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The
Albanian
Handbook
for *Art*
and
Education

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Editorial Note

The Albanian Handbook for Art and Education is an ongoing, bilingual and open-access publication exploring the theme of art and education in Albania, starting by tracing a narrative that is still only partially accessible and complex to untangle.

Developed with a research collective made up of professionals coming from different disciplines, and working within or in relation to Albanian Art Institutions, the 'histories' presented here are envisioned as plural, in an effort to overcome the predominance of any single narrative or perspective, and to offer the ground from which a plethora of critical viewpoints can emerge.

The two parts of the Albanian Art Institution Histories (1920 – 1969, and 1969 – 1989), comprise a timeline showing the development of art institutions, including significant individuals and ateliers. This cultural timeline also includes historical information that further contextualizes the people, places, and events that feature in these narratives. The broader geopolitical picture, and its significance for local and international actors, is crucial to understanding the development of art institutions: it helps clarify the trajectories of various political figures and the role art continually plays in shaping national, socio-economic, and individual identities.

Albanian Art Institution Architectures delves into the architectural features and the material politics of the building of the University of the Arts in Tirana, built during the Italian fascist occupation of the country, and then on the still unexplored features of the "Jordan Misja" Artistic Lyceum, founded during the state socialist period of Albania.

Taken together, these elements demonstrate the multiple transformative approaches that we - as artists, researchers, editors and writers - can take towards understanding the shifting character of Albanian Art Institutions.

The Albanian Handbook for Art and Education is envisioned as an ongoing research project, which is updated yearly. The next stage will delve into the timeline of Albanian Art Institutions bridging the end of socialism and the beginning of pluralism – 1989/1991 – to then follow the first decade of the 90s and continue until today, a grounding investigation involving both archival research and oral history.

Valentina Bonizzi

Albanian Art
Institution

Histories

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The University of Arts in Tirana

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Histories

Part I:
1920 - 1969

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This research aims to provide a chronological documentation of the architectural life cycle of the building of the University in Arts of Tirana, from its conception as the Albanian Opera Dopolavoro (the after-work organization) in 1939 through today, when a project for a new campus for the University of the Arts is waiting to be implemented.

The use of the building during most of its life cycle to accommodate an institution with a different function than the one it was conceived for during the fascist period in Albania, presents today a very compelling case for reevaluation through the adaptive reuse of Italian heritage. The architectural adaptive reuse constitutes a sustainable approach in itself, also applied in the cases of other important edifices of totalitarian Italian heritage along the axis of the Boulevard “Dëshmorët e Kombit”, such as the Polytechnic University of Tirana, the Colonnade with the Rectorate, and the Prime Minister’s Office.

Unlike the building of the lyceum, which from the start was designed to serve as a school, evident in its clear and typical scheme of spatial distribution and organization in the plan, the present University of the Arts was not conceived as such, but adapted for this new use by optimizing its functioning through expansion, resulting in approximately three times the original volume.

To have a complete panorama of the building of the University of the Arts, it is necessary to consider its relationship with the rest of the architectural ensemble it belongs to, meticulously analyzing the concepts and ideas behind its spatial and volumetric organization; selection of materials, mainly brought from Italy as befitting a public building of great importance; as well as the changes and interventions it has undergone over time, giving it the physiognomy it carries today.

This architectural documentation is important not only to understand how historical events during different political systems influence the morphological alteration of spaces as well as their purpose, but also in order to create the necessary knowledge base to determine the most appropriate and integrative way a building conceived under a totalitarian regime can offer and inspire in its young users a feeling of freedom of thought and creativity, during the future decades of its life cycle.

1920

In Albania, the post-World War I decade is generally characterized by political instability. Its commencement in 1920 is marked by the WW War, a popular armed uprising in the region of Vlora opposing its annexation by Italy, which had occupied the city and several villages around it. The uprising was also supported by the Albanian government at the time, and, in the end, Italy was forced to abandon the Albanian coastline. In these years, Ahmet Zogu emerges as the principal political figure. He was challenged by Fan Noli, the most prominent intellectual of the period, who led a progressive revolution that brought him to power for only six months in the middle of 1924. Following Noli’s defeat, Zogu once again assumed leadership, transforming Albania into a monarchy in 1928. Under Zogu’s monarchy, the economic conditions remained difficult, prompting many Albanians to emigrate. During those years there were no visa requirements for Albanians, allowing them to move with their passports to Western countries, including the United States, even though only a few could afford the travel costs.



Anonymous, Artist Mario Ridola, founding director of the Drawing School, 1930/1940

At this time, young artists in Albania were taught and trained by established artists in their studios; this was the prevailing educational model in the main cities of the country. Consequently, institutional initiatives focused on artistic education were limited and regional in nature. Notable among them were: “The Foreign School of Crafts and Arts”, founded by the Italian Saverio Polaroli in the city of Shkodra;¹ “The School of Fine Arts”, directed by the lawyer Duro Guri in the city of Gjirokastra;² as well as a course organized by the painter Spiro Xega in the city of Korça.

1 Among his students, Simon Rrota is considered the most talented

2 Duro Guri, a lawyer (and later chief judge of the court of Tirana), an amateur painter and embroiderer in Gjirokastra, is mentioned in the press of the time, in the years 1914-1920, in connection with the creation of some paintings and embroideries.

II. The Urban Concept for the Architectural Ensemble of Littorio Square: Casa del Fascio, ODA, GLA

The building of the University in Arts of Tirana, originally conceived as ODA (Opera Dopolavoro Albanese), is part of one of the most important architectural ensembles in Albania, playing an important role in the urban configuration of the southern pole of the capital's main axis, the "Martyrs of the Nation" Boulevard (originally Viale dell'Impero). The ensemble includes (along with the University of Arts and the Polytechnic University of Tirana, originally conceived as Casa del Fascio) the Colonnade with the Archaeological Museum and the Rectorate, originally conceived as GLA (Gioventù Littorio Albanese); and the "Qemal Stafa" Stadium, today demolished, conceived as a hill with the top cut off, reminiscent of the surrounding hilly landscape of this architectural ensemble.

Consequently, it would be difficult to create a clear picture of the conception, of the ideology behind, and further of the design and implementation of the University of the Arts without first considering the ideation of this architectural ensemble as a whole and of the square that is defined and shaped by these objects, "Nëna Tereza" Square, initially called "Littorio" Square. (Fig. 1)

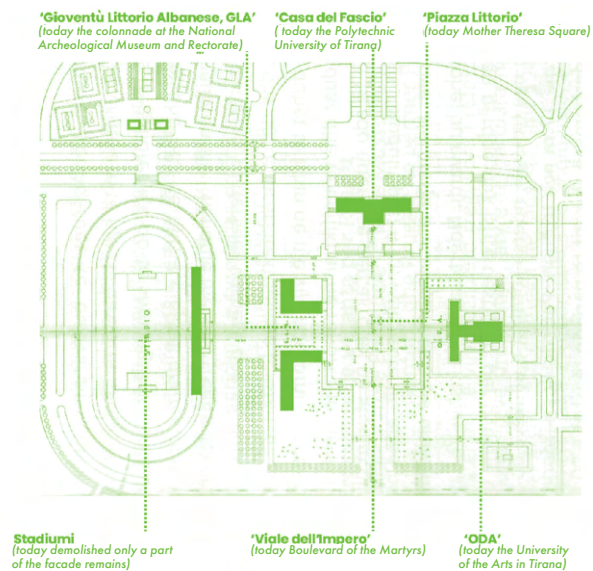


Fig. 1. The architectural ensemble of Littorio square, illustration by Jora Kasapi.

1930

The 1930s are generally marked by the influence of Italian art and culture in Albania, reflecting the increasingly close ties between Ahmet Zogu's monarchic government and the Italian fascist regime. A striking example of their cooperation is the relatively considerable number of Albanian students who were sent to study at Italian universities during the 1930s and the direct influence of the new fascist architectural style on the construction of state buildings and the public spaces surrounding them, best illustrated by the "Martyrs of the Nation" Boulevard in Tirana and the block of ministries, which were completed during Albania's occupation by fascist Italy.

On May 10, 1931, the "Friends of Art" society was established by Odhise Paskali and Qenan Meserea. With a proper statute and program, it was immediately supported by a group of young artists such as Vangjush Mio, Zef Kolombi, Abdurrahim Buza and Lasgush Poradeci, as well as several older artists such as Kolë Idromeno and Spiro Xega. The creation of this society marks the end of the regional character that had defined Albanian art until then. Two weeks after its establishment, the "Friends of Art"

society also held its first exhibition at the "Kursal" café in Tirana.

Also in May 1931, a so-called Drawing Course was opened in Tirana, with funding from the National Entity and the Committee of Arts, overseen by painter Andrea Kushi. From the start, it attracted a lot of interest, with about 150 boys and girls enrolling in this course following the selection process. The rush to enroll clearly showed the compelling need to establish a larger institution.

In January 1932, the Drawing School was established, under the direction of the Italian Mario Ridola. The number of students and teachers at this school increased over time, until it consolidated its reputation as the best place to raise the finest cohort of emerging artists. The themes ranged from classic academic subjects—such as models, portraits and still lifes—to landscapes and scenes from urban life. The director of the Drawing School oriented its artistic direction towards academicism by bringing plaster models from classical antiquity to the school, while the models for the classes were mainly boys, girls and old people dressed in national costumes, an aspect of Albanian life that was disappearing before the eyes of artists, amidst the march of modernization in the society.³

³ "Inauguration of the art exhibition", *Gazeta e Korçës*, 8 June 1932, p. 4; N. V., "Our future Academy

This architectural panorama becomes clearer if placed in the context of historical events of the time when this ensemble was conceived. The event that preceded and laid the foundations for its conception was the invasion of Albania by the Italian army on 7 April 1939, leading to the flight of King Zog and later the coronation of King Victor Emmanuel III as his successor, as well as the establishment of a new political order that reflected fascist ideology, among others also in the architectural and urban development of the main Albanian cities.

Some well-known Italian architects of the time were commissioned with changing the face of the capital, Tirana, from a city with a pronounced Muslim heritage and oriental influences – a testament to the lengthy rule of the Ottoman Empire – into a city reflective of the new regime’s Western worldview. This was achieved by applying a marked Italian rationalism and the so-called “architecture of beyond the sea”, “which was characterized by a minor, timeless architecture, with pure rationalism, featuring white structures, pure cubes and abundant terraces, evoking a Mediterranean ambiance suffused with light...”. This architecture was also used by this generation of Italian architects in the other Italian colonies, in Africa, evidenced by the development of the regulatory plans for Gondar, Gimma, and Dessie.¹

In the summer of 1939, the Undersecretary of State for Albanian Affairs, Zenone Benini, sent to Tirana the Florentine architect Gherardo Bosio, commissioning him to oversee the establishment and operations of the Central Office for Construction and Urban Planning (Ufficio Centrale per l’Edilizia e l’Urbanistica), which would ensure the implementation of the 1940 regulatory plan for Tirana, as an improvement on the earlier plan by Armando Brasini.² Additionally, he oversaw the preparation of other regulatory plans for some of the main Albanian cities, as well as the conception of a new political-sports center, situated at the southern pole of the Brasini axis, that is, the Ensemble of Littorio Square.

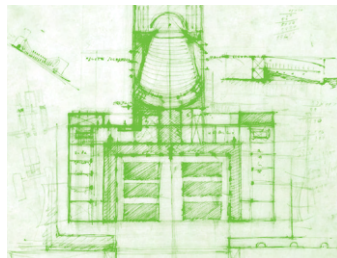


Fig. 2. Initial sketches for the Littorio Square and the monumental trio by Gherardo Bosio (1939–1940).

1 Armand Vokshi et al. 2013, *Architetti e Ingegneri Italiani in Albania*, EDIFIR, Florence, p. 85, 82.

2 Giuliano Gresleri, Giorgio Massaretti dhe Stefano, Zagnoni, 1993, *Architettura italiana d’oltremare 1870-1940*, Marsilio, Bologna, p. 329.

In 1932–33 in Tirana, a decoration course or class was opened at the “Harry T. Fultz” Technical Institute, under the direction of Zef Dajçi.⁴ This course was divided into two areas of study, the drawing class and the sculpture class, operating with both technically focused and artistic programs. In it, students initially learned how to draw using proportions, with light and shadow and with volume, as well as learning how to model three-dimensional sculptures and reliefs in clay. In a second phase, students learned to produce artistic objects: capitals, plates with floral decorations, geometric forms, etc. Ultimately, students were trained as craftsmen or artisans, with all their artistic works cast in plaster. Some established artists, such as Ibrahim Kodra and Andrea Mano, received their first lessons in these courses, which lasted four to eight years.

On 7 April 1939, Albania is invaded by Mussolini’s fascist Italy. The occupation prompts the Albanian monarch, Ahmet Zogu, to effectively abandon the country, seeking asylum

in unoccupied countries. During the Italian occupation, from 1939 to 1943, a series of public buildings were completed, some of which had already been started prior to this interval, while others were initiated during this interval. In the aftermath of the war, some of these buildings were converted into educational institutions, such as the Higher Institute of Arts (today the University of Arts), Polytechnic University and Rectorate in “Mother Teresa” Square.



Anonymous, Artworks of the School of Drawing, September, 1938

of Fine Arts”, *Minerva*, no. 12–13, July–August 1933, p. 18; Nebil Çika, “A cradle of artistic life in Albania”, *Minerva*, no. 10, 15 May 1933, pp. 12–14; “Preparatory school for fine arts”, *Besa*, 1 December 1932, p. 3.

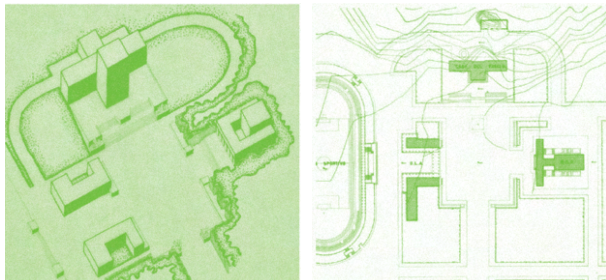
4 Zef Simon Dajçi (1890–1963) was born in Shkodra, where he completed his initial studies at the school “Per Arti Mestieri”, and then completed a three-month specialization in Milan for the decorative arts. One of his best-known works is Saint Francis of Assisi, made in bronze and installed on the main facade of the Assembly of Stigmatine Sisters in Shkodra. The work survived until 1967. See: Lec Zadeja, “Zef Dajçi, a distinguished master of chisel and plaster”, *Shkodra over the centuries*, International Seminar, Volume II, 1999, p. 411.

III. The Author of the Architectural Project and its Implementors

Gherardo Bosio, the author of the ODA project, stayed and worked in Albania for a very short but professionally prolific time, spanning just one year, due to a sudden illness that took his life in 1941. Thus, he did not witness the completion of the majority of the projects he had designed for Albania, but entrusted his successors to ensure their progress and implementation: professionals like engineer Ferdinando Poggi and architect Ferrante Orzali, who were also the figures who implemented and finalized the ODA project (now known as the University of the Arts).³

Bosio adopted a very careful approach in terms of maintaining a balance between new interventions in Tirana, a city experiencing demands for urban expansion and further development, and preserving to a considerable extent the built heritage from the Ottoman occupation era, with the aim of safeguarding significant aspects of the local identity. This approach is noticeable in the volumetric conception of the Casa del Fascio, using as a reference the typology of the “tower” dwelling (*kulla*) prevalent in northern Albania, or in the careful examination, assimilation, and reintroduction of important elements from the local natural environment into the proposed solutions. A prime example is the conception of the stadium behind the GLA, conceived as an extension of one of the surrounding hills in the lake park, but with the summit truncated. This approach is also exemplified in his project-proposal for the capital as a “garden-city”, inspired by a defining characteristic of Tirana at the time: its organic development through adobe houses with very large and green courtyards.

At the same time, Bosio undertook the task of examining the urban and architectural legacy left by his Italian predecessors in Tirana, updating their work in such a way as to align with his vision for the city. (Fig. 2)



3 Ettore Sessa et al. 2013, *Architetti e Ingegneri Italiani in Albania*, EDIFIR, Florence, p. 137.

1940

Albania’s occupation by Mussolini’s Italy was met by armed resistance, which was swiftly organized after the invasion. This resistance was divided into two main groups. The first was that of *Balli Kombëtar* (the National Front), a nationalist movement initially led by Mithat Frashëri. The second movement that emerged was the communists, a group that had existed in embryonic form in cities like Shkodra and Korça before the war. The communist movement ultimately achieved greater popular support. It initially organized partisan detachments that—upon Albania’s occupation by Nazi Germany in 1943—turned into the National Liberation Army. The National War of Anti-Fascist Liberation allowed Albania to align itself with the victors of World War II, and it also made possible the Communist Party’s coming to power in Albania in November 1944.

In September 1943, fascist Italy capitulated and Albania was occupied by Nazi Germany.



Anonymous,
Cafe Kursal in Tirana, 1940s

In October 1944, the National Liberation Anti-Fascist Committee was transformed into the Provisional Democratic Government of Albania under the leadership of Enver Hoxha, and the philosopher, poet and politician Sejfulla Malëshova was appointed as the Minister of Press, Propaganda and Folk Culture. Malëshova had studied medicine in Italy in the early 1920s, while in 1924 he had been involved in Fan Noli’s June Movement. When the movement failed, he immigrated to the Soviet Union, where he studied philosophy at the State University of Moscow (Lomonosov University) in the second half of the 1920s, also teaching there in the early 1930s. During his stay in the USSR, Malëshova became politically involved in the international communist movement, becoming a member of Comintern as well as a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He returned to Albania during the war years, and after the Communist Party of Albania came to power, he

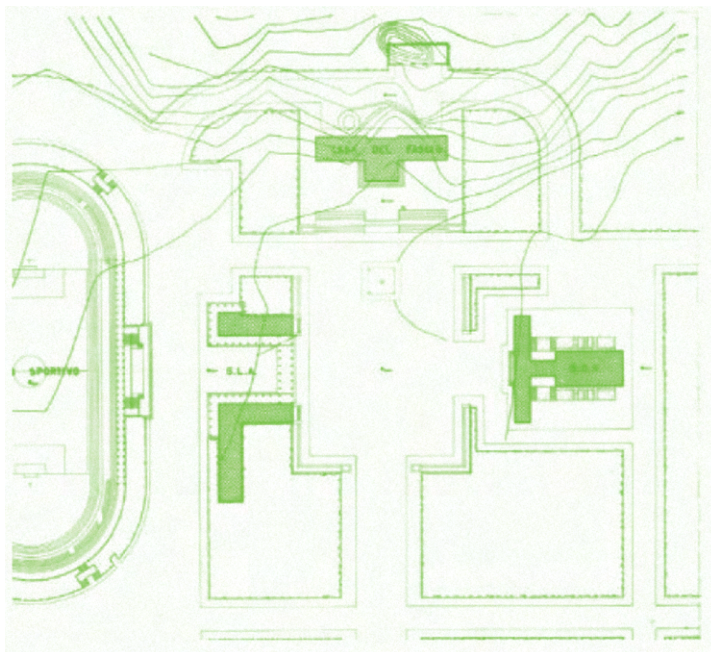


Fig. 2. Initial sketches for the Littorio Square and the monumental trio by Gherardo Bosio (1939–1940).

immediately engaged in directing the art and culture sector and later the education sector.

On 29 November the Nazi troops left Albania. Subsequently, having fought against the both Italian fascists and the Nazis, the Communist party established its government.

Malëshova's views on the direction that new art and culture should assume in the post-liberation period—articulated in his programmatic speech “The Role of Culture in Today's Albania”, published in the first issue of the magazine *Bota e Re* (*The New World*) under the pseudonym Lame Kodra—have been interpreted retrospectively as liberal. In his speech, Malëshova called for establishing close cultural relations with all countries that had positioned themselves against fascism and Nazism during World War II, including the United States and Great Britain. However, there is no information indicating that Malëshova's positions were interpreted as liberal in July 1945, when his

speech was made public, even though these positions would later be used to level accusations of “opportunism” against him.⁵

In January 1945, under the direction of director Sokrat Mio, a Drama School opened in Tirana. This “school”—which was not actually a proper school but a course (initially lasting only several months)—aimed at creating a theatrical group that would serve as the nucleus of new professional (and socialist) Albanian theater.

In March 1945, at the request of the Ministry of Press, Propaganda and Folk Culture, Yugoslav actor and director Boža Nikolić came to Tirana to assist in establishing the first professional state theater in Albania.⁶ During his six-month stay in Albania, Nikolić also worked with the state theatrical group (after its creation) to stage the drama *Dashnori* (*The Lover*), which premiered in September 1945.⁷

In April 1945, the first post-liberation exhibition of figurative arts opened, featuring contributions from 23 artists, with a total of 111 works.⁸

5 Lame Kodra, “The role of culture in today's Albania”, *Bota e Re*, no. 1, July 1945, pp. 5–16.

6 Boža Nikolić, “About our theater”, *Bashkimi* (Unity), 25 March 1945.

7 A. Burnazian, “Event of the month: Theater - The Lover (Gjido)”, *Bota e Re*, no. 4, October 1945, pp. 48–50.

8 Andon Kuqali recalls: “Many works had ordinary themes and content: landscapes, still lifes, figures in folk costumes. But there was also a reflection of the war in different aspects, busts and paintings of a partisan, a female partisan, drawings that showed the war and partisan life or presented the misfortunes caused by the enemy: refugees, portraits of orphaned children, landscapes of ruined places.” Andon Kuqali, *History of Albanian Art 2*, Tirana: Instituti i Lartë i Arteve, 1988, p. 77.

More specifically, he thought that Viale dell'Impero (today's "Martyrs of the Nation" Boulevard), conceived by Armando Brasini, should be used as the city's main artery, connecting the already established administrative and civic center, comprising the ministries complex and Skanderbeg Square, with a new political-sports center, which would be a symbol of fascism and which would be integrated into the undulating terrain of the other end of this monumental axis.⁴ To ensure a culmination of this extremity of the axis, and an elevation of this new center, Bosio conceived the Littorio Square as the plateau of an ancient theater, created by the staircase system of the main buildings around – ODA, GLA and Casa del Fascio – a configuration clearly discernible to this day, with Casa del Fascio serving as the main scenography of this theater.⁵

The application of similar principles to the volumetric and architectural treatment of the facades of these three important public works for fascism in Albania. The placement of the footprints of the four buildings constituting the Littorio Ensemble was meticulously planned during the square's conception, establishing clear urban relationships among them and other contiguous green spaces, strategically placed to create distance from the streets and traffic. This rationality, symmetry, and rhythm was extended to the designs of the facades of the architectural trio, ensuring the continuity of the facades through their composition with 4m modules and their multiples, to achieve the right balance in proportions.⁶ Furthermore, the ensemble is perceived as a whole also due to its volumetric and altimetric proportioning, where clearly ODA, GLA, and the Stadium harmonize through their close vertical development, whilst Casa del Fascio stands out due to its function and ideological symbolism. (Fig. 3)



4 Maria Adriana Giusti, 2006, *Albania Architettura e Città 1925-1943*, Maschietto Editore, Firenze, p. 45.

5 Ibid, p. 45.

6 Ibid, p. 49.

Presented as the first exhibition of the new order, this exhibition best shows the aspirations of the new state for a dynamic artistic climate, the need for reflection on the "glorious years" of war and the thematic orientations that would become better formulated in the following years.

