGLAJ – WAR AND PEACE: A PRECIOUS MESSAGE IN 26 MINUTES

| Written by: Benisa Bibuljica

In 2018, the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina produced a documentary entitled Maglaj – War and Peace. Directed by Alen Ćosić, Will Richard and Asmir Muratović, the film portrays three ex-soldiers from Maglaj – a Bosniak, a Croat and a Serb, members of the BiH Army (ARBiH), the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) and the Republika Srpska Army (VRS) respectively – who fought on opposite sides during the war in BiH (1992-1995). Today, they live and work together again for a better future for their community. The protagonists of the film, Rizo Salkić-Talijan, Boro Jevtić and Marko Zelić, testify to the events in the Maglaj area before, during and after the war, saying: "There are no winners in the war."

Shown in different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the film provoked an abundance of reactions, both positive and negative. Each screening was accompanied by a conversation with the protagonists who shared with the audience their experiences gained during and after the war. Numerous television stations in BiH also hosted the war veterans so that the Bosnian public could hear their accounts.

One of the shows that hosted them was 24 minutes with Zoran Kesić. On the show, the veterans discussed the beginnings of the war in BiH, emphasizing that, at the time, they could not have ever dreamed that it would happen. "In fact, we all went insane and were confused as soon as the war started, and no one expected it to last that long," said Jevtić, a former member of the VRS, on the show. He added that it was "a great madness", but that no one asked ordinary soldiers anything at the time.

After the war, Maglaj was one of the cities that suffered the greatest consequences. Approximately 2,000 soldiers were killed on all three sides, as well as over 500 civilians, including a large number of children. When asked

whether, after the Dayton Peace Accords that ended the war in BiH, anyone greeted the end of the war as the victor, Zelić, an HVO member, replied: "Today, after everything, when we look back and see how many people have died, how much destruction was caused, who would have the courage to say that he is the winner in that war?" Jevtić added that everyone is a loser in war: "We all lost our loved ones, lost our homes, were displaced. Then we returned and, in the end, we live together again. What did we get from all that bloodshed? Nothing."

The consequences of the war were indeed immense for all the generations that survived it. However, as one of those generations, this "precious threesome" entered the project with the intention of sending the message to the children of BiH and its future generations that war is a waste of time – to be avoided at all costs. "Let people see that there is another way of thinking, different to the way in which the elites want them to think. This film is not political, it is not against anything or anyone, but simply a film portraying common sense," said Salkić, a former member of ARBiH.

The veterans' friendship before, during and after the war was recognized by the OSCE Mission to BiH. "They asked us if we would like to have it recorded. Out of that, a film was born with clear messages to everyone that war cannot happen ever again. This is for the future of our children and our youth, so that they can have a bright future," said Zelić in an article for Klix.ba. "This is a call from us as parents – when we wake our children in the morning, we want to be able to wish them something in life, without there being war," Salkić told Oslobođenje.

The film was presented to the public in Sarajevo in cooperation with the Embassy of Sweden in BiH, and on behalf of the Swedish Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2021.

The Ambassador of Sweden to BiH, Johanna Strömquist, emphasized the importance of the message that these three brave men are sending when it is most needed. "They fought on different sides during the war in the 1990's. Now they have come together with the aim of talking about the futility of the war, and about the struggle to build peace that unites them today. I am glad that Sweden's support has enabled more people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond to hear them share their experiences," Strömquist told TVSA.

Before the screening of the film in Sarajevo, the head of the OSCE Mission to BiH, Kathleen Kavalec, emphasized that Rizo, Boro and Marko were "three of the most impressive leaders" she had ever met. "This documentary emphasizes the important task that Rizo, Boro and Marko are performing in the name of reconciliation. Moreover, it reflects just one of the many positive peacebuilding stories we see at the local level throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. I thank the three veterans and all the people in BiH who work as ambassadors of peace," Kavalec told Klix.ba, adding that she hopes that people in other places will come to watch the film and discuss this very important topic.

