

P / REFERENCES OF DESIGN

CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICES IN REVIVING FOLK ART / INDONESIAN - HUNGARIAN CASE STUDY.

Luca Petrányi^{*a}

a Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest, Hungary

* luca Petranyi@gmail.com

DOI: 10.63442/ROCI1938

**KEYWORDS | DECOLONIALITY, TRAVEL DIARIES, FOLK ART, HANDCRAFT TRADITIONS,
CONTEMPORARY ETHNOGRAPHY**

ABSTRACT | Global tendencies in the aesthetics of art and design are led by the interests of capitalism. Globalisation expects mainstream aesthetics to be new and different, even (to use a controversial expression) we could say exotic, often borrowing motifs from local, traditional cultures. This cycle does not result in recognising and reviving certain folk arts but the opposite: positioning folk art for consumption through fast, market-based circulation. Contemporary artists, on the other hand, often face criticism when using folk art or traditional styles of handcraft techniques. The importance of local forms of knowledge represented in handcraft traditions and folk art is undeniable. However, the ways artists can use, reuse, interpret, redefine, transform, or distort such cultural heritage are unclear.

As a fine artist, I work with Indonesian wax resist batik dying. I find it a personal responsibility to question how I position myself in this highly critical Western discourse. I am committed to the revival of local folk art and believe that artists need to reconsider how we can approach folk art and what kind of relationships should and can be built with local communities. Artistic attitudes can be very different: from exploitative re-exoticising to traditionalist or sensitive. I seek to explore future-oriented artistic attitudes that are free from the colonialist narratives of West-East dynamics that continue to divide us today.

In the research methodology, I explore the questions of colonial heritage, focusing on Hungarian travelers of the 19th and 20th centuries whose ethnographic collections form a large part of the Ethnographic Museum in Budapest. Since the three travelers' personalities had different social backgrounds and personal motivations for traveling to the Dutch-East Indies, these case studies can provide an accurate picture of the semi-peripheral conditions of the period in Hungary. Intersections can be found when describing their attitude to "exotic cultures" compared with the relation to their "own" Hungarian folklore. Studying past narratives and understanding historical complexity can help shape our contemporary approaches.

My network in Indonesia allows me to explore the context of the theme among local artists whose practices involve handcraft techniques and make use of cultural references or who take up the topic of contemporary exoticness. The research touches on the issues and lessons of Documenta15, curated by an Indonesian collective, ruangrupa, in 2022. I discuss questions about the traditional authenticity in the framework of folk art, which often resists concepts of individual ownership or creativity. Folk art practices have a lot to teach us about community-based practices, sustainability, and the potential of learning slow processes, patience, and humility that offer counterpoints to the current trend of global aesthetics.

LONGING TO THE "OTHER" (?) IN THE 21TH CENTURY

Why should we talk about it?



Maori trading a crayfish with Joseph Banks, by Tupaia, 1769. © British Library

Is it a tendency?

In what kind of manner should we relate?

„Then, strip the word exoticism of its exclusively tropical, exclusively geographic meaning. Exoticism does not only exist in space, but is equally dependent on time. From there, move rapidly to the task of defining and laying out the sensation of Exoticism, which is nothing other than the notion of difference, the perception of Diversity, the knowledge that something is other than one's self; and Exoticism's power is nothing other than the ability to conceive otherwise.” (Segalen, 2002, p. 18-19)

LONGING TO THE "OTHER" (?) IN THE 21TH CENTURY

Why should we talk about it?



Maori trading a crayfish with Joseph Banks, by Tupaia, 1769. © British Library

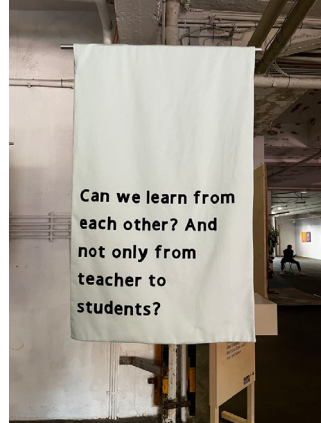
Is it a tendency?

In what kind of manner should we relate?

„Then, strip the word exoticism of its exclusively tropical, exclusively geographic meaning. Exoticism does not only exist in space, but is equally dependent on time. From there, move rapidly to the task of defining and laying out the sensation of Exoticism, which is nothing other than the notion of difference, the perception of Diversity, the knowledge that something is other than one's self; and Exoticism's power is nothing other than the ability to conceive otherwise.” (Segalen, 2002, p. 18-19)

“TO FRAME THE FRAMER”

Issues and lessons
of the Documenta15



A banner of *foundationClass* collective at Documenta15, Hafenstrasse 76, Kassel.