On 8 May 1945, World War II ended in Europe, and in early September of the same year, Japan also surrendered, thus closing one of the darkest chapters in human history.

In the early post-war years, the foundations were laid for the division of Europe and the world in general into two blocs: the capitalist one, led by the United States, and the socialist bloc, led by the Soviet Union. The epicenter of this division is Europe, where the initial political clashes transpired, in occupied Germany. In the area under Soviet control, the German Democratic Republic (known as the DDR by local acronyms) was established. The areas under French, British and American jurisdiction united to form the Federal Republic of Germany. From 1960 onwards, the most tangible representation of this division would become the construction of a wall stretching

for tens of kilometers that separated the western part of the city from the eastern part, which also served as the capital of East Germany.

On 24 May 1945, the State Professional Theater (later known as the People's Theater) was established. The organization of courses in the so-called Drama School continued, now with the main aim of professionalizing the state theatrical group. A number of Soviet theater professionals would contribute to this effort over the years, including directors Alexander Fyodorovich Dudin (1947) and Andrey Ivanovich Krichko (1948), who seem to have made the first attempts to introduce Stanislavski's System into Albanian theater.⁹

In July 1945, the first issue of the cultural magazine *Bota e Re* is published. Named after a progressive Korça-based publication from the 1930s, *Bota e Re* sought to be "the continuation of positive and progressive traditions of our National Awakening movement—aiming to link two glorious historical periods and move with newfound vigor on the path of progress". The magazine closed without existing for even a year—its eighth and last issue came out in February 1946.

9 See: "Cultural life of the country: Theater – *The Russian issue*", *Literatura jonë (Our Literature)*, no. 9, November 1947, pp. 55–57; "Cultural life of the country: Soviet director Andre Kriçko arrives in Tirana, to work in our People's Theatre", *Literatura jonë*, no. 8, October 1948, pp. 80–81; Andon Pano, "Cultural life of the country: The first year of the decoration of the People's Theater", *Letërsia jonë (Our Literature)*, no. 6, June 1950, pp. 67–69.



Fig. 3. Volumetric proportioning and urban harmonization of the Littorio trio of monuments with ODA in the foreground.



The New World,
August 1945

On 7 October 1945, the Albanian Union of Writers (Lidhja e Shkrimtarëve e Shqipërisë) was established, with a wide membership that included “writers from all generations, from the National Awakening, from 1924, from the time of Zog and from the National Liberation Movement”.¹⁰ It aimed for “writers to get to know each other, to revisit issues in the field of art and literature, and from this process a unity in thoughts and actions is to emerge”.¹¹ With the establishment of the Union of Writers, *Bota e Re* transitioned to serving as its official publication for the final four issues.

In 1945, Albania witnessed a historic moment when women were granted the right to vote for the first time. This was made possible by a series of laws promulgated by the provisional government, led by Enver Hoxha, which aimed to lay the foundation for the country’s institutional future. One of the most significant laws was the one pertaining to the general elections of the Constitutional Assembly, which were held on 2 December 1945. The fact that women could participate in these elections marked a watershed moment for women’s rights in Albania. Notably, the Constitutional Assembly elections also saw the first women being elected to the Assembly, which reflected the communist party’s attitude towards women’s role in society. Although gender imbalances persisted during the whole of the socialist era, the communist party’s ideology emphasized the principle of equality between men and women, played a crucial role in shaping its inclusive attitude towards women. Moreover, the pragmatic consideration that women could fill various roles in the job market and contribute significantly to the country’s economic development and progress also influenced the party’s stance. Thus, the inclusion of women in the Constitutional Assembly elections

10 “Life and books among us-Albanian Union of Writers”, *Bota e Re*, no. 3, September 1945, pp. 54-56

11 “Life and books among us-Albanian Union of Writers”, *Bota e Re*, no. 4, October 1945, pp. 50-52.

IV. The Volumetric Conception of the ODA (Opera Dopolavoro Albanese): 1939–1942

The construction of the ODA spanned three years, from 1939 to 1942,⁷ and part of the work on the structure was documented month by month within this timeframe by the Luce Institute. (Fig. 4)



Fig. 4. Documentation of the construction works at ODA by Istituto Luce (Luce Institute).

⁷ Armand Vokshi et al. p. 130.

of 1945 was a significant milestone in Albania's history and marked the beginning of a new era for women's emancipation and empowerment.¹²

In January 1946 Albania was declared a People's Republic by a Constitutional Assembly that was elected solely with lists of voters from the Democratic Front, controlled by the Communist Party. This event, coupled with Albania's rejection of US aid under the Marshall Plan in 1948, marked in a way two initial moments of the Cold War for Albania, and the definitive inclusion of the country in the Eastern Bloc then led by Soviet Union.

From 21 February to 3 March 1946, the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Albania convened. At this plenum, there was extensive discussion about the direction that new socialist culture and art should take. Participants in the debate noted that the administration of culture up to that moment had failed to meet the expectations of the leadership regarding artistic and literary creativity, and concluded that both fields should draw inspiration from the

building of socialism in Albania, and should incorporate more characters drawn from the people.

The main figure targeted at the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party was Sejfulla Malëshova, whom Enver Hoxha accused of "opportunism"—although Malëshova continued to hold leadership positions until 1950, when he was interned in Fier.¹³ One of the first "victims" of this forum in the artistic-cultural field was the *Bota e Re* magazine, whose publication was discontinued. Meanwhile, Koçi Xoxe emerged from the forum with a strengthened position. After 1948, Xoxe's reputation for brutality and his working class background would be used as a justification for the subsequent 'mistreatment' of intellectuals that followed the plenum.¹⁴

In late June of 1946, an extraordinary meeting of the Union of Writers was held. During this meeting, the ranks of membership were purged of "those who trumpet the most unfaithful demagogies", "those who zealously protect

¹² Beqir Meta, ed, *Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX*, Vëllimi V, Tirana: Akademia e Studimeve Albanologjike, 2023, pp. 32–40.

¹³ Minutes of the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Albania, February 21–March 3, 1946, in the Central State Archive (Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror, AQSH), F.14, AP-OU, V.1946, D.1.

¹⁴ "A decision of importance: The Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania appreciates at the deserved level the activity and creative work of people of culture, arts, sciences and sports", *Letërsia Jonë*, no. 2–3, April–May 1949, pp. 1–2.

Its purpose aligns with one of fascist Italy's most prevalent institutions, the *Dopolavoro* (translated as “after work”), characterized by its recreational and relaxational character. This is further underscored by the inclusion of a classical theater hall, serving as the focal point of the ODA's composition.

The conceptualization of the ODA's volumetric design is inherently linked to Bosio's vision for the other two components of the Ensemble, particularly the GLA, situated opposite it.

These two objects are placed parallel to each other, with the same extension of the main facades but applying the notion of the antithesis of volumes or a full-empty game between the two objects. Thus, the transparency of the body of the colonnade of the GLA responds to a closed and stiffer volume that gains a slight dynamism only from the retraction through the entrance portico. The transparency of the central space of the GLA in the part of the colonnade has a second purpose, which is the visual connection of the “Littorio” Square with the Stadium. (Fig. 5)

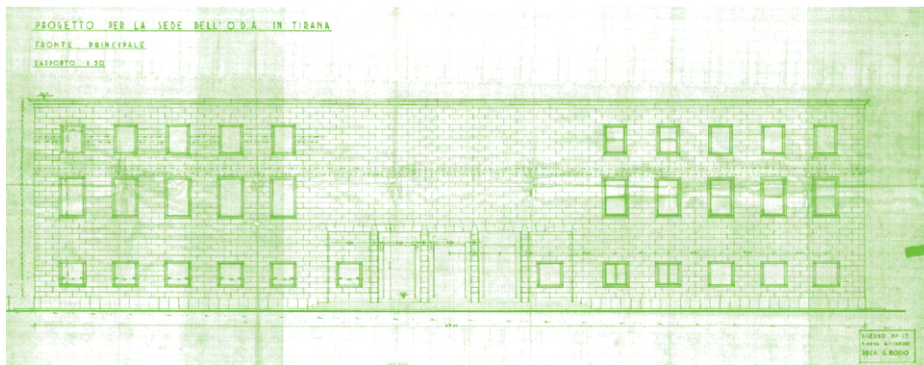


Fig. 5. Main frontal facade of the finalized project for ODA, 1940, AQTN.

war criminals”, “the war criminals”, and those “who were making plans to overthrow our popular regime”.

Additionally, it is decided that the country's new literature should be a genuine mass literature, one that should reflect the process of rebuilding the country, contributing to this same effort of rebuilding.¹⁵

In August 1946, an educational reform was announced, one that—especially from the point of view of content—aimed at establishing an education system “on the basis of Marxist-Leninist theory and socialist pedagogy”.¹⁶ The reform also aimed at expanding educational institutions in the country and increasing attendance (especially in the case of primary schools, because primary education became compulsory); expanding the respective levels (such as pre-school education, vocational schools and night schools) in the existing education system; and establishing the secular and state character of the education system—through the prohibition of religious teaching in schools at

all levels and the unification of school programs throughout the country.¹⁷

In November 1946, the Artistic Lyceum (later called the “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum) opened. With teachers educated in some of the best Western academies, its students remember it as an earnest educational establishment, with a visible enthusiasm, passionate teachers and no prominent political influences. About this school, Vilson Kilica recalled: “It seemed to me a serious school, according to my youthful memories, because there were teachers who had studied in the West, mainly in Italy. Sadik Kaceli, Nexhmedin Zajmi, Odhise Paskali, Kristina Hoshi, Abdurrahim Buza, and others were there. These were passionate teachers who represented a new era. At that time, they were interested in making art flourish.”¹⁸

At beginning of 1947 the first scientific institution of the post-liberation period opened: the Institute of Studies (later the Institute of Sciences). It

15 Dhimitër Shuteriqi, “On the Organization of the the Union of Writers of.”, *Bashkimi*, 25–26 June 1946, 1946; Shevqet Musaraj, “On the Duties of Writers in Today's Albania”, *Bashkimi*, 27, 28, and 29 June 1946; “Discussions on the Organizational Report”, *Bashkimi*, June 30, 1946; “Discussions on the report on the duties of writers in today's Albania”, *Bashkimi*, 2 July 1946.

16 Enriketa Kambo, *Development of the Cultural Revolution in Albania during the years 1944-1948*, Tirana: Academy of Sciences of PSR of Albania, Institute of History, 1982, pp. 76–86.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 50–65.

18 Excerpted from an audio-visual interview with Vilson Kilica and Edi Hila conducted by Ermir Hoxha. From the author's archive.

Bosio conceived the ODA as a monolithic block composed of three modules or regular geometric volumes, arranged in a T-shape.⁸ The first volume that approaches the “Littorio” Square, maintains a consistent height, punctuated only by the ground-floor entrance portico and modular windows on the upper levels, symmetrically distributed along both sides of the portico. This module’s design employs simplified architectural lines, emblematic of Italian rationalism and an aesthetic that conveys monumentality. Following this frontal section, the structure transitions into a more dynamic volumetric composition, characterized by the theater hall volume and an interconnecting element between it and the frontal block, also serving as the foyer. These subsequent volumes extend perpendicular to the initial one and inside the square, creating two side courtyards along the two sides of the object. (Fig. 6)

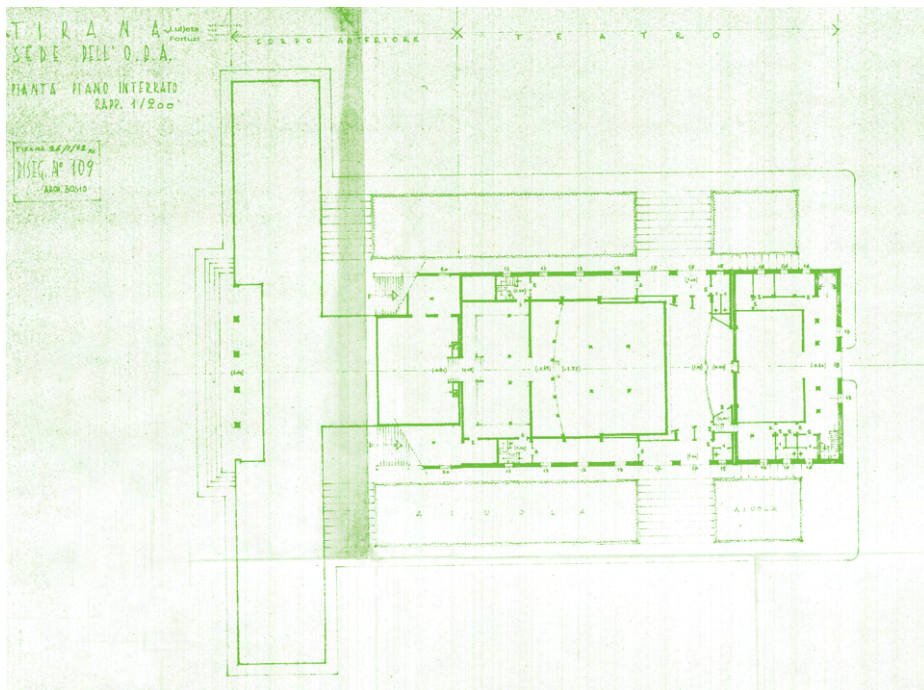


Fig. 6. Plan of the underground floor of ODA, AQTN.

initially consisted of three divisions: the section of natural sciences, the section of linguistics and literature, and the section of history-sociology and economics. This institute would serve as the nucleus of the Academy of Sciences. Simultaneously, the institute maintained a continuity with the Institute of Albanian Studies (1940-1944).

In March 1947, the first issue of the *Literatura Jonë* (*Our Literature*) journal was published, as the official publication of the Albanian Union of Writers (thus replacing *Bota e Re*). In 1950, *Literatura Jonë* would be renamed *Letërsia Jonë*, a name it would keep until it was replaced by the journal *Nëndori* (*November*) in 1954. From the very beginning, these publications featured translations from a significant corpus of Soviet theoretical texts on the methodology of socialist realism, alongside literary texts by well-known Soviet authors (among others) who represented this literary approach.

In June 1948, after several months of escalating tensions between Stalin and Tito regarding the latter’s ambitions and plans to dominate the Balkan Peninsula, Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform.¹⁹ On a narrower scale, this gave the pro-Soviet faction led by Enver Hoxha the opportunity to gain an advantage over the pro-Yugoslav faction led by Koçi Xoxe, who was arrested before the end of the year and executed on June 11, 1949. On a broader scale, the Tito-Stalin split gave Albania the opportunity to emerge from Yugoslav tutelage and position itself alongside the Soviet Union, marking the beginning of an era of intensive “Sovietization” that lasted more than a decade.²⁰

On 8 November 1948, during his speech at the First Congress of the Party of Labor of Albania, Enver Hoxha officially declared socialist realism as the “new direction” of post-war Albanian literature and art.²¹ Hoxha’s speech shows how the severance of

19 Mark Kramer, “Stalin, the Split with Yugoslavia, and Soviet–East European Efforts to Reassert Control, 1948–1953”, in *The Balkans in the Cold War*, pp. 30–32; Ethem Çeku, *Kosovo and Diplomacy since World War II: Yugoslavia, Albania, and the Path to Kosovan Independence*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2016, pp. 15–35; Jeronim Perović, “The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence”, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, Spring 2007, pp. 42–57; Ivo Banac and Richard West, *Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia*, London: Sinclair–Stevenson, 1996, pp. 217–228; Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, trans. Michael B. Petrovich, London: Penguin Books, 1962.

20 Ylber Marku, “Shifting Alliances: Albania in the Early Cold War”, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3, Fall 2022, pp. 80–115.

21 Enver Hoxha, *On Literature and Art*, Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese “8 Nëntori”, 1977, pp. 20–23.

V. The Use of Materials in the Treatment of the Exterior and the Interior of ODA

On the building's exterior, its facade cladding and external arrangement, as well as in the cladding and the finishes used in its interiors, we notice the use of rigorous and full materials. The facade cladding is made of natural stone, where in the case of the GLA and the ODA, the cladding is made of travertine with flat slabs, while in the case of Casa del Fascio and the Stadium, the stone slabs have a more rustic, relief treatment. Concrete contouring frames, crafted from artificial composite stone, adorn the windows of Casa del Fascio and the GLA, whereas the ODA employs decorative marble panels for these frames, echoing the marble's presence in the secondary stairways connecting the main body floors of the ODA.

The travertine in question has been used throughout the three main facades, while the other facades have a simpler treatment with painted plaster. (Fig. 7) The object's exterior is also seen as unified as a result of the extension of this treatment with travertine along the external stairs and the square-terraces they create, a feature that further emphasizes its monumentality. Marble (as a material with a pronounced monumental character) is employed not only in the exterior shell of this building, but also in the treatment of interior spaces, although in different varieties depending on the space it covers.

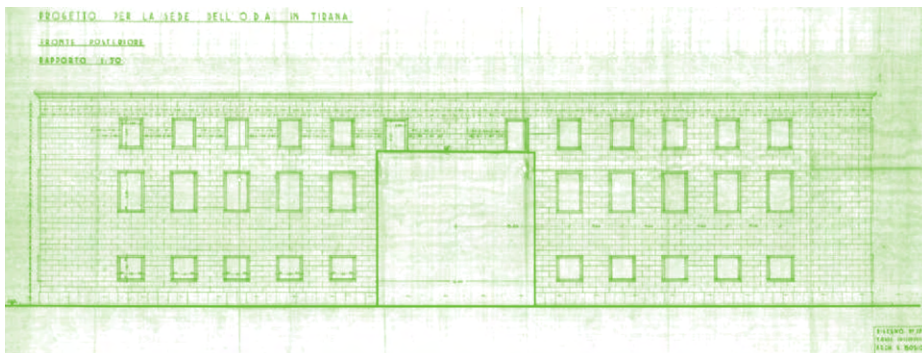


Fig. 7. a. The back facade of the ODA building, finalized project by Gherardo Bosio and collaborators, 1940, AQTN.

relations with Yugoslavia and the establishment of direct relations with the Soviet Union played a decisive role in shaping the artistic development of Albanian literature and art along the lines of Soviet socialist realism.

During this first stage of state socialism in Albania (1944–1948), a network of institutions was also created with the aim of spreading art and culture among the masses. This network included libraries and reading houses, as well as clubs and cultural houses, whose organization began in April 1945 with the inauguration of the House of Culture in Tirana. However, work in these institutions left much to be desired, so in spring of 1948 professional artistic societies were created. Despite a membership that included a mix of amateurs, enthusiasts and professional artists, these organizations laid the foundations for the future of Albanian art.²²



Anonymous, the School of Drawing, photo, 1930

1950

In the 1950s, a significant number of the central artistic institutions in the country were established. Notably, in 1950 the Albanian Philharmonic was created, along with the State Art Gallery (Pinacotheca).²³ The first would serve as the core of the National Theater of Opera, Ballet and the Popular Ensemble, which was created in 1956; while the second would serve as the precursor to the Gallery of Fine Arts (later the National Gallery of Arts), which opened in January 1954.

In 1952, the “Shqipëria e Re” (“New Albania”) Film Studio was inaugurated, as part of the First Five-Year Plan (1951–1955) of the People’s Republic of Albania. The film studio—like the five-year plan as a whole—was realized with considerable support from the Soviet Union. Even after it opened, the necessary materials and technology for its operation were imported (mainly) from the Soviet Union. (However, this was often a matter of re-exporting materials and technologies that the Soviet Union itself imported from countries like East Germany and Czechoslovakia, which had relatively more developed techniques compared

22 Enriketa Kambo, *Development of the Cultural Revolution*, pp. 122–132.

23 “The cultural life of the country”, *Letërsia Jone*, no. 1, January 1950, pp. 70–71.

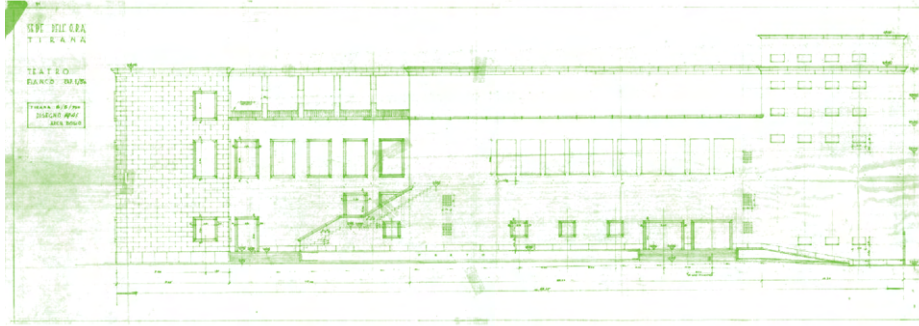


Fig. 7. b. The lateral facade of the ODA building, finalized project by Gherardo Bosio and collaborators, 1940, AQTN.

During this time period, the materials employed in the realization of buildings of a certain importance were mainly brought from Italy. It is worth mentioning here the white travertine sourced from Carrara,⁹ situated in Tuscany, known as the Italian capital of marble and renowned for the extraction of marble since ancient Roman times. Noteworthy edifices such as the Pantheon and numerous statues of the Italian Renaissance were crafted using marble extracted from Carrara.

Regarding the structural framework of the ODA, a reinforced concrete system was implemented, with structural calculations typically entrusted to local Albanian engineers. The 1930s were characterized by an increase in the construction of public buildings — alongside infrastructural projects such as bridges or hangars, particularly in the periphery of Tirana — employing reinforced concrete construction systems. Prior to this era, the prevailing architecture primarily revolved around residential structures, wherein — despite a transition from a stylistic standpoint toward neoclassical, rational, or eclectic European architecture — traditional materials and construction techniques persisted, including adobe brick walls, wooden beams, and reed ceilings: “This enduring tradition is evident today in certain pre-war Tirana residences, wherein degradation due to lack of maintenance reveals, subsequent to fallen plaster, a juxtaposition of stucco and ornate Western-style decorations against traditional mud-based construction”.¹⁰

⁹ Maria Adriana Giusti, pp. 95–96.

¹⁰ Artan, Shkreli et al. *Tirana yesterday and today. How will it be tomorrow?, Tirana between 1920–1940*, Tirana: Italian Institute of Culture, BESA Editrice, 2000, pp. 157.

to the Soviet Union, especially in terms of photographic equipment.) Beyond the importation of essential materials and technology, and the training of local staff, Albania also depended on the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries to import film diaries, documentaries and artistic films. This initiative aimed not only to cultivate the correct cinematic tastes within the local audience, but also to entertain and educate in alignment with socialist ideals. In this way, Albania became part of a wide network of cultural, technical and educational exchanges throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.²⁴



Anonymous, “New Albania” Film Studio building, Tirana, photo, 1950s

In late October 1952, following a two-day conference, the Union of Artists of Albania was established. Underlining the lack of regular forms of “professional education” until that period, its aim was to “organize and bring together the artistic forces of the entire Republic in a single focal point, elevating their work to the necessary level to meet the great demands of our working masses”. The establishment of the Union of Artists also aimed to further the assimilation of socialist realism, drawing from the experience of Soviet art.²⁵

On 11 January 1954, the Gallery of Fine Arts opened, boasting an initial collection of 100 works of art by about 40 different artists. The Gallery’s first building was located on Kavaja Street, in a two-story building. Two years later, in 1956, the Gallery was transferred to a two-story villa on Fortuzi Street.

