

# *Ukiyo-e between Pop Art and (Trans) cultural Appropriation: On the Art of Muhamed Kafedžić (Muha)*

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## **Introduction**

“The Sun may rise in Japan but it certainly goes to bed with Muhamed Kafedžić every night,” the poet and artist Haris Rekanović said of the series of paintings *100 Views of Ukiyo-e*.<sup>1</sup> For me, this metaphor illustrates the scope of Japanese art and culture’s influence on Kafedžić’s work.<sup>2</sup> On several occasions he told me that he has not watched television since 1996, and that he watches at least one episode of anime every day. Since 2001, all his paintings have carried a style that he has built from the graphic and thematic techniques of Japanese Ukiyo-e between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries and American pop art from the twentieth century. I believe that he has managed to meet most fans of Japanese popular culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia, and that the Japanese Embassy in Sarajevo knows about every one of his exhibitions and events; moreover, I believe it is practically impossible to have any artist from Japan present in the country without him knowing about it. In a couple of talks with my colleagues I called him a “Bosnian Japanese.” I have not told him about this yet.

For some this may be an obsession, for others an honest dedication, but the truth is that Muhamed Kafedžić’s artwork is deeply related to the appropriation of themes and techniques from art history, defying an easy categorization in time as well as place. It is my goal in this text to interlink his artistic method, where he creatively interprets his models (of which the old masters of Ukiyo-e are most common), with the process of

1 Amalija Stojsavljević, “Pop art i pop art,” in *100 Views of Ukiyo-e, Volume I: Masters* (Bihać: Gradska galerija Bihać, 2012). Muhamed Kafedžić, *Muhamed Kafedžić—Muha: Paintings of the Floating World*. <http://muhaonline.com/> [Accessed on 3. August 2017]

2 Original article published in: Angelina Milosavljević Ault and Maja Stanković, eds., *Kultura br. 147/2015, Kontekst u umetnosti i medijima* (Beograd: Zavod za proučavanje kulturnog razvitka), 168–193.



**Fig. 1:** *Nanso Satomi Hakkenden, On the Roof of Horyoji after Toyokuni III.* Technique: acrylic on canvas. Size: diptych 177 x 240 cm (69.68 x 94.48 inch); each panel 177 x 120 cm (69.68 x 47.24 inch). Year: May 2011. Availability: In Private Collection.

cultural appropriation, as well as the transcultural consequence of this mix (not) belonging to one place. In other words, the goal is to indicate how, by the use of appropriation, the artist constructs his cosmopolitan identity based on a milieu that is (seemingly) distant from his own in time, place, and culture.

### **100 Views of Ukiyo-e**

Since 2009, Muha has created a series of paintings, using acrylics on large canvases, titled *100 Views of Ukiyo-e*. The first of the series is subtitled *Volume I: Masters*, and it is dedicated to selected authors and topics of Japanese graphics between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. It marks a starting review that the artist considers a basis for further series development, mostly regarding everyday life, family, city, and the



**Fig. 2:** Ama and Octopus after Hokusai. Technique: acrylic on canvas. Size: 120 x 177 cm (47.24 x 69.68 inch). Year: October 2011.

mythological, cultural, and erotic life of “the floating world.”<sup>3</sup> Japanese Ukiyo-e graphics are the source and templates for further explorations. The series title is a reference to other graphic print series, such as *100 Famous Views of Edo*, by Hiroshige, and *100 Views (Aspects) of the Moon*, by Yoshitoshi.

Ukiyo-e, wood print graphics designed for mass markets, were developed in the Edo period (1603–1867, the reign of the Tokugawa shogunate) when the cities were attracting merchants and artisans, who augmented their social status by funding the arts. Unlike the peasant class, which was tied to the countryside and food production, and the warrior/noble samurai class, with whom they shared the city, the lowest urban class (chōnin) mostly contributed to the development of cultural life in urban zones,<sup>4</sup> in theaters, bordellos, houses, ports, trade routes, and in the streets of Yoshiwara

3 There were six Ukiyo-e genres during the Edo and Meiji periods: *yakusha-e* (actor prints), *bijinga* (“beautiful women”), *fukeiga* (landscape prints), *musha-e* (warrior prints), *kachoga* (birds and trees), and *shunga* (“spring pictures,” or erotica), see Chris Uhlenbeck, “Erotic Fantasies of Japan: The World of Shunga,” in *Japanese Erotic Fantasies: Sexual Imagery of the Edo Period*, eds. Chris Uhlenbeck and Margarita Winkel (Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2005), 10.

4 Mikiso Hane, *Japan: A Historical Survey* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972), 151–181.

(Edo's red light district). This environment was called "the floating world"—the temporary, pleasurable world that disappears with death; a life focused on the current moment, according to the tenets of Buddhism.<sup>5</sup> In the past, to an eye trained to European-influenced art, the Japanese woodblocks must have seemed strange, foremost because of the "floating" effect—in most cases due to the lack of classical perspective (or their composition with two or three linear perspectives), non-representational/non-naturalistic painting (which today may convey a comic-like effect) and a general approach that made no attempt to trick the eye, as if the image were seen through a window, but rather to emphasize flatness.<sup>6</sup>