The three veterans recount how during the filming they also learned that they shot at each other. Circumstances and the interests of a few – as they put it – created lines of separation between them, something that remains to this day inexplicable to many. But after all that, they chose to sit down together to "get the measure of things". Although one can see their eyes fill with tears while talking about memories of human mistakes, there is no room for hatred in their message. "We all have reason to hate, but a good person doesn't hate. It is one thing when a man makes a mistake and can correct it. Or when a man is conscious of his mistake and takes responsibility for it. But it is worst when the mistake makes the man," concluded Salkić.

"Once upon a time, they were Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, and none of them turned out to be the smartest, on the contrary. Many years later, they are Rizo, Marko and Boro, and I thank them for being with us," said Zoran Kesić on his show, sitting with the bearers of this precious peace message in 26 minutes.



NOTES MADE OF PEACE AND TOLERANCE

Written by: Maida Šljivić
Photography: Mladen Kojić

A place where the most beautiful music is created, where notes are made of peace, tolerance and good fun. This is how the House of Good Tones can be described. It is a multiethnic music project which helps build an environment of greater coexistence for children from Srebrenica, Bratunac, Potočari, Skelani and Konjević Polje.

This project allows children aged 2 to 17 to experience the importance and beauty of music. In a multiethnic environment it is necessary to constantly work on preserving positive social values, such as peace, love, tolerance, respect for others, and respect for difference.

Haris Mujić, an eighteen-year-old student of the House of Good Tones program and a fourth-grade student at the Srebrenica High School, says that from the very beginning, he has supported this project with his participation. He believes that reconciliation is possible, but that the path itself is difficult.

When asked about the atmosphere among peers and young people in a multiethnic environment, such as Srebrenica, Haris says that there is no difference in behavior among young people. The most important values, he says, that a young participant of the House of Good Tones program inherits are love and a positive perspective on multinationality.

"Multinationality is a treasure, so it is necessary to develop hope and enthusiasm among young people towards it, and to encourage young people of all nationalities to act," says Haris.

So far, more than 600 children have traveled and participated in music camps and concerts abroad during the school year. Ismar Porić, General Manager and Artistic Director of the

House of Good Tones, explains that community trust is crucial.

"The work of our organization, whose activities are realized through several program areas, and which unquestionably enjoys the trust of a large number of citizens, is the axis around which a better social environment will be created in Srebrenica. If the local population has trust in the goals of our organization, we can



work more and better on the establishment of a new set of values based on a common goal – to create a better social environment in Srebrenica," says Porić.

He explains that through various activities and workshops, young people are encouraged to become informed and interested citizens who can advocate for change within their community.

"Through music lessons, choral singing and instrumental music in one protected environment, children and young people learn about the values of other cultures and nations, which then encourages them toward intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation. This strengthens their participation in the local environment and improves their opportunities in society," concludes Porić.

Haris Mujić points out that participants are offered numerous opportunities. He says that all activities in the center are free of charge. Classes are taught by musicians, singers and teachers, and they are adapted to all ages and categories. In addition, he says, through this type of project, he has been given the opportunity to continue learning to play the guitar and to participate in numerous trips. For him, this would be impossible without the support of this organization and its programs.

This place recognizes the importance of art, music and creativity as useful tools for building and maintaining peace, tolerance and mutual respect.

"This cultural and artistic space aims to be a training ground for the exchange of cultural values, recognition of diversity, and enjoyment of

the richness of encounters with others who are different. The actions of participants from other cultures sharing their experiences and knowledge will make them feel part of the global community and that somewhere there are individuals and communities who are interested and concerned about them. Various cultural and artistic activities will make space for the renewal of fundamental human values," says Ismar Porić.

Personally experiencing all of the above, Haris realized that music and art are things that can bring us closer.

"More companionship and love and less encouragement toward hatred – that's what we need. We need to develop a healthy environment and get involved in things that are of value to us," he says.