Also in January of 1954, the first edition of the monthly literary and artistic journal *Nëndori*, the main publication of the Union of Writers and the Union of Artists of Albania, was published. It replaced *Letërsia Jonë*, the previous journal of the Union of Writers, which had been published since 1949. Unlike

²⁴ Elidor Mëhilli, “Globalized Socialism, Nationalized Time: Soviet Films, Albanian Subjects, and Chinese Audiences across the Sino-Soviet Split”, *Slavic Review*, vol. 77, no. 3, Fall 2018, pp. 611–637.

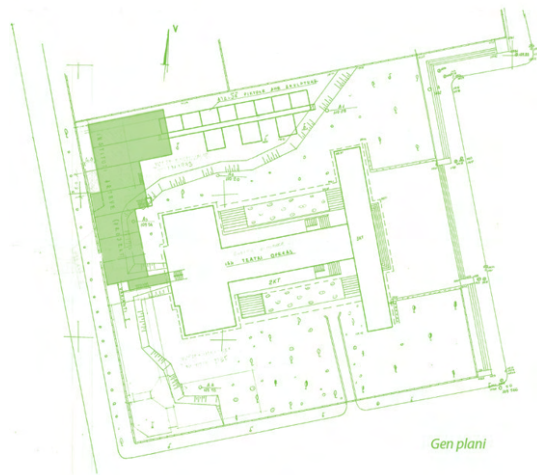
²⁵ Mustafa Krantja, “The Creation of the Union of Artists’ of Albania”, *Letërsia Jonë*, no. 10–11, October–November 1952, pp. 118–120 (p. 119).

VI. The Establishment of the Higher Institute of Arts

In 1966, the Faculty of Figurative Art of the Higher Institute of Arts relocated to the structure originally designed by Gherardo Bosio in 1939 as the Opera Dopolavoro Albanese. As the institution evolved within this historical edifice, the need gradually arose for the integration of additional professional studios, prompting the need to expand beyond its confines, into the outdoor spaces that the historical building had available.

VII. Expansion of the Higher Institute of Arts through the Extension Project by Mauricio Bega: 1973–1974

The project of the extension of the Higher Institute of Arts was designed by architect Mauricio Bega in 1973–1974. Two years earlier, Bega had designed the sculpture studios of this institute, situated on a single elevated floor, thus formulating the module of the extension in the north of the main body, where it is located today. The extension of the Higher Institute of Arts, as it was called at the time, would make the connection of the existing body of the concert hall with the module of the sculpture studios, through a connecting bridge. (Fig. 8)



its forerunner, *Nëndori* covered the broad spectrum of Albanian cultural production, including theatre, music and film, alongside literature, poetry and visual arts.

In 1955, Albania joined the Warsaw Pact. This would bring a new material reality to the country, due to considerable economic aid. It also brought a new cultural vitality, thanks to increased cultural exchanges as well as the number of scholarships for young Albanians who studied at Soviet academies during the 1950s.²⁶

In February 1956, Nikita Khrushchev gave his “secret speech” at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, denouncing Stalin’s policies, many of which he called criminal. This marked the beginning of what would be known as the process of “de-Stalinization” in the USSR and Eastern Europe. Subsequently, violent protests against the ruling communist parties erupted in Poland and then in Hungary, where the authority of the local communist party was threatened by an armed uprising, to which Moscow responded by invading Hungary and restoring control to the local communists.

26 Elidor Mëhilli, *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017.

27 Ana Lalaj, *The Turbulent Spring of '56*, Tirana: Infobotues, 2015.

28 Lalaj, *The Turbulent Spring of '56*; Elidor Mëhilli, “Defying De-Stalinization: Albania’s 1956”, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, Fall 2011, pp. 4–56.

29 Ylber Marku, “Shifting Alliances: Albania in the Early Cold War”, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3, Fall 2022, pp. 80–115.



Qamil Prizreni, National Gallery of Arts
Kavaja street, pencil, 1958

The echoes of Khrushchev’s speech were also felt in Albania. During the Tirana Party Conference held in April 1956, a chorus of voices calling for reform and opposing the cult of personality emerged, including some from the ranks of the party organization at the “New Albania” Film Studio, such as Nesti Zoto and Viktor Stratobërdha.²⁷ Enver Hoxha tried to and succeeded in regaining control of the Conference by refusing de-Stalinization, and later purging the party of those opposing his line.²⁸ Subsequently Albania and the Soviet Union begin to recalibrate their many exchanges, affecting both the economic and social-cultural domains. China emerged as a possible ally for Albania, since the USSR’s reform policies under Khrushchev were perceived as destabilizing by both sides.²⁹

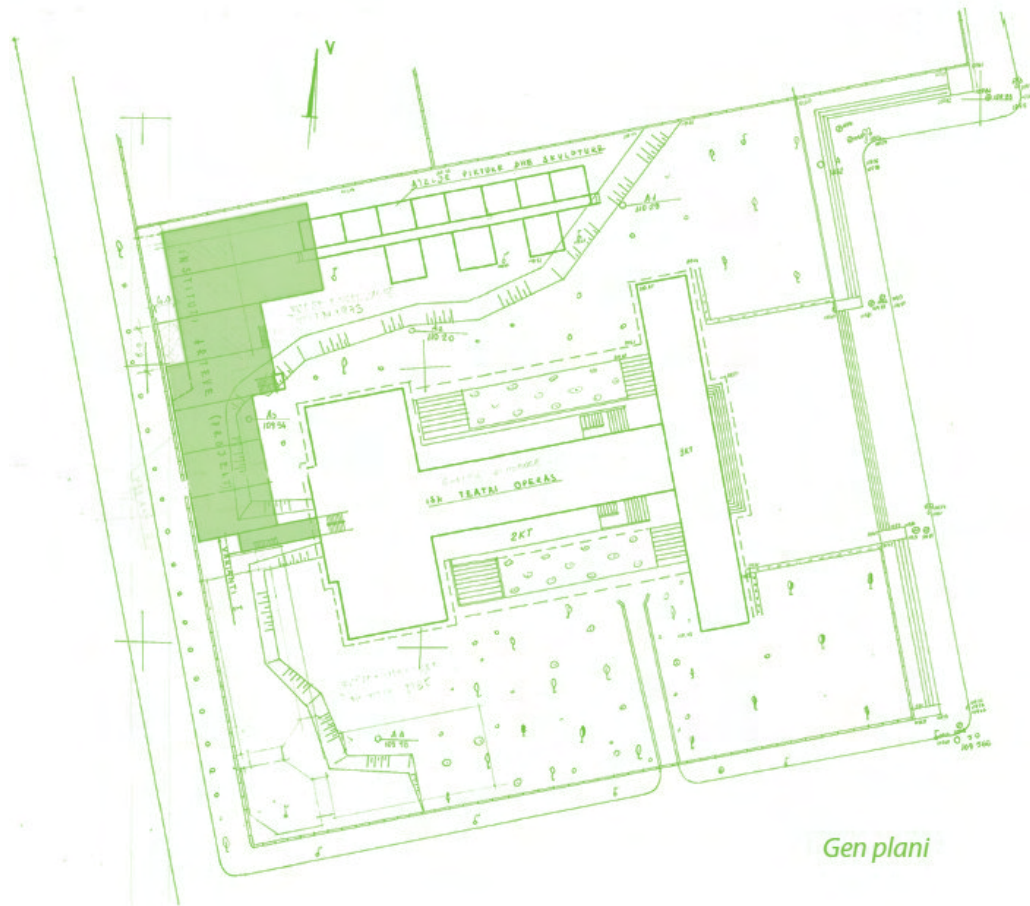


Fig. 8. Plan of the extension of the Higher Institute of Arts by Mauricio Bega (1973–1974).

In October 1956, acting upon recommendations from the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Party of Labor and a decision from the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic, the Union of Writers and the Union of Artists are merged into a single entity—the Union of Writers and Artists of Albania.

In May 1957, the State University of Tirana—the first institution of higher education in Albania—was established on the basis of six higher institutes that had been opened in the country during previous decade (1946–1956), specifically: the Pedagogical Institute, the Polytechnic Institute, the Medical Institute, the Agricultural Institute, the Economic Institute and the Legal Institute.

During the 1950s, thousands of Albanian students, selected for both their abilities and their social background and biography, were sent to the “motherland” of proletarian communism and its satellite countries. Some of the future painters and sculptors who studied at the academies of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during this decade were: Sali Shijaku, Kristaq Rama, Jakup Keraj, Guri Madhi, Zef Shoshi, Vilson Kilica, Kujtim Buza, Agim Zajmi, Llambi Blido, Rafael Dembo, Muntaz Dhrami,

Shaban Hadëri and Thanas Papa, who studied in the Soviet Union; Thoma Thomai, Hektor Dule, Ksenofon Dilo, Halim Beqiraj and Llazar Myzeqari, who studied in Prague; Hysen Devolli, Perikli Çuli, Spiro Kristo and Isuf Sulovari in Bucharest; Danish Jukniu and Shaban Hysa in Warsaw; Abdulla Cangonji studied in Sofia and Aristotel Papa in Zagreb. Upon their returning, some of them contributed to filling institutional gaps, such as the establishment of higher education institutions for the arts.

In 1959, the “Aleksandër Moisiu” Actor's School, the first higher education institution for up and coming actors, was established as part of the People's Theater.

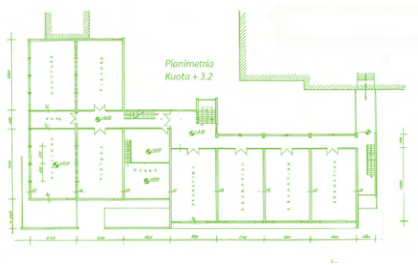


Anonymous, group photo, Kujtim Buza, Skënder Kamberi, Llazar Taçi, Guljem Mosi, Prof. Kel Kodheli, Bajram Mata, Izabet Petrela, Liljana Çefa, Bahri Jubani, Alajdin Tabaku, Ferdinand Paci dhe Myrteza Fushekati, photo, Artistic Lyceum 1960

The task of designing this extension was challenging, as it required the realization of a very compact structure at a low cost, while adhering to specific functional requirements dictated by predefined reference dimensions. These requirements included five studios for the Figurative Arts section and four for the Dramatic Arts section, each measuring 8x12m with a height of 5m, an exhibition hall for the Figurative Arts section, along with smaller classrooms and offices measuring 3m in height, and service areas measuring 2.5m in height. The rationalism, cost-effectiveness, and compactness proved somewhat daunting given the disparate spatial dimensions required for various functions. However, Bega successfully addressed these challenges by employing half-floor phasing of the studios, resulting in tiered volumes conducive to natural lighting. This design strategy met the demand for compactness while ensuring aesthetic harmony with the surrounding structures, ultimately resulting in a reduced cost amounting to 75% of the initial projection.¹¹

The project for the extension of the Higher Institute of Arts underwent scrutiny during the 1973–1975 campaign against foreign influences and modernism, following the directives of the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania in 1973, whose impact extended across the fields of art and architecture. Alongside Mauricio Bega, notable local architects such as Koço Comi, Petraq Kolevica, Sokrat Mosko, and Maks Velo found themselves among the accused. While Velo later faced imprisonment due to further accusations, others were transferred, criticized, or demoted.

Specifically, Spiro Koleka, then a member of the politburo, took issue with an element of the project, namely, plans to create an extension resembling a loggia intended for four drama studios, as embodying foreign-inspired influence. This feature, planned to be enclosed by glass and detached from the ground floor, was proposed by Bega to adorn the facade along the main street, with the aim of enhancing the architectural expressionality of the structure. (Fig. 9)



11 Mauricio Bega, *Architecture files 1965-2004, Chronicles of a turbulent life, Monograph*, Tirana: Gent - grafik, 2009, pp. 28–31.

1960

On 4 January 1960, the Institute of Figurative Arts opened, serving as the nucleus of the subsequent Higher Institute of Arts. It initially offered only a two-year program in either painting or sculpture.³⁰ The institute adopted simplified programs from the Soviet educational model, as its first professors were also a product of Eastern educational institutions. Thus, while in the Artistic Lyceum in the early 1960s a good number of the teachers were still former students of Western academies, such as Sadik Kaceli, Nexhmedin Zajmi, Adburrahim Buza, Kel Kodheli, etc., in the Institute of Figurative Arts the supremacy of the Eastern school was evident. The institute was opened and directed by former students from Eastern European countries such as Vilson Kilica, Sali Shijaku, Kristaq Rama, Guri Madhi, Shaban Hadëri, Danish Jukniu, Hektor Dule, Perikli Çuli, etc. From the state's perspective, these teachers—despite their young age (Kilica, the first director, was only 28 years old)—possessed both the proper ideological framework and the

formal tools to enable the unequivocal orientation of every student towards the aesthetics of socialist realism.

In November 1960 during the Conference of Communist Parties taking place in Moscow, Beijing and Tirana decided to denounce Moscow's stance as revisionist, directly blaming and accusing Khrushchev of holding an anti-Marxist position. This conference was followed by a severe reduction in exchanges between Albania and the Soviet Union, the termination of economic relations in 1961, the ultimate withdrawal of all Soviet specialists and the repatriation of all Albanian students studying in the Soviet Union.³¹ By the end of 1958, over a thousand Albanian students were pursuing higher studies in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.³² It is not clear how many of them were studying at art academies in these countries. However, considering the priority that the socialist system had given to the fields of construction and agriculture, it can be inferred that the number art students would have likely been limited to a few dozen.

30 Audio-visual interview with Vilson Kilica, the first Dean of the Institute of Visual Arts, conducted on 16 November 2010 by Ermir Hoxha. Part of the author's archive.

31 Ylber Marku, "Communist Relations in Crisis: The End of the Soviet-Albanian Relations and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1960–61", *The International History Review*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2020, pp. 813–832.

32 Elidor Mëhilli, *From Stalin to Mao*, p. 62.

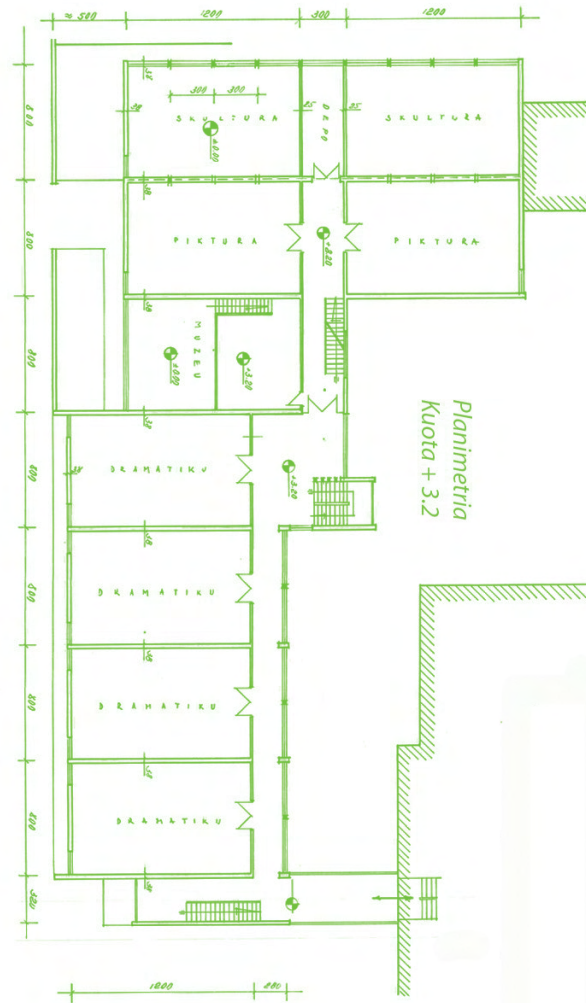


Fig. 9. Plan of the extension of the Higher Institute of Arts by Mauricio Bega, at +3.2m.

The issue was extensively discussed in various forums, including deliberations with representatives of the field and meetings of the Party's base organization within the Institute. Despite numerous attempts to defend himself and justify the feature by Mauricio Bega, the author of the project, he was ultimately transferred, along with his family, from the Architectural Design Institute in Tirana to Fier.

In 1961 Albania formed a close alliance with the People's Republic of China, under the leadership of Mao Zedong. Although this repositioning isolated Albania from the Soviet Union and also reduced its ties with other socialist Eastern European countries, it enabled it to concurrently expand relations with countries in East Asia and the so-called "Third World". Albania also gained greater autonomy in shaping its socialist development, no longer directly influenced by the Soviet or the Chinese model. This shift also manifested in local forms that were reflected in art and culture.

In 1960 a reform of the pre-university education system began. In the case of primary education, the eight-year system was introduced, replacing the seven-year system that had preceded it. In the case of secondary education, beginning from the 1959–60 school year, subjects focused on political education were introduced into all high schools, including in institutions such as the Artistic Lyceum.³³

On 15 January 1962, the State Conservatory of Tirana opened.

In 1965, the four-year study system was introduced at the Institute of Figurative Arts.³⁴

A year later, the merger of three art schools took place: the State Conservatory of Tirana, the Institute of Figurative Arts and the "Aleksandër Moisiu" Actors' School. Thus, in 1966, the Higher Institute of Arts (IAL) was inaugurated, a name it would keep until 1990. The first director of the IAL was Vilson Kilica.

The staff teaching artistic subjects initially consisted of Danish Jukniu, Sali Shijaku, Andrea Mano, Kristaq Rama, Shaban Hadëri, Pandi Mele, Vasil Konomi and Ismail Lulani, whilst theoretical subjects were developed by Agim Duhaxhiu (Art History), Petro Papadhopulli (Anatomy), Maks Velo (Perspective), and various specialists in different crafts.

In 1966 in Albania embarked on the Ideological and Cultural Revolution, a comprehensive mobilization movement that permeated all spheres of creativity. This movement, among other things, emphasized the education of the masses with a special focus on the working and peasant classes. Art, literature and culture in general were

³³ Enriketa Kambo, *Albanian School in the years 1960-1970*, Tirana: Center for Albanological Studies, Institute of History, 2014, p. 55.

³⁴ Audio-visual interview with Ksenofon Dilo, the first Dean of the Institute of Visual Arts, conducted on 16 November 2010 by Ermir Hoxha, From the author's archive.

VIII. The Second Expansion of the University of Arts

In addition to the extension located in the western part of the building, to the northwest of the main body of the University, the other objects added to this institution within the framework of the expansion of its activities were placed around the perimeter of the plot defined by the three main road axes, encircling the historical Bosio project, connecting through a transition bridge with the technical and auxiliary spaces of the stage tower in the large concert hall. However, this expansion encroaches upon and divides the two adjacent courtyards flanking the concert hall, originally conceived by Bosio as open spaces essential for providing the necessary buffer and isolation from traffic.

The third volume, located in the southern/southwestern sector, constructed subsequent to the one envisioned by Bega, exhibits the most significant expansion relative to the rest of the extension. It develops on three levels and its footprint is delineated by its placement at the juncture of the “Lekë Dukagjini” and “Ibrahim Rugova” streets.

IX. Restorative, Adaptive, and Reconstructive Interventions in the Building of the University of Arts: Post-2000

The building of the University of Arts was granted the status of a Cultural Monument of the second category in March 2007 for its historical and architectural values as part of a unique ensemble in the city of Tirana. According to data from the Archive of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage, numerous projects aimed at preserving, adapting, and revitalizing the University have been carried out since the turn of the millennium. Worth mentioning is the 2011 project titled “Restoration of terraces and architectural details of the facades of the Academy of Arts”, conceived by the architectural firm led by Arben Biçoku and engineer Elsa Kasimati. Furthermore, there is the “Renovation, reconstruction, and restoration of the concert hall of the University of Arts (2020-2023)” which, again referring to data from this same archive, began with a feasibility study followed by the project implementation phase.

assigned a central role in the mission of mass education. The “Hearths of Culture” (often known as cultural houses) has been established earlier, but in this period they spread to all corners of the country, allowing local artists to be engaged in musical and theatrical performances from a young age. The role of these institutions was multifaceted: they were a mixture between a theater and a cabaret, especially in rural areas, and they brought a cultural dimension to contexts that otherwise possessed only work cooperatives. These cultural houses also served as a first platform for emerging talents who were subsequently promoted on more prominent stages, such as local theaters or national institutions. The Variety Theaters in particular benefited significantly from this expansion of popular culture. Many actors who later became national icons began their careers at the local level, in the Hearths of Culture.

In 1969, with the appointment of painter Ksenofon Dilo as head of the Faculty of Figurative Arts, a structural transformation occurred. Previously focused solely on painting and sculpture, the faculty expanded to include other branches and studios, such as textiles, scenography, graphics, ceramics and

glass, aligning with the industrial development of the country. While these disciplines had been offered as supplementary subjects in the 1960s, their elevation to the status of full branches of study persisted until the late 1980s at the Faculty of Fine Arts. As Dilo, who had studied at the Bauhaus-style art school in Prague, recalls: “I wanted to change the character of this school, which followed the Russian model, focused only on painting and sculpture. I thought of adding all these studios (Textiles, Fashion, Lacework, Monumental Painting, Ceramics, Glass) and we started working on this together with Danish Jukniu, who had been invited by Vilson [Kilica] right before me, for the textiles branch, which opened a little before I came, in 1968. Danish had been educated at a Bauhaus-style school, so together we decided to make the first changes.”³⁵

Significant changes occurred to the building itself. Initially, the Institute of Figurative Arts was located in a building on Kavaja Street, then later on Elbasan Street, later again at the “Mihal Grameno” School, until finally settling in 1966 in the historic building on “Mother Teresa” Square. In the mid-60s, more professional studios were set up in the new buildings designed by architect Mauricio Bega. About

³⁵ Interview with Ksenofon Dilo about the Higher Institute of Arts. Interviewed by Prof. Najada Hamza.

X. The project of Renovating, Rebuilding and Restoring the Concert Hall: 2020–2023

This project, which mainly focused on the concert hall and its auxiliary spaces, was carried out by the architectural studio “Atelier4”, in collaboration with architects Fabio Cappani, Giacomo Tempesta, Riccardo Renzi, and Simone Secchi from the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence. It started in 2020 and the implementation was completed in October 2023. The project, which represents the most recent intervention into this building, consists in a comprehensive analysis of the hall’s technological and acoustic parameters, with a commitment to preserving, restoring, and replicating where necessary the original elements and finishes within the hall and its associated areas. Emphasis was placed on enhancing acoustic qualities, as well as heating, cooling, ventilation, artificial lighting, and spatial mobility.

The interventions mainly affected interior spaces, except for the provision of some new technical underground facilities, in the northern section of the yard. The elevated part that results in a concrete platform has been repurposed as a recreational space through the integration of urban design elements such as seating, greenery, and artistic installations by the students. Other specific interventions include the opening and use of underground spaces as rehearsal rooms for artists before performances; restoration and expansion of the capacity of the orchestra pit, the implementation of an automated structure facilitating stage elevation across three levels, and the full reconstruction of sanitary facilities while maintaining their original locations. Additionally, a goods elevator has been installed to connect the carpentry warehouse with storage areas within the stage tower, alongside the establishment of a new reception area.