This emphasis on the current moment and overall hedonism of the city environment was primarily represented via a medium that was both widely available and cheap: graphic prints. This type of mass culture, despite being very popular, was not considered representative of the art of Japan, although it had a huge impact in Europe (especially on the Impressionists), as well as on the future visual identity of Japan itself. Since then, Ukiyo-e has become a true part of Japan's pop-cultural heritage, possibly due to its appeal to a great number of artists from the West,<sup>7</sup> as well as the fact that in this visual and graphic art lie the roots of manga and, consequently, anime. Several contemporary artists use Japanese artistic heritage in their work, playing with the context and adapting it to contemporary narratives, through the prism of Ukiyo-e. In this manner, Masami Teraoka appropriates the visual code of these graphics in his paintings and woodcuts, enriching them thematically with references to contemporary phenomena (such as an "invasion" of McDonald's hamburgers in Japan), while Gajin Fujita also incorporates graffiti art in his work (thus creating a mix of two urban arts). On the other hand, Iona Rozeal Brown uses an Ukiyo-e inspired style to show a blend of

5 Donald H. Shively, "Popular culture," in *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 4: Early Modern Japan*, ed. John Whitney Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 756.

6 Murakami Takashi uses the expression "superflat" to characterize "aesthetic two-dimensional forms, the absence of western notion of perspective." Murakami Takashi, in *Cool Japan Illustrated*. <http://www.cool-jp.com/articles/art/superflat.php> [Accessed on 3 August 2017].

7 For more, see Muhamed Kafedžić, "Jedan od 100 pogleda," (Master's thesis, Sarajevo: Academy of Fine Arts, 2012) and Colta Feller Ives, *The Great Wave: The Influence of Japanese Woodcuts on French Prints* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976).

Japanese and African-American hip-hop culture.<sup>8</sup> In the Balkans, artists such as Ana Krstić (*Young Partisan*) and Nenad Kostić (*Masterpieces I can only copy?*) have appropriated manga/anime references in specific works.<sup>9</sup>

### Appropriation: A Game between Original and Copy

The appropriation of elements of a visual culture in art history—either physical or conceptual—is one of the most stable traditions of the art world. This may be why an act of appropriation of foreign or historical culture is closely tied to questions of original and copy, imitation, homage, creative interpretation, theft, and plagiarism, as well as reproduction of an artwork via technical means. In our contemporary globalized world, the discussion on originality is becoming more complex, as information becomes more widely available, and it becomes easier to see parallel and similar tendencies in art that were developed independently of one another.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the invention of printing and photography have radically changed notions of the originality of artwork.<sup>11</sup>

The processes of reproduction and appropriation differ, as much as they are interlinked—both take an original as a starting point and introduce smaller or greater changes. A reproduction tends to be something of a look-alike, although it has compromises regarding size, surface, material, location, and

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8 Classical postures, clothing, and scenes from Ukiyo-e prints are enriched with elements of hip-hop culture (such as music, clothing, hairstyles, situations), while the faces are darkened with makeup (for imitation and homage purposes), illustrating a fashion subculture in Japan called *ganguro*, see Kurt Andersen, “Iona Rozeal Brown’s Afro-Japanese Mashup,” interview, *Studio 360* (podcast), June 7, 2013. [http://www.wnyc.org/story/296845-iona-rozeal-browns\\_afro\\_japanese\\_mashup/](http://www.wnyc.org/story/296845-iona-rozeal-browns_afro_japanese_mashup/) [Accessed on 30 July 2017].

9 Nenad Kostić, “Masterpieces I can only copy?” <https://www.nenadkosticart.com/1> [Accessed on 15 January 2015]; Ana Krstić, “Mlada partizanka.” <https://anankrstic.wordpress.com/installation/young-partisan/> [Accessed on 15 January 2015].

10 James O. Young quotes two artists: “Appropriation is what novelists do. Whatever we write is, knowingly or unknowingly, a borrowing. Nothing comes from nowhere.” (Margaret Drabble); “Bad artists copy. Good artists steal.” (Pablo Picasso). James O. Young and Susan Haley, “Nothing Comes from Nowhere: Reflections on Cultural Appropriation as the Representation of Other Cultures,” in *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*, eds. James O. Young and Conrad G. Brunk, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 6.

11 “To an ever-increasing degree, the work reproduced becomes the reproduction of a work designed for reproducibility. From a photographic plate, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense.” Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (second version),” in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 25.



**Fig. 3:** Masterpiece. *Technique:* acrylic on canvas. *Size:* 147 x 147 cm (57.87 x 57.87 inch). *Year:* February 2014. *Availability:* In Private Collection.

print quality, among others. Additionally, a reproduction aims to (physically) replace an original, making it directly present to a spectator.<sup>12</sup> An artwork that has appropriation as its goal possesses much more creative potential and a different strategy. Primarily, in appropriating certain, e.g. visual elements of a culture or art, artist, or artwork, the artist transforms the original. He or she can contextualize these elements in a completely different manner, to make a creative interpretation, or, on the contrary, to morally and legally problematize the appropriation of someone else's work.

Does appropriation expand, change, or erase the cultural and historical knowledge, process of development, meaning, and context of an original artwork? Appropriation can treat borrowed narratives as a remix or sampling, a harmonic or conflictive juncture, or simply as a personal interpretation, aspiring toward homage and/or fan culture. To illustrate

<sup>12</sup> See Dejan Sretenović, *Umetnost prisvajanja*. (Beograd: Orion Art, 2013), 123–146.

this process in Muha's oeuvre, I will first outline the technical production of his work and its further transformation via appropriation.

