

Etnodizajn and *Folkstar* Souvenirs: Polish Experiences in Uses of “Folk Art” in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

The present paper offers a critical reflection on folk inspirations in Polish design in the early 21st century. It discusses the question of *folk* as an artistic form, pointing to conceptualizations of *folk style* and its formal qualities within the field of modern artistic production to which design and craft practices belong. It also touches on the role of the rural actors involved in the processes of the construction of folklore and their attitude towards *folk* conceived as esthetics, artistic form, and style. For rural producers, *folk style* was a question of conscious choice, sometimes motivated by conformism and sometimes by a deliberate effort to contribute to local/class/national self-presentation, very often in contradiction to the individual's own taste and that of their peers. The paper then examines the involvement of Polish folk-inspired design (*etnodizajn*) in the early 21st century with national self-presentation, as well as the various folk (lore)-inspired design strategies followed by contemporary Polish designers. It concludes with the observation that 21st-century design practices drawing on folkloric inspiration are part of a long sequence of cultural appropriations, where *appropriation* can mean both the alienating inequality experienced by the rural manufacturers of *folk*, as well as a necessary condition for the understanding of alterity by both sides in the cultural exchange.

KEYWORDS

folk style, design, souvenirs, folk art, cultural appropriation

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Critical reflection on folk inspiration in Polish design in the early 21st century requires reference to the use of the categories *folk* and *vernacular* in modern discourse on art and design, as well as modern art and design practices. The categories *folk* and *folklore* are embedded in the romantic concept of the authentic as truth, where authenticity is recognized as a principal feature of the primitive, primordial, and uneducated, unspoiled by modernity (cf. BENDIX 1997; WARCHALA 2006). Both categories have also been central to developments within modern political discourse, legitimizing the invented traditions of many modern nations and nation states (cf. LEERSSEN ed. 2018). Thus, folk inspiration in art and design tends to be associated with national self-presentations in the form of so-called national styles, as well as nation state-related souvenirs. For this reason, in the first part of the present paper I explore the question of *folk* as an artistic form, pointing to conceptualizations of folk style and its formal qualities within the field of modern artistic production to which design and craft practices belong. I also briefly touch on the role of the rural actors involved in the processes of folklore construction and their attitude towards *folk* conceived as esthetics, artistic form, and style. I then examine the involvement of *etnodizajn* in the early 21st century with Polish national self-presentation, as well as the various folk (lore)-inspired design strategies followed by contemporary Polish designers. Finally, these practices are interpreted from the perspective of the category *cultural appropriation*, as applied to the field of artistic production (ERRINGTON 1994, 1998; SCHNEIDER 2006a, b; YOUNG 2010).

“FOLK” AS A FORM AND STYLE

In Polish discourse on art and design, a formal style of artistic expression attributed to a certain social and spiritual entity, referred to as *folk culture*, was constructed at the turn of 19th and 20th century and developed in the following decades. The concept of *folk style* was, therefore, generated according to the same expressivist paradigm that had been at the root of the 19th-century understanding of historic styles such as the Gothic or Renaissance, conceived as expressions of *Zeitgeist*. *Folk style* was devised by bringing together the folk objects and their representations collected in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century in the rural regions of all three partitions¹ and in the territories of subsequent incarnations of the Polish nation state. The collectors of these objects, members of the social stratum of the intelligentsia, were mostly motivated by a romantic nostalgia for the ancient and archaic truths of the *folk* and its picturesque primitivism, which they longed to save unchanged by modernization. A patriotic longing to safeguard the roots of the nation, as preserved in folklore, was another motivation, which was especially important from the perspective of representatives of a nation deprived of political agency in the form of a nation state. This safeguarding meant collecting everything that a member of the intelligentsia considered to be of value in the rural world of simple, uneducated peasants: legends and songs in the form of written texts and musical notation, descriptions of customs and rituals, visual representations of people dressed in folk costumes, and finally, objects. What all these collecting practices meant was the decontextualization of particular elements of the 19th-century rural world, which were carefully selected to form a consistent representation of the rural folk, and the subsequent recontextualization of these elements in the

