



## **INTERVIEW conducted on 29.10.2019**

by

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## **INTERVIEW - Taib Kovač**

*INTERVIEW WITH TAIB KOVAC A PROMINENT ARTIST FROM SARAJEVO, BOSNIA  
HERZEGOVINA BY SITI RUQAIYAH HASHIM FOR DIOGEN PRO CULTURE FOR  
WORLD PEACE.*

**SRH: Tell me more about yourself. Your childhood, family, schooling and education background and career.**

**TK:** On January 3, 2020, I will celebrate my 61st birthday. I was born in Tjentište, in a picturesque area, in the southeastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Tjentište is a small tourist site, in the Sutjeska River valley, surrounded by the beautiful Zelengora Mountain, the highest peak in BiH, Maglić, and Preučica, the largest rainforest in Europe. There, I spent happy, beautiful days and years of my early childhood, and I went to primary school there.

Since 1973, Sarajevo has been my permanent residence. I finished my education in Sarajevo, finished my professional working life, was there when my city was going

through the hardest days in its history, I retired there.. I live in Sarajevo, and Sarajevo lives in me.

**SRH: When did you start painting and what inspired you into it? How did it develop from beginning until now? Are you a professional artist, living on your paintings alone? How many paintings you had done until now?**

**TK:** I became interested in painting in my early years, in elementary school. I remember that in 1974 I had my first student art exhibition at my school. Interestingly, after 45 years, I had a solo exhibition of my own art paintings at that same school..Unfortunately, my intense engagement in painting was disturbed by a series of, I would say, objective circumstances and events that happened to me during this period.. Four years of war, aggression against my homeland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and later, professional engagement in the military. I was completely separated from the brush and pallet. Of course, then, my first priority and patriotic obligation was to put myself at the disposal of the defense in preserving the independence of the Homeland. During this period I did not think about art and painting ..With the end of my working life, a fairly wide space was created, enough time required, so I returned with caution, I can say, to this repressed love - painting. I began to master painting techniques because I was not a professional painter, to paint intensely, and to exhibit independently. In this year, I have had seven solo exhibitions.

I sell paintings, of course, and therefore in addition to my retirement income, I supplement my budget from the sale of paintings. I do not have a record of how many paintings I have painted, but surely over 150 paintings in the last few years, that I know. Many of my paintings are scattered throughout the homes, both in BiH and beyond its borders.

**SRH: What are the challenges faced in being an artist in Bosnia Herzegovina and how are you coping with them?**

**TK:** Bosnia and Herzegovina is having a difficult time recovering from the traumas of the four-year war, even after 25 years. Administrative and ethnic disunity is largely reflected in the overall social life, so that neither culture nor art have been spared from it. However, even during the worst events of war, the

culture did not die. For example, artistic performances, some cultural and public events took place in besieged Sarajevo.. So, nevertheless, this link between art and the cruel reality of life was alive.

Due to the imposed social system, there are none or very few cultural organizations, groups or associations, unique - at the state level. Generally, they operate at the local or entity level, but fortunately, these barriers are slowly being removed by the organization of common cultural manifestations, or for example, of art colonies, when it comes to painting. Unfortunately, such ill-favored, existing socio-political system, and the ruling oligarchies, do not seem to have the subtle hearing for the need to treat art, in all forms, adequately, to materially inspire, above all, the top artists and the large number of enthusiasts. There are no laws that would adequately treat the status of artists, which would adequately treat culture, art and artists as a social and national priority. In such an unfavorable environment, artists are, I might say, very poorly materially supported, usually left on their own. In such circumstances, culture and art are in a very poor status, poorly stimulating position.

I can say for myself, that I rely solely on my enthusiasm, and only the love of fine arts, even the written word, are imperative for me to create in these unfavorable conditions.