Apart from Ukiyo-e, another important influence on Muha's artistic method is Roy Lichtenstein, one of the founding artists of the American pop art movement in the twentieth century. Lichtenstein imitated comic panels printed on (mostly) low quality paper and with a reduced color set, but painted them on a much larger scale, with changes, although he kept the graphic recognizability of the originals.<sup>13</sup> By appropriating the style of comics and transferring it to large-scale paintings, Lichtenstein confronted visual codes of traditional art and mass culture, merging them into a whole.

Briefly, the appropriation process in Muhamed Kafedžić's work is based on two main sources: Ukiyo-e graphic prints and the painting method of Roy Lichtenstein. This connection was initially noticed by art historian Amalija Stojsavljević.<sup>14</sup> The respective processes are as follows:

### Ukiyo-e

- 1) Artists created graphic print templates—mostly using line drawings with water colors (most of the originals no longer exist).<sup>15</sup>
- 2) Based on these, wooden panels were made, one per color (as the technique improved, the number of colors increased); the templates changed in the transition to a new medium.
- 3) There were four participants in this process: the artist (who was not directly involved in the printing process, but sometimes approved the colors used in the printing process), the carver, the printer, and the publisher.<sup>16</sup>

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13 Đulio Karlo Argan and Akile Bonito Oliva, *Moderna Umetnost II: 1770—1970—2000* (Beograd: Clio, 2005), 247–249. Roy Lichtenstein, "Šta je pop art," in *Likovne sveske 1–2*. (Beograd: Umetnička Akademija, 1971).

14 Stojsavljević, 2012.

15 Artists also painted Ukiyo-e, although the printed versions were much more popular and widely available thanks to mass reproduction.

16 A notable exception is Yoshitoshi, who printed his own Ukiyo-e, developed author prints, and at the same time, marked the end of the Ukiyo-e era and the beginning of shin-hanga ("new prints"). There are rare cases of artists being involved in the whole process. This change is mostly tied to the modern art movement sōsaku-hanga ("creative prints") that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century.

- 4) Each wooden block could print about a thousand copies before the print quality deteriorated.
- 5) The gradual deterioration of the wooden panels caused characteristic “deviations” during printing that were an expected part of the charm of Ukiyo-e.
- 6) The artworks were further reproduced, depending on demand, and merchandised from the twentieth century onward.
- 7) Authorship in this case is shared: Both artists’ and printers’ signatures appeared on the prints.<sup>17</sup>

### Lichtenstein

- 1) The twentieth century pop art movement relied on appropriation of mass (popular) culture templates, including comics.
- 2) Lichtenstein’s approach consisted of using a printed comic panel as a template for a painting in oil and acrylic.<sup>18</sup>
- 3) In this process, the original was transformed and introduced to the world of high art, while its non-art narrative had an effect of shock and irony.
- 4) Incorporating the visual elements of printing techniques (such as Ben-Day dots), the artist also enlarged the scenes and changed the colors, keeping his creator’s touch visible.
- 5) Authorship is solely attributed to Lichtenstein.

### Muha

- 1) Muha appropriates narratives, topics, characters, styles, and graphic elements from Ukiyo-e, without imitating the woodcut technique, yet enlarges them and introduces several changes.
- 2) Content is reproduced on large-scale acrylic paintings.

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17 See Andreas Marks, *Japanese Woodblock Prints: Artists, Publishers and Masterworks 1680–1900* (Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2010), 10–21.

18 Lichtenstein preferred Magna acrylics; see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna\\_\(paint\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna_(paint)) [Accessed on 6 September 2017].

- 3) Color traces are visible (dripping); innovation is noticeable in details, colors, and contrasts.
- 4) Instead of comics, Muha uses a different visual source (which has become a true pop and cultural visual identity of Japan), thus referring to two different pop arts.

Muha's approach takes a reproduction as a starting point, since Ukiyo-e has been reprinted via mass culture for a long time. As Lichtenstein did with mass-produced comic panels, he creates a new, unique painting. By making a "new original," he is conceptually returning an Ukiyo-e graphic print-reproduction to its "start," the artist-made template that every Ukiyo-e was at first, before it was gradually destroyed in the printing process. Furthermore, every print was not identical to its original, due to the cumulative damage to the wooden pattern, and so there are notable differences in each printed series, as well as reproductions, with regard to printing surface, age, and quality. While Ukiyo-e was losing its original template and entering the triple reproduction process (graphic, technical, and digital), in this context the copies are creating the originals. In appropriating the practice of old masters, Muhamed Kafedžić is respecting the core templates and referring to the original (scene title, original artist, date, and location), while the differences introduced between Ukiyo-e and his paintings are mostly visible in changing color relations, adjustments of certain shapes to contemporary styles, and leaving slightly expressionistic acrylic traces.

Every artist who references existing phenomena in art history, famous artworks, and artists, does so to make his or her own work more visible. By relying on the heritage of pop art, an artist can tackle visual codes that have their own influence and recognizability, i.e. a piece of borrowed glory. Maybe this is the right moment to mention a tendency of creating homage and the phenomena of homage or fan art, related to an object of admiration. Both—similar and different—tend to materialize their enjoyment in other's' work, by interlinking themselves with it, imitating (*imitatio*<sup>19</sup>) it, relying on its, e.g., technique, topic, character, or a story. Fans have a tendency to copy, because that can bring them closer to their role models; they identify partially with makers and characters (as in the case of cosplay), supplying themselves with the model's