¹Between 1795 and 1918, Poland did not exist as a nation state, the territory of the pre-partition Commonwealth of the Two Nations having been divided among the Russian Empire, the Habsburg Monarchy, and the Kingdom of Prussia.



world of educated 19th- and 20th-century collectors. The rules for creating this representation were informed by the makers' interests, prejudices, value systems, etc., thus there was a consensus among the *non-folk* audience of folk objects concerning both the moral values they expressed (e.g., sincerity and authenticity), as well as their formal and stylistic features. Therefore, the folk representation of the rural world and its inhabitants was based on collecting, understood both as an activity and as an attitude towards the collected objects, which were constructed as valuable in the act of the discovery of a disappearing primitive world, authentic because unspoiled by modernity and its various forms of discontent.

The debate concerning *folk style* involved artists, designers, art historians, art critics, and ethnographers. However, in spite of discrepancies of opinion among experts regarding the nature of the conditions that determined its formal features, the existence of a formal artistic style, conceived as the expression of some kind of essence of *the folk*, remained unquestioned. In design theory and practice, the context for the debate was provided, on the one hand, by theoretical deliberations on ornament as the most primitive form of artistic expression, and thus the form in which primitive peoples excelled (JONES 1868; GOMBRICH 1979). On the other hand, there had been support for so-called folk industry, meaning traditional rural handicrafts manufactured for the urban market and adjusted to urban tastes and urban expectations of *folk*. It is also important to see interest in folk forms in art in the context of the artistic vanguard's fascination with the primitive. The uneducated *folk* were seen as providing avant-garde artists with access to form not bound by artistic conventions, and to authenticity of expression. The form used by a *folk/primitive* artist was seen as coming directly from nature, free from the straitjacket of the academic norms that constrained the modern artist (GOMBRICH 2002).

The objects selected from the rural inventory by educated collectors and artists as examples of the genuine expression of *the folk* were subsequently reassembled — as exhibits, books, and images — into a representation of the rural, which was indeed *folk* in style. This representation then became a requisite of the rural world, verified directly by the intelligentsia involved in the process of folklorization that resulted from the feedback loop uniting the actors in the rural world made (and, in later stages of the process, self-made) into *the folk* and the intelligentsia that defined *the folk* in esthetic and formal terms. The *folk form* in art, craft, and design was conceived on several levels: it was defined both in academic discourse and in the artistic, design, and manufacturing practices carried out by different groups of actors whose activities were intertwined in complex ways. While theoretical endeavors in the field of academic discourse were pursued exclusively by the intelligentsia, the field of artistic practices proved more inclusive, although the presence of rural actors was limited to those who conformed to the requirements of folk style and form and was orchestrated by the intelligentsia. On the one hand, these rural actors played the role of specific embodiments of the collective creator and bearer of ancient tradition, inspiring the intelligentsia to conjure up the “truly national art.” On the other hand, they were the objects of various practices designed and performed by the intelligentsia, aimed at safeguarding that ancient and inspiring tradition by motivating *the folk* to practice folk manners, styles, and forms.

Enchanted by the picturesque qualities of folklore, seduced by the political potential of *the folk*, and professing the modern myth of the authenticity of the “natural man,” the intelligentsia set in motion the Heideggerian mechanism of the world picture (HEIDEGGER 1977). Taking the representation of their own creation as reality, they began to transform the rural world according to its image and likeness. The long process of turning the rural world into folklore was



at its most spectacular in its national-political guise: having become the providers of the ideologically useful “roots of the nation,” the folklorized peasants were no longer dangerous adversaries in an acute social conflict, while *folk style* was seen as an expression of their “root quality.” Its formal features included vivid colors, rich ornamentation, *horror vacui*, strong contours, simplicity of artistic means, monolithic form, and “perfect material feeling,” in which the ornamental motifs were allowed to follow harmoniously the properties of a particular material “without hiding its truth.”