PEACE MONUMENT IN BOSANSKI PETROVAC

Written by: Kristina Gadže
Photography: Omar Salihagić

Peace monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) are increasingly more present as ways of establishing peace in a post-conflict society. One of three such monuments in BiH is the Peace Monument in Bosanski Petrovac. This town of just over 7,000 inhabitants – half of whom are Serbs and the other half Bosniaks – has been hard at work in the local fight against ethnic hatred and a divided society.

The Mayor of Bosanski Petrovac, Mahmut Jukić, emphasizes the importance of erecting this monument: "In our community, we must build peace, coexistence and respect, and do good deeds, as much as we can. The greatest gifts we can give our children are the pillars of responsibility and the wings of independence, and if we want true peace, let's start with the children."

The Peace Monument was also visited by representatives of the international community, whose visit on the occasion of International Peace Day was organized by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Together with the representatives of the Municipality of Bosanski Petrovac, the visits were attended by representatives of the Office of the United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator in BiH as well as the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Sweden to BiH. The erection of the monument was also praised by the UN Under-Secretary-General, Alice Nderitu, in her video address in Srebrenica on July 11, noting further UN support and efforts in the community.

As Ivan Lupis, UN Political Affairs Officer, points out, the visit served not only to highlight Bosanski Petrovac's successes in promoting mutual trust, constructive dialogue and cross-nationality cooperation, but also to inspire other communities to follow suit. "We hope to continue highlighting and promoting such positive narratives. They are powerful counterexamples to the rhetoric and agendas of division of some public and elected officials and media organizations. We hope to help these champions of peace connect with other partners across the country so that more joined-up peacebuilding and cooperation efforts can be replicated across the country," says Lupis.

Over the last two years, the OSCE Mission to BiH has been implementing the 'September: Month of Peace and Tolerance' initiative, within which they have organized numerous activities for young people on the topic of reconciliation. Of the activities that took place during September of this year, preschool children in Bosanski Petrovac created and sent messages of peace, and primary and secondary school students studied materials celebrating the cross-nationality of this town in their religious and historical curricula. In addition, they held quizzes on local history and knowledge of each other's religions, and visited churches and mosques.

"IT IS NOT MONUMENTS THAT SPEAK"

Tarik Družić, 20, from Bosanski Petrovac believes, however, that the newly erected monument has no significance or in any way affects

the everyday life of young people in his local community. "The social environment currently offers more risks and uncertainties than chances for a better present and future. It is not monuments that speak about building peace and dealing with the past, but individuals and their life stories," he insists, adding that the culture of memory cannot be created only by one side, but with the interaction of government and of people of different nationalities.

"Young people in Bosanski Petrovac no longer have a space for themselves to hang out and socialize, which distances them from each other and creates a culture of the individual. They are left without a sense of belonging, without an attachment to the environment in which they are," says Tarik. He highlights informal education as a space that provides young people with the opportunity to interact and collaborate with each other. "I hope that there will be a change and that young people will get a chance to express themselves as they deserve, by taking that step that leads us to peace and progress. The voice of young people does not lead to conflicts, because young people do not want conflicts. We want quality time with our peers and to be able to choose sneakers and mobile phones regardless of price and politics," believes Tarik.

A MONUMENT OF HOPE AND A BIG STEP FORWARD

On the other hand, his fellow citizen and youngest president of the Municipal Council in Bosanski Petrovac, Nemanja Davidović, states that peace as an atmosphere is created with both monuments and people. "The Peace Monument in Bosanski Petrovac is a personal reminder to me to resolve things in a peaceful way, to seek both internal peace and dialogue and peace among people. Bosanski Petrovac is a great example of coexistence and this monument

certainly presents it to the world in a great way. I think that young people see the importance of peace and the importance of peace talks, monuments and all joint initiatives," says Nemanja. He adds that Bosanski Petrovac is an environment where there is no division and where young people participate together both in progress and in discussions about the past.