Another important intervention is the restoration of the original elements of the auditorium, gallery and balconies along with the reproduction of various elements referring to Bosio’s original design. Worth mentioning here is the reproduction of some of the plaster luminaires with shell configuration from the concert hall, the reproduction of the seats of the auditorium and balconies according to their original design, noticeable in the gallery area, where Bosio’s original seat is preserved. (Fig. 10)

this, Dilo adds: “[...] large studios were created, with light from the north, [for media] such as textiles, graphics, monumental painting (mural painting and mosaics), painting, glass. All studios were equipped with cabinets hung on the wall, to which each student had their own key. The plan was to add more. We wanted to open a space dedicated to fashion as well, because at that time those kind of industries could be applied and influence everyday life.”³⁶

Workers (Punëtorët) by Vilson Kilica; *In the Electrification Work Site (Në kantierin e dritës)* by DanishJukniu; and the cycle of linocuts dedicated to the Albanian woman, entitled *Our Road (Rruga Jonë)* by Lumturi Dhrami. While the majority of the artworks explored Albanian themes, certain paintings by Kujtim Buza depicted the Cultural Revolution in China, and others (like those by Lumturi Dhrami, for example) addressed Albania’s friendship with the Arab world.³⁷



Anonymous, Teachers at the “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum, photo, year unknown



Anonymous, Teacher at Jordan Misja Art Lyceum, photo, year unknown

In November 1969, the customary annual national exhibition, opened at the National Gallery of Figurative Arts, commemorating the 25th anniversary of national liberation. Among the exhibited works were: Sali Shijaku’s monumental and iconic painting of *Vojo Kushi*; as well as

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *National Exhibition of Figurative Arts*, Tirana: National Gallery of Figurative Arts, 1969.



Fig. 10. Interior view of the concert hall of the University of the Arts, photo by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

Concerning seating arrangements, the project entailed a reduction in hall capacity by decreasing the number of seats from 240 to 218 in the auditorium and from 255 to 242 in the gallery, while augmenting seating capacity in the balcony sections (boxes), resulting in a total hall capacity of 500 seats presently.

In the context of enhancing acoustic performance, the floor's carpeting has been replaced with wooden parquet, and doors and windows have been renewed, though preserving their previous design and similar materials. The sole exception are the side stair doors, which retain their original structure and appearance but have been modernized with anti-panic handles to serve as evacuation exits.¹² Meanwhile, within the stage tower spaces, the technical and ancillary facilities for the performers and stage requirements have been reconfigured, alongside improvements in functionality. In addition to interventions in interior spaces, very rich in finishes and architectural details, the project also included the restoration of facades through the cleaning of travertine panels and their replacement with the same materials in case of damages.

¹² Atelier 4, University of Florence, DIDA 2020, *Architectural report: Restoration project, Reconstruction and Renewal of the Tirana Art University's concert hall*", NIPM Technical Archive, Tirana, pp. 159–181.

Histories

Part II: 1969– 1989

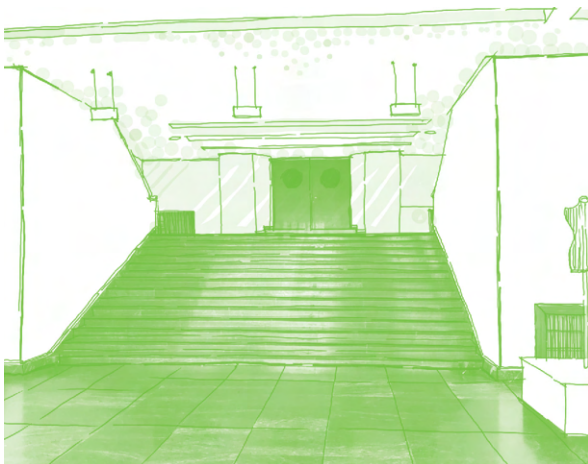
Written with:

Jonida Gashi
Ermir Hoxha
Raino Isto
Ylber Marku

XI. Analysis of Materials, Finishes and Original Elements Preserved Today in the University of Arts Building

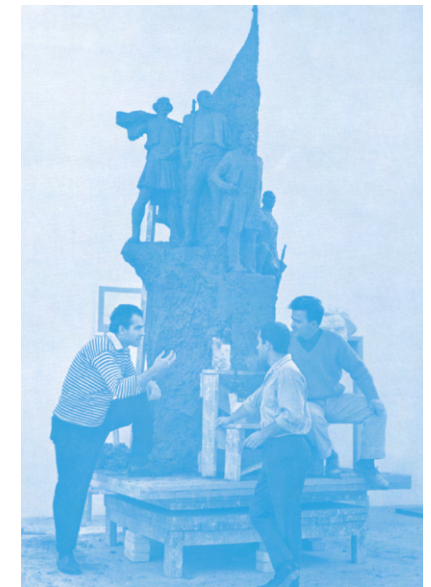
The passage of time, coupled with a lack of maintenance and the adaptive reuse of this architectural marvel for a new institutional purpose, presented a host of spatial, technological, and infrastructural challenges. Consequently, many of its original elements have undergone alterations over time, either through replacement or removal. In this context, it is valuable to bring to light those authentic elements of the building that are preserved today and that demonstrate the highly versatile design of architects and the Italian architects and engineers Bosio, Poggi, and Orzali. They were capable of moving from the macro-scale conception of the structure's urban integration, volumetric spatial design, and functional layout, to smaller details of material selection, finishes, and bespoke interior elements such as seating arrangements, lighting fixtures, doors, and windows.

One of the foremost authentic materials that is immediately noticeable upon entry into the building are the serpentine stone slabs. These natural stones, employed in flooring, exhibit deep green hues interspersed with white veins. They constitute costly materials, both at the time of their installation and today. Such polished stones have a tactile softness reminiscent of snakeskin, hence its name. It finds application throughout the structure, adorning the principal spaces including the hall-atrium, the expansive three-story staircase, and the corridors flanking the Rectorate building-unit on either side. (Fig. 11)



1969: On 13 July 1969, Enver Hoxha published an open letter on the first page of *Drita* (*The Light*), addressed to three of the most prominent sculptors in Albania at the time – Kristaq Rama, Shaban Hadëri, and Muntaz Dhrami. At that time, the sculptors were at work on the Independence Monument planned for the southern port city of Vlora, where Albania's independence from the Ottoman Empire had been declared in 1912. Hoxha's letter followed up on a recent visit that the dictator had made to their studio. It summarized his impressions from this visit, as well as clarifying suggestions he had made to the artists in person about what the monument should symbolize. A letter of response from the three sculptors was also printed in the same issue of *Drita*.¹ This exchange of letters would subsequently serve as a key episode frequently cited in socialist Albanian cultural discourse: it represented the first time that Hoxha's aesthetic commentary and intervention in the creative process were made public in such a direct way, and in the ensuing years it was held up as an example of the dictator's concern with art's importance and his beneficent role

as cultural critic. In the midst of the proliferation of monumental commissions that coincided with the 25th anniversary of Albania's liberation, the letter also made clear Hoxha's priorities for public commemorative art: that it should not only recall the past but also reflect the building of socialism in the present.



Kristaq Rama, Muntaz Dhrami, and Shaban Hadëri at work on the Vloa Independence Monument, published in *Socialist Albania Marches On* (*Shqipëria socialiste marshon*), Tirana, 1969, p. 178.

¹ Enver Hoxha, "In the Bountiful and Life-sustaining Fountainhead that Is the People's Creativity, We Shall Find the Mighty Inspiration Needed to Create Beautiful and Magnificent Works for Our People"; Kristaq Rama, Muntaz Dhrami, and Shaban Hadëri, "Dear Comrade Enver", both published in *Drita*, 13 July 1969.

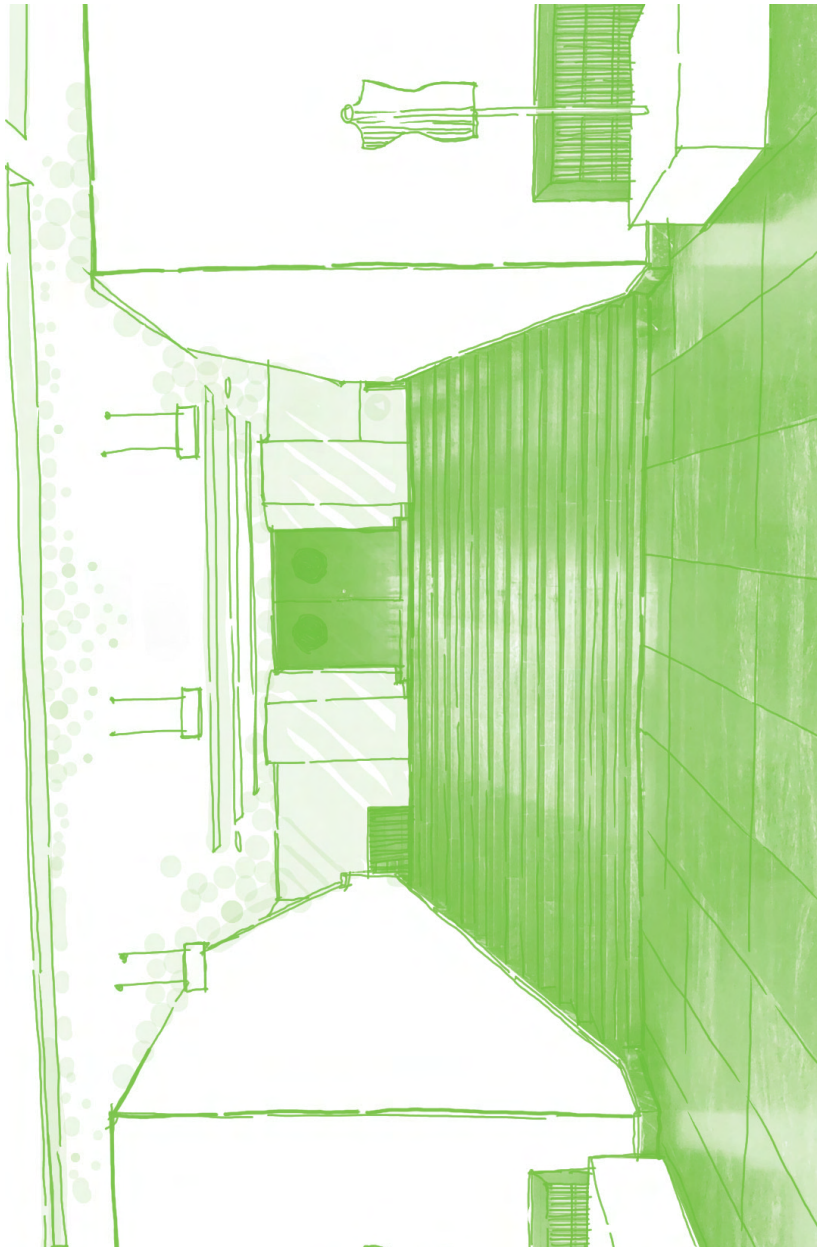


Fig. 11. View of the main hall with its original pavement, illustration by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

1969: In December 1969, the National Reform for Education was approved,² mandating “the revision of school documentation, plans, and programs across all levels of education, leading them towards an extreme politicization. From this point on, the entire educational and teaching process, programs, and subjects would be permeated by communist ideology. As part of the reform, a new school structure was compiled. Accordingly, the education system would be based on three components: teaching, production work, and physical and military education, all infused with the Marxist-Leninist ideological framework.”³ Thus, from the mid-1970s, the Higher Institute of Arts (ILA) witnessed an increase in new subjects (which varied from year to year) such as productive work and military training, along with professional disciplines, including work with specific materials, vocational knowledge, and artistic photography.⁴

1970

1970–72: Catalyzed by the wider circulation of catalogs and books on modern art within the Higher Institute of

Arts, a series of official talks on modern art was developed in the form of lectures. Topics such as Cubism (1970) and Surrealism (1972) were covered by Kudret Velça; Expressionism (1971) by Petro Kokushta; and discussions on artists like Van Gogh (1972) by Ksenofon Dilo and Danish Jukniu. Their primary purpose was to condemn these artistic movements. As such, after the explanation, accompanied by illustrative slides, they were condemned as non-revolutionary. This is also evidenced by the announcement posters (currently part of the collection of the Faculty of Fine Arts). Additionally, some sessions were followed by other improvised talks by the Institute’s teachers held in semi-secrecy with selected students. These lectures should not be understood as representing a single institutional stance, as there were many other lectures conducted in those years and thereafter on important authors of art history such as Michelangelo, Goya, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Vera Mukhina, George De la Tur, and Odhise Paskali, or on certain periods and phenomena such as Hellenic and Egyptian Art, as well as on local and foreign cultural heritage.

² Eriketa Kambo, *Shkolla shqiptare në vitet 1960–1970*, Tirana: Qendra e Studimeve Albanologjike, Instituti i Historisë, 2014.

³ ASHSH, *Historia e Popullit shqiptar IV*, Tirana: Toena, 2008, p. 289.

⁴ Art photography was first taught as a subject in the 1972–73 academic year, and stopped being taught after the 1973–74 academic year.

Also noteworthy is the utilization of Calacatta marble, a distinctive variety imported from Carrara, significantly more costly than typical Carrara marble due to its unique visual attributes that set it apart from other varieties. This includes the deep intensity of the white base and more pronounced gray veining. This material is employed in the construction of secondary staircases flanking the main hall, staircases that facilitate the connection between different levels within the Rectorate building-unit, as per the information and technical specifications derived from the original project drawings archived in the Technical Building Archive in Tirana.

The incorporation of dark wood in the treatment of the handrail along the parapet-masonry of the stairs, as well as the balustrades of the concert hall balconies, represents another authentic feature, some sections of which are accented with a mint-colored relief. It is believed that the same wood was used in the original door construction, though it was replaced to a significant extent later on. Additionally, Bosio designed a specific decorative luminaire for the theater hall, which is still conserved and replicated throughout the perimeter of the concert hall space and beneath the balconies primarily for ornamental purposes. These luminaires take the form of shells and are crafted from treated plaster. (Fig. 12)

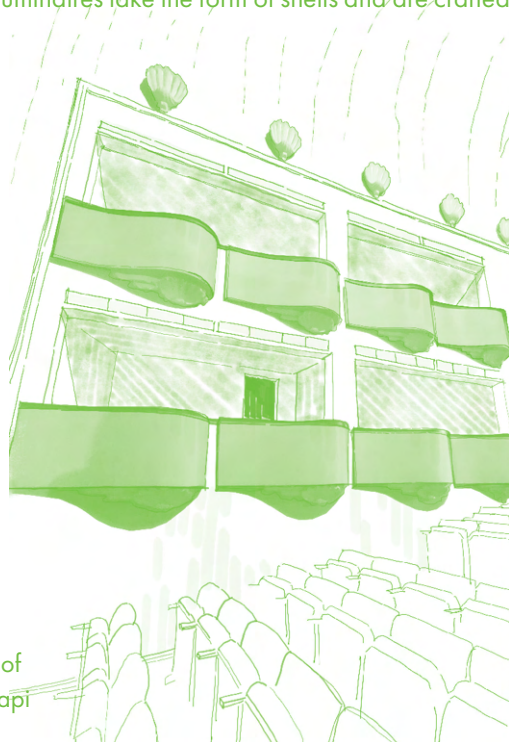


Fig. 12. View of the original balconies of the concert hall, illustration by Jora Kasapi
CC BY-SA 4.0.



Petrit Kumi, *Image published in Poem for the Albanian Woman*, 1972.



Anonymous, *Expressionism (Ekspressionizmi)*, tempera and watercolor, poster, 1971.

1971: Theater critic Ismail Hoxha's detailed account of the history (and legacy) of Albanian partisan theater during the Antifascist National Liberation War appears in the August issue of the journal *Nëndori*, published by the Union of Writers and Artists of Albania. Hoxha's treatise proved very influential in the field of theater studies, spawning a dozen or so diploma theses on the topic of partisan theater over the next two decades. In particular, Hoxha's claim that partisan theater represented the foundation and origins of Albania's Socialist Realist theater in the postwar period, continued to occupy a central place in histories of Albanian theater even after the collapse of the communist regime in 1991.⁵

1971: The biannual journal *Monuments (Monumentet)* begins publication. Focused on the work of the Institute of Cultural Monuments (IMK), it contains articles covering new excavations, art historical analyses, and strategies for restoration. The architect Gani Strazimiri (the founder of the IMK) is the editor-in-chief of the publication.

1971: In 1971, the annual National Exhibition of Figurative Art, which opened

5 Ismail Hoxha, "Partisan Theater: 1941–1945", *Nëndori* [November], vol. 18, no. 8, August 1971, pp. 47–94; Anxhela Çikopano, "Partisan Theater or the Albanian Variant of Agitprop Theater?", *Art Studies*, no. 21, 2022, pp. 11–38: https://albanica.al/studime_arti/article/view/3012/2964.

Regarding the exterior materials, it is worth highlighting the aforementioned utilization of travertine slab cladding combined with window frames adorned with Calacatta marble, thus ensuring a seamless transition between the exterior and interior spaces through the consistent use of materials. (Fig. 13)

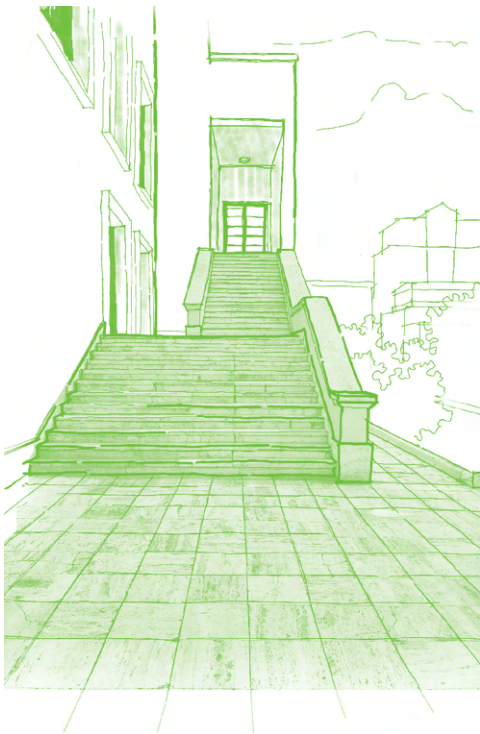


Fig. 13. View of the original outdoor staircases of the concert hall, illustration by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

XII. Current Functional-spatial Organization of the University of Arts Building: Original Building Designed by Gherardo Bosio and the Extension Building

Adapting an existing building, designed to serve a certain use, is not an easy process since every building typology of a predetermined character is equipped from the ideation and design phase with a series of criteria related to the dimensions of spaces, the type of lighting, the most suitable location of spaces, the type of installations, access, and the method of connecting spaces, which are specific to the function and character of the building.

The allocation of various faculties within an arts university necessitates a spatial expanse beyond what the Bosio-designed edifice offered. However,

in late October, featured several artworks that would engender heated debate about the direction and character of socialist visual art in Albania, including (most notably) Edison Gjergo's *Epic of the Morning Stars* (*Epika e yjeve të mëngjesit*), Edi Hila's *Planting of Trees* (*Mbjellja e pemëve*), Fatmir Haxhiu's *The Councilors from Hekal* (*Këshilltarët e Hekalit*), and Ferdinand Paci's *The Mothers Take Revenge* (*Nënat marrin hak*).⁶ According to critics like Andon Kuqali—who would champion many of the artists in the exhibition as part of a shift towards new forms of socialist art—the exhibition evidenced the search for “a more artistic, more emotional, and more original form”.⁷ While Kuqali celebrated the effort to find new “means of expression”, others criticized works like Hila's *Planting of Trees* as taking “an aestheticizing approach to reality”, or Gjergo's painting, as being “contented [...] with merely surface effects”.⁸ The specific debates catalyzed by the exhibition reflected broader ideological and artistic disagreements over how Albanian socialist realism should in-

corporate (or not) aesthetic elements of historical modernism as it sought to find a new vocabulary for the new experiences of the Ideological and Cultural Revolution period.

1972: In February of 1972, the plenary meeting of the steering committee of the Union of Writers and Artists focused on the topic of criticism.⁹ In his report at the plenum, Vilson Kiliça characterized literary and artistic criticism as engaged in an ongoing struggle against naturalism, sentimentality, melodrama, psychological superficiality, pomposity, academism, and excessive folk sensibilities, praising the critical writings of figures like Kudret Velça, Andon Kuqali, Dalan Shaplllo, Razi Brahimi, and Çesk Zadeja for the way they had risen to the challenge of addressing the radical social changes of Albanian society.¹⁰ While Kiliça affirmed that criticism was advancing in important ways in terms of both its ideological approach and its specificity, other speakers in the discussions pointed to real challenges faced by aesthet-

6 “Creative Discussion on the National Exhibition of Figurative Art”, *Drita*, 5 December 1971; Andon Kuqali, “The Vigour of Socialist Realism”, *Nëndori*, vol. 18, no. 12, December 1971; and “Creative Discussion on a Few Paintings”, *Drita*, 5 March 1972.

7 Andon Kuqali, qtd. in “Creative Discussion on the National Exhibition of Figurative Art”.

8 Skënder Milori and Dhimo Gogollari, respectively, qtd. in “Creative Discussion on the National Exhibition of Figurative Art”.

9 Selections from the talks given at the plenum were published in the April 1972 issue of *Nëndori*.

10 Vilson Kiliça, “For a Qualitative Improvement in Our Literary and Artistic Criticism”, *Nëndori*,

despite this limitation, the inclusion of a concert hall, most probably conceived as a theater hall with classical design parameters, presents an initial positive indication for a new functional adaptation. Such an adaptation could connect this structure with the realms of art and education. Simultaneously, the primary three-story module of the building, facing the “Nëna Tereza” square, has a highly rational layout across its floor plans. Characterized by a systematic and repetitive arrangement akin to a “comb” scheme, it features a principal distribution corridor that channels in a certain rhythmic movement, through spaces of the same dimensions, all oriented towards the east.

This organizational arrangement is suitable for accommodating educational and administrative functions, which constitutes the formula of today’s use of this module. Within this building unit, the University’s administration, along with the Rectorate, the Deanship, and the classrooms of the Faculty of Music, engage in their respective activities.

This organizational structure is repeated symmetrically along both sides of the module, with the central space — the main hall with an atrium — serving as the axis of symmetry. This hall, developed over three levels, has natural zenith lighting from above. Furthermore, the hall-atrium serves as the connection between the initial module and the concert hall, which is oriented perpendicular to the spaces of the former. (Fig. 14)



Fig. 14. Zenith lighting of the main hall atrium, photo by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

ic criticism, challenges that point to the growing tensions in socialist art discourse at the time. Fadil Paçrami, for example, pointed to the complex character of the critic as both academic and artist, a position that created unique demands on critical writing and raised difficult questions about how audiences might determine the authority of a piece of criticism.¹¹ Andon Kuqali lamented the predilection for negative formulations in criticism, arguing that official reports from the committees on arts and culture were so preoccupied with what “works of art or literature do not have” that they failed to present a coherent discussion of any work of art conceived as a unified phenomenon.¹²

1972: On 29 May 1972, the *Spring (Pranvera)* exhibition opened in two galleries housed within the National Theatre complex (the former club of the Union of Writers and Artists). On the heels of the debates and creative discussions that were still ongoing regarding the 1971 annual National

Exhibition, the *Spring* exhibition reflected continued shifts in the way Albanian artists were conceiving and adapting Socialist Realism.¹³ The exhibition evidenced artists’ continued exploration of the expressive use of color, as well as the proliferation of lyrical subjects, seen in the abundance of more intimate landscapes, still lifes, and portraits in the exhibition. For some critics at the time, this shift away from more overtly ideological subjects (like the National Liberation Struggle or socialist industrialization) reflected a celebration of the new variety and dynamism of socialist life, whose new character demanded new forms of representation.¹⁴



Front page of *Drita*, 11 June 1972, featuring Hasan Nallbani’s article on the Spring (Pranvera) exhibition

vol. 19, no. 4, April 1972, p. 10.