Although the villagers themselves approached such folklorizing practices with ambiguity, the intelligentsia were skilled in motivating them to comply with the folk canon of form and expression, either by promoting and buying only those products that met their standards, or by the distribution of cultural capital, whereby *folk* was the only version of the rural included in the official national culture. Besides state-sponsored competitions, under the People’s Republic of Poland (1949–1989) the folk form of artistic expression was encouraged by a state system of grants and stipends, as well as social benefits and pensions for rural inhabitants who qualified as folk artists. The qualification procedures, presided over by folk art experts with degrees in the fine arts and/or ethnography, encompassed both the makers and their products. These procedures consisted in the verification of the *folk style* features of a product or artistic expression, which endowed it with the desired authenticity, closeness to nature, and collectivity. All the above practices resulted in the fossilization of the formal folk style in art, craft, and design, and the stereotyping of its meaning. For rural producers, *folk style* was a conscious choice, sometimes motivated by conformism and sometimes by a deliberate effort to contribute to local/class/national self-presentation, very often in contradiction to the individual’s own taste and that of their peers.

FOLK-INSPIRED DESIGN AND NATIONAL SELF-PRESENTATION

The power of folk style influences in Polish design seems to correspond to a relatively regular pattern of fluctuation, of which folk inspiration has been an essential element for over a hundred years. National self-presentation in art and design made use of folk elements to varying extents, depending on trends in the nation state’s cultural policy. The high point came in the mid-1920s, with the overwhelming presence of folklore and folk-inspired design in the extremely successful Polish pavilion and exhibits at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris in 1925. The 1930s were marked by a shift in international cultural propaganda focused on modernity, the modernization of the country, and Poland’s links to the European West, indicated by the slightly less enthusiastic use of the exoticism of folklore in national representation (CHMIELEWSKA 2014, 2019). Under the People’s Republic, when folklore, folk art and craft, as well as products with a folk-style design were among the country’s main exports and “Poland, the country of folklore” was constantly evoked in the national self-presentation, the visibility of folk inspiration in design underwent a similar fluctuation. In the 1970s, however, folklore was widely employed both in socialist mass consumption and in the folk style-inspired fashion and design addressed to external markets and more discerning clients among the intelligentsia (KORDUBA 2013). However, at the end of the decade the Polish intelligentsia, partly disappointed by their own creation (folk artists able to choose their own style had lost the innocence and authenticity of the primitive), finally rejected the folkloric national self-



presentation, exchanging it for a version based on the esthetics of *samizdat* and religious-patriotic symbolism (KUBIK 1994). The post-1989 transformation period required a national representation of Poland as a country of economic liberalization, modernization, and systemic change, legitimizing its aspirations to join the community of the Western world. The image of an exotic “land of folklore” was not only useless in such an endeavor, but could even compromise it. Accordingly, Polish design in the 1990s was eager to express its cosmopolitanism, both in its references to postmodernism and in its modern functionalism.

The situation changed during the first decade of the 21st century, when a new generation of designers, born in the 1970s, came on the scene. These designers had never witnessed intelligentsia-sponsored folklore as national self-presentation in action; they had acquired their professional skills and education after 1989, being beneficiaries of the transformation, especially in terms of international travel and education abroad. Regarding themselves as legitimate, autonomous actors in the global design market, they launched their professional careers in a way that had been impossible for at least the two preceding generations of Polish designers. Accustomed to the rules of the global cultural supermarket and its selection of commodified identities (MATHEWS 2000), they sought distinctive inspiration in their own cultural background, ending up with references to *traditional forms* and *natural materials* that might make their *locality* different. It was largely their work that was presented in the exhibition *Polska Folk* (the original title combines the name of the country in Polish with the English word *folk* — for further observations regarding the use of the globally accessible English terms rather than the vernacular Polish in the context of folk, or vernacular inspirations in design, see below), curated by Agnieszka Jacobson-Cielecka and organized by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute as a contribution to the London Design Festival in 2009. *Polska Folk* was based on an exhibition that Jacobson-Cielecka had curated earlier the same year for the Regional Museum in Stalowa Wola, Poland: *Naturalne zasoby polskiego designu* (Natural Resources of Polish Design). Both the domestic and foreign iterations of the exhibition were greeted with acclaim, and *Natural Resources* became the core exhibit at the *Festiwal Etnodizajnu* (Etnodizajn Festival) organized by the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków in November 2009. In the same year, a company with the English name *Folkstar* was established in Łowicz, a folk art production stronghold since the turn of the 20th century. Its founder, a young female entrepreneur, was keen to commercialize local folk products, although her brand quickly started selling mass-produced folk-inspired gadgets and souvenirs that were positioned as *etnodizajn* (Fig. 1).

