



TOMAS KAVALIAUSKAS

Vytautas Magnus University. Lithuania
Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas. Lietuva

MENO FILOSOFIJA: DOGU BANKOVO IŠRADINGUMAS

Art Philosophy: Dogu Bankov's Inventionism

SUMMARY

This article is a continuation of a previous article "Art philosophy: the Multi-layered Biography of Dogu Bankov". The previous article analysed created biography as the first dimension of Dogu Bankov's project. This article will analyse the second and the third dimensions: the second dimension – the dialectics of the original picture and its fake; the third dimension – collage pictures as indirect illustrations to classic literature. The combination of documentary and fiction, literature and visual arts creates the specificity of Dogu Bankov's exhibitions. This mixture also blurs the lines between the original and its fake – be it the question about authenticity of the pictures or be it the question of authenticity of Dogu Bankov himself. "The Concrete Art Manifesto", which no longer wants an artist's signature, was displayed in the exhibition "300 pictures to Satyricon". It suits the concept of Dogu Bankov. Another manifesto – "The Inventionist Manifesto", urges to invent. The article analyses the role of these manifestos in art philosophy in the case of Dogu Bankov.

SANTRAUKA

Šis straipsnis – tai ankstesniojo „Meno filosofija: daugiasluksnė Dogu Bankovo biografija“ tęsinys. Pastarajame straipsnyje analizuota sukurta Dogu Bankovo biografija kaip pirmoji dimensija. Dabartiniame straipsnyje išskiriamos antroji ir trečioji dimensijos: antroji dimensija – tai originalaus paveikslų ir jo klastotės dialektika; trečioji dimensija – koliažų paveikslai kaip netiesioginės klasikinės literatūros iliustracijos. Dokumentikos ir fikcijos, literatūros ir vaizdinių menų derinys sudaro Dogu Bankovo parodų savitumą. Taip pat nutrinamos ribos tarp originalo ir jo klastotės – nesvarbu, ar būtų aptariamasis paveikslas, ar paties Dogu Bankovo autentiškumo klausimas. Parodoje „300 paveikslų Satyrikonui“ buvo pakabintas „Konkretaus meno manifestas“, kuriam nebereikia menininko parašo. Jis atitinka Dogu Bankovo koncepciją. Kitas manifestas – tai „Išradėjo manifestas“, skatinantis išrasti naujus kūrinius. Straipsnyje analizuojama šių manifestų svarba Dogu Bankovo meno filosofijoje.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: meno filosofija, Dogu Bankov, Petronijus, Satyrikonas, koliažai, klastotė, originalas, manifestas.

KEY WORDS: art philosophy, Dogu Bankov, Petronius, Satyricon, collage, forgery, original, manifesto.

INTRODUCTION

This article is a continuation of a previous article “Art philosophy: the Multi-layered Biography of Dogu Bankov” (Kavaliauskas 2020). The previous article analysed created biography as the first dimension of Dogu Bankov’s project. This article will analyse the second and the third dimensions: the second dimension – the dialectics of the original picture and its fake; the third dimension – collage pictures as indirect illustrations to classic literature.

The first dimension – Dogu Bankov’s biography – is important in order to understand how the biography of the Bulgarian artist was constructed and how it is interpreted by the media, artists, and local exhibition visitors nowadays. The second dimension is important in order to comprehend an intellectual play with the dialectics of the original picture and its fake, i.e. usually the fake is the copy of the original, but in this case all the “fake pictures” are the original pictures. How is it possible? To an-

swer to the question is one of the aims of this article.

Invented or created biography¹ of Dogu Bankov makes the exhibition visitors to believe that the artist as such existed and, therefore, the pictures that are exhibited in his name belong to him.² In such a case, logically, the pictures must have a defined authenticity. However, the pictures do not have a signature. Then one wonders why the pictures are not signed, which leads to a potential suspicion whether the pictures are the originals. Thus, this article will analyse the dialectics of the original and its fake.