11 Fadil Paçrami, “We Need an Authoritative Criticism”, *Nëndori*, vol. 19, no. 4, April 1972, pp. 64–68.

12 Kuqali, “Criticism Should Open Up Horizons for the Future”, *Nëndori*, vol. 19, no. 4, April 1972, p. 82.

13 For contemporary discussions of the exhibition, see: Hasan Nallbani, “The Spring Exhibition of Figurative Art”, *Drita*, 11 June 1972; “Creative Discussion on the Spring Exhibition of Figurative Art”, *Drita*, 9 July 1972; and Moikom Zeqo, “The First Spring Exhibition”, *Nëndori*, vol. 19, no. 7, July 1972, pp. 202–206.

14 Raino Isto, “‘This Exhibition Will Go Down in Our History of Painting’: Art Exhibitions in Albania around 1972 and the Promise of Spring”, *Art Studies*, no. 21, 2022, pp. 89–135: https://albanica.al/studime_arti/article/view/3014/2968.

A three-story staircase facilitates vertical connectivity between the ground floor of the Rectorate module and the concert hall's entrance level. On the upper levels, accessible from the hall, two spaces are developed: the "Çesk Zadeja" hall and the concert hall's projection room.

The module of the concert hall, originally conceived as a theater hall, consists of the stage tower and the concert-hall with its hall (foyer). The stage tower consists of the orchestra pit, proscenium and stage along with its technical and auxiliary spaces, the carpentry warehouse, stage design warehouse, and changing rooms for performers. These spaces around the stage, added later, help the stage tower also from the structural side by reinforcing it, as the highest module in altimetric development. The stage tower comes out 4.5m above the other spaces thus ensuring its exit on the terrace of the building.

Meanwhile, the hall consists of the auditorium, gallery and balconies (theater boxes), which in themselves develop on two levels, as well as the distribution corridors. The entire hall is composed symmetrically along the east-west axis, following the design principles of classical theaters and referring to the golden proportions, characteristic of the composition matrices used by Bosio as in the case of the 4m module utilized for the proportioning of the Rectorate's facade. (Fig. 15)

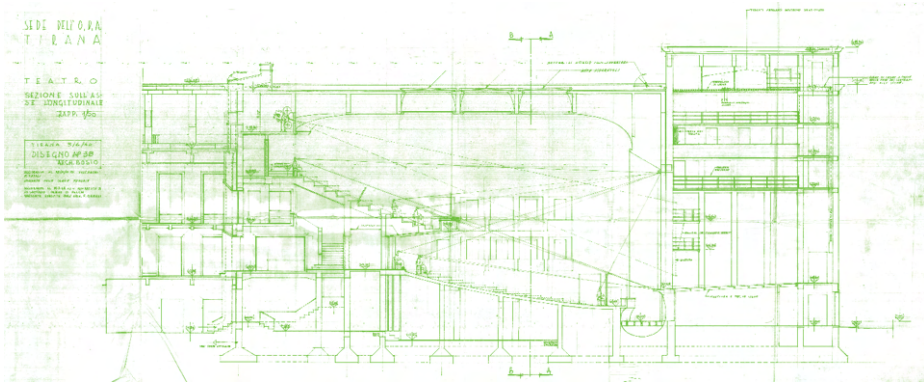


Fig. 15. Longitudinal section of the concert hall of the University of Arts, AQTN.

1972: On 10 October 1972, the establishment of the Academy of Sciences of Albania (AShSh) was decreed by the Presidium of the People's Assembly. On 25 January 1973, the first meeting of the Assembly of the Academy of Sciences took place. During this session, Aleks Buda was elected chairman of the AShSh. It is worth mentioning other esteemed researchers among its founding members, such as Eqrem Çabej, Mahir Domi, Kolë Popa, etc. At its beginnings, the Academy comprised 17 regular members and 5 correspondent members; it operated with a range of institutes of social sciences and albanology, as well as natural and technical sciences.¹⁵ These institutes were initially divided into three sections: 1) the section of social sciences, which included the Institute of History, the Institute of Language and Literature, the Institute of Folk Culture, the Center for Archaeological Research, as well as the Institute of Economic Studies (until 1982); 2) the section of natural sciences, which included the Institute of Nuclear Physics, the Center for Computational Mathematics, the Center for Biological Research and the Geography Sector; and 3) the section of Technical Sciences, which included

the Institute of Hydrometeorology, the Seismological Center and the Hydraulic Research Laboratory.¹⁶

1972: On 28 November 1972, the Independence Monument (*Monumenti i Pavarësisë*) was inaugurated in Vlorë, Albania. The monument was significant for its content (which emphasised the unity of the different geographic regions of the country, as well as the contribution of Ismail Qemali and the intellectuals of the National Awakening movement), but perhaps even more so for the details of its genesis. As was the case with several other monuments inaugurated in the late 1960s and early 70s—including the equestrian statue of Skanderbeg in the main square of Tirana (inaugurated in 1968) and the Four Heroines of Mirdita in Rrëshen (inaugurated in 1971)—the Independence Monument was produced by a team of three sculptors: Kristaq Rama, Shaban Hadëri, and Muntaz Dhrami. Beyond the reputations of the three sculptors tasked with the monument's realization, even more notable was the ideological importance of collective labor as a necessary aspect of monument creation. The proliferation of monuments and the corollary need for collective

¹⁵ See the website of the Academy of Sciences of Albania: <https://akad.gov.al/historiku/>.

¹⁶ Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, *Fjalor Enciklopedik Shqiptar: Vëllimi I*, Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese "Kristalina-kh", 2008, pp. 33–35.

The extension accommodates the majority of the University of the Arts' functions, with the Faculty of Music occupying a three-story module on "Lekë Dukagjini" Street, accessible primarily from the inner courtyard. The Faculty of Dramatic Arts occupies two floors of the central module along "Ibrahim Rugova" Street, while the Faculty of Fine Arts extends from the central module to the north of the concert hall, housing various studios and laboratories for photography, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, and monumental arts such as mosaic. The central module of the extension houses the library and FAB gallery, with the latter's entrance on "Ibrahim Rugova" street. (Fig. 16)

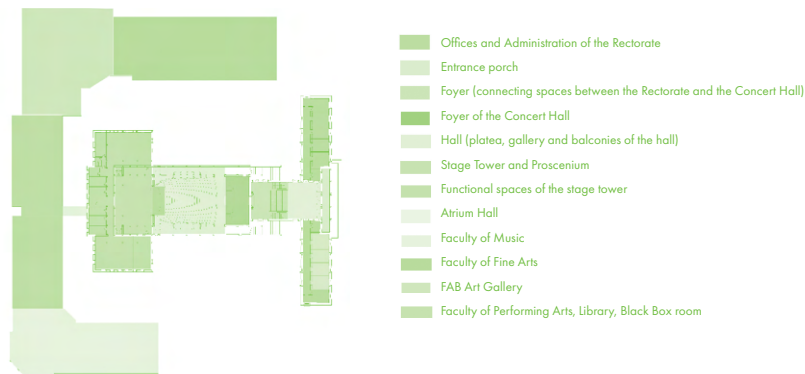


Fig. 16. Plan of the functional organization of the University of the Arts.

Judging from the current state of these spaces, it is evident that there has been a lack of restoration or maintenance over the years. The building of the first construction module, where some of the classrooms of the Faculty of Music are located, also includes a small, open, inner courtyard, which is currently blocked by the accumulation of positive obsolete furniture, depriving it of the possibility to serve as a space for recreational or contemplative purposes.

The inner courtyards between the original Bosio-designed structure and subsequent additions lack a defined purpose and primarily serve as passageways between faculties. The northern courtyard, as a result of the project mentioned above, only finalized recently in 2023, aims to articulate the space into a multi-level space, with a recreational square, created as a result of the necessary technical spaces situated underground. Meanwhile, the southern courtyard, accessible from the secondary entrance to the University on "Lekë Dukagjini" Street, features an open coffee house.

creative work to complete them were part of an important shift in how artistic activity was construed, as artist and critic Kujtim Buza wrote in the early 1970s. Buza asserted that "nearly all of our sculptors, no matter their age, have joined together to form collectives". He went on, citing Enver Hoxha: "Just as life in our country is developing with a dynamism hitherto unseen, so must our monumental art also advance [...]. To meet these challenges, we must make great efforts: 'We must conceive of, search for, and discover new forms of work and organization, to meet the demands of new situations, to open up possibilities for new phenomena, and to assist in the development and refinement of those phenomena', Comrade Enver [has] declared [...]."¹⁷

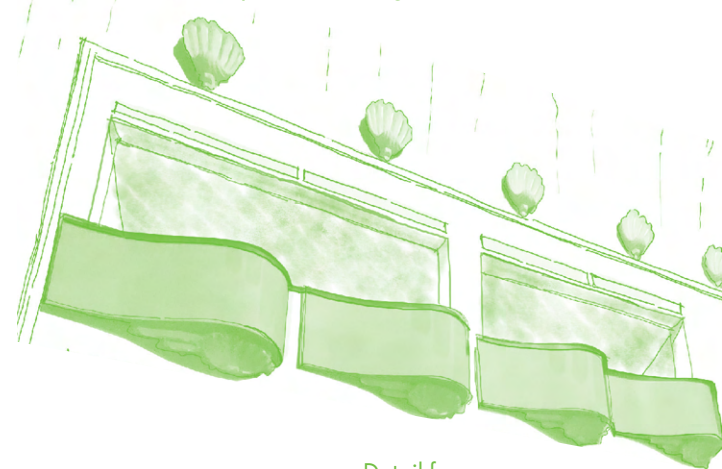
1972: The Eleventh Festival of Song was held in late December. The songs presented at the festival, including those by already established musicians—such as Tish Daija, Çesk Zadeja, and Vaçe Zela, for instance—but particularly by the cohort of young and non-professionalised musicians—such as Justina Aliaj, Sherif Merdani, Françesk Radi, Zija Saraçi, and Enver Shëngjergji—were infused with foreign (and specifically Western) music influences, such as blues, jazz, pop, and

rock. One reason for this may have been the cultural authorities' efforts to cater to "the demands of the Youth" in the years leading up to the Eleventh Festival of Song. Another reason may have been their attempts to infuse the proceedings with the mass line, via "listeners' participation as 'popular critics'". This was especially evident in the selection of the jury—or, rather, juries—for the Eleventh Festival of Song, with amateur juries in the districts replacing the professional jury in the capital of previous editions. Yet another reason may have been the changing media landscape in the preceding decade, with an ever increasing number of households obtaining access to radio and television sets and, by extension, broadcasts—both domestic and foreign—that inevitably influenced the tastes of "young urbanites" in particular.

Finally, the Eleventh Festival of Song would not have been possible without the appointment of Todi Lubonja, a high-ranking but liberal-minded party cadre, as general director of the state broadcaster, RTSh, in early 1972. In the following weeks and months, the Eleventh Festival of Song came increasingly under attack, culminating with Enver Hoxha's denunciation of "foreign manifestations" (*shfaqje të*

In the summer of 2019, within the amphitheater of the University of the Arts, the latest intervention project for this institution was presented: the creation of a new campus for art students. This endeavor is expected to commence implementation imminently. The concept-design project for the new university campus was drafted by the Italian architect Marco Casamonti in collaboration with students from the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of the University of Tirana. Casamonti has already been entrusted with various significant projects, including the construction of the “Air Albania” Stadium by dismantling the former “Qemal Stafa” Stadium (a second-category cultural monument and integral component of the “Littorio” architectural ensemble, as noted above).

The objective of the new university campus project is to expand the learning and performance spaces for art students and faculty members. It proposes the addition of a new cylindrical structure surrounding the existing Bosio-designed edifice. The implementation of this supplementary volume necessitates the demolition of the existing annex structures, notably that of Mauricio Bega, situated within the perimeter of the site. This clearance aims to accommodate expanded spaces for the Faculty of Fine Arts, the Faculty of Music, and the Faculty of Performing Arts.¹³



Detail from:

Fig. 12. View of the original balconies of the concert hall, illustration by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

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Art University 2008, *UART website*, Albanian government, accessed 24 March 2024, <<http://uart.edu.al>>

huaja) in Albanian art at the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party of Labour of Albania in June 1973, which led to a wave of purges in the cultural sector at large. Partly because of this, there has been a tendency in the postsocialist period to view this “self-conscious attempt” to diversify and expand Albanian “light music” (*muzikë e lehtë*) as having had an inherently oppositional character. There is little to support such a narrative, however.¹⁸ As outlined above, the efforts to rethink the parameters of popular music in Albania at the outset of the 1970s, or, rather, the conditions of possibility for such a rethinking – which, moreover, was not limited to the music field,¹⁹ can be more readily attributed to official policies. Many of these policies – such as those targeting the youth or those aimed at bolstering the participation of the masses, and even the modernization drive – were a direct result of the Ideological and Cultural Revolution.²⁰

1973: The Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania was held over the course of three days in late June (26–28). The plenum came after several Politburo meetings in which the issue of foreign influences (*shfaqje të huaja*) and the threat they posed to the party’s line were discussed. Thus, the Plenum became a forum for analyzing cultural production and cultural work in Albania over the course of the last few years.²¹ The Plenum also opened the path to a wave of purges among party bureaucrats and artists who were considered to have allowed such influences to permeate cultural production and cultural work in Albania. Todi Lubonja, the general director of the state broadcaster RTSh, and responsible for organizing the Eleventh Festival of Song, was attacked during the Plenum, and later sent to prison, together with Fadil Paçrami. The purge continued with artists, including singers and songwriters (and to a lesser extent composers), as well as visual artists and writers, and so on,

18 Nicholas Tochka, *Audible States: Socialist Politics and Popular Music in Albania*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 87–103.

19 Raino Isto, “‘This Exhibition Will Go Down in Our History of Painting’: Art Exhibitions in Albania around 1972 and the Promise of Spring”, *Art Studies*, no. 21, 2022, pp. 89–135: https://albanica.al/studime_arti/article/view/3014/2968.

20 Ylber Marku, “Socialism in Action: Albania’s Ideological and Cultural Revolution and the Lessons from History”, *Art Studies*, no. 21, 2022, pp. 39–87: https://albanica.al/studime_arti/article/view/3013/2966.

21 Minutes of the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party of Labour of Albania, 26–28 June 1973, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1973, D.2, fl.143–713.

Jordan Misja Artistic Lyceum

Jora Kasapi

who lost their positions and privileges, were banned from practicing their profession, or were sent to work in production, with some receiving lengthy prison sentences. This analysis of cultural work and purge of cultural workers in Albania came only one year after American President Richard Nixon's visit to China, an event that upset Hoxha and undermined the Sino-Albanian alliance. The purges in the cultural sector may have been a reaction to an undesired outcome of the Ideological and Cultural Revolution: aimed at, among other things, promoting the local element in cultural production, it allowed for a spirit of liberalism instead, with clear influences from the West, in particular Italy. But there may be an additional reason behind this turn of events. It is possible that the internal liberalism manifested during the Eleventh Festival of Song was crushed also as a reaction to the international situation created by the Sino-American rapprochement. Liberal and foreign manifestations in the cultural life of the country were hard to tolerate at a time when the slow realignment of Albania's closest ally, China, required Albanian leaders to further strengthen their grip on power and reinforce their legitimacy. Thus, such liberal influxes from abroad were viewed as

a challenge to the party's political line at a critical moment in time, one that required the people as a whole to form a united front behind the party's policies.

1973: In October, the second edition of the National Folklore Festival was held in the southern city of Gjirokastra, Enver Hoxha's birthplace. In the wake of the Fourth Plenum, with national identity and folk culture becoming an ever more central aspect of discourse about the arts, the 1973 edition of the festival was heralded as evidence of the vitality of the "people's art" (*arti popullor*) and of the synthesis of the rural peasantry with the urban working class. Taking place in the castle of Gjirokastra, commentators on the festival did not hesitate to extend the metaphor of the "castle" to Albania's geopolitical position, separate from both the capitalist and the "revisionist" Soviet socialist spheres of influence.²²

The first edition of the festival had taken place in 1968, but its genesis began earlier and it took years before the festival was organized on a regular basis, i.e., every five years, in Gjirokastra. This was perhaps the only event in communist Albania where regional differences and particularities

22 Fatos Kongoli and Thanas Dino, "On the Days of the Festival", *Drita*, 14 October 1973.

This research aims to lay the foundations for a deeper understanding of one of the most important institutions of artistic education in Albania, the “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum, by chronologically following the architectural life cycle of the building, from its conception and construction in 1961 up to the present. Often, the architectural essence and substance of a building may be overshadowed when the institution it hosts has been active for many decades, endowing the building with a historical status for its contributions to the artistic and cultural development of society. Most discourses concerning the Artistic Lyceum have focused predominantly on the importance of its activity and the cohorts of artists it has produced, which has been one of the challenges encountered in this research – namely the difficulty in collecting information and documentation about the physical building and its architecture. Interviews with individuals whose lives have been connected to the lyceum in one way or another over the years have greatly mitigated such obstacles, helping to complete the missing elements of this enigmatic tableau closely linked to the architecture of the building.

Further light has been shed on the initial conception of the project and its authors; on the urban relationships that the building establishes with its surrounding context; on the spatial transposition of the main and essential didactic environments; on the choice of materials of that period employed both internally and externally; as well as the changes, extensions, and reconstructions that the building has undergone in different periods to conform to the evolving requisites of a perpetually dynamic city. The starting point is the premise that our surroundings, in the way they are architecturally treated, influence our sensibilities, and that the configuration of spaces where aspiring artists study and thrive impacts their inspiration, sensitivity, and worldview. In this context, gaining a deeper understanding of how spaces within institutions like the lyceum have been conceived and designed should serve to provide us with more context regarding the artistic activities of these generations of artists.



were proudly highlighted, as a sign of the cultural richness of the country. From one edition of the festival to the next, tens of thousands of people would become part of the process across all regions of Albania. Teams of experts would be dispatched to the provinces to boost, but also support and collect, local elaborations of old songs, poems turned into music, new songs and dances – all drawing from local, centuries old traditions. Eventually, through a process of careful and meritocratic selection, regional teams would compete at the festival of Gjirokastra. Moreover, teams of artists from Kosova, Macedonia, and the Arbëresh communities of South Italy regularly participated. The festival itself was organized in such a way that the whole city of Gjirokastra ended up being involved. Altogether, well over a thousand artists (approx. 1500) participated in each edition of the festival, during which time they were hosted by the locals in their homes for the days of the competition. Parades of the participating teams were also organized, and some of them performed for the Greek-speaking communities bordering Greece, but also in front of workers in local factories and farms. Occasionally, after the festival was over and the awards had been handed out, some of the regional teams would perform at the National Theatre of

Opera and Ballet in Tirana, often in the presence of Enver Hoxha and other party leaders. Thus the festival was a genuinely collective and participatory mass spectacle, as well as providing an avenue for talented young artists all over the country to distinguish themselves and forge a career path.

1974: Rozeta Uçi publishes *Aesthetic Education in Schools (Edukimi estetik në shkollë)*. Drawing on the importance placed upon aesthetic understanding by Enver Hoxha’s 1973 speech at the Fourth Plenum, the book presented a Marxist-Leninist view of the development of taste and aesthetic analysis. The book considered both practical matters intended to help young teachers in planning lessons related to aesthetics, and more institutional questions about how aesthetic education functions within a broader a communist educational program.

1970-1974: Throughout the 1970s, there was a continuous commitment to establishing a network of artistic high schools in the People’s Socialist Republic of Albania, based on the model of the “Jordan Misja” artistic lyceum in Tirana. The establishment of such a network was a necessity, since from its founding year in 1946 until the end of the 1960s, the “Jordan

II. The Founding of the “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum

The “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum, initially known as the “Jordan Misja” High School of Arts, was founded and commenced its activities on 20 December 1946, under the direction of Konstandin Trako (1946–1950), a professional musician of the time, who graduated in choral conducting from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Bucharest in 1941. At that time, the building entrusted with fostering and shaping the aspirations of many talented youth was located at the University of the Arts.¹ In 1950, the Lyceum relocated its activities to Durrës Street,² and finally, on 10 September 1962, it settled permanently on Elbasan Street, where it remains situated to this day.³

III. The Architect of the “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum

The architectural project for the construction of a building dedicated to the artistic education of new generations of future artists across various disciplines was carried out in 1961 by architect Vitore Perolli, in collaboration with construction engineer Ferit Stermasi, an esteemed professional of the time, who is also popular for the construction of the Hotel Tirana International, widely known as the “15-story building”.

Vitore Perolli stands among the cadre of female architects whose contributions to Albanian architecture have often been overlooked. Yet, her portfolio speaks volumes, encompassing a breadth of projects realized throughout Albania. Referring to the data from the Central Technical Construction Archive (AQTN), projects carried out by Perolli (on her own or in collaboration) from 1955 to 1968, include residential complexes and significant public infrastructures such as factories, schools, kindergartens, hospitals, courts, etc. Among Perolli’s notable architectural works, apart from the well-known artistic lyceum of Tirana, are the Pogradec People’s Court (1961), the Institute of Epidemiology in Tirana (1964), the Elbasan Court (1965), contributions to the construction of the Palace of Brigades in Tirana (1958), hospitals in Erseka (as a co-author, 1966), Puka (1966), Pogradec (1968), and the Pediatric Hospital in Shkodra (as a co-author, 1968).⁴

1 Gjovalin Lazri, *Artistic Lyceum ‘J. Misja’ during years 1946-1991*, Tirana: FLESH Editions, 2009, pp. 123, 86.

2 Ibid., pp. 108.

3 My gratitude to Genti Gjikola for sharing this information with me, which he obtained from his conversations/interviews with former students of the “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum over these years, such as with Shyqyri Sako.

4 AQTN, *Designing to live: Designers 1945–1990*, Tirana: PEGI Printing Press, 2017, pp. 266–269.

Misja” artistic lyceum had been the only artistic high school in Albania. However, from the beginning of the 1960s onward, it was decided that this school and the number of professionals graduating from it were not enough to meet the growing demands in the fields of culture, education, and the country’s industry. Between 1970–1974, efforts to establish a network of artistic high schools in Albania were concentrated in the main cities of the country, with the opening of the “Jan Kukuzeli” artistic lyceum in Durrës, the “Onufri” artistic lyceum in Elbasan, the “Tefta Tashko Koço” artistic lyceum in Korça, and the “Prenkë Jakova” artistic lyceum in Shkodra. However, it is important to emphasize that the schools just mentioned have their origins much earlier than the 1970s, specifically in the 1950s, as 8-year music schools, and their transformation into artistic high schools came somewhat gradually, initially with the elevation to the level of high schools for music, to which other sections were later added, usually that of the visual arts.

1974: In July 1974, in a party plenum, Enver Hoxha attacked the minister of defense Beqir Balluku.²⁵ This was soon followed by a purge in the army ranks.