Despite sounding and appearing English/global to a Polish language user, the term *etnodizajn* (which also appears with the more English-looking spelling *etnodesign*, or even *ethnodesign*) is not a word of English origin but rather a local Central Eastern European coinage. The cosmopolitan pretense encoded in its foreign-looking form, the different spellings that play with the potential reader’s cultural competence as manifested in familiarity with non-Polish ways of using the Latin alphabet to convey different sounds, and the ostentatiously local spelling of a global-sounding term that is meant to appeal to a public sophisticated enough to play the global-local identity game — all these reflect important folk-related issues that cannot be neglected in a critical study of folk inspiration in Polish design in the early 21st century. Incidentally, the Polish word *lud* means both *folk* and *people*, thus the same word was used, on the one hand, for the folklorization of the rural and the building of the modern nation along national ideological lines; on the other hand, it was put to ideological use by the “people’s democracy” and was further compromised with the failure of the Communist regime.





Fig. 1. *Natural Resources of Polish Design*, exhibition curated by Agnieszka Jacobson-Cielecka, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, Ethnodesign Festival, 2009. (© Marcin Wąsik)

Subsequently, Polish-language coverage of the new wave of folk inspiration in design in the first two decades of the 2000s almost unanimously avoided any Polish wording suggestive of a connection with the compromised *folk* words (n.: *lud*; adj.: *ludowy*), instead making use of the English-sounding term *etnodizajn*. The fact that folk-inspired design is today being exoticized with an English-sounding name in order to win acceptance among the modern Polish public clearly suggests that a taste for *folk* is intrinsically inscribed in the modern perception of taste, regardless of political systems and their accompanying ideologies. Even though the term *ludowy* has lost its attraction, a shift in vocabulary has made it possible to use the same “natural resources” of Polish design as have been used since that design itself began. The *etnodizajn* presented in Jacobson-Cielecka’s exhibitions was not apparently aimed at the programmatic construction of a national style based on the vernacular, unlike previous uses of *folk* in Polish design (cf. SZCZERSKI 2011), although there were several similarities in the approach to *folk as form* and in its meaning as constructed in the early 20th century (Fig. 2).

The approach followed since the turn of the 20th century and canonized by the Central Bureau for Folk and Artistic Industries (known by the Polish acronym Cepelia) under the People’s Republic included the adaptation of folk objects and motifs via the alteration of their function, material, and scale. This adaptation strategy was used in what is arguably the most recognizable *etnodizajn* product, which has been honored with many important design awards — the attractive felt carpet *Mohohej!Dia* by Moho Design (Michał Kopaniszyń, Magdalena

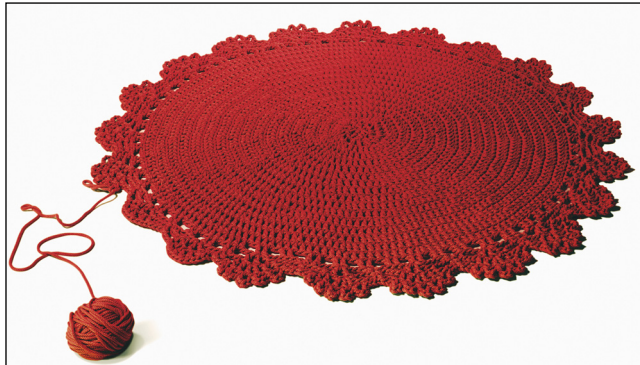


Fig. 2. Aze Design (Artur Puskarewicz, Anna Kotowicz-Puszkarewicz), *Nodus*, carpet, 2006. (© Aze Design)