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19 According to Aristotle, "imitatio" is conforming to nature, while from the Renaissance this term is predominantly used for copying role models from antiquity, with an aim to develop taste and learning from the old masters. Dejan Sretenović, "Imitacija i invencija," in *Umetnost prisvajanja* (Beograd: Orion Art, 2013), 23–26.

own energy, which is very close to but different from the practice of artists. In the homage process, one is learning (from more experienced creators), improving one's technique, and incorporating a part of oneself into something that is already present and established. Although most fans remain focused on the world developed by the original, artists have more aspirations to create independent scenes and readings, which is the main reason why Muha's oeuvre could not be categorized as fan art. Having said this, a partial parallel could be drawn with Nemanja Kostić's work, which is situated somewhere between the appropriation of commercial/pop/mass culture (anime) and the fan approach. Midžić calls this type of artists "devotees."<sup>20</sup>

Appropriation can be assimilative (affirming the template's value system), dissimilative (establishing differences and critiquing), or neutral (expressing ambivalence).<sup>21</sup> As a devotee (or *ronin*,<sup>22</sup> in his own words) Muhamed Kafedžić relies mostly on assimilation. Reviewing the same elements from art history is key for appropriation and for understanding the context where a new author infiltrates. I consider this process important from the perspectives of empathy, identification in the psychological sense, and constitution of self, which I will address later in this text. First, however, one question needs to be clarified: the appropriation of "foreign" art/culture, with all its consequences for identity and ethics. In his doctoral dissertation, Sretenović concludes that an artist has a discursive role; he or she is questioning his or her own ego and establishing relations with something allegedly foreign.<sup>23</sup> It seems that affectations are at the center of attention (fantasies, desires, obsessions, fascinations, imagination...), which foster *a motion through culture*. The question is—whose culture?

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20 "Why does anyone neatly copy/translate scenes from the 'classics' of the animated genres of the '80s and '90s? Because that 'someone' (let's not call him the author) feels a strong urge to participate in the production of meanings that pin themselves onto the 'original,' through interpretation and translation of an act of creation from one medium into another. That 'someone' can only be called a devotee... a devotee who does not realize the interpretation as violence, but sees the original as a call to imitation and copying, a process which inevitably leads to mutation and that provides a radical shift from mere consumption of cultural products into the sphere of production of meaning and personal entries." Svebor Midžić, "Satori," *Nenad Kostić Fine and Visual Arts Bibliography*. <https://www.nenadkosticart.com/bibliography> [Accessed on 5. September 2017].

21 Sretenović, 270.

22 A *rōnin* was a samurai without a master in feudal Japan. Hane, Japan. 151–181. See also "Belonging to no party or school of thought," in Muhamed Kafedžić, *Muhamed Kafedžić—Muha: Paintings of the Floating World*. <http://muhaonline.com/> [Accessed on 30. July 2017].

23 Sretenović, 270.

### **Example: The Appropriation and Reproduction Process of 100 Great Waves**

*The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (神奈川沖浪裏 Kanagawa Oki Nami Ura), by Katsushika Hokusai, is one of the most recognizable icons of Japan, a visual emblem referring to both Ukiyo-e and Japanese art in general. The amount of merchandise that reproduces this print is enormous. Muha appropriated this print in a painting of the same title in 2009. The whole process was as follows:

- 1) First, there was a drawing or watercolor sketch by Hokusai; then, the first wooden patterns were made (woodblocks) for transferring the image to graphic prints.
- 2) Gradually, more prints were made (of varying quality and similarity to the original); the Wave has been reproduced (via photography) and today is also available digitally; reproductions are part of commercial and mass culture.<sup>24</sup>
- 3) Muha created a painting appropriating Hokusai's print, in a conceptual return to the lost original.
- 4) Afterward, he created digital print copies (relating to the old artist-printer system) with a printing office (not anonymous).<sup>25</sup>
- 5) In 2011, Muha started a mural series of conceptual "prints" of *The Great Wave*, with the intention to replicate it one hundred times; thus far, versions have appeared in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Banja Luka, Banovići, Petrovo, and Poljice), in Serbia (Pančevo and Belgrade), in Germany (Berlin), and in Italy (Torino di Sangro).

The progression of *The Great Wave* project is visible in its adaptability to available surfaces and locations, in the context of street art (Berlin), as well as in Muha's collaboration with children (and other artists). The Great Super Mario Wave of Čukarica (2013) in Belgrade was painted in a schoolyard (as were all except the one in Berlin, which was made at the Youth Center in Marzahn), together with kids, who were also credited.

24 For more on the image's commercial success see *The Private Life of a Masterpiece (Episode 14): Katsushiko Hokusai—The Great Wave*, director Bob Bentley (2004, Fulmar Television & Film, UK). <http://www.infocobuild.com/books-and-films/art/PrivateLifeMasterpiece/episode-14.html> [Accessed on 3 August 2017].

25 BlackBOX Art and Print, *Muhamed Kafedžić—Muha*. [http://www.blackbox.ba/art\\_shop\\_muhamed\\_kafedzic\\_muha.html](http://www.blackbox.ba/art_shop_muhamed_kafedzic_muha.html). [Accessed on 15 January 2015].



**Fig. 4:** The Great Super Mario Wave of Čukarica, Belgrade. Technique: acrylic studio paint on Carrara marble mosaic tiles. Size: cca. 260 x 362 cm (102.36 x 142.52 inch). Year: September 2013. Availability: Public/Street Art.



**Fig. 5:** Lupin III - Leggenda della Grande Onda or The Great Wave of Torino di Sangro. Technique: acrylic studio paint on brick wall. Size: 260 x 540 cm (660.4 x 1371.6 inch). Year: June 2015. Availability: Public/Street Art.