**SRH: What are your favorites things to paint? And in what form? How long it takes for you to finish a painting?**

**TK:** I find the motifs and themes that I mostly paint in my Bosnia, in its extraordinary beauties. Because Bosnia is a beautiful country and provides an inexhaustible source of themes and motifs. I paint landscapes, motifs of old cities, medieval fortresses, bridges, characteristic old parts of Sarajevo, as well as of other cities in BiH.. In this way, I try to use my painting to keep the memory of them, and even prevent their disappearance. The theme and the motif determine what technique I will paint .. in what form. I paint on canvas, with oil and acrylic paints, pastels and watercolors. Painting with oil or acrylic usually takes more time, because of the very technique of painting, and lasts three or more days, and painting with pastel and watercolor technique, takes much shorter, several hours, more or less. I prefer watercolor painting, however, canvas paintings are more wanted on the market..

**TK: What about exhibitions and International receptions towards your paintings? Are they well received?**

**TK:** Since my return to painting took place relatively late, technical refinement was necessary. The public setting of paintings and the organization of exhibitions required a necessary and reached artistic level, a necessary number of superb works. But, as I said earlier, I still managed to organize seven independent exhibitions, only in this year, .. I am making intense preparations to continue the same way in the next year. My paintings are visible to a wider audience, and to art criticism, both on exhibitions and on public networks. I had positive impressions of the audience and visitors when it comes to exhibitons, and the reactions to my exhibitions organized so far are positive, as it seems. Of course, there is always room for upgrading, and access to a new and underperformed artistic impression and level, and therefore for training and advancement in every sense. At least, art provides and allows it.

**SRH: You also write poems. Tell me more about that.**

**TK:** Yes, I am also a lover of written words and, I would say, a nice word. Writing, in addition to painting, was a challenge that I did not hesitate to 'run from', but just on the contrary. I know of many examples in literature, where writers and poets, in addition to superb literary expression, have been very successful in the visual ie artistic expression, and vice versa. It's just an internal impulse to paint a certain motif in words, including emotion, of course. Certainly, I am far less committed to writing than to painting. In moments of inspiration, I write a poem in short form, mostly, or a review in prose, purely to satisfy the inner urge to write, I would say. I don't think about the artistic reach of my written expression... I'm writing, more 'for myself', for now.

**SRH: Situation in post-war Bosnia Herzegovina and the arts. How are the artists handling with the trauma of a brutal ethnic-cleansing, genocide war against your community, nation and religion?**

**TK:** The four-year war in BiH left terrible traumas and irreparable consequences. Terrible atrocities, terrible crimes, material and general devastation and ethnic cleansing were committed. All of this traumatically affected the lives of the artists. Many were killed, many expelled from their territories, "scattered" around the

world, where they have difficulty coping, traumatized, clueless, frustrated. However, by nature, our Bosnians are tough and persistent, so are many artists. Some creators from these Bosnian areas, however, were able to integrate and become involved in artistic life in countries where they 'stopped', after persecution by ethnic cleansing, and began a new life. Of course, many of them returned to BiH, and continued to act, to create, and to share destiny with its citizens, .. The consequences of the horribly brutal war are still visible, because the causes that started the war in BiH have not been eliminated, namely, that Bosnia be ethnically cleansed of the majority people and those who stood in its defense, to be split, divided, and, at some time, merged to its eastern and western neighbor. These large-scale current policy projects of its eastern and western neighbor are still clearly expressed through the negation of Bosnian history, its millennial identity, through direct interference with internal developments in BiH, by encouraging certain political oligarchies on the creation of political destruction, on the creation of an image of BiH, as a country where it is not possible to live together because of the ethno-national divisions caused by the war, and the alleged historical heritage, of the inter-national, inter-religious intolerance of the peoples living in BiH.. which, of course, is not true.

It is precisely this mutual tolerance that the millennial foundations of Bosnia stand on, which are built on multiethnicity, on ethical and religious tolerance. But the policies and great-state aspirations towards Bosnia have always undermined those foundations, this historical fact upon which this country rests. Fortunately, these plans to overthrow the foundations of Bosnian statehood were not realized in this last war effort, but there were terrible consequences, especially on Bosniaks, Bosnian Muslims. In this past war, Bosniaks have suffered the greatest casualties, the most serious crime in recent history has been committed against them. Genocide was committed against Bosniaks in several Bosnian cities, as well as terrible ethnic cleansing, huge numbers of religious and historical buildings were destroyed, huge numbers of Bosniak homes were set on fire, demolished and wiped off the face of the earth. These are facts that no one can deny, because there is visible evidence for this, as well as many judgments of the largest international and domestic judicial figures. Of course, we shouldn't forget the fact that other Bosnian patriots from the Bosnian Serbs-Orthodox and Bosnian Croats-Catholics fought for the values of that coexistence, the integrity and the sovereignty of the Bosnian state. Fortunately, this 'core of multiethnicity' has not been destroyed by this brutal war. It is now being renewed, though slowly, but raises hopes for future generations.