Lubińska), along with follow-ups based on the same idea, designed and manufactured by other producers, such as Sztuka Beskidzka. The form of a centrally symmetrical paper cutout was transformed into a circular carpet. Paper cutouts, made from a square of paper folded first along the diagonal and then twice more along the altitudes of the resulting triangles, were a form of decoration used in village houses in central and eastern Poland at the turn of the 20th century. They were subsequently canonized in folk art and produced for urban audiences, with paper cutting becoming one of the most emblematic techniques in folk artistic expression. Widely reproduced, they proved to be a good source of graphic motifs with a folk flavor. Moho Design adapted one such repetitive motif, resulting from the paper folding and cutting technique, into a machine-manufactured form cut from a flat material. The inspiration here was an object reduced to its graphic form, a folkloric visual *cliché* (Fig. 3). The Polish Pavilion at Expo 2010 in Shanghai was also inspired by the circular symmetry of paper cutouts, embodying the universal folk form in Polish visual culture. The idea, which had earlier been presented at the *Polska Folk* exhibition in London, was based on the transposition of a paper cutout motif, although on this occasion the graphic transformation was more extensive. The pavilion building, in the form of an unfolded paper box decorated with a pattern originating from the paper cutout, was designed by the WWA Architekci studio (Marcin Mostafa, Natalia Paszkowska) in collaboration with Wojciech Kakowski. The designers used the motif of *lalki* (puppets), consisting of human figures holding hands, originally produced in a row as a strip-form paper cutout. This time, however, the repeated figures were organized into a circular, centrally symmetrical composition, with their heads placed in the center. This circular form was subsequently multiplied on the walls of the pavilion, giving the entire building the appearance of openwork.

Paper cutouts and embroidery provided the source motifs for the folk gadgets produced by Folkstar, which are gaudy if monotonous in their floral gaiety. By the early 21st century, the shops operated by Cepelia, the folk enterprise of the People's Republic, had mostly disappeared from Polish cities. However, they are currently being replaced by Folkstar outlets, similarly strategically located in the most frequented tourist destinations and the main streets of big cities. The model followed by the company is apparently well suited to the rules of the cultural supermarket: while the products sport the label "100% folk" (only in English), the marketing





Fig. 3. Agnieszka Lasota, *Wiecha*, lamp, 2009; on the floor is the carpet *MohoHejDia*, (Michał Kopaniszyn, Magdalena Lubińska) 2004. (© Marcin Wąsik)

message underscores their local (Polish) manufacturing, appealing to economic patriotism. However, when the manufacturing process is located outside the national borders, the label “Designed by Folkstar in Łowicz” is used instead, with no mention of the place of manufacture. The company also proudly announces on its website that all the creators of their source paper cutouts are granted copyright, thus all graphic transformations for their use in manufacturing are legal. The products are further legitimized by the origins of the designer (no family name is given), who allegedly comes from Łowicz. However, the company uses motifs and patterns of different origins, offering series of “regional products” based on the unifying graphic transformation of various floral patterns used in folk art and crafts. The bright, sometimes garish colors, inexpensive materials, and accessible product prices correspond to expectations regarding the mass design of gifts and souvenirs. They are aimed at both Polish nationals and international tourists, attracted by the idea of folklore as a tourist attraction and national representation.

In the genre of folk souvenir, the canonized folk form has undergone further fossilization, simplification, and stereotyping in the course of acquiring its function. The souvenir is a particular form of portable identity for sale, ready for rather disinterested incorporation into the purchaser’s world once they are back at home (on souvenirs, cf. [BENSON 2004](#); on identity for sale, cf. [COMAROFF – COMAROFF 2009](#)). The cultural material used in souvenirs largely consists of easily digestible clichés of what is “most characteristic” in an identity, often combined into new



and sometimes surprising wholes. However, the conception of a souvenir requires the objectification of an identity, its description in formal terms, and, subsequently, the selection of those features with the greatest potential attraction to tourists. For its purchaser, the souvenir is a part of leisure, like the tourist industry as a whole, as well as a part of *the folk* itself. The latter is true not only because the origins of the souvenir lie in a particular type of domestic tourism, or the urban intelligentsia's travelling to rural regions, but also because of the criteria applied when collecting the rural for the sake of folk making: folklore collectors and students of folk customs proved to be particularly interested in materials associated mostly with "merry activities performed in leisure time," such as songs, dances, tales, celebrations, etc. (STOMMA 1986: 233–248; LIBERA 1995).