The Super Mario character appeared in an attempt to adapt to the squared marble surface of Đorđe Krstić school, a reference to the pixelization of older video games, as well as incorporating another mass culture element.<sup>26</sup>

This process and the question of originality is also complex if we have in mind the original context of Hokusai's art. He was primarily inspired and influenced by both traditional Ukiyo-e and European art that came into contact with Japan. Moreover, during his lifetime, Hokusai used about one hundred names to sign his work (an extreme example of a procedure that was fairly common at the time), and therefore did not assign value to unique artistic signatures, which is closely tied to modernistic perceptions of authorship.<sup>27</sup>

### **Cultural Appropriation: Dislocated Identity**

With the term cultural appropriation, I describe the appropriation of elements a culture that is not (predominantly) part of the artist's "original" cultural sphere, in contrast to geographical, national, and time determinants. I will mention two definitions, by theoreticians Richard A. Rogers and James O. Young, to explain more closely the process of cultural appropriation and link it with Muhamed Kafedžić's art. On a more philosophical, aesthetic, and legal level, Young offers a detailed system for determining the type and amount of appropriation in an artwork. According to his classification, again with Muha in mind, the following fields could be problematized:

#### 1) Content appropriation

An artist in greater measure appropriates an idea (intangible item) from another artist from a different culture. Example: Akira Kurosawa borrowed plots from Shakespeare's plays for his movies.

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26 Srđan Tunić, *100 Views of Ukiyo-e: Belgrade*. (Belgrade: Dom Kulture Studentski Grad, 2013).

27 "In pre-modern Japan, people could go by numerous names throughout their lives, their childhood yōmyō personal name different from their zokumyō name as an adult. An artist's name consisted of a gasei artist surname followed by an azana personal art name. The gasei was most frequently taken from the school the artist belonged to... and the azana normally took a Chinese character from the master's art name." See Andreas Marks, *Japanese Woodblock Prints: Artists, Publishers and Masterworks: 1680–1900* (Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2012).

## 2) Style appropriation

In this case, an artist does not appropriate the whole artistic expression of an artwork, but just a part, like its style. Example: non African-American musicians playing jazz and blues.

## 3) Motif appropriation

Here what is appropriated is an appearance, especially in cases where there is no aspiration to develop works in a style identical to that of the original work's culture. Example: In "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon," Picasso appropriates traditional motifs of African sculptures.

## 4) Subject appropriation

This occurs when it is not artworks, but subjects that are appropriated, e.g. the culture itself and its protagonists. This type is also titled "voice appropriation," particularly when outsiders represent the lives of insiders in the first person. Examples: Puccini's "Madam Butterfly;" most representations of the traditional lives of indigenous North American cultures.<sup>28</sup>

Young also speaks of the "cultural experience argument," which maintains that an artist can produce a high-quality artwork while appropriating a different cultural trait, if they possess the required cultural background. If this act is a simple addition, e.g. to traditional content, it is very low in innovation and mostly relies on a previously defined standard. On the other hand, if artists are engaged in "innovative content appropriation," they can use content, style, and motifs to present a new artwork that does not exist in their original culture.<sup>29</sup>

For Rogers, cultural appropriation is tightly interwoven with cultural politics, according to the following scheme:

- 1) Cultural exchange: the reciprocal exchange of symbols, artifacts, rituals, genres, and/or technologies between cultures with roughly equal levels of power.
- 2) Cultural dominance: the use of elements of a dominant culture by members of a subordinated culture in a context in which the dominant culture has been imposed on the subordinated

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<sup>28</sup> James O. Young. *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts*. (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 5–9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–41.

culture, including appropriations that enact resistance.

3) Cultural exploitation: the appropriation of elements of a subordinated culture by a dominant culture without substantive reciprocity, permission, and/or compensation.

4) Transculturation: cultural elements created from and/or by multiple cultures, such that identification of a single originating culture is problematic; for example, multiple cultural appropriations structured in the dynamics of globalization and transnational capitalism, creating hybrid forms.<sup>30</sup>

Apart from Rogers and Young, another example illustrates the discussion of cultural appropriation, although it is only partially applicable to Muha's art. Writing about the USA, in "Understanding Cultural Appropriation" Drew Beck states that appropriation has powerful political and racial implications.<sup>31</sup> Targeting the white middle class, Beck states that this process of identity dislocation (which he calls "outside-ness") is due to a lack of traditional culture in the local field, but also a rejection of identity as a protest or due to a sense of alienation. One of the most important points is whether a person who undertakes this appropriation has personal, direct contact with the culture in question and its people, or whether we have a certain "cultural imagination," with a more personal meaning, than sustainable connections with a given target group.

What lies here (although unspoken) is the danger of exoticization; Tzvetan Todorov states that exoticism, like nationalism, is relative, though the two are diametrically opposed: "What is being valued is not a stable content, rather a specific country and culture which are defined exclusively related to the viewer... [in exoticism] we are not talking so much about qualifying someone else, as far as criticizing ourselves, neither describing a reality, as much as formulating an ideal." The entities "we" and "they" are relative and dependent on local context and viewpoints. Nationalism, in this case, positions one's own country at the top of its value scale, while exoticism glorifies a country that is not one's own, and the ideal is stronger if the people and cultures are more distant and less known.<sup>32</sup>

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30 Richard A. Rogers, "From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation," *Communication Theory* 16 (2006): 477.