Minister Balluku, the chief of staff of the army (general Petrit Dume), as well as members of the general staff (generals Hito Çako and Rrahman Parllaku), were imprisoned. All of them were executed with the exception of general Parllaku, who survived the end of the socialist system.²⁴ It isn’t yet fully clear why Hoxha decided to get rid of the military chiefs when all of them had served the party faithfully as well as supporting Hoxha. Years earlier, when the party decided to remove ranks in the army (in 1965), many of these same generals had shown little enthusiasm, though all of them publicly supported the policy. However, disputes would later emerge within the general staff of the army between the minister and some generals regarding defense strategy. In 1973, the minister of defense Beqir Balluku had promoted the updating of the strategic document, *Thesis on Defense (Tezat e Mbrojtjes)*. This document was approved in 1967 by the Council of Defense, a secretive institution that dealt exclusively with military issues and was headed by Enver Hoxha. In studying and reviewing this document, the minister clashed with the chief of staff of the armed forces Petrit Dume. In the updated version of the document,

25 Records and minutes of the 5th Party Plenum, 25-26 July 1974, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1974, D.1.

24 Gjon Boriçi, *Marrëdhëniet Shqiptaro-Kineze në Luftën e Ftohtë, 1956–1978*, Tiranë: GEER, 2022, p. 211.

Today, the building of the Artistic Lyceum in Tirana bears the designation of a cultural monument of the second category, as classified by the Ministry of Culture on 16 July 2015, for its architectural values at the time of its inception, as well as for its historical values as one of the first institutions for artistic education and training in Albania.⁵

IV. The Urban Concept of the “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum Building

The “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum was the first high school of arts in Albania and had to be strategically positioned in an important and easily accessible location in the city. For this reason, it was conceived and built along one of Tirana’s principal and historic streets, specifically on Elbasan Street, on a plot where the groundwork for a hotel had commenced. Initially, this area had a pronounced residential character, with urban villas dating back to the 1930s and 1940s, with their large, green courtyards. Its location along Elbasan Street and the proximity to the main axis of the “Dëshmorët e Kombit” Boulevard were the main attributes of the area where the Artisti Lyceum was built, ensuring the necessary tranquility for artistic practices. Moreover, this positioning facilitated accessibility for who were, and still are, predominantly young pedestrians. (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1. The urban positioning of the “Jordan Misja” Lyceum at the intersection of the Elbasani and “Ismail Qemali” streets, photo by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

⁵ <https://iktk.gov.al/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/MQ-Tirane.pdf> [accessed on 24 march 2024].

Balluku conceded the possibility that in the event of an all-out war on multiple fronts, the Albanian army would have to retreat into the mountains. Ultimately, Balluku’s review of the document on defense turned into a revision of the *Thesis on Defense*. Hence he and the general staff were purged as revisionists and traitors.²⁵ The crucial point, however, was that the minister had mobilized and ordered the general staff of the armed forces to study and review a strategic document on defense without authorization. If he did this to review an important document, he could potentially use his influence to foment dissensus and overthrow the party’s leadership. Relations (deteriorating) with China also played a role. The minister had been to China several times and had negotiated China’s enormous military assistance to Albania. With China veering away from its firm anti-imperialist stance after Kissinger’s visit in 1971, any potential sympathies for such a turn in Albania had to be crushed.

1974: The new building of the National Gallery of Arts opens in November 1974, near the Hotel Dajti on the “Martyrs of the Nation” Boulevard.²⁶

²⁵ Ylber Marku, *Sino-Albanian Relations during the Cold War, 1949–1978: an Albanian Perspective*, Hong Kong: Lingnan University, PhD thesis, 2017, pp. 263–264.

²⁶ “Inauguration of the New Gallery and Opening of the Figurative Art Exhibition”, *Drita*, 1 December 1974.

Initially established in 1954, the National Gallery had moved to a building on Fortuzi Street in 1956. The new structure inaugurated in 1974 was designed by architect and urbanist Enver Faja.

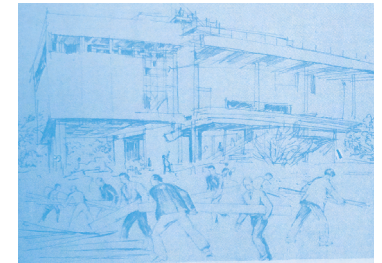


Image 3: Zef Shoshi, Work on the construction of the Gallery of Figurative Arts in Tirana (Nga puna për ngritjen e Galerisë së Arteve Figurative në Tiranë), published in *Drita*, 31 March 1974.

1974: To commemorate the 30th anniversary of the liberation of Albania from German occupation during the Second World War, in November 1974 the Academy of Sciences of Albania, the Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies, and the University of Tirana organized a mammoth conference entitled “National Conference of Studies on the Antifascist National Liberation War of the Albanian People” (“Konferenca kombëtare e studimeve për Luftën Antifashiste

Situated between two main streets, Elbasan Street and “Ismail Qemali” Street, the footprint of the building and its strategic placement—both in relation to these streets and the construction plot—demonstrates an approach that fundamentally respects and seamlessly integrates within the existing urban fabric. The building’s footprint smoothly harmonizes the two streets, erasing the hierarchy between them, and positioning the main entrance toward the intersection of these roads, in the curved part of the building. Both wings of the building have the same treatment and development along the two main streets: the building itself becomes an integral part in shaping the urban silhouette of this intersection, extending towards the northern and northeastern extremes of the construction plot, while optimizing the interior space of the plot as a more secluded area for the school’s main gathering square and its sporting activities.

In the technical notes outlining the implementation of the project, Perolli identifies the Artistic Lyceum as a “corner” building, and the designated site for its construction – at the time opposite the Lenin Stalin Museum – underwent scrutiny and received approval from the Executive Committee. Today, the school has three entrances: a public entrance in the curved volume along the intersection of the streets, a secondary entrance along the western edge of the plot, serving as a passageway for the students gathering from the inner courtyard to the building, and a less used third entrance between the northern linear volume and the extension of the building. (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2. The three main entrances to the “Jordan Misja” Lyceum, photo by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

Nacionalçlirimtare të popullit shqiptar”). The conference also included a section on “Problems of the New Culture during the Antifascist National Liberation War of the Albanian People” (“*Probleme të kulturës së re gjatë Luftës Antifashiste Nacionalçlirimtare të popullit shqiptar*”), with the speakers presenting on a wide range of topics, from the “stylistic traits” of the language and illustrations used in the illegal press, to the “new content” and “artistic method” of the literature that emerged during the wartime, the enrichment of folk music, the creation of partisan theatre, and so on.²⁷ As outlined by Bedri Dedja and Dhimitër Shuteriqi in their introduction, the aim of this particular section of the conference was to establish a “dialectical relationship” between the wartime period and the postwar period. This effectively meant finding (and, to an extent, inventing) the specifically *socialist* – as opposed to simply “anti-fascist, anti-imperialist or democratic” – character of wartime culture and, by extension, the local and national roots of Albania’s post-war socialist culture.²⁸

1975-76: In May of 1975 a party plenum announced new purges among high technicians, engineers, and party officials who were working in the oil fields in the south of the country. Among those affected was politburo member and minister of industry and mines Koço Theodhosi, the vice prime minister and head of the State Planning Commission Abdyl Këllezi, the Central Committee member Ramadan Xhangolli, and the minister of foreign trade Kiço Ngjela.²⁹ This was only the first of a number of purges that took place in the economy and culture between 1975 and 1977. In July 1976 Thoma Deliana, former minister of education during the early years of the Ideological and Cultural Revolution, and a proponent of the preservation of part of the religious monuments targeted during the cultural revolution, was expelled from the party.³⁰

1976: Albania adopts a new constitution reflecting the stage of Albania’s socialist construction. The 1976 constitution was drafted ten years after Albania had launched the Ideological

²⁷ *National Conference of Studies on the Antifascist National Liberation War of the Albanian People: Vol. 6*, Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese “8 Nëntori”, 1975.

²⁸ Bedri Dedja and Dhimitër Shuteriqi, “Problems of the New Culture during the Antifascist National Liberation War”, in *National Conference of Studies on the Antifascist National Liberation War of the Albanian People: Vol. 6*, pp. 3–22.

²⁹ Reports, decisions and minutes of the 7th Plenum of the Sixth Congress of the Party, 26–29 May 1975, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1975, D.1.

³⁰ Minutes of the 9th party plenum, 19-20 of July 1976, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1976, D.37.

V. Spatial Conception and Functional Organization of the “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum: The 1961 Project

The Artistic Lyceum building, as conceived by Vitore Perolli, aimed at creating a unified, single monolithic structure, capable of accommodating all sections of the educational program envisioned at the time. The latter included the music, general culture, and figurative arts sections, all distributed across four floors, along with their requisite auxiliary spaces.

The uppermost two floors of the wing facing Elbasan Street were designated to accommodate boarding facilities for students from the surrounding cities, with a total capacity of 200 individuals. Along this wing, situated at the end of the building on the ground floor, the cafeteria was conceived alongside the kitchen and auxiliary spaces, connected to the inner courtyard of the lyceum. Above the cafeteria, plans included a concert hall intended to facilitate the lyceum’s performance activities, with the possibility of expanding the boarding capacity in the future. (Fig. 3)

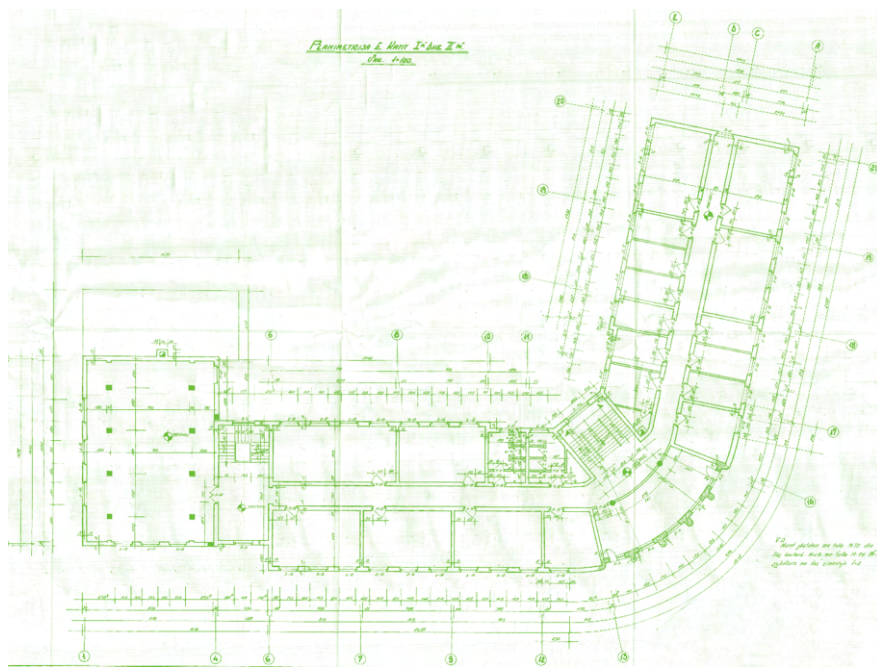


Fig. 3. General plan of the first and second floors of the “Jordan Misja” Lyceum, AQTN.

and Cultural Revolution which had promoted mass mobilizations in the struggle against religion, the class struggle, the emancipation of women and the centrality of the ruling party and its leader.³¹ The new constitution, promulgated in December 1976, reflected all these elements together with the aversion to any form of private property, the affirmation of centralized economic planning, the principle of self-reliance, the struggle against forms of liberalism and bureaucratism, and ultimately the exclusive leading role of the Party of Labour of Albania. Albania was proclaimed a “state of the dictatorship of the proletariat” built on the alliance of two classes, those of the working people and the peasants organized in people’s communes, with the working class having the leading role in the Albanian society.³² In the new constitution, the state explicitly denied recognition to any religion, and committed to promoting atheist

propaganda, falling short of proclaiming Albania an atheist state, as has frequently been claimed following the collapse of the socialist system. The new constitution reflected the current stage of Albania’s socialist system. From the party’s perspective, it was the concluding moment of a series of achievements in the economy: major industrial complexes being built or completed, resulting in a larger part of the population entering the ranks of the working class and urban life; but also of a series of political events of major importance: purges in the economy, military and culture; and finally, major international realignments that caused a slow but irreversible turn inwards for Albania with a reconsideration of its close relations with China.

1976: Ethnographer Rrok Zojzi publishes *Arti Popullor në Shqipëri (People’s Art in Albania)*,³³ and the exhibition *Kultura Popullore Shqiptare*

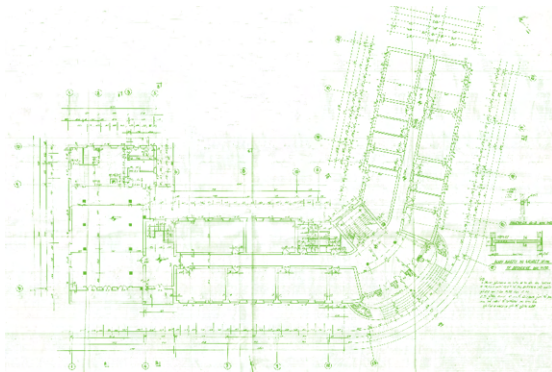
31 For a recent contribution on Albania’s Ideological and Cultural Revolution, see: Anxhela Çikopano, Raino Isto, and Ylber Marku in Jonida Gashi ed., *Art Studies*, no. 21, 2022. The campaign against religion was particularly fierce, and also involved several party publications during the 1960s. See, among many: Gaqo Pisha, ed., *Religion is the Opium of the People*, Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese “Naim Frashëri”, 1964; Hulusi Hako, *We Blame Religion*, Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese “Naim Frashëri”, 1968; Petro Lalaj, Kristaq Angjeli, et al., eds., *Instituti i Studimeve Marksiste Leniniste, Materials on the Revolutionary Movement Against Religion*, Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese e Librit Politik, 1973. On the relations between the state and the clergy during the first two decades of the communist rule see: Artan R. Hoxha, *Communism, Atheism, and the Orthodox Church of Albania: Cooperation, Survival, and Suppression*, London and New York: Routledge, 2022.

32 The text of the constitution is available online.

33 Rrok Zojzi, et al., *People’s Art in Albania*, Tirana: Akademia e Shkencave e RP të Shqipërisë,

The main connecting and distributing hall – positioned at the center of the building in the curved section – also houses the auxiliary spaces on each floor, the hygiene-sanitary areas, as well as the main staircase with three ramps that ensures vertical movement. On the first and second floors, this hall transitions into a corridor, potentially adaptable for conversions into a closed room.

The layout of classrooms follows a typical arrangement along the two wings of the building, featuring a central corridor facilitating horizontal circulation amidst classrooms situated along both wings. The classrooms themselves were designed, in most cases, according to a standard module measuring 813 cm x 506 cm, which constitutes the main structural support system of the entire building. Some of these standard modules are divided radially into smaller rooms employing an additional module measuring 250 cm x 506 cm. The rhythmic repetition of these two modules typifies the main floor plan scheme of the building, which is replicated also on the other floors (Fig. 4). This standardization inevitably led to a uniformity in materials and constituent elements within these spaces. Standardization itself brought cost efficiencies, a very important criterion requested in the early 1960s in the construction scene in Albania.



Access to the building was envisioned as having two entrances: the principal one, situated within the arched section, and a secondary along Elbasan Street. The latter would channel users towards a vertical connecting node, embodied in the form of a secondary three-ramp staircase. This staircase, besides facilitating vertical movement between the cafeteria and the concert hall, also facilitated connectivity between the main body of the Lyceum and these facilities.

(*People's Culture in Albania*) opens in Tirana.³⁴

1977: *On Literature and Art (Mbi letërsinë dhe artin)*, a volume of Enver Hoxha's writings on the arts, is published. It was the first collection of the dictator's writings to focus explicitly on culture, and included both scripts from speeches and published writings dating from 1942 up through 1977. Among the texts reprinted in the collection were Hoxha's 1969 letter to Kristaq Rama, Shaban Hadëri, and Muntaz Dhrami on the creation of the Vlora Independence Monument, and his June 1973 speech from the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee of the PLA, further solidifying both as canonical reference points for art criticism.

1977: In December of 1977, the plenary meeting of the Union of Writers and Artists was devoted to the subject of monumental sculpture.³⁵ Nearly a decade after the boom in monumental commissions that accompanied the 25th anniversary of

liberation (in 1969), the discussions at the plenum aimed to take stock of the dramatic proliferation of monuments across socialist Albania's territory (a phenomenon that had already been documented in the 1973 volume *Monuments of Albanian Heroism (Përmendore të Heroizmit Shqiptar)*, a photobook compiled by Kujtim Buza, Kleant Dedi, and Dhimitraq Trebicka). The focus on monuments emphasized the crucial ideological role played by collective artistic production, as well as the importance of the synthesis of architecture and monumental sculpture, as sculptor Kristaq Rama noted in his opening report.³⁶ The turn towards sculpture might also be interpreted as an effort to avoid the problems raised by the aesthetics of painting (the subjective use of color, in particular) in the early 1970s, prior to the Fourth Plenum.

1978: Aesthetician Alfred Uçi publishes the first edition of *Labyrinths of Modernism (Labirintet e modernizmit)*, a sustained polemic against modernist visual art and literature. The book

Instituti i Historisë, Sektori i Etnografisë, 1976.

34 See: ATSh, "The Ethnographic Exhibition 'Albanian Folk Culture'", *Drita*, 4 July 1976; Abaz Dojaka, "Beautiful reflection of our folk culture", *Zëri i Popullit*, 13 August 1976; and Pëllumb Karkanaqe, "Our Cultural Treasures in the Exhibition 'Albanian Folk Culture'", *Nëntori*, vol. 24, no. 7, July 1977, pp. 147–160.

35 Speeches delivered at the plenary meeting can be found in the January 1978 issue of *Nëntori*.

36 Kristaq Rama, "Achievements and Prospects of Our Monumental Sculpture", *Nëntori*, vol. 25, no. 1, January 1978, pp. 11–33.

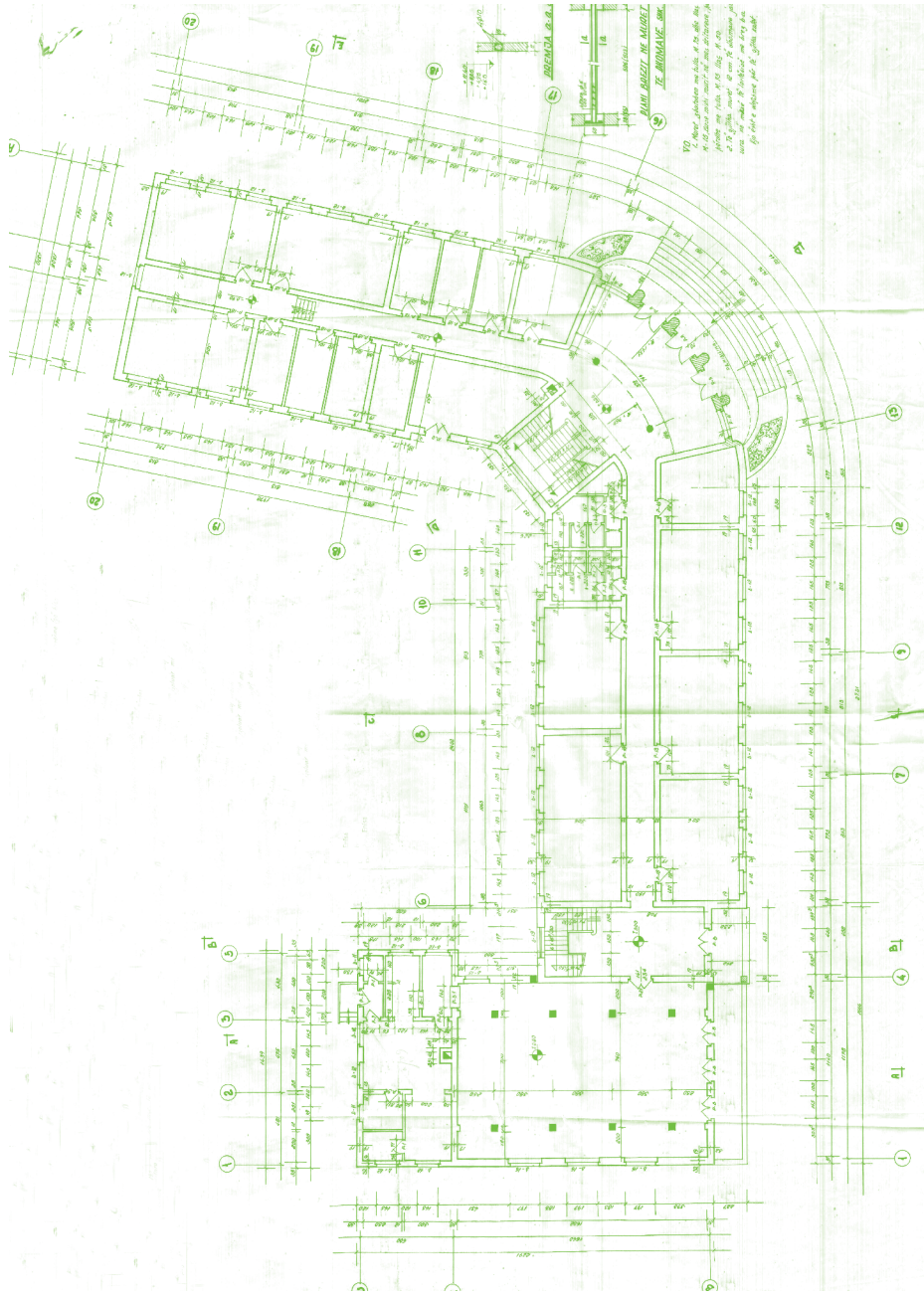


Fig. 4. General plan of the ground floor of the “Jordan Misja” Lyceum, AQTN.

built upon Uçi’s earlier writings – such as *Aesthetics, Life, Art (Estetika, jeta, arti)* (1970) – and anticipated his later, three-volume *Aesthetics (Estetika)* (published starting in 1986). The book endeavored to present a summary of the various ‘isms’ associated with historical modernism, and to critique them from a Marxist-Leninist perspective, informed by the framework of class struggle. Coming at the close of a decade whose inception was marked by experiments with many of these same modernist ‘isms’, Uçi’s book represented a monumental effort to provide a philosophical as well as an ideological justification for the rejection of these earlier experimentations.



Cover of Alfred Uçi, *Labyrinths of Modernism: A Critique of Modernist Aesthetics (Labirintët e modernizmit: Kritika e estetikës moderniste)*, 1987 edition.

1978: This year marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the League of Prizren, an event widely interpreted as the inception of the Albanian National Awakening in the 19th century. In addition to the large-scale art exhibition dedicated to the topic, this anniversary provided opportunities for Albanian artists to organize cultural exchanges with Kosova, at the time part of Yugoslavia. An exhibition of applied arts from Kosova opened in the Palace of Culture in Tirana, featuring the work of artists like Muslim Mulliqi, Rexhep Ferri, Agim Çavdarbasha, Simon Shiroka, and Violeta Xhaferri.³⁷ Artists Guri Madhi and Kujtim Buza traveled to Kosova in 1978 as part of an exchange between the Albanian Union of Writers and Artists and the Association of Figurative Arts of Kosova. Buza and Madhi visited Prizren, Gjakova (from whence Buza’s family originated), and Deçan, and subsequently opened an exhibition in Tirana, entitled *Impressions of Travels among Kosova’s Historic Places*.³⁸

1978: In July 1978, China interrupted its economic assistance to Albania and in August of that year withdrew its specialists from the country.

³⁷ Fuat Dushku, “Exhibition of works by artists from Kosova”, *Drita*, 27 August 1978.