FROM FLORAL AND PAPER CUTOUT CLICHÉS

The designers took the centrally symmetrical paper cutout as an ur-folk form, related neither to their immediate experiences of the countryside nor to regional tradition. Moho Design is a company registered in Katowice, the capital of Upper Silesia, a region with a very strong local identity. Their paper cutout-inspired carpet, which was a winner of the first iteration of the regional design contest *Śląska Rzecz* (The Silesian Thing) in 2005, made use of an element of interior decoration never employed in Silesia. Of course, it is not only Moho Design who are using the folk canon as a source of generalized, national folk form in art. Interestingly, design products inspired by local/regional folk traditions emerged only in the second decade of the 21st century, when regional self-government identity-building policies were gaining momentum. Strong, self-governed, and increasingly self-aware regions were the outcome of the 1999 administrative reform that introduced 16 large *województwo* (voivodships) in place of the 48 rump regions of the centralized administration of the People's Republic. Regional identity policy was embedded in the geographical, historical, and demographic differentiation of the national territory, as well as in the process of regional branding, which was strongly encouraged by access to EU markets. A meticulously designed pattern booklet, *Rzecz Małopolska* (A Małopolska Thing), itself an attractive and appealing item in terms of its material form, was published by the Ethnographic Museum of Kraków, the capital of the Małopolska region, to accompany the 2009 Etnodizajn Festival as an attempt to curate the folk form beyond the cliché. In the following years, there were some more or less successful efforts to design products inspired by local/regional traditional material culture, including its folk forms. A ceramic designer based in Cieszyn (Silesia), Bogdan Kosak, produced the *szolka* cup, inspired by the coffee mugs used in Silesian homes, while Marta Flisykowska from Gdańsk explored in her furniture the distinctive color palette of Kashubian embroidery (Fig. 4).

There have even been some interesting ideas in souvenir design outside the clichés: Aze Design (Anna Kotowicz-Puszkarewicz, Artur Puszkarewicz) proposed the TOD (Taste of Diversity) condiment set as a souvenir from the Podlasie region. The set comprises four items made from white porcelain, the shapes of which were inspired by elements from the regional landscape that testify to its multicultural heritage: the minaret of a Tatar mosque, the onion dome of an Orthodox church, the Gothic belfry of a Roman Catholic church, and a *matsevah*, a Jewish stone pillar marking a grave. Aze Design resolved not to use the folk form omnipresent in regional promotion: instead, their design juxtaposes the sacred and profane spheres in a way that





Fig. 4. *Natural Resources of Polish Design*, exhibition curated by Agnieszka Jacobson-Cielecka, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, Ethnocodeign Festival, 2009. (© Marcin Wąsik)

belongs to the world of parish patronal festivals and village fairs (Fig. 5). *Etnodizajn* also brings to the fore features of village crafts and manufacturing that were not made into folk form. These include the scarcity of materials that led to their infinite reuse; and local character resulting in triviality and banality. This approach was apparent in the Polish Pavilion designed for Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan, by the studio Ingarden & Ewý (Krzysztof Ingarden, Jacek Ewý), while the brand Poorex by Bartosz Mucha can be regarded as another inspiring example. The building in Aichi comprised a steel frame covered with wicker, woven using the traditional basketmaking technique. Even the flamboyant folklore of the Łowicz region, which has been overexploited by both Cepelia and Folkstar, was able to provide inspiration beyond its formulaic flowers, being transformed into the flamboyant carpet *Pasanka* by Joanna Rusin (Fig. 6), which plays with both the texture and color of the striped woolen fabrics traditionally produced in the region.