**SRH: In your opinion, are the efforts by international communities done enough to the victims of the war? What about situations where there are still victims who were still not found after almost 25 years?**

**TK:** I just want to mention that the international community, that is, the world's leading economic and military powers, could in an open way, through strong diplomatic, ultimately military involvement, prevent the wars in the Balkans, prevent the brutality of Milosevic's politics through the military a force of the JNA, which was in service of realizing its great-state and imperialistic intentions, and which lasted for almost a decade. Especially because it was happening in the very core of Europe . I am saying this out of conviction.that the International Community could have prevented it and what it did not, but it is for another, broader analysis and elaboration. However, the fact that the war in BiH, however, was halted by diplomatic efforts and even by the military involvement of the International Community, above all the United States, cannot be denied or neglected.

A significant role of the International Community, even after the war, is in the forming of the International Court of Justice and in the prosecution of war criminals, to assist in the transformation of a devastated society, normalization of the situation, engagement of international peace forces, to assist in reconstruction and financial assistance, to rebuild a devastated country, to assist in the return of the expelled population. Many governments have issued declarations of Genocide in Srebrenica, prohibiting the denial of crimes, many countries have prosecuted war criminals from BiH. Although there is no absolute justice for the victims of the war, I think a significant effort has been made by the international community.

Unfortunately, the persistent, unconstitutional obstruction of individuals and institutions from the smaller BiH entity, and the influences from the neighborhood, have largely slowed down the process of quick elimination of the effects of the war, to move towards economic progress. There are still remains of thousands of missing ie killed BiH citizens that have not been found. Return to the pre-war residence has been obstructed, crimes committed have been denied, Genocide has been denied, thus endangering, not respecting, and thus violating, basic human rights . It is a gloomy setting, and a very traumatic state.. for culture, art and artists.



**SRH: Bosnia Herzegovina is still recovering from the war in all aspects. And the process is slow. What about inter- ethnic relationships in the present Bosnia Herzegovina communities? In your opinion as an artist, what more is needed and should be done?**

**TK:** With the Dayton Peace Agreement, Bosnia has been an administratively regulated state union with the Constitution, which, through its constitutional provisions, has contributed a great deal to interethnic division and deepening of other antagonisms, national and religious. The peace agreement stopped the war, restored peace, but it left plenty of room for obstruction and the provisions of the Dayton Constitution, as well as slowing down the democratic transition, obstruction of state competencies and the very state sovereignty.

Unfortunately, the holders of these obstructions are the highest Entity officials, individuals, holders of the highest political titles, political parties, organizations and entity institutions, who openly deny state sovereignty, do not admit the crimes committed, deny Genocide, and thus do not admit the judgments of national and international tribunals. All this has created a fertile ground for interethnic, international and inter-religious intolerance, lawlessness, corruption, slow economic development, severe poverty of the population, and as a result has massive exodus of 'intellect' from BiH, above all the young, highly educated population, to EU and US countries.

I do believe, however, that an artist, by his or her vocation, should not be burdened with something that is contrary to humanism, the human and civilization standard.

The solution to this situation in BiH, in my opinion, is the civic concept of state development, an administrative structure by economic parameters and cultural, historical and other parameters. Laws that would regulate, above all, individual and then collective rights are the solution. This implies a change in the current Dayton concept, however unrealistic it may seem to some at the moment. Because this kind of environment, in my opinion, does not give space for broad artistic expression, from the aspect of art or even humanism. Anything that is restricted by social frameworks also limits the required breadth of artistic expression. It is not even humane to impose restrictions on art and artists, in any way.