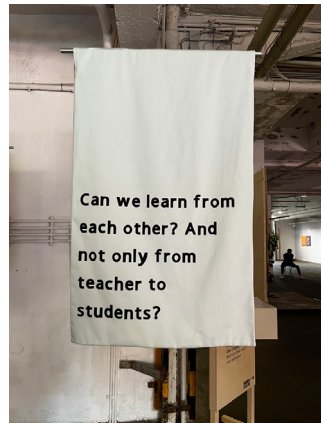
Dan Perjovschi's drawings on the front columns of Fridericianum façade, in Documenta15.

questions of
traditionality,
autheticity,
vulnerability, rural
agenda, vernacularity,
artists' responsibility,
reactions of the West

2022 Documenta15 organised by Indonesian curator-collective ruangrupa led to a long-lasting debate about what art should mean in the Western context. Ruangrupa's aim was to dismantle the fixed structure of the biennales and to rebuild a functional and applicable model for an alternative way of presenting "art" by destroying decentralising curatorial position and showing anti-art projects (Marchart, 2022). The issue of Documenta15 clearly shows how stuck is the debate of the West and the Other and how irreconcilable questions can come in front when talking about art in general.

“TO FRAME THE FRAMER”

Issues and lessons
of the Documenta15



A banner of *foundationClass* collective at Documenta15, Hafenstrasse 76, Kassel.



Dan Perjovschi's drawings on the front columns of Fridericianum façade, in Documenta15.

questions of
traditionality,
autheticity,
vulnerability, rural
agenda, vernacularity,
artists' responsibility,
reactions of the West

2022 Documenta15 organised by Indonesian curator-collective ruangrupa led to a long-lasting debate about what art should mean in the Western context. Ruangrupa's aim was to dismantle the fixed structure of the biennales and to rebuild a functional and applicable model for an alternative way of presenting "art" by destroying decentralising curatorial position and showing anti-art projects (Marchart, 2022). The issue of Documenta15 clearly shows how stuck is the debate of the West and the Other and how irreconcilable questions can come in front when talking about art in general.

The way how artists can improve their ways of using, reusing, interpreting, redefining, transforming or distorting such cultural heritage are not clear. Artistic attitudes can be very different: from exploitative, re-exoticizing to traditionalist, or sensitive in artistic manner.



How can we find our identity
in artistic attitude?



personal connection:
Indonesian wax resist “batik” dying

visual and cultural coding
meaning-making
iconography



recalling
atmosphere-making
“primitivist desire”

“This is not a pagan sacrificial altar — but an open fireplace at the campsite in Tihany, where campers can bake bacon.”

Page 25 from “The Balaton Herald”, 1959. The design is known from János Dianóczky.



Holy tree – installation in Project833: Floodplains, curated by Zsolt Miklósvölgyi in 2021.



reference: **kain poleng** - Balinese Hindu tradition of wrapping sacred trees where spirits reside



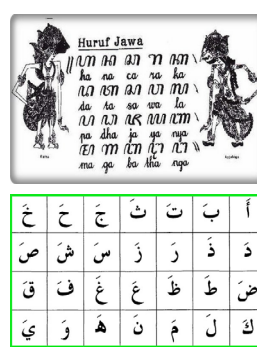
If I had a body – installation for the group exhibition in New Budapest Gallery entitled And Mistake These Walls for Skin, curated by Flóra Gadó in 2021.



reference: **jathilan/jaranan** - possessive dances in Java, Indonesia



different batik works using imagined/fictive calligraphy, 2020, 2021



Javanese alphabet and Arabic alphabet

Discoveries



Expedition



Arrival

Discoveries



Expedition



Arrival

SEARCHING FOR LOCAL CONNECTIONS

Hungary and the “Exotic”
Eastern European context
self-colonizing metaphor
microhistories



Ferenc Hopp's collection of rarities in one of the upstairs rooms. 1900 k.
© Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts. Photo: Mór Erdélyi (?)

what is our heritage?
what is our agenda?
how to relate locally?