CONCLUSIONS: CULTURAL CREATIVITY AND MULTILAYERED APPROPRIATION

The procedures of collecting village-manufactured artefacts and of producing visual and textual ethnographic sources concerning the 19th- and early 20th-century European peasantry have both involved the process of cultural appropriation aimed at the construction of a folkloristic



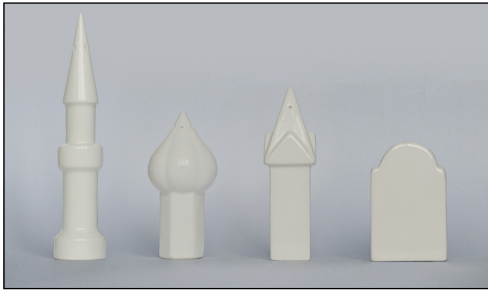


Fig. 5. Aze Design, *Taste of Diversity*, condiment set, 2012. (© Aze Design)



Fig. 6. Joanna Rusin, *Pasanka*, carpet, 2005/2009, prototype 2005. (© Joanna Rusin)

representation of the rural. In her research on so-called primitive art, Shelly Errington pointed to the fact that the field of modern art actually encompasses two totally different modes of artistic production, namely *art by intention* and *art by appropriation* (ERRINGTON 1994:202–207). Works corresponding to the first mode were manufactured within the field of modern art and are thus grounded in its fundamental premises regarding the autonomic value system and autotelic world of art. The second group consists of all the works made into art by modern art discourse and institutions: museums, galleries, exhibitions, art publications, etc. As an integral element of colonization, cultural appropriation has already been rightly and widely criticized, not only within the discipline of anthropology. However, some scholars (YOUNG – BRUNK eds. 2012; YOUNG 2010; SCHNEIDER 2006a, b) have pointed to the fact that cultural appropriation, as a means of relating to alterity, is a multidimensional and complex field of creative practices not necessarily accompanied by violence, whether symbolic or otherwise. According to these scholars, appropriation can be seen as the *sine qua non* of understanding (SCHNEIDER 2006a), as well as an important element of creative cultural practices mediating alterity (TAUSSIG 1993; YOUNG 2010). Appropriation as a necessary condition of understanding is a concept that originates in phenomenology. Art anthropologist Arnd Schneider points to the fact that the hermeneutic *Aneignung*, rendered in English as *appropriation*, refers to “the process by which one makes one’s own (*eigen*) what was initially other or alien” (SCHNEIDER 2006a:26, after Ricoeur). However, in its hermeneutic sense *appropriation* does not mean possession of the other but “implies in the first instance the dispossession of the narcissistic ego, in order to engender a new self-understanding, not a mere congeniality with the other” (SCHNEIDER 2006a:26). Reflecting on appropriation involved in the practicing of anthropology, Schneider subsequently proposes that anthropology “develop a concept of appropriation that takes account of the inherent inequality in transactions, as in cultural transactions” yet allows for the possibility of understanding by appropriating, which means “changing oneself as a result of interpreting the other’s artefact (or any other cultural manifestation)” (SCHNEIDER 2006a:26). However, as Schneider also points out, in an unequal relationship appropriation means alienation for the weaker party and their unequal passivity induced by the stronger. Indeed, this is what happens within the colonial relationship, as well as in the Orientalizing discourse of the folkloristic representation of the rural.

Those 21st-century design practices that draw on folkloric inspiration are thus involved in a long sequence of cultural appropriations, where *appropriation* can mean both the alienating



inequality experienced by the rural manufacturers of *folk*, as well as a necessary condition for the understanding of alterity by both sides in the cultural exchange. The modern inequality between the urban and the rural inscribed in the processes of modernization, as well as the construction of the rural other as folk, are firmly inscribed in mainstream Polish culture in the 21st century, as is the nation-building narrative concerning folk as the roots of the nation. It is no wonder, then, that many design practitioners follow the mainstream concepts and make use of the cultural forms constructed in the asymmetric processes of appropriation that have resulted in the representation of the rural as folk, subsequently stereotyped to its form embedded in mass culture. Appropriation in the hermeneutic sense therefore seems quite difficult to pursue in the field of 21st-century *etnodizajn*, as it would require recognizing the alterity of the rural behind some familiar clichés and attempting to obtain an understanding that would involve becoming changed in the process. Design that caters mostly for the user's mental comfort, resulting from a recognition of the familiar, finds it difficult to challenge clichés in its practice. Nevertheless, there are designers who have apparently tested the possibilities of cultural appropriation on more equal grounds, beyond folkloristic representation.

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