³⁸ “Opening of the Visual Arts Exhibition ‘Impressions of Travels among Kosova’s Historic Places’, *Drita*, 19 November 1978; and Dalan Shaplllo, “History Speaks Through the Language of Painting”, *Drita*, 26 November 1978.

VI. Volumetric Conception of the “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum building: The 1961 Project

The building of the Artistic Lyceum was conceived with a simple volumetry, to some extent dictated by the development plan of the main component spaces within the construction plot, in a very well thought-out layout. It develops as a monolithic and linear volume, wherein four typical floors are arranged. It possesses a “typification” that dictates the development of the facades as seamless, without many apertures or volumetric dynamism in altimetry, except for the subtle, rhythmic and regular interruptions created by architectural apertures such as windows and doors.

The center of the volumetric composition stands out clearly. The central arched volume is treated by Perolli through a system of four reinforced concrete pillars measuring 50cm x 70cm each, which extends throughout the whole structure. These pillars, beyond their aesthetic compositional role to the facade, also contribute to providing structural support. (Fig. 5)

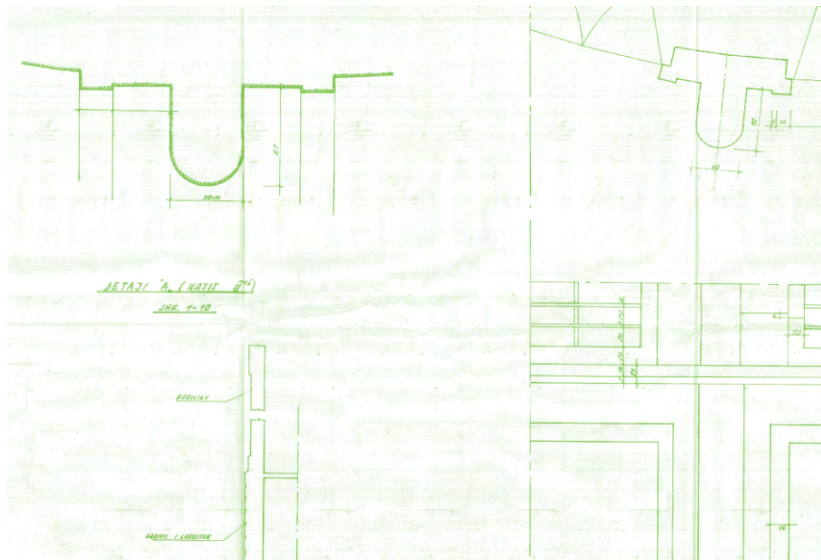


Fig. 5. Details of the concrete pilasters and of the door and window frames, AQTN.

China and Albania had been allies since 1960–61, years of great turmoil within the socialist camp when the Sino-Soviet split manifested. In the Sino-Soviet rivalry and split, Albania had sided with Beijing, marking the start of a unique partnership which allowed Albania to build hundreds of economic projects with Chinese assistance.³⁹ Beijing, on the other hand, gained a European ally that promoted its interests in international organizations and the International Communist Movement.⁴⁰ The ground upon which the Sino-Albanian alliance was built was undermined by China's new stance in international relations beginning in the early 1970s, with the Sino-US rapprochement and the visit of the American President Richard Nixon to Beijing in February 1972. Although China's full openness and integration in the international community was boosted after Mao's death in 1976, it was in the early 1970s that

China started a slow but irreversible path of engagement with the West and the world in general that accommodated the demands for coexistence with the Western and Eastern powers. This position clashed with the Sino-Albanian common front against American imperialism and Soviet revisionism. Albania's reaction at first was cautious, but then, after Mao's death in September 1976, disagreements became difficult to settle. The theory of the Three Worlds that Deng Xiaoping brought to the United Nations in 1977, Tito's warm reception during his visit to Beijing that same year, and China's refusal to continue basing its assistance to Albania on principles of socialist brotherhood, preferring economic calculations instead, rendered the alliance untenable.⁴¹ Unlike Albania's break with other countries during the Cold War, such as Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, the end of the alliance with China did not result in the interruption

39 One such project was the Metallurgical Plant of Elbasan. See: Visar Nonaj, *Albaniens, Schwerindustrie als zweite Befreiung? "Der Stahl der Partei" als Mikrokosmos des Kommunismus*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021.

40 Ylber Marku, *Sino-Albanian Relations during the Cold War, 1949–1978: an Albanian Perspective*, Hong Kong: Lingnan University, PhD thesis, 2017. On Albania's position in the Sino-Soviet rift see Ylber Marku, "Communist Relations in Crisis: the End of Soviet-Albanian Relations and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1960–1961", *The International History Review*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2020, pp. 813–832. On the Sino-Albanian common front in the International Communist Movement see: Ylber Marku, "Stories from the International Communist Movement: the Chinese front in Europe and the limits of the anti-revisionist struggle", *Cold War History*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2021, pp. 139–157.

41 Ylber Marku, *Sino-Albanian Relations during the Cold War: 1949–1978: An Albanian Perspective*, Hong Kong: Lingnan University, PhD thesis, 2017.

Conversely, the northern and eastern wings of the Lyceum's volume exhibit a symmetrical configuration in relation to the central arched volume. Employment of a similar treatment on both facades, characterized by a modular arrangement of apertures and a rhythmic repetition of a few decorative elements, constitute very clean and simple compositional leitmotifs, which formulate the shell of this important institution. (Fig. 6)

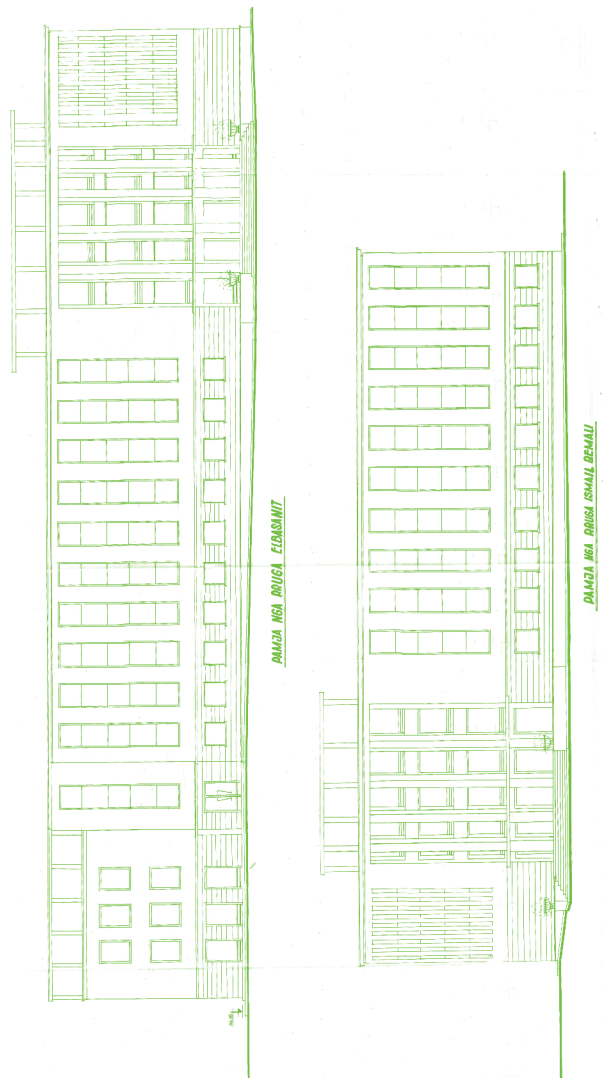


Fig. 6. Side facades of the building from the two main streets, AQTN.

of diplomatic and interstate relations, and trade between the two countries continued, albeit in small volumes. Yet, the end of the alliance with China brought a rapid decline in Albania's economic situation, with detrimental consequences for people's everyday life.⁴² In deciding to maintain interstate relations with China following the Sino-Albanian split, Albania recognized that it could not hope for other political and ideological alliances, signaling some sort of coexistence with a world that it viewed as divided into two camps, capitalist and revisionist.

1970s: While relations with China deteriorated during the 1970s, those between Albania and Yugoslavia improved considerably in the same period. Trade between the two countries resumed, and cultural exchanges also increased. This was enormously beneficial to the relations between the Albanians of Kosova and those of Albania proper. This rapprochement must be understood against the backdrop of the massive protests that broke out in Kosova in 1968, involving wide strata of the society, in particular students and workers. Despite initial repression by the Yugoslav authorities,

these protests led to Tito's reconsideration of Yugoslav policies towards the Albanians in Kosova. As a result, the University of Pristina was established in 1970 and Albanian became an officially recognized language in Kosova, guaranteed also in the Yugoslav constitution of 1974.⁴³ The marked improvements in the situation of the Albanian population of Kosova created opportunities for wide-ranging exchanges between Albania and Kosova to take place. For instance, well-known members of the Academy of Sciences of Albania, such as Androkli Kostallari, Stefanaq Pollo, Eqrem Çabej, and Aleks Buda, began regular visits to the University of Pristina, in order to teach classes and engage with the local community of scholars. On the other hand, artists from Kosova started to perform in Albania on a regular basis, with some of them even becoming famous across the border. Singers such as Nexhmije Pagarusha, who was proficient in a wide range of musical genres, became praised on both sides of the border. Additionally, Albania's folkloristic ensembles were authorized to tour in Yugoslavia on several occasions. Apart from Kosova, they also toured among

42 Idris Idrizi, *Herrschaft und Alltag im albanischen Spätsozialismus, 1976–1985*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018.

43 See article 171 of the Yugoslav constitution of 1974, easily accessible online. This was the last constitution adopted in Yugoslavia.

However, the purported symmetry of these wings is only partial as it is disrupted by the inclusion of the canteen, the kitchen, and concert hall volume situated in the southeast. This volume develops at the same height as the rest of the structure, but is set back from the road by 230cm and extends transversally into the inner courtyard of the Lyceum. The volume in question undergoes an escalation in height as well, as it transitions from the kitchen to the concert hall on the next floor, an escalation perceptible only from within the courtyard, rather than from the main facade.

VII. Treatment of the Exterior and Interior of the Building through Materials: The 1961 Project

Regarding the selection of materials for the interior spaces and the treatment of the facade's tectonics, the building of the "Jordan Misja" Artistic Lyceum relied quite simply on the use of contemporary materials, standardized functional architectural elements like doors and windows, and generally a spirit of economic efficiency and architectural rationalization, without attempts to make the building stand out.

Internally, the surfaces of the spaces are uniformly treated with plain plaster, while externally, the facades feature a textured "teranova" plaster, with a more granular composition. The few decorative elements of the main facades, which give them a certain dynamism, consist of sleek, white cement frames, mainly along the doors and windows. Their thickness ranges from 15cm to 20cm, referring to Perolli's original specifications, depending on the type of doors and windows, while the most prominent decorative frame, in the terrace's soffit, extends to a total thickness of 30cm, following a specific rational profile.

The interior floors were envisioned to be adorned with colored exposed aggregate concrete tiles with decorations, also known as granilite, according to Perolli's concept, a material prevalent during that period, with a prefabricated bullnose tile trim of 10cm. Granilite was also chosen for the staircase flooring near the main entrance, but in this case was poured in place and not added in prefabricated panels, also due to the more organic shape of such steps. Due to the domestic production, granilite was widely utilized in residential and public constructions during the 60s and 70s. Due to its preparational varieties, it represented a material with an aesthetic appeal and relatively low costs, and was easily produced by blending basic components such as cement, water, and small stones (gravel) from riverbeds. The main interior staircase of the lyceum, which appears opposite the main entrance, is also

the Albanian speaking population in Montenegro, Macedonia (North), but also up to coastal cities in Croatia such as Dubrovnik and Zadar. This revived cooperation with Yugoslavia, and the exchanges established with Kosova as a result, in a way turned Tirana into the hegemonic cultural center for the Albanians of Kosova, replacing Belgrade. However, Albanian authorities exerted a major control on the people coming from Kosova, and their visits were tightly monitored. The Yugoslav authorities, at least overtly, were considerably more accommodating with those crossing the border into Kosova.

1979: In the late 70s and early 80s, there was a second wave of establishing artistic high schools in various cities of the country. Noteworthy among them are the "Feim Ibrahim" artistic lyceum in Gjirokastra, the "Naim Frashëri" artistic lyceum in Vlora, the "Jakovë Xoxa" artistic lyceum in Fier, and the "Ajet Xhindole" artistic lyceum in Berat. These institutions trace their roots to high schools founded in 1979, which very soon evolved into comprehensive artistic high schools by incorporating visual arts sections, starting in 1980 with the "Naim Frashëri" artistic lyceum of Vlora, followed in 1981 by the "Feim Ibrahim" artistic lyceum of Gjirokastra, in 1982 in by the "Jakovë

Xoxa" artistic lyceum of Fier, and in 1983 by the "Ajet Xhindole" artistic lyceum of Berat. As can be seen, even the artistic high schools that were established in the late 70s and early 80s followed the model and trajectory of the artistic high schools that had been opened in the main cities of the country in the early '70s.

1979-80: The Institute of Folk Culture (Instituti i Kulturës Popullore) was established in 1979, and in 1980 it began publishing the journal *Kultura Popullore*. Both the Institute and *Kultura Popullore* were helmed by the aesthetician Alfred Uçi, whose writings on Marxist-Leninist critiques of modernism and on folklore were instrumental in shaping discourse and policies on culture, especially in the 70s and 80s. Born in 1930, and trained in philosophy—and specifically aesthetics—in Moscow, Uçi had returned to Albania in the 1950s and took a position at the State University of Tirana at its founding in 1957.

laid with polished prefabricated exposed aggregate concrete. The staircase features widths as wide as the ramps, at 200cm and 150cm respectively, adorned with a granilite cladding. Its handrail was crafted with a combination of masonry with plaster cladding at a height of 53cm at the base, while the upper part of the handrail is treated with wooden elements, at a height of 36cm, a design that is no longer preserved today. (Fig. 7)

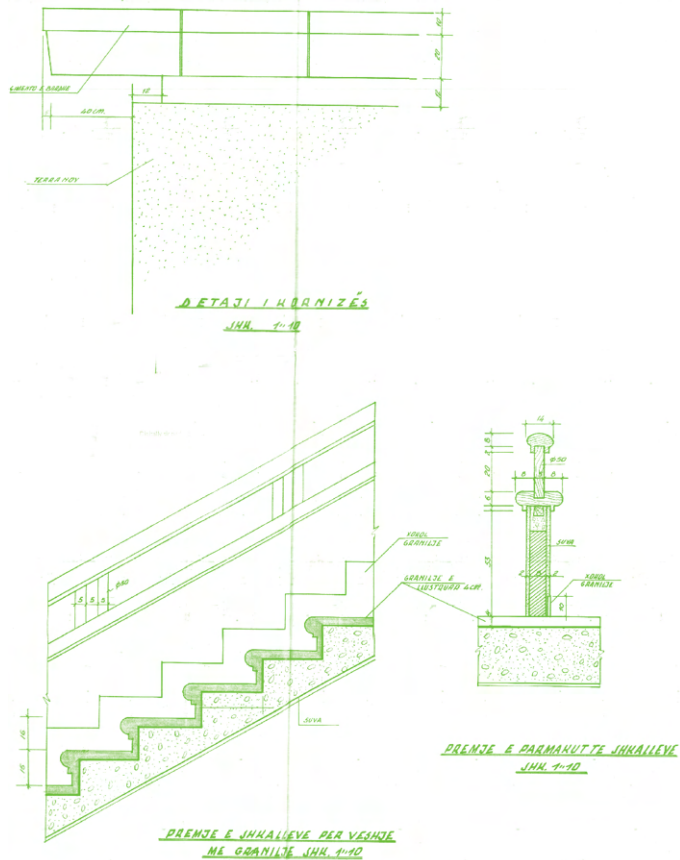


Fig. 7. Details of the staircase, handrails, and the building's main decorative frame, AQTN.

1980

1980s: At the beginning of the 1980s, the didactic structure of the Faculty of Figurative Arts remained largely unchanged. It was organized into two departments: the Department of Applied Arts (led by Agim Zajmi and later by Kujtim Buza), and the Department of Monumental Arts (led by Thoma Thomai, and later Jorgji Gjipopulli and Hasan Nallbani). The departments consisted of studios or classes/teaching programs such as Monumental Painting, Monumental Sculpture, Applied Sculpture, Graphics, Scenography, and Textiles. Divided into four school years with a total of about 40 subjects which varied based on the program, the study cycle ended with the State Exam and the Diploma. The diploma was mainly given as a year of work with a predetermined conclusion, during which the student worked for the state receiving a salary, while also fulfilling diploma requirements for the institution. The number of students varied from 25-30, of which only 4-5 were women. These numbers increased significantly from the mid-1980s, when the maximum number of registered students reached about 40 students, of which 8-10 were women.

1980: The first issue of the bimonthly journal *Stage and Screen* (*Skena dhe ekrani*), published by the Art and Culture Committee (Komiteti i Artit dhe Kulturës), came out in January 1980. Up until this point, there had not existed a publication dedicated to the discussion of the performing arts, or of film and TV for that matter, in Albania. *Stage and Screen* attempted to address this by providing critical, historical, and theoretical accounts of the past, present, and future development of the performing arts—covering a wide variety of mediums and genres, such as folk dances and folk songs, classical ballet and the opera, classical theater and vaudeville (or variety theater), etc.—as well as the country's cinematic and televisual output.

1980: In May 1980, Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia's leader since 1945, died in a hospital in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The coffin containing his body traveled through Yugoslavia for one last time until it reached Belgrade, where it lay in state until Tito's funeral. Under the slogan "unity and brotherhood" and his iron fisted rule, Yugoslavia's many ethnic groups had managed to peacefully coexist and the country had built a strong international reputation due to the good relations Tito had maintained with both camps. Despite Hoxha's public attacks against

Externally, the entire building was adorned with a continuous socle along the ground floor's base, crafted from lightly crushed exposed aggregate concrete.

The building was designed with a central heating system, with radiators positioned beneath classroom windows. In the kitchen area, walls surrounding the sink were clad with domestically produced small, white majolica tiles up to a height of 60cm. Similarly, the area designated for large dish washing in the canteen was tiled up to 120cm with pink majolica tiles, though these features have been lost due to the spaces' repurposing into a concert hall.

Its doors and windows are mostly 'standard', with specifically 20 typologies or door standards, repeated along the apertures of the building. To meet the acoustic requirements in the music halls, honeycomb doors, 6cm thick, were chosen, and cotton and fabric was placed in the areas where the frames meet. Moreover, for acoustic insulation, the dividing walls between the music classrooms were made with perforated bricks.

VIII. Changes and Interventions in the "Jordan Misja" Artistic Lyceum Building: 1961–2023

Throughout its 62-year existence since its construction in 1961, the Lyceum building has undergone a series of reconstructions and interventions aimed at enhancing its longevity and accommodating the evolving requirements for new spaces due to the expansion of educational curricula. Originally established as a national school that welcomed students from across Albania, the lyceum's educational program dictated the division of its physical spaces into three zones or segments: the general culture area, the musical culture and visual arts area, and the dramatic arts and choreography area — a zoning arrangement that remains partially intact today.

It is believed that around the onset of the 1980s, an additional unit was built, extending from the Lyceum wing along "Ismail Qemali" Street, intended to accommodate visual arts classes. This unit was also equipped with a dedicated entrance, which still exists today. (Fig. 8)



Yugoslavia, and Tito personally, the two countries managed to reestablish normal relations in the 1970s, connecting through railways and increasing trade and cultural exchanges after Tito had granted autonomy to Kosova. Yet, even before Tito's death, Hoxha had predicted the dissolution of Yugoslavia after Tito's passing.⁴⁴ In 1981, Milovan Djilas, former collaborator of Tito turned dissident, similarly predicted the collapse of Yugoslavia following Tito's passing.⁴⁵ These predictions turned out to be true, since Tito's death really did mark the beginning of the end of Yugoslavia due to the emergence of interethnic divisions, deepening of economic disparities among the republics, and the clashing interests of international powers and institutions, which exacerbated local antagonisms while reinforcing existing

divisions.⁴⁶ In April of 1981 protests broke out in Kosova, with Albania condemning the suppression of the students' and workers' demands for better living conditions and demanding that the rights of the Albanians be respected. After Tito's death, Kosova's autonomy again became a subject of heated debate among the nationalists in Belgrade. Slobodan Milošević would soon become their leader. Under his leadership in Belgrade, all of Yugoslavia would go up in flames, with disastrous consequences for the entire Yugoslav peoples, but particularly the Albanians, Croats, and Bosnians. The end of Yugoslavia began with the protests of the Albanians in Kosova in 1981, and ended with the international intervention in Kosova in 1999.

44 Artan R. Hoxha, "The 1981 Protests in Kosova and the Nationalism of the Communist Regime in Tirana—An Analysis of the Albanian Press", *Studime Historike [Historical Studies]*, vol. 58, nos. 3–4, 2021, pp. 169–194, 171.

45 Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, pp. 74–75. Kaplan is a journalist who met on several occasions with Milovan Djilas in Belgrade.

46 Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*, Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995; John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a Country*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Sabrina Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the Fall of Milosevic*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002. Aleksa Djilas, son of Yugoslav writer (before becoming one he was a high-ranking communist official) and dissident Milovan Djilas, has attacked the work of Sabrina Ramet and John R. Lampe as "biased" for claiming that the revived Serb nationalism during the 1980s was largely to blame for the misfortunes of late Yugoslavia. See: Aleksa Gjjilas, "The Academic West and the Balkan Test", in *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2007, pp. 323–332. See also the response of Ramet and Lampe to Djilas in "Responses to Aleksa Djilas" in *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2008, pp. 113–120.



Fig. 8. Building extension for the visual art classes, constructed in the 1980s.
Photo by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

1981: The National History Museum is inaugurated in Tirana.⁴⁷ Plans for the museum began in 1976, coinciding with a series of debates (many of which were published in *Drita*) about the national character and form of architecture. The national history museum “Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu” in Kruja was inaugurated the following year, in 1982 (although plans for it likewise began in the mid-1970s).⁴⁸ Together, the establishment of these two institutions helped consolidate the national narrative of Albanian identity that the state socialist regime had actively been constructing, especially over the previous two decades.

1981: Mehmet Shehu, Enver Hoxha’s second in command and Prime Minister of Albania since 1954, died by suicide (allegedly). In the months preceding Shehu’s death, there had been several signs that he had fallen out of Hoxha’s grace. Shehu was notably absent (for the most part) from the state television’s broadcast about the Eighth Party Congress which took place that same year. Hoxha had also avoided consulting with him on economic and political issues on more than one occasion, despite the fact that he had relied on Shehu’s opinion

on such matters in the past. Not only that, but behind the scenes Hoxha attacked Shehu directly for allegedly lowering his revolutionary vigilance by allowing his son to get engaged to the daughter of a class enemy (a former landowner from Tirana). The engagement of Shehu’s son became a political issue and was discussed in the politburo. Soon followed the meeting of the party’s plenum, where harshly critical voices emerged against Shehu, accusing him of falling into opportunist positions. It all culminated with Shehu’s (alleged) suicide in December 1981. Overnight, Hoxha announced that Shehu had been an agent working for multiple foreign intelligence services (*poliagjent*), and accused him of treason. Shehu’s family was imprisoned and eventually one of his sons also committed suicide. There are several factors that may help partly explain this turn of events, which have to do with Hoxha’s legacy and his probable anxiety about the future of his own family. Shehu had been a capable manager of economic issues, and it became evident that after the split with China, Albania’s economic situation had deteriorated. The political response to the disastrous economic situation was to emphasise even further the

⁴⁷ Petraq Kolevica, *Architecture and Dictatorship*, 2nd ed., Tirana: Logoreci, 2004, pp. 228–238.