Adnan Družić, Youth and NGO Officer in Petrovac Municipality, says that for him, the Peace Monument is a beautiful and symbolic act to show that Bosanski Petrovac stands for peace and that, as a community, they want to work to strengthen the reconciliation process. "For me, this monument represents hope. Hope that in the future our municipality will develop even more and be more successful. Hope that nobody will ever again leave this city due to a war. The monument is also a message to children and young people, to the new generations of Bosanski Petrovac, to know what kind of community they live in, and to constantly work on preserving and building the coexistence for which this city is known. I think young people don't even see how big a move this is in our community," says Adnan.

He hopes that in the future, through activities with young people from other communities in BiH, young people from Bosanski Petrovac will feel how big a step their small town has made. He hopes that they will see that they can become leaders of positive narratives and reconciliation processes throughout BiH. "For a long time now, children and young people in our country have been living together. This is not made up, it's real. We go to kindergarten, elementary school, and later to high school together. Young people are often the bearers of initiatives aimed at strengthening the process of reconciliation and dealing with the past. I am convinced that the Peace Monument not only recognizes, but also crowns, all previous activities and projects on this topic," concludes Adnan.

Although of different opinions, young people support one thing, and that is peacebuilding work in their local communities. Peace monuments represent a continuation of this process and they replace those monuments that instead seek to promote hatred towards other peoples or that glorify war criminals.



A UNIQUE SYMBOL OF PEACE IN ŽEPČE

Written by: Kristina Gadže
Photography: Alem Bajramović

Žepče, a town predominantly populated by Croats and Bosniaks, often evokes issues concerning divisions and tensions. However, the newly reconstructed memorial to civilian victims of war, which was erected in 2017, brings a message of peace not only for young people, but also for all the citizens of this municipality.

Mato Zovko, municipal mayor, points out that the memorial is primarily a humane gesture and a brave decision, bringing a message of peace and of continued efforts to build good interpersonal, inter-ethnic and interreligious relations.

"The youth mostly follow in the footsteps of the elderly, that is, of their parents, and the message of peace is first instilled at home, and then passed on to others. We, the older generation, have to serve as an example of encouragement to the younger generation, in order to achieve co-operation and friendly dialogue. Youth relations in Žepče are good and they need to be enhanced through various social, cultural, sporting, and musical events, as well as through schools and other public institutions," explains

Zovko, adding that the memorial was met with approval by most of his fellow citizens.

The municipality of Žepče, in Zovko's opinion, inherited many socio-political problems after the war. Buildings and infrastructure were demolished, citizens fled and were displaced, and lot of its citizens had died during the war. On top of that, there was the issue of dual authorities.

"We resolved one problem at a time through discussions, agreement and perseverance, and we primarily integrated all our institutions. We also received assistance in those efforts from international organizations, like the OHR, UN and others. That made it possible to build trust between people. We can serve as an example of how a multi-ethnic community can and should function," continues Zovko.

Apart from this memorial, in Žepče there are also memorials to the Croat Defense Council (HVO) and the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as victim commemoration rooms which serve as a reminder of the numerous fatalities on the territory of the municipality of Žepče during the 1992 – 1995 war.

However, Zovko believes that the joint memorial to the civilian victims of war can build co-existence and trust for the benefit of all citizens, primarily the future generations. On the occasion of the unveiling of this reconstructed memorial, the Association of Civilian Victims of War in Žepče organized a one-day visit by representatives of the international community to Žepče, including the Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ambassador Kathleen Kavalec, Swedish Ambassador to BiH Johanna Strömquist and UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu.

"The role of the international community is very important in resolving tense relations. However, victim associations are actually those who invest the biggest efforts in the implementation of initiatives such as this memorial in Žepče. Žepče is a town in which children attend classes together because they wanted that to happen, regardless of their ethnicity. They have

a single school and that is the place in which ethnic tensions are not prominent. Support to reconciliation processes and confidence-building in the local community are a priority area of the international community's engagement at the local level," says Alen Čosić, the OSCE Mission to BiH staff member working in Maglaj. He also announced new projects related to building better interethnic relations.