“The concept of self-colonizing can be used for cultures having succumbed to the cultural power of Europe and the west without having been invaded and turned into colonies in fact. Historical circumstances transformed them into an extracolonial “periphery,” lateral viewers who have not been directly affected either by important colonial conflicts or by the techniques of colonial rule. The same circumstances however put them in a situation where they had to recognize self-evidently foreign cultural supremacy and voluntarily absorb the basic values and categories of colonial Europe. The result might be named “hegemony without domination.”” (Kiossev, 1995)

SEARCHING FOR LOCAL CONNECTIONS

Hungary and the “Exotic”
Eastern European context
self-colonizing metaphor
microhistories



Ferenc Hopp's collection of rarities in one of the upstairs rooms. 1900 k.
© Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts. Photo: Mór Erdélyi (?)

what is our heritage?
what is our agenda?
how to relate locally?

“The concept of self-colonizing can be used for cultures having succumbed to the cultural power of Europe and the west **without having been invaded and turned into colonies** in fact. Historical circumstances transformed them into an extracolonial “periphery,” lateral viewers who have not been directly affected either by important colonial conflicts or by the techniques of colonial rule. The same circumstances however put them in a situation where **they had to recognize self-evidently foreign cultural supremacy and voluntarily absorb the basic values and categories of colonial Europe**. The result might be named “hegemony without domination.” (Kiossev, 1995)



Archive photographs from the early 20th century, showing a collector, hunter Oscar Vojnich, and his curiosity cabinet, then Ferenc Hopp first museum space and the exhibition in established Ethnographic Museum in 1889.

Learning from past personalities' voices can help in shaping contemporary approaches. What is the relevancy of ethnographic collections today? How is it connected to our pathfinding processes?



Artefacts I visited in the archives of City Museum, Subotica, Serbia and Ferenc Hopp Asiatic Museum Budapest, in 2023

Discoveries



Expedition



Arrival

FOLK ART PRACTICES

Folk art practices in Hungary and in Indonesia contains collective and individual work, which can be used as a model. Indonesia's folk art traditions are alive, however Hungary's are preserved.



Community work
at a Fonó in Transylvania, Romania
(Népújság)



Individual work
Shepherd woodcarving. Pölöske,
Hungary
(Múzeum Digitár Budapest)



Individual work
Wayang kulit maker in
Yogyakarta, Indonesia
(own photograph, 2024)



Community work
Leksa Ganesha batik workshop, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
(own photograph, 2024)

What can folk art practices teach us? How can we implement them in contemporary art practices?

Contemporary artist examples in Indonesia, whose practices involve handcraft techniques, artisan work, who apply cultural references or who thematise the topic of colonial heritage.



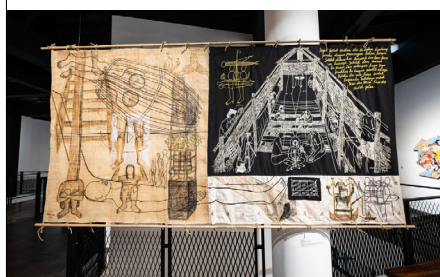
Citra Sasmita re-creating traditional Balinese kamasan paintings into female dominated pictures



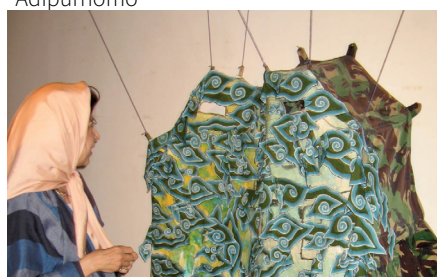
Nindityo Adipurnomo using various mediums and imaginative narratives, conceptual crafts



Jompet Kuswidananto Conceptual artist working with the questions of culture and identity



Ipeh Nur using various mediums and imaginative narratives, conceptual crafts



Mella Jaarsma Dutch artist living in Java, working with traditional techniques



Gabber Modus Operandi musical duo whose visual concept includes cultural motifs

Contemporary artist examples in Hungary, whose practices involve folklore as a theme or practice, or who thematise cultural topics as artistic-projects.



Dominika Trapp conceptual projects around folklore examples, microhistories



Bence Pálincás & Kitti Gosztola a collective working with stories from folklore mainly connected to nature



Eszter Ágnes Szabó often working with traditional crafts and collective activities