**SRH: What is your respond towards the choice of Peter Handke as the recipient of Nobel Peace Prize for Literature 2019? And why?**

**TK:** I'm disappointed! Personally, I have the opinion that everyone who establishes themselves and is established by the wider community as an artist, must, through their engagement in artistic expression, carry a human, humane and civil message. In addition, through their public appearance, through any form of engagement, even political, they have to be on that civilizational, human and humane line. This separates them from the settled space and elevates them to a pedestal of sublime value. Such are clearly visible, and serve as an example in which direction this world and relations in it should be built.

Unfortunately, Peter Handke, now a Nobel Literature Prize winner, is not that. The holder of such a significant recognition, through his public actions, and publicly demonstrated conviction, through written reviews, covered himself and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, which awarded him the Nobel Prize, thereby honoring him, with a dark stain of doubt, misunderstanding and indignation.

Unquestionably, Peter Handke gave public support to the main protagonist of all the ex-Yugoslavian wars, Slobodan Milosevic, the 'Balkan executioner', and his regime, the cause of the greatest post-World War II casualties, on the ground of 'civilized' Europe, a man whom the Tribunal in The Hague prosecuted for the most serious, crimes committed.

The man who denies the crimes committed, who disputes the Genocide committed in Srbrenica against the Bosniak people in BiH, the man who, by denying it, directly justifies these crimes, has no human or artistic capacity to receive such a significant award and recognition. Awarding Handke with the Nobel Prize is absurd. This award also implies that the author of the award-winning work, by his artistic expression and public action, does not violate any human right, especially not the right to the truth. Of course, I do not want to minimize the value of his literary work for which he was awarded, but his public and political views, regarding wars in the former Yugoslavia, and the doubt about the existence of Bosnia and the Bosnian ie Bosniak people, gives me the right to be disappointed in such a significant institution, and its members, who awarded him and thereby paid due respect.

Everyone in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially Bosniaks, and all those for whom civilizational value is beyond question, should draw messages and lessons from all



this, from awarding this Nobel Prize to a man, writer and artist such as Peter Handke.

**SRH: Current and coming writing projects?**

**TK:** I am engaged in painting, and occasional written 'works', out of personal satisfaction and pure inner urge, while satisfying my inner passion for artistic expression as much as I can at the moment of inspiration. My future plans also go in this direction - to paint so much that neither fatigue, tiredness, saturation nor hastiness jeopardizes my passion. So to paint, to organize exhibitions in parallel, to present my works through public networks, international art groups .. all for a wider audience. I'm thinking of painting a cycle on a specific topic with a minimum number of motifs, starting next year, to complete one thematic cycle with that cycle, for example. All these are options that I'm thinking about, for the next period. Of course, all of these goals are limited by some other moments - health, above all, and the necessary material support.

**SRH: What are your hopes and dreams as a prominent artist in Bosnia Herzegovina?**

**Is there anything else you want to add?**

**TK:** My sincere hope stems from the desire that reasonable and universal aspiration of the little man, for justice and equality on this beautiful planet of ours, will be equal and the same in every part of it. I also hope for the minds of those who can prevent this path to global disappearance, that this cognition will also prevail this indifference of the rich to uncontrolled exploitation, and that it will turn towards a more equitable distribution of earthly goods, that justice of stronger will be transformed into justice of more humane, smarter and more advanced, for the common good of us all, on this shared piece of earth in the Universe. I also have the sincere hope that, in my Bosnia, such an environment will finally be created, in which all its peoples, and above all citizens, will finally move towards greater prosperity in all spheres of life, including art, of course.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude and sincere satisfaction for having the opportunity to present myself through some of my reflections, and views, with which, of course, not everyone have to agree. Also, I am pleased that in this way, readers and all those who follow your editions , will have the opportunity to get to

know me through my artistic and written expression. I wish you, and your readers, all the best.

With sincere respect.

**SRH: Taib Kovac, on behalf of Diogen Pro Culture For World Peace, I would like to express my appreciation and thank you very much for the detail, comprehensive and very deep insight you had provided in your answers. And apology for taking a long time to publish this interview. I humbly beg your understanding for my inability to publish this interview much earlier due to many difficult situations.**

Thank you.

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