31 Drew Beck, *Understanding Cultural Appropriation*. (Amherst: Hampshire College, 2003).

32 Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 257.

To conclude, in relying on Dick Hebdige, Beck notes that appropriation, in this social context, is an expression of alienation, non-affiliation as an opposition to or frustration with white (Western) culture.<sup>33</sup> In this light, appropriation could be understood as a reaction to one's own society, displeasure, escape, constructing one's own uniqueness and expressing non-belonging by searching for an identity in foreign cultures. Nevertheless, it is important to draw a line between exoticization and understanding the culture in question, asking how much that culture remains distant or is lived every day, i.e. is it really transcultural. Muha can appropriate art models from world art history that are not related to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which Beck sees as losing the local culture; however he also needs to be a good painter (innovation). Affiliation, in his case, is not in strictly expected borders, while identity dislocation has its own roots, which will be analyzed in the next chapter.

For there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away. This is no less true of the feelings we often have that we would have been more "at home" in the sixteenth century or in Tahiti.<sup>34</sup>

### **Transculturalism and Local Identity**

Srđan Tunić (ST): In the creative appropriation of other art, where do you most feel your own contribution?

Muhamed Kafedžić (MK): In appropriation, the key is in the research relationship. A comment I usually hear is "I can do it too," and to be frank, they can, but nobody actually does it; nobody actually reads books, finds articles, or reads more than Wikipedia to research an object of interest. If one is using symbols randomly, one is not saying anything. I will never be a Japanese Ukiyo-e painter, which is not my goal, but I can recognize certain motifs through which I can send some other message. Depicting a homosexual scene from a *shunga* does not have the same meaning in Sarajevo in 2014 as it had in Edo in 1760.<sup>35</sup>

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33 Beck, 50.

34 Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 55.

35 Srđan Tunić. "Skype call Arlington-Sarajevo." *Internet portal BUKA*. Last modified March 7, 2015. <http://www.6yka.com/novost/76359/skype-call-arlington-sarajevo> [Accessed on 13 September 2017].

Appropriation today is a direct consequence of *total reality*—all “now,” “here,” and “everywhere.” There are many expressions (or buzzwords) aiming to contextualize and make sense of the contemporary processes of mixing cultures, fueled by globalization: hybrid cultures, transference of cultures, cultural convergence, melting pot, salad, fusion, cosmopolitanism. I will rely on the term transculturalism because it implies a motion through culture and merging with deeper cultural values. I will also refer to a definition provided by musician and professor Huib Schippers, who applies this term to musical education as part of so-called “world music,” partly similar to Rogers’s structure of culture appropriation.<sup>36</sup> Schippers proposes a structure with several levels, gradually increasing in openness and mixing with other cultures:

- 1) Monocultural: focus on one culture, self-centered, without verification from the outside, marginalizing other cultures and other perspectives;
- 2) Multicultural: differences exist, acknowledging other perspectives, but every culture works for itself, separately;
- 3) Intercultural: loose contacts and exchange between cultures, simple forms of fusion and borrowings;
- 4) Transcultural: in-depth exchange of approaches and ideas, “chaotic” from a conservative viewpoint, but new forms are being made while generally accepted ones are questioned, different music and musical approaches are on equal footing, not marginalized.

Replace “music” with “art” and the definition loses none of its significance. Is Muha’s work a total or partial process of transculturation? Given the level of his acceptance of Japanese art, together with its context and exchange of certain Japanese-Bosnian and Herzegovinian topics, I think that the term is applicable. Why would an artist choose something like this? In his own words:

Why are we reaching towards other cultures? Because we think that our own is poor, decadent, or in stagnation, and that it needs to be enriched, i.e. we are taking from others what we lack. In Yugoslavia, it was Coca Cola and McDonald’s, and now that we have those, we see that we are missing far deeper and more powerful things. Like tolerance and accepting others and differences.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Huib Schippers. *Facing the music: Shaping music education from a global perspective*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30.

<sup>37</sup> Muhamed Kafedžić, e-mail to the author, November 2014.



**Fig. 6:** 62% Poster Boy (Cropped)—The Young Bosniak Flautist. *Technique: acrylic on canvas. Size: 100 x 50 cm (39.37 x 19.69 inch). Year: October 2012. Availability: In Collection of The International Art Colony Počitelj.*

The main question for me here is trying to understand this “escape” from one’s own environment. This reaction results from a feeling of being an outsider, a certain dislocation of identity, and is affectively and cognitively tied to the local social context and art the author is coming from. Approaching the Other—Japanese art and culture in this case—could be understood by some as withdrawing from under the weight of post-war heritage in the former Yugoslavia, or as an alternative to politically-charged and engaged art practices. It is rather dangerous to paste a stereotype on



**Fig. 7:** Return to Innocence. *Technique: acrylic on canvas. Size: 100 x 268 cm (39.37 x 105.51 inch). Year: March 2014. In BlackBOX Gallery, Sarajevo 2014. Availability: In Private Collection.*

a country or relate an artwork to a couple of events (positive or negative), because it erases the complexity of life and a deeper understanding of the society in question.

Maja Isović: Many B&H [Bosnian and Herzegovinian] artists are working with political and social themes, especially related to the last war. How important is it to keep dealing with these topics, and are we still chained to the events of the war?