The youth of Žepče, although they attend classes together, often do not have an opportunity to actively spend time with each other, especially when they leave the town to go to a university in BiH, in the region, or abroad. Magdalena Barešić, a citizen of Žepče, says that a joint commemoration of all the victims, irrespective of their ethnicity or religion, contributes to empathy and to the understanding that people from all of the warring sides truly suffered and experienced a great loss.

"I think that it may be somewhat easier for the younger generations to turn towards the future and towards co-operation, but to see that people who were in the midst of the conflict during the war want so much to build peace and good relations need to be commended. Therein lays the greatness of this gesture. We, the young people, have to maintain the values of humanity, in the spirit of which we have to keep living and keep developing them together. The peace is now in our hands and it is far too precious for us to lose it," says Magdalena.

Although young people in smaller local communities want to overcome nationalism and ethnonationalism, the social and political life reminds them of the realities they are up against, whether through hate speech in the public arena, the glorification of war criminals, or even through sports.

"The citizens of Žepče have risen above quarrels and denials long ago, and they live together. They share the same problems irrespective of their ethnicity: emigration, unemployment, salaries which are too low. I am especially glad to see that the joint memorial to civilian victims is here in Žepče, but politicians must be aware of the fact that the citizens of Žepče would rather gather in factories than in front of memorials," highlights citizen J.P.

R. B., another young person from Žepče, agrees that, even in the past, the municipality of Žepče had been a positive example of good relations between persons of different ethnicities.

"The result of our joint efforts and of the fact that we live together is the enhanced development of the municipality of Žepče, which is today a middle-income municipality. Mutual respect resulted in the municipality of Žepče being the first municipality in BiH which constructed a joint memorial to the civilian victims of war. Young people advocate for ideas such as the memorial to civilian victims of war, and they are aware of the fact that they can ensure a better future for all the citizens of the municipality of Žepče only if they are together," says R.B.

This memorial is just another indicator that memorials preserve the culture of remembrance and that they remind us of the victims, which should be equally respected and commemorated, regardless of their ethnicity. Young people play the leading role in facing the past and they represent a pillar of peace which, like the memorials, should never cease to exist.

SIT BACK AND ENJOY THE MUSIC OF KOSOVO'S ROCK CITY

Written by: George Foden
Photography: Mitrovica Rock School

The fuzzy, metal-infused guitars and punk rock attitude of Mitrovica Rock School alumni, Proximity Mine, stand for much more than just youthful attitude and rebellion. Hailing from Mitrovica, the new band joins the ranks of a long line of influential rock musicians from Kosovo's "Rock City". They, along with the six other currently active bands at the Rock School, are carrying the torch forward for a city steeped in musical heritage that somewhat lost its way in the wake of the bloody Kosovo War of 1999.