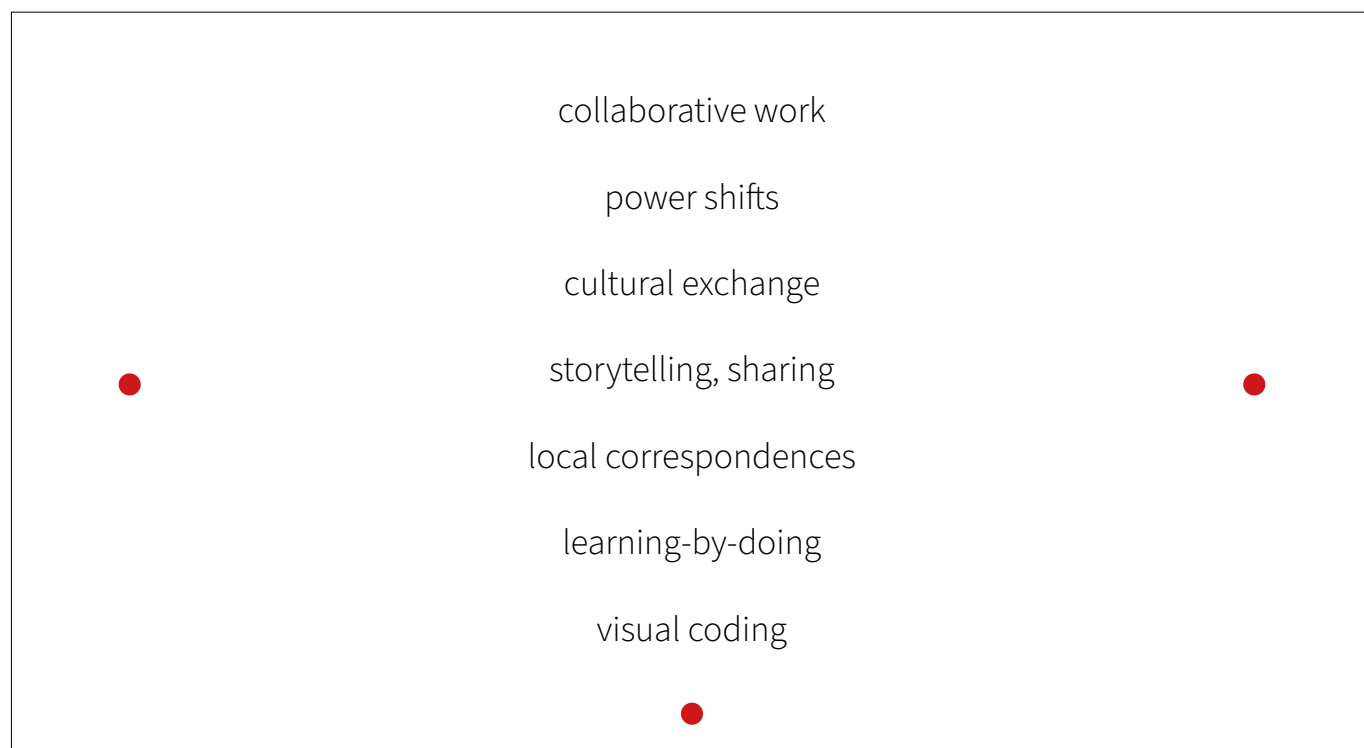
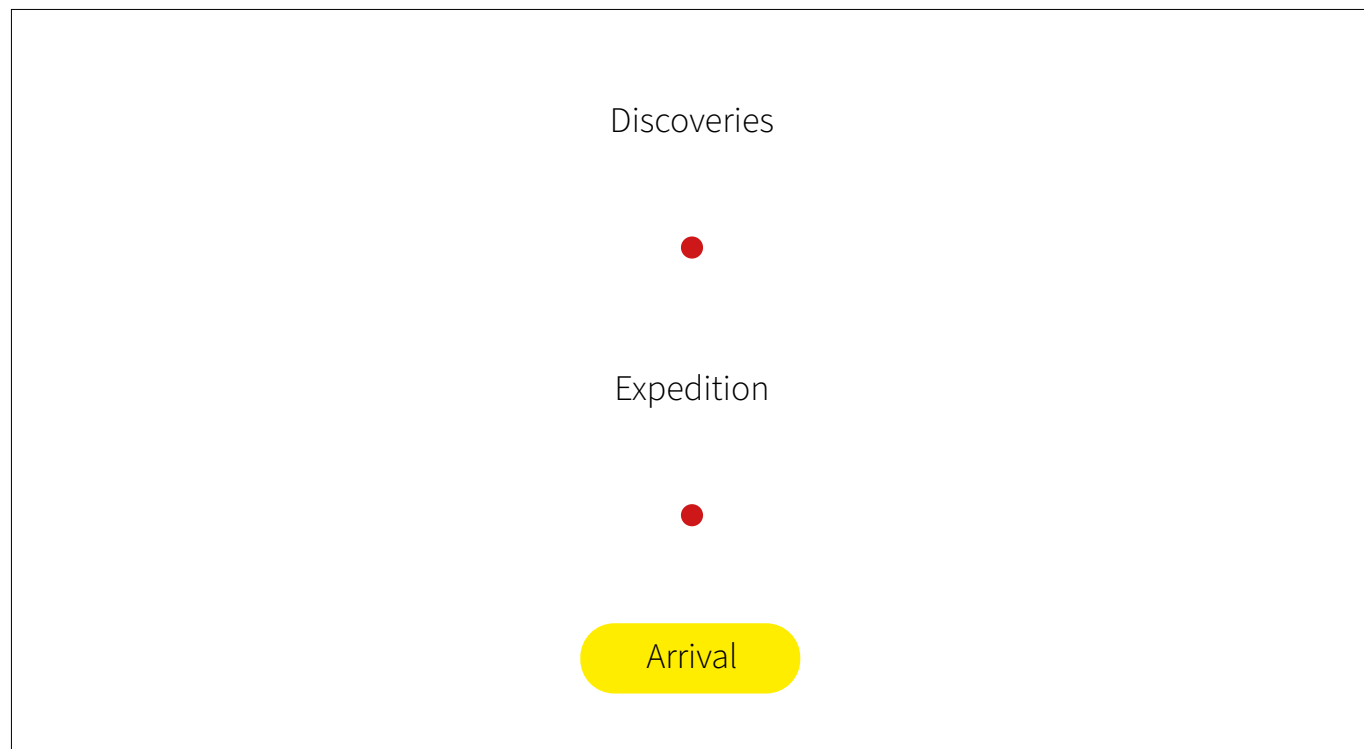
OMARA Roma self-taught artist, often thematising her identity