MK: I have not been following those artists; I do not like watching our movies, our torment. Maybe one day I will gather the strength to face that war. It is important to do anything with an open heart and honesty; negligence and abuse can always be recognized, and that kind of work is always leading to spiritual death. Regarding the war, it still lingers on, people are dying, not from bullets, but from hunger, soldiers are not dressed in camouflage uniforms, but in national colors, generals are tycoons of this wild capitalism.<sup>38</sup>

38 Maja Isović. "U BiH je zaboravljeno šta je normalan život." *Internet portal BUKA*, last modified 1 February 2012. <http://www.6yka.com/novost/18784/ljudi-u-bih-su-zaboravili-sta-je-normalan-zivot> [Accessed on 13 September 2017].

ST: Where do you see yourself on the local scene?

MK: At the moment, in Sarajevo, while dreaming of Tokyo and Boston.

ST: To what extent is contemporary B&H society visible in your art?

MK: It can only exist as a contrast, a negative, the other extreme.<sup>39</sup>

As a consequence of this distancing from the local context, we can see a development in empathy and devotion to Japanese art. Muhamed Kafedžić's oeuvre is not devoid of critical attitude and retrospection (civil war, growing nationalisms),<sup>40</sup> yet he refuses to be labeled by that focus. Maybe in this case his art could be identified as anti-nationalistic. Escape is a personal, artistic, and political attitude. Such a position dislocates him as a cultural actor from a recognized network of traditions and identities, which is visible, for example, in the Bosnian and Herzegovinian contemporary art exhibition "Decoding: Contemporary Art in Bosnia and Herzegovina."<sup>41</sup> His art stands out if we are trapped by dominant issues of political, social, or local art, yet at the same time I have the impression that he is not recognized by the art professionals in his home country as speaking about identities, not belonging to dominant categories, and a way of reacting that is based in local-transnational relations. In his case, identity is dislocated, it is an outsider, with a vision that is broader than the local context and creates a meeting point, not exclusiveness.

While one can discuss appropriation as a sort of *translation* of different traditional and contemporary arts and cultures, there is also a sense of untranslatability in Muha's work. On one hand, there is the artist's personal escapism and cosmopolitanism (present at the same time), paired with the context of his art in Bosnia and Herzegovina, somehow remaining outside the dominant art discourse in his home country. On the other hand, there is Japan, via traditional Ukiyo-e, which is not fully translatable, nor imagined to be a translation, given its recontextualization. Maybe in Muha's art we can state that Japan is a transnational link, a network of ideas and knowledge, instead of national

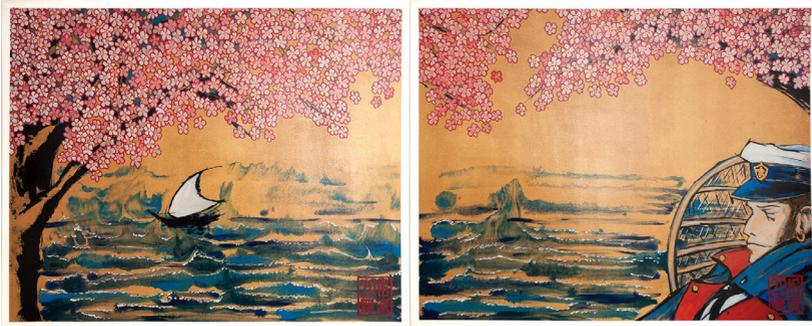
39 Tunić, "Skype call Arlington-Sarajevo," 2015.

40 For example, see: Muhamed Kafedžić—Muha, *MonuMENTImotion project*. <http://muhaonline.com/portfolio-item/monumentimotion/> [Accessed on 15 January 2015].

41 Branka Vujanović, "Aspects of Art-Working in a Bristling Reality." In *Decoding—Contemporary art in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. (Cetinje: National Museum of Montenegro, 2014), 14–15.

and geographical ties; not a pure translation, but an interpretation. Through *his* Japan, he also speaks and avoids speaking about his surroundings. In other words, he established means of self-realization, avoiding local trends, categorizations, topics, and discussions, surrounding himself with his own world: self-consciously, knowingly, with homage and respect, emulating the sources of his inspiration. The best argument for his approach could be Émile Zola's words on an age of reception of Japanese art in the West:

The influence of Japonisme was what was needed to deliver us from the (murky) black tradition and show us the bright beauty of nature... There is no doubt that our dark painting, our painting in oils, was greatly impressed, and pursued the study of these transparent horizons, these beautiful, vibrant colors of the Japanese.<sup>42</sup>



**Fig. 8:** *Oceans*, Technique: acrylic on canvas, Size: diptych 100 x 250 cm (39.37 x 98.42 inch); each panel 100 x 120 cm (39.37 x 49.21 inch), Year: January 2016, Availability: In Private Collection.

### Conclusion: Floating Identities

Where do inspiration and borrowing stop, and copying and plagiarism start? How far can cultures mix before arriving at acculturation? In a short text like this, a satisfactory and exhaustive answer cannot be provided. As a result, remaining in geographical and national borders blurs the fact that categorizations exist to be questioned and newly established, as well as that categories without changes and mixing are impossible.

42 Cited in: Muhamed Kafedžić, "Jedan od 100 pogleda," (Master's thesis, Sarajevo: Academy of Fine Arts, 2012), 55.

ST: Why are you painting the cultural codes of another culture?