⁴⁸ See: Enver Hoxha, “The Construction of the Skanderbeg Museum is a Complex and Delicate Undertaking” [1975], in *Vepra* vol. 56, Tirana: Shtepia Botuese “8 Nëntori”, 1987, pp. 145–150.

The lack of maintenance and interventions until 2004 led to the degradation of the main interior spaces, materials, and original elements, as well as the exterior of the building, a fact that necessitated the initial reconstruction effort. During this reconstruction phase, a significant portion of the original materials was replaced, including staircase railings, flooring in interior spaces, and the main entrance paved with exposed aggregate concrete, among others. (Fig. 9)



Fig. 9. Changes to the main staircase materials due to the 2004 reconstruction works, photo by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

concept of self-reliance, and avoid any openness to foreign trade and investments outside of the party's control. It is possible that Hoxha may have anticipated some sort of discontinuity between his line and that of Shehu, had the latter been left to lead the country after Hoxha's death. As a result, Hoxha may have feared a reprisal against his hard-line followers as well as his family members after his death, since it was customary for each purge of high officials to target not only the individuals in question but also their extended family, by sending them to forced labor camps and/or prison, often resulting in the loss of life. Shehu's long-standing reputation for ruthlessness, acquired since the days of the Anti-fascist National Liberation War, when he had fought on the front lines against the Nazi occupiers, may have been a contributing factor. On several occasions, Shehu had not hesitated to order the execution of those who opposed the communists or were simply considered lenient with the invaders, and Hoxha may have wanted to ensure that such a fate would not befall his family with Shehu at the helm. Hence Hoxha's decision to choose Ramiz Alia as his successor, after making way for such a passage by purging Shehu, the last impediment to Hoxha's plans for succession.

1982-83: After the death of Mehmet Shehu, Hoxha purged the former minister of internal affairs—and by then minister of defense—Kadri Hazbiu, who had worked for a long period in the cabinet headed by Shehu. Together with Hazbiu, Hoxha also purged the minister of internal affairs Feçor Shehu, who had replaced Hazbiu in a reshuffle of the government following Shehu's death. Both of them were accused of treason and executed in September 1983. Hoxha's last purge was part of a policy aimed at cleansing the party ranks from people who had worked under or with Mehmet Shehu. This was also an intergenerational struggle. The purge cleared the way for the promotion into leadership positions of a new generation of trusted people that were either coming from the periphery of political power, or had earlier held marginal positions. These were generally party officials groomed in the postwar years, shaped after the new socialist identity forged in the postwar period, but especially during the years of the Ideological and Cultural Revolution.

1985: Enver Hoxha dies of natural causes at the age of 77 after nearly 41 years of uninterrupted rule, leaving behind his 71 written works, around 176 thousand bunkers, and a terrible economic situation. During the public funeral ceremony, held in Tirana on 15 April 1985, Hoxha's successor, Ramiz

The renovation also changed to some extent the functioning of and entry into the building. A secondary entrance was secured, leading to the school's inner courtyard, in the area where the main interior staircase featuring three ramps was established. This entrance was expanded to include a secondary hall, which in volume is treated as a semi-cylindrical module, developed on two floors. (Fig. 10)



Fig. 10. Secondary entrance to the “Jordan Misja” Lyceum through an extension in the form of a semi-cylindrical hall, photo by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

The intervention made it possible for the school's inner courtyard to be used as the main gathering yard for students, in addition to its previous sporting function. The entrance was directed towards this space until approximately 11 a.m., while access through the arched volume at the intersection of the main thoroughfares was temporarily restricted, to be reopened thereafter. Consequently, the main entrance gradually assumed a predominantly ceremonial role. Vladimir Myrtezai, a former student of the Lyceum, recalls the atmosphere

Alia, promised Albanians to follow Hoxha's line—a promise he faithfully kept until December 1990, when the first students' protests (part of the wave of the changes taking place across Eastern Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall) put into question the rule of the Party of Labour of Albania.

1985: Mikhail Gorbachev becomes the leader of the Soviet Union in March 1985. After a long period of economic stagnation during the late years of Leonid Brezhnev's rule, and the short lived rule of Yuri Andropov and Kostantin Chernenko, Gorbachev came with a mandate to reform the Soviet economic system and streamline the country's vast bureaucratic apparatus which made departures from the old established economic and political models difficult. His reforms, under *perestroika* and *glasnost*, were the last attempts made in the

Soviet Union to reform and modernize its economy and slowly open its society without renouncing the rule of the Communist Party.⁴⁹ Despite Gorbachev's intentions, there were few improvements in the economic condition across the Soviet Union, and long queues for basic everyday items continued. Eventually, and following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, there erupted massive protests seeking better economic conditions which, in tandem with the separatist pushes of the republics comprising the Soviet Union, brought about its end. On the night of 25 December 1991, the flag of the Soviet Union was lowered over the Kremlin, nearly 70 years after the treaty that had established it, and almost 75 years after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The end of the Soviet Union also marked the end of an era of great ideological confrontation between the opposing camps that had shaped the global Cold War.⁵⁰ In its aftermath

49 Paul Robinson, *Russian Liberalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023, pp. 135–150; Vladislav M. Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021, pp. 13–42. Zubok argues that the reforms Gorbachev promoted under *perestroika* were drawn from many ideas he had from his mentor Yuri Andropov; Padma Desai, *Perestroika: The Design and Dilemmas of Soviet Reform*, 2nd edition, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.

50 Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, New York: Penguin Press, 2005. John Gaddis' view of the Cold War has been scrutinized and debated by Geir Lundestad. See: Geir Lundestad, “The Cold War According to John Gaddis”, *Cold War History*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2006, pp. 535–542. See also: Jussi M. Hanhimäki and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Cambridge

during the 1970s: “The morning line-ups, the raising of the flag, the unanimous ovation ‘always ready’, the half-hour physical education, the lining up and organization into general classes, were all integral to the the daily life. At 1:30 p.m., the trumpet signaled assembly for lunch, then the afternoon break and finally dinner as dusk settled, somehow quite melancholic.”⁶

The five-story structure, characterized by silicate brick walls without plaster, facing the Lyceum in “Ismail Qemali” Street, served until recently as a dormitory for art students coming from other cities, until its recent repurposing as the Administrative Court of Appeal.

Regarding the dormitory space, Myrtezai says that: “The dormitory near the Lyceum, being a mediocre structure, inspired the impression of a unique and adapted animated space, without aligning it to the aesthetics of the time, instead considering it an unnatural conservatory basin amidst the chosen environment that would grow embryos, that would be provoked by the system of the time.”⁷ Today, the Lyceum students no longer have dedicated dormitory accommodations, a circumstance that led to the drastic decline in enrollments of students from other cities beyond Tirana.

The next and most recent reconstruction, which precedes the current state of the building, was carried out in 2016: a general reconstruction financed by the Albanian Development Fund. This affected the main exterior facade, the interior facades due to humidity, floor waterproofing, the toilets, door and window replacements, the central heating system, fire safety provisions, landscaping, and the rearrangement of the external territory as well as the sports field.

In 2017, a tender was also announced for the construction of a proper concert hall named after the esteemed Albanian composer and musician Tonin Harapi, through the transformation of the area previously designated for the canteen, kitchen, and a modest events space. The completion and inauguration of the hall took place in 2019. In addition to the dedicated entrance along Elbasan Street, the concert hall is also accessible from the extended eastern wing of the Lyceum through the longitudinal distribution corridor. (Fig. 11)



6 Vladimir Myrtezai, “Lyceum, without filters: ‘Jordan Misja’ Artistic Lyceum, the history”, MAPO, no. 1182, 12 April 2014, pp. 14–15.

7 Ibid.

there followed a period of triumph for the liberal economic order, which brought harsh privatizations in the former socialist republics of the Soviet Union and across the former communist countries of Eastern Europe in general, the vigorous re-emergence of ethnic conflicts, and huge social problems further aggravated by massive waves of migration towards Western Europe.

Mid-1980s: In the mid-1980s, the number of candidates participating in the admission competition at the Higher Institute of Arts, which had been increasing for years, reached a record figure of approximately 800 people. One of the causes was undoubtedly the creation of a relatively wide network of artistic high schools throughout the country during the previous decade and the first half of the 1980s. The main destination for graduates of artistic high schools was precisely the Higher Institute of Arts. This was also due to the fact that a diploma from this institution ensured a secure career and all the benefits offered by the local artistic system. Indeed, studying at the

Higher Institute of Arts became a goal not only for students of artistic lyceums, but also for amateur artists. This influx strained the capacities of the institution, leading to the restructuring of the competition in two phases. The first phase was held in districts, with selected candidates advancing to the final competition in Tirana. The competition itself lasted 5 days; in the first 2 days the candidates were tasked with producing drawings while in the next 3 days they had to produce paintings or sculptures. State mandates dictated not only proportional representation across geographic regions but also ensured participation from diverse social classes, encompassing candidates and perhaps winners with both peasant and working-class backgrounds. The gender distribution among winning candidates also held considerable importance. This was all part of the comprehensive state policies initiated in the late 1960s, during the period of the Ideological and Cultural Revolution.

University Press, 2010; Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory*, London and Portland, OR : F. Cass, 2000. Some years ago, a debate regarding definitions and the framework of the Cold War for scholarly contributions took place between two respected scholars of the field in Europe. See Federico Romero, “Cold War Historiography at the Crossroads”, *Cold War History*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2014, pp. 685–703. For the polemic response to Romero see: Pierre Grosser, “Looking for the Core of the Cold War, and Finding a Mirage?”, *Cold War History*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2015, pp. 245–252.



Fig. 11. View of the new “Tonin Harapi” concert hall from Elbasani Street, photo by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.



Anonymous, Besim Çausi's diploma defense, Higher Institute of the Arts, 1985.

1986: The Center for the Study of Arts (QSA) is established at the Academy of Sciences of Albania. The QSA had as its object of study all Albanian arts without exception, including figurative, scenic (theater and choreography), music, and cinematography, along with the interactions between these domains. Until 1993, the QSA predominantly focused on theoretical studies and methodological challenges, and later on studies on the history of arts in Albania and critical and analytical views. The QSA comprised three sectors: the Sector of Figurative Arts, the Sector of Scenic Arts and Cinematography, and the Sector of Music and Choreography.⁵¹

1988: *Historia e Artit Shqiptar II* (*Albanian Art History II*) by Andon Kuqali was completed in 1988. It was part of a five-volume series on the

history of Albanian art as well as world art starting from antiquity all the way up to and including the 20th century, comprising two volumes on Albanian art and three volumes on world art. The series, which represents the first attempt to write a synthetic history of art in state socialist Albania, was produced by the Higher Institute of Arts (Instituti i Lartë i Arteve) in the late 1980s. It was preceded by a three-volume series on the history of Albanian theater in the mid-1980s, also produced by the Higher Institute of Arts. Nevertheless, both series remained in an unfinalized form, although the manuscripts were used within the institute for pedagogical purposes. *Historia e Artit Shqiptar II* is devoted to the history of modern art in Albania and is structured chronologically. The first part of the book spans a sixty-year period beginning with the National Awakening in the 1880s and concluding with Albania's occupation by Mussolini's Italy in 1939; the second part covers the fifteen-year period immediately after the end of World War II and the establishment of state socialism in Albania, which Kuqali refers to as “the period of the construction of the economic bases of socialism” (1945–1960); while the third part

51 Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, *Fjalor Enciklopedik Shqiptar: Vëllimi III*, Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese “Kristalina-kh”, 2008, p. 2144. The entry on the Center for Art Studies was written by Josif Papagjoni.

IX. The Current Functional-Spatial Organization in the “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum

Currently, the Artistic Lyceum operates as a mixed primary and secondary art school. Organized over four floors, the ground floor accommodates primary education classes, the second floor the 9-year education level, while the top two floors are designated for secondary education.

This structure represents the organization of educational cycles in the altimetry of the building. Furthermore, each floor has a similar structure, as far as the organization dictated by the educational curriculum is concerned. More specifically, the eastern wing, along Elbasan Street, hosts the music classes, which hold theoretical, as well as individual classes, in which singing, accordion, piano, and string instruments (viola, guitar, cello, etc.) are taught.

The northern wing of the Lyceum along “Ismail Qemali” Street houses the general culture classes, with additional areas in the adjoining building dedicated to the figurative arts, including painting, sculpture, photography, and graphics. Each floor has between 17–18 music classrooms and an average of 6 general culture classrooms. (Fig. 12)

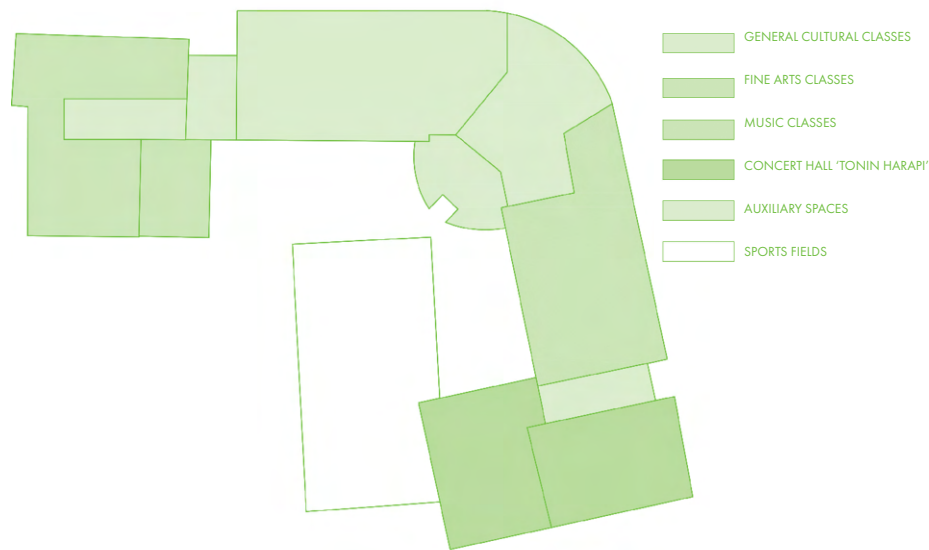


Fig. 12. Plan of the functional organization
of the “Jordan Misja” Lyceum.

focuses on the contemporary period, or “the period of the full construction of socialism” between 1961–1981.

1988: The “Enver Hoxha” Museum, colloquially known in the post-socialist period as “The Pyramid” (*Piramida*), opens in October of 1988. Plans for the structure began immediately after Hoxha’s death in 1985, and the building was designed by Klement Kolaneci, Pranvera Hoxha (the dictator’s daughter), Pirro Vaso, and Vladimir Bregu. Intended as a massive monument to Hoxha’s life and legacy, the form of the Pyramid was first conceptualized as a five-pointed star (seen from above), but eventually took on a form that more directly resembles the Albanian double-headed eagle. The building was also designed to mirror the form of Mt. Dajti, on Tirana’s horizon. As its centerpiece, the museum contained a monumental sculpture of the dictator created by Kristaq Rama. After 1991, the structure was converted into the “Pjetër Arbërori” Cultural Center.

Late 1980s: In the late 80s, a new generation of professors joined the “old guard” of professors who continued to teach at the Faculty of Fine Arts. Figures like Kujtim Buza, Çlirim Ceka, Muntaz Dhrami, Myrteza Fushekati, Jorgji Gjokopulli, Shaban Hysa, Petro

Kokushta, Andon Kuqali, Qirjako Meniko, Fatmir Miziri, Hasan Nallbani, Lec Shkreli, Niko Thana, Thoma Thomai, and Agim Zajmi were joined by a new cohort of lecturers, including Mustafa Arapi, Najada Hamza, Ilmi Kasemi, Ilir Pojani, Edi Rama, and Kreshnik Xhiku. Some of these newcomers were engaged as part of the teaching staff after graduation due to institutional needs and their high grades. There were also cases where teaching staff were recruited from the “working class.” For instance, Vlash Prifti and Kristo Krisiko were recruited from the porcelain factory in Tirana for their expertise in ceramics, while Nexhat Majellari came from the “Migjeni” Artistic Production Enterprise, also in Tirana. These individuals often became integral parts of the staff after completing higher education at the institution, leveraging their firsthand knowledge of the industrial sector, where the Institute’s students would often later find work.

1989: An exhibition entitled *Spring ‘89* (*Pranvera ‘89*) opens. Devoted to the work of artists under the age of 35, the exhibition represented an explicit reference to the first *Spring* exhibition of 1973. The new generation of artists whose works were exhibited again turned to intimate, psychologically charged portraits and lyrical

The hall of the first floor was closed off with glazed panel doors to create a small instrument museum to commemorate the 77th anniversary of the Artistic Lyceum's activity. (Fig. 13)

The hall on the top floor, formerly the lyceum's library, is now closed and used for educational purposes. The auxiliary sanitary facilities, renovated during the second reconstruction in 2016, are located next to the main interior staircase with three ramps.



Fig. 13. First floor hall transformed into a small instruments museum, photo by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

landscapes, instead of more clearly politicized images of Partisans, the working classes, and the building of socialist society (though these latter subjects are still present). Among the artists whose works attracted the attention of reviewers were Edi Rama (the son of sculptor Kristaq Rama), Vladimir Myrtezaj, Zihni Veshi, and Ikbal Kalaja.⁵² Four years after Hoxha's death, the exhibition reflected a shift away from socialist realism and towards more generally lyrical styles, in painting as well as sculpture.

1989: On the night of 9 November 1989 crowds of people from East Berlin began moving towards the border crossings with West Berlin.⁵³ From the mid-1980s, thousands of people from East Germany had crossed the border into Czechoslovakia so as to seek asylum at the West German embassy there. To tackle this situation, on the evening of 9 November 1989, the East German ruling party (SED) decided to adopt a new policy that allowed East Germans to legally cross the border into West Germany. During the press conference announcing these changes, politburo member Gunter Schabowski

declared that this policy would be effective immediately. Upon hearing this announcement on the local radio and national television, thousands of East Berliners moved towards the border that same evening. At first confused, eventually the East German border guards were overwhelmed, and simply allowed people to cross the border in both directions. During the same evening, crowds of West Berliners joined in and started bringing down some parts of the wall. What had been the symbol of the division of the continent into two opposing blocks for 28 years, since it was first built in 1961, was torn down (also literally in a few sections) in a matter of hours. The Cold War was over, and with it the dream of a classless socialist society. The liberal order, with its free market formulas, could finally reign sovereign across almost the whole of the globe. The news of the fall of the Berlin Wall first reached Albania through the illegal antennas people had placed in their homes to hear Yugoslav radio and to watch Italian TV. Eventually, the Albanian state broadcaster also briefly reported on the event.

⁵² See: Dritëro Agolli, "Artistic Anthology of the Youth", and Gjergji Marko, "On the Path to Maturity", both in *Drita*, 18 June 1989; and Petro Kokusha, "Young Artists on the Path to Growth", *Drita*, 25 July 1989.

⁵³ For an account of how the idea of the wall came about in the first place, and what triggered its building, see: Hope Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall. Soviet-East German Relations, 1953–1961*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001.

When considering their underlying rationales and the nature of interventions throughout the years in the two principal institutions of artistic education in Albania, the “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum and the University of the Arts, some similarities can be observed. Such parallels are due to the evolving circumstances and similar demands during the periods when these changes were deemed necessary. Notably, the additional structure designed by Mauricio Bega in 1973–74 and the subsequent extension of the University of the Arts, alongside the construction of additional facilities around the 80s to accommodate the figurative arts unit within the Artistic Lyceum, responded to the escalating demand for educational and practical spaces amid a growing contingent of students, as well as to the expansion and enrichment of the curricula with new disciplines.

However, while these expansions resonate with the original reasoning behind their conception, they diverge in their architectural treatment in relation to the existing structures. The Lyceum’s additional structure blends with the volume and facade’s design language, appearing as a seamless extension of the 1961 edifice. While the structures added to the University of the Arts show a very rational and simple architectural approach, clashing with the monumentality of Gherardo Bosio’s building, both in materials and spatial treatment.

A further similarity between the interventions carried out in these institutions during the last decade is related to the reconstruction projects of the concert halls. The renovation of the “Tonin Harapi” concert hall in the premises of the “Jordan Misja” Artistic Lyceum, as well as the reconstruction and restoration project of the concert hall of the University of the Arts, aim to serve beyond the educational and training needs of the two host institutions where they are located. Being open (through artistic activities) to the wider public beyond their immediate educational environment, they can also be considered as investments serving the artistic life of the city. Such concert halls, besides being integrated within their respective educational institutions, should exist as separate entities to nurture the cultural life of a capital city that has a pronounced lack of such performance and art production spaces.



4. Michel Setboun, student Arben Bajo working in the monumental sculpture atelier at the Higher Institute of the Arts, Tirana, end of the 1980s.

1989: The repercussions of events happening in the Soviet Union, Germany, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe also resonated in Albania. At the Higher Institute of Arts, at the request of the department (then led by Hasan Nallbani), a group of young artists including Bashkim Ahmeti, Edi Hila, Gazmend Leka, and Ilir Pojani, were approached to teach in the institution. Until then engaged in museum institutions such as the Museum of Kruja or the “Enver Hoxha” Museum in Tirana (the Pyramid), they could offer the institution a new perspective, far from the conservative line of the generation of Russian school teachers. Thus, at the request of this new group, some of the studios were duplicated under the name of the teacher - that is, two painting classes, two graphic classes, etc. Meanwhile, demands for political change in the form of protests began to intensify within these institutions. These discussions started

in the studios of the Institute when small groups of students were having semi-“secret” lessons on the theory of color of modern artists like Kandinsky or Paul Klee, with teachers like Gazmend Leka or Edi Rama. All these movements brought to the surface the desire for change that circulated among teachers and students, turning the institution into an innovative center of the time. Even a meeting chaired by Hekuran Isai, then Minister of the Interior, failed to stop the dissenting voices of the “rebel” students. And while protests had just started in the Student City, at the Higher Institute of Arts, a tribute evening for John Lennon was being organized, as if to confirm that things had already taken their course. It all culminated with the overthrow of the dictator’s monument in “Skanderbeg” square on 20 February 1991, where it became clear to anyone that there was no turning back. In the following months, after the massive exodus by sea, or crossing the borders into neighboring countries, those who decided to stay in the country engaged in associations and exhibitions, finally freed from the censorship of governing bodies. Following these events, significant changes were expected within the most important institution of art. The initial shift came in 1990, with changes in the education system, elevating the Higher Institute of Arts to the level of a



Secondary entrance to the “Jordan Misja” Lyceum through an extension in the form of a semi-cylindrical hall, photo by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

Building extension for the visual art classes, constructed in the 1980s.
Photo by Jora Kasapi CC BY-SA 4.0.

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University, naming it the “Academy of Arts”. In the following months, changes within the institution extended beyond the didactic structure. This also coincided with the removal of elements of the academic staff that represented the state’s artistic hierarchy, symbolically represented by Kujtim Buza. Concurrently, even though close to retirement, several faculty members relinquished their positions, paving the way for the cultivation of new academic approaches to art and artistic methodology.