Krisztián Kristóf conceptual projects framing anthropology, human glaze



AU Workshop architecture duo who work with rural practices in their process from Hungarian folklore



REFERENCES

- Frohnappfel, David. *Anticipations of Alterity: The Production of Contemporary Haitian Art through Interklas Encounters*. In *Reshaping Global Dynamics of the Caribbean. Relations and Disconnections*. Edited by Anja Bandau, Anne Brüske, Natascha Ueckmann. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2018.
- Foster, Hal. "Artist as Ethnographer?." In *The Traffic in Culture. Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, edited by George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers, 302-309. Berkeley and Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995.
- Kiossev, Alexander. "The Self-Colonising Cultures." In *Cultural Aspects of the Modernisation Process*. Oslo: TMV-senteret, 1995.
- Kjørup, Søren. "Art as the Other? Reflections on Craft's and Fine Art's Places in the Aesthetic Field." In *Documents on Contemporary Crafts, No.5, Material Perceptions*, edited by Knut Astrup Bull and André Gali, 13-29. Oslo: Norwegian Crafts, 2018.
- Mrázek, Jan, ed. *Escaping Kakania: Eastern European Travels in Colonial Southeast Asia*. Budapest - Vienna - New York: Central European University Press, 2024.
- Marchart, Oliver. *Hegemony Machines documenta X to fifteen and the Politics of Biennalisation*. Zurich, Berlin: Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, 2022.
- Piotrowski, Piotr. "East European Art Peripheries Facing Post-Colonial Theory." *nonsite.org Articles Issue #12*, 2014. <https://nonsite.org/east-european-art-peripheries-facing-post-colonial-theory/>
- Segalen, Victor. *Essay on Exoticism. An Aesthetics on Diversity*. Translated and edited by Yael Rachel Schlick. London: Duke University Press, 2002.

P/REFERENCES OF DESIGN

This contribution was presented at Cumulus Budapest 2024: P/References of Design conference, hosted by the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design Budapest, Hungary between May 15-17, 2024.

Conference Website

cumulusbudapest2024.mome.hu

Conference Tracks

Centres and Peripheries
Converging Bodies of Knowledge
Redefining Data Boundaries
Bridging Design and Economics
Speculative Perspectives
The Power of Immersion
The Future of Well-being
Taming Entropy: Systems Design for Climate and Change
Ways of Living Together
Cumulus PhD Network

Full Conference Proceedings

<https://cumulusbudapest2024.mome.hu/proceedings>

ISBN Volume 1: 978-952-7549-02-5 (PDF)

ISBN Volume 2: 978-952-7549-03-2 (PDF)

DOI Volume 1: <https://doi.org/10.63442/IZUP8898>

DOI Volume 2: <https://doi.org/10.63442/TADX4016>

Conference Organisers

Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design Budapest (MOME)

mome.hu

Cumulus Association

cumulusassociation.org