

Wrapped in the Shadow of Freedom

Agha Shahid Ali (KSH/US) / Anna Ehrenstein (AL/DE) / Arlinda Morina - Liki (RKS) / Arbër Selmani (RKS) / Astrit Ismaili (RKS/NL) / Bashar Murad (PS) / Clifford Prince King (US) / Kristiyan Chalakov (BG) / Ledia Dushi (AL) / Marko Gutić Mižimakov (HR) / Nanda Agić (BiH) / Paola Revenioti (GR) / Pédra Costa (BR/DE) / Piro Rexhepi / Rah Naqvi (IN/NL) / Robert Gabris (AT) / Silvi Naçi with Dëshira Maja (AL/US) / The Queer Muslim Project (IN) / Uresa Ahmeti (RKS) / Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi (crazinist artist) (GH)



Silvi Naçi with Dëshira Maja, *Untitled (mapping utopia, with pomegranate)*, 2024 (In progress)

Curated by **Shaunak Mahbubani (IN/DE)**

With Assistant Curator **Anyla Kabashi (RKS)**
Curatorial Advisors Dardan Hoti and Ajete Kërçeli

Organized by **Sekhmet Institute**
At **Grand Hotel, 6th floor, Prishtina, Kosovo**

Opens **30 Aug 2024, 7-10pm**,
On view until 29 Sep 2024, Wed-Sun, 12-8pm

'*Wrapped in the Shadow of Freedom*' is the first large-scale exhibition in Kosovo exploring queerness with its contemporary complexities, seeking to reorient priorities towards those in the shadows and margins of the non-normative. Thinking from the specific context of the newly independent state of Kosovo, the exhibition holds questions of freedom at its core—not only the freedom to look and love as we desire, but also the freedom to exist in multiplicity eschewing the confines of unilinear identities, and to be political agents enacting visions of radical intersectional queerness.

Its title pays homage to the poem '*Ndryshue/ Change*' (1999) by Albanian poet-anthropologist **Ledia Dushi**, grounding this gathering in feminist and queer movements that have laid the foundations for it. This located history of queerness in the region is highlighted through works such as archival photographs showing gender non-conformity from the late nineteenth century collated by **Piro Rexhepi**, and the anarchist sex-worker-led zine *Kraximo* (1981-93, Athens) published by **Paola Revenioti**. Intergenerational commissions further honor these legacies, including a new poem by **Uresa Ahmeti** in response to Dushi, as well as **Silvi Naci's** collaboration with master qilim weaver **Dëshira Maja** creating a trans*feminist rendition of the traditional heirloom.

Celebrated performance artist **Astrit Ismaili** breaks out of their discipline exhibiting semi-autobiographical surrealist drawings for the first time, as does theater director **Arlinda Morina - Liki**, presenting a new installation of photographs reflecting on transformations in body and kin while in isolation recovering from

Leukaemia. Intersections between gender, sexuality, and Islam, a crucial yet restrained conversation in the region finds voice through **Anna Ehrenstein**, **Rah Naqvi**, and **The Queer Muslim Project**. The importance of embodied archives surface in displays that include a photo-manifesto on non-binary Roma experiences by **Robert Gabris**, the video of a ritual-performance by **Va-bene Elikem Fiatsi** demanding freedom for queer communities under threat in Ghana, and a tender video-poem about dilemmas around HIV and intimacy by **Clifford Prince King**.

Expanding on Jose Esteban Munoz's proposal of "*queerness as horizon*", this multi-form assembly proposes the idea of freedom, too, as horizon, as a practice of continual alignments, asking what we stand to gain—and more importantly lose—when our current social and legal freedoms are hinged on making choices between binaries such as natal and chosen families, or visibility and safety.

Curator **Shaunak Mahbubani** reflects, "It has been extremely generative to build kinships with auto-narrative artists from Kosovo and the greater Balkan region in line with my broader curatorial focus, as well as to take this opportunity to introduce to the region artists of color from the Global South who provoke rich solidarities outside of the domination of European discourse." The exhibition is organized by **Sekhmet Institute**, a queer advocacy NGO working at the crossroads of media literacy and cultural awareness to challenge the erasure of queer experiences from Kosovo's public discourse.

Please find images [here](#).

Biographies

Sekhmet Institute

SEKHMET is a NGO based in Prishtina, Kosovo. With our work, we intend to contribute to the democratization of Kosovo. For us, this means recognizing our individual civic duty to fight for justice through our work, to occupy the public space with competence and responsibility, and to nurture public processes which promote wellbeing for all. SEKHMET promotes justice and respect for human rights, particularly of women and LGBTIQ+ individuals, of those excluded from power, representation and recognition, by supporting inclusive social and cultural change. In a landscape where many organizations focus on legal, psychological or health services for the queer community, SEKHMET has chosen a distinct path. We've embraced the power of media and the arts to challenge the erasure of queer experiences from Kosovo's public discourse. Our initiatives span diverse forms of expression – from podcasts, to articles, from exhibitions to street art.

Shaunak Mahbubani

Shaunak Mahbubani is a curator-writer based between Berlin and Mumbai. They explore possibilities of co-visioning futures grounded in the pursuit of non-duality, striving to hold complexity, fluidity, ambiguity, and mutability in investigating the boundary between the self and other. Their work focuses on practices that foreground personal and ancestral experiences, towards the resuscitation of wounded archives. Ongoing and recent projects include *Wrapped in the Shadow of Freedom* (Sekhmet Institute Pristina, Aug-Sept 2024), *Dis-visible Narratives* (SAVVY Contemporary Berlin, 2024-25), *Disrupting Protected Ignorance* (Co-curated with Sajan Mani, HKW Berlin, Aug 2024), *The Albanian Conference* (initiated by Anna

Ehrentein, 4th Lagos Biennial, Feb 2024), Parag Tandel: Archipelagic Archivist (TARQ Mumbai, 2023), Skin to Skin by Bhasha Chakrabarti (Experimenter Kolkata, 2023), AUTOPOIESIS (Berlin, Mexico City, Guatemala City, New Delhi, 2022-23), and Party Office at documenta fifteen (co-curated with Vidisha-Fadescha, Kassel, 2022). Their critical writing contributions have appeared in Hyperallergic, NO NIIN, Artforum, Critical Collective, Mezosfera, ifa Biennale stories, and other platforms.

Anyla Kabashi

Anyla Kabashi is an emerging art historian, researcher, and writer based in Pristina, Kosovo. Anyla completed her BA in Art History and Information and Communication Sciences in Zagreb and her MA in Semiotics in Budapest. During this time, she has been involved in researching feminist practices in Central European and Balkan art history and documenting and classifying artworks in museum and gallery collections using technologies such as ICONCLASS and AI. She has worked on documenting the works of the artist Vera Dajht Kralj in Zagreb and on the database of Kosovo artists developed by the Qahili Gallery. She participated in the mediation program of MANIFESTA 14. Recently, she was an artist-in-residence at the MuseumsQuartier in Vienna and worked on the curatorial team for the exhibitions Ancestral Clouds, Ancestral Claims, and Darker, Lighter, Puffy, Flat at Kunsthalle Wien. She has been part of the Sekhmet Institute since January 2024.

Supported by

Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, Kosovo, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Hajde Foundation, Manifesta 14 Prishtina, ifa - Institut Für Auslandsbeziehungen.

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