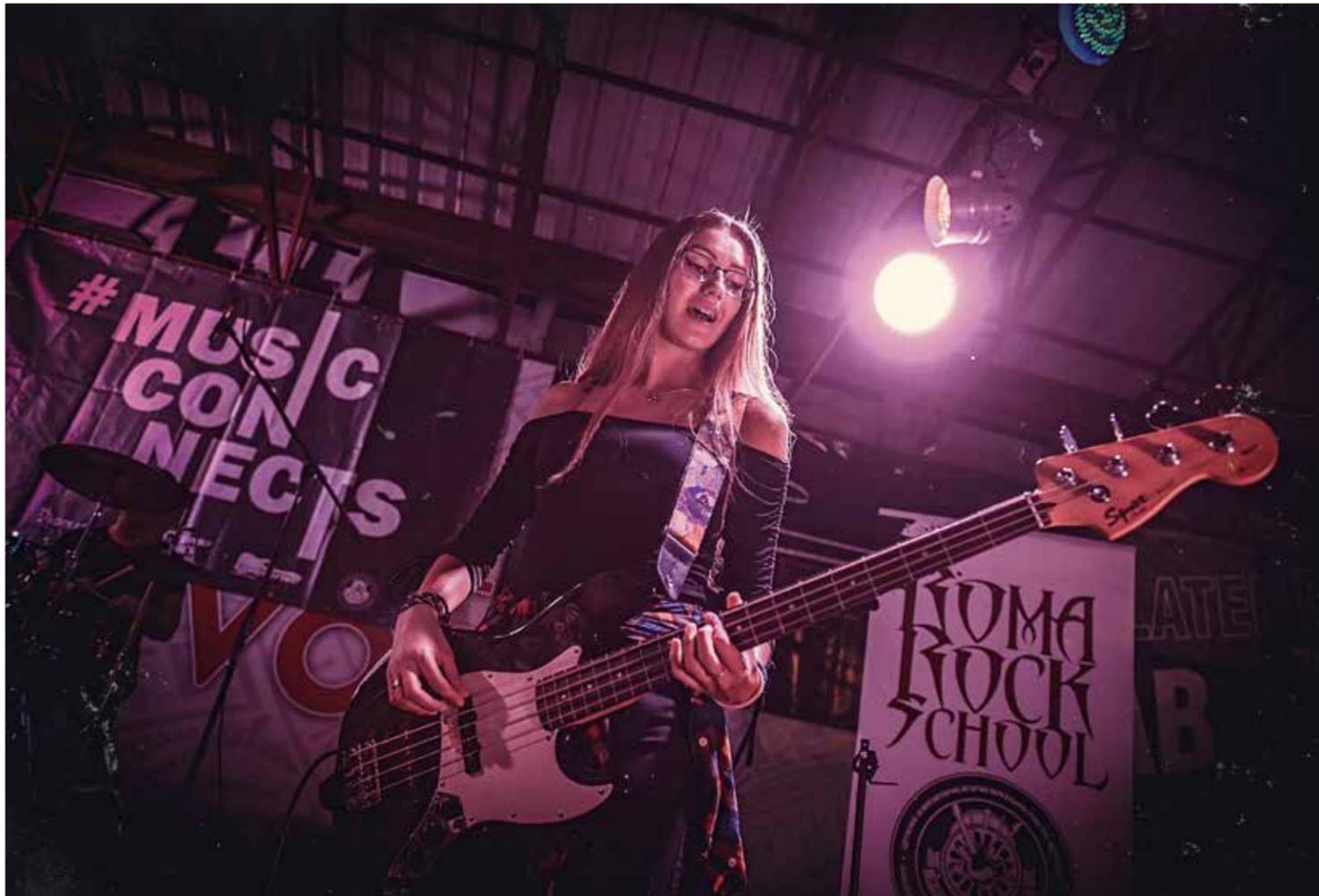
In the 1970's and 1980's, the Rock City was home to a buzzing music scene that spawned some of Kosovo's most influential bands – including the ethnically Albanian TNT and bi-ethnic MAK – and hosted several music festivals. However, with the steadily increasing tensions of the 1990's and the outbreak of war in 1999

the music scene in Mitrovica was replaced by aggressive ethnic rivalry. As a city so close to the Serbian border, with a sizeable Serbian minority but boasting an ethnically Albanian majority, it became a symbol of the ethnic divisions that were tearing Kosovo apart. After the conflict, a deep rift remained, with the River Ibar that runs through Mitrovica's city center serving as a physical barrier that separated the Serb enclave in the North from the Albanian-dominated South.