MK: Because that is my culture too. Globally speaking, we are all the same, we have the same desires and dreams. Therefore, maybe my insistence on using the visual symbols of the “other” culture is basically a way of enriching or reactivating forgotten symbols of the “first” culture. Let us say it is like vitamin B: When you do not get enough from your daily diet, you need to take supplements. I found a very funny title in one newspaper for my solo exhibition in Bihać: “Japanese Art of the Twentieth Century.” My art is neither Japanese, nor are the motifs from the twentieth century. Is it based on Japanese art? For sure, but is it Japanese? Certainly not. Van Gogh did not go to Arles to paint France, he was going to paint Japan. However, he was creating neither Japanese nor French art. When Yasumasa Morimura is appropriating Frida Kahlo or Eduard Manet, is it Mexican or French art?<sup>43</sup>

The series *100 of Ukiyo-e: Masters I* is broadly conceived as an homage and re-interpretation (both traditional and pop-cultural<sup>44</sup>) of Japanese Ukiyo-e, while paintings such as *The Young Samurai Flautist (History re-painting)*, *Japanesque*, and *36 Odd Views of Sarajevo* apply that visual syncretism to local topics. Appropriation is mainly visible through references in Impressionist paintings (two Ukiyo-e painted by Van Gogh, *Plum Orchard in Kameido* and *Sudden Shower*, as well as references to Manet’s *The Fifer*) and anime culture (*Dōjinshi*, Studio Ghibli’s Totoro character). Unusual mixes, fostering transcultural readings, are present in the transposition of situations and stories from Ukiyo-e prints to contemporary B&H (*Počitelj in Čapljina Municipality*, *The Young Bosniak Flautist*) and imagined, fictitious scenes with references to art history (such as *Utamaro Lichtenstein—Masterpiece*). This creative replacement of and playing with content (e.g. Japan in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* referenced in *The luncheon on the grass/Le bain after Hiroshige/Manet*), makes a true personal contribution in interpreting role models, where Muha for the most part applies what Young calls the “argument of cultural innovation” in the appropriation of another culture.

43 Tunić, “Skype call Arlington-Sarajevo,” 2015.

44 Also called “Edo pop” by the Cool Japan website. [http://www.cool-jp.com/articles/art/edo\\_pop.php](http://www.cool-jp.com/articles/art/edo_pop.php) [Accessed on 5 September 2017].

One of the factors that makes Muha's paintings accessible, apart from the pop-cultural and art-historical references (flattering our knowledge of visual culture), is its strong emphasis on painting as a traditional art medium. Seeing it from the technical side, he relies mostly on modernistic tradition (painting as an object and a surface), while innovating in the subject matter.

ST: Why painting as a medium?

MK: Because it requires time. In front of a computer an artist can become a machine, while in front of a canvas, that is impossible. In painting you have three phases. First, an idea and creating the painting in your mind (which sometimes can last for an entire lifetime). In this phase you make the first version of the painting. In the second, you are preparing the material, colors, canvases, format etc. And the third stage is the painting itself, where what you make can be different from the initial idea. My favorite example is the *100 Great Waves* series, where literally the whole work depends on its surroundings and the surface of the wall where I am painting. It is always the same motif, but every mural has a different solution.<sup>45</sup>

In drawing the scope of cultural appropriation and potential transculturalism, and using the art of Muhamed Kafedžić as a cornerstone, it is important to understand the skill applied, the quality of the work, and the goal of appropriation itself. After all, a conscious and prudent appropriation also speaks about its (new) author, a (possible) comparison and loading of oneself, *a motion through culture*,<sup>46</sup> which shows consideration and respect towards its model. Whether considering a piece of research or an artwork (and both are present in Muha's work), entering the experience of "other" presents a need to clarify one's own position and context of operation, as well as crossing borders. If not, we can easily get stuck in projecting the Other (which is then nothing but a mirror of ourselves) or exoticization, which, even with good intent, distorts the picture.<sup>47</sup>

The theory of the politics of (personal) location in feminist studies emphasizes the need to re-examine one's reasons for conducting research, our assumptions and roles in a given moment, as well as limitations related

45 Tunić, "Skype Call Arlington-Sarajevo," 2015.

46 Sretenović, 270.

47 This is the way Edward Said explained Orientalism, i.e. the colonial attitude of Western powers towards the countries of North Africa and the Near and Middle East. More in: Said, 1977.



**Fig. 9:** Never Let Me Down Again (Sakura Passage)—Unfinished / Sakura @ 80%, Technique: acrylic studio paint on plaster, Size: Approx. 1,5x7m (59.05 x 275.59 inch); Year: June 2017, Availability: Public/Street Art.



**Fig. 10:** Ceci n'est pas un Magritte or The Great Wave of Verviers, Belgium, Technique: acrylic studio paint on brick wall, Size: 290|260 x 550 cm (114.17|102.36 x 216.535 inch), Year: October 2015, Availability: Public/Street Art.

to e.g. social class, sex and gender, race, and power relations, among others.<sup>48</sup> With an approach like this, the legitimacy of experience is based on strong self-reflection, avoiding essentialism, and allowing us to responsibly perceive our own context and that of the observed, in a given time and space. It has also influenced my own position, as a researcher and a curator, providing valuable grounding and reflection on transculturalism in my work; thus, it was a two-way process. This process requires creative altruism and empathy, enabling us to create physical and metaphorical, imaginary and practical bridges towards understanding.

The quest outwards is always the quest inwards.

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48 Gesa E. Kirsch and Joy S. Ritchie. "Beyond the Personal: Theorizing a Politics of Location in Composition Research." *College Composition and Communication* 46, no. 1 (1995).