In the years following the conflict, the city's precarious situation has resulted in occasional outbreaks of violence and it is still considered dangerous to cross the New Bridge that spans the Ibar. People on both sides of the river have suffered as a result of the continued animosity and the city bears the emotional scars of nearly two decades of ethnic confrontation. Despite seeing some progress in recent years, there are still few signs that the underlying drivers of conflict are being appropriately addressed at

the political level, and the division of Mitrovica remains an impediment to the cultural, emotional and economic growth of the city.

Understandably, this tense and often dangerous environment is not conducive to the creative atmosphere required for the Rock City to flourish. Talented musicians with similar tastes in music, who may have otherwise met at a rock venue and started a band organically, do not mix because they do not venture to the opposite side of the river. The visitors that once flocked to the cities for concerts and festivals have been replaced by international organizations. EULEX police and K-FOR troops stationed to keep the peace now appear alongside NGOs working towards rebuilding community ties across ethnic lines. However, the problem with many of the transitional peace initiatives aimed at bridging divides is that they continue to shine a spotlight on the differences between the cultures of the people involved – the very issue they are trying to overcome.



The Mitrovica Rock School was founded in 2008 as an alternative to the more traditional methods of peacebuilding being implemented in the area. The central idea behind the project, founded by INGO Musicians without Borders and local NGO Community Building Mitrovica, is that music is a tool that brings people together and creates a sense of shared identity, irrespective of ethnic heritage or language spoken. As Emir Hasani, Project Manager and Band Coach at the Rock School, points out, the great ethnically mixed bands that came out of Mitrovica in the 1970's and 80's were not referred to as "mixed bands", but just bands. They were not Serb or Albanian musicians, but rock stars. The toxic identity politics that has clouded civil life in Mitrovica does not change the fact that many of the city's youth still listen to the same music and want to play the same instruments.

Because of the continued ethnic tension in the area, the only way the Rock School could function at its outset was from two separate locations – based on either side of the river – that provided classes for musicians of all skill levels. In order to facilitate socialization across ethnic lines (something that would have been impossible in Mitrovica at the time) the school began to hold summer schools in Skopje, Macedonia, in addition to band camps and training weeks. This meant that for a couple of weeks throughout the year the students of the Rock School could interact, and talk about and play music together without fear of the reprisal they might have faced at home. Out of this experience, bands began to form, across ethnic lines.

Since 2011, the Rock School has been fostering ethnically mixed bands that are writing, recording and performing together, some playing gigs as far away as Italy and The Netherlands. In 2016, some of these bands had their first gigs in Kosovo,

playing both in Priština and Gračanica. The next step is to put together a concert in Mitrovica itself, which is proving a more difficult task due to the city's ongoing divisions. Band members are currently only able to practice together one week out of every two months, with the school providing secure transport for students wanting to cross the river to the other side of the city. It was only in the last year that some of the students felt safe enough to cross the bridge by foot. Nevertheless, this demonstrates just how far the school and the city have come.

The new generations of artists making their way through the school are pushing the boundaries even further than their predecessors. While the previous bands were exceedingly cautious about the hometown concert, the new bands are committed to making it happen. Their drive to perform in Mitrovica is not borne out of political desire, but a desire to play music for their friends and family, to show off what they have learned at the school, and to display what they and their bandmates have created. Although the school is indeed a project with reconciliatory and political aims, it does not like to define itself solely as such. Its primary source of pride relies on the fact that it is one of the only alternative music education institutions in South-Eastern Europe.

Music is an escape. It is a celebration of what people can achieve when they come together. Music is not about ethnicity or culture or language. It is about humanity. And as long as there are young people in Mitrovica willing to follow their passion rather than concern themselves with the identity politics of the past the city will continue to heal. In a city where everybody is preoccupied with the issues of ethnicity and nationality, Mitrovica Rock School's message is simple: sit back and enjoy the music together.



WINNERS OF THE MIR MULTIMEDIA COMPETITION - VISUAL CONTENT



Alem Bajramović



Berina Ibrić



Saliha Mustafić



Svetlana Rajković



Danica Novaković



Mirnes Bakija



Photography: Ahmedin Dozić