The third dimension reveals collage pictures as indirect illustrations or simply as pictures to particular pages of classic literature: Federico *García* Lorca’s theatre play “El Publico”, Wilfred Owen’s war poetry as it is used by the composer Benjamin Britten in his “War Requiem”, the ancient Roman novel “Satyricon” by Petronius, and finally a novel “Querelle de Brest” by Jean Genet.

THE DIALECTICS OF THE ORIGINAL PICTURE AND ITS FAKE

Apparently in the case of Dogu Bankov’s pictures, which are without signatures, the concern should be beyond what is “a fake” and what is “the original”. Rather the question should be: do the pictures have quality or not, and if so, to what art school and period of time they belong? The authenticity question here is secondary, because no duplicates of any other picture have ever been found.³ If Dogu Bankov is a fictitious

artist with an invented biography, then logically the art works that are ascribed to his name are done by someone else. The underlying idea behind all this could be called “anti-Pablo Picasso”.

If the strategy of Picasso was to sign as many pictures he could possibly make in promotion of his name at the expense of quality, so the true name behind Dogu Bankov does not flash. Neither the pictures are signed unlike Picasso’s pictures.

It is so because art should not be for the market where the authenticity of the established artist's name effects the value of an art work, – rather art should be about its own quality for the sake of art itself. In other words, art collectors and agents do not have much to gain at Dogu Bankov's exhibitions, because none of the pictures are for sale – they belong to the M. K. Čiurlionis National Art Museum in Kaunas, Lithuania. Some other collections of Bankov's pictures also belong to Buenos Aires *Centro Cultural Recoleta* and to Sofia's National Gallery of Foreign Art, and to the City Gallery of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Although from a legal point of view one may find peculiar that Bankov's works have no copyright, yet the pictures are museum property.

The very fact that the pictures have no copyright may indicate the following idea: to create a free access to the usage of the pictures as one wishes, although the museum that holds the collections of Bankov's pictures would have the right to limit the use of copying from the originals for conservation reasons due to the fragility of the collage material (like its 100 years old paper) that might be effected by the exposure to direct light.

Gøran Ohldieck, the curator of numerous Bankov's exhibitions, on the dialectics of the original picture and its fake has replied as follows:

"In Bankov's case one could say with a little flippancy that we do not know if it is the fakes that are real or the real that are the fakes. Having worked for so many years with the problem of "Dogu Bankov", I have come to the conclusion that I take all of them for genuine unless otherwise proven. I remember my old tea-

cher Michael Rothenstein made quite a stir at the art school pronouncing that when an exhibition is mounted the artist should go home. The intention was of course to tell that "name building" is unnecessary for the sake of art" (Ohldieck 2014:179).

This shows that the curator Ohldieck has his own attitude towards the issue of what is a fake and what is a genuine work. Why to be concerned with the authenticity, if the author as such is not necessary? If an exhibition is for art itself, not for "name building", then quality of presented art works is sufficient. Hence comes the curator's conclusion that he takes all Dogu Bankov's pictures as genuine unless otherwise proven. And if Bankov is "invented artist", as Jacytė claimed,⁴ it does not change the dialectics of the original and its fake, because his pictures – whether they belong to an invented author or a real one – they are openly exposed to the visitors of exhibitions for evaluation of quality. The visitors and art experts can see how copyright free pictures are exposed to the public, including numerous children excursions for learning Bankov's collage technique.

As we can see such dialectics of the original and its fake have nothing to do with the art of forgery or crime. "Art thieves tend to be mercenary, have no specialized skills or interest in art, rarely steal art on more than one occasion and do not fit consistent psychological profile. In contrast, in the world of forgery, there are consistent generalizations that can be applied to forgers – motivation, character" (Charney 2015: 14). But in the case of

Dogu Bankov's story a thief is non-existent and there is nothing mercenary about it, because the pictures after the exhibitions are inventoried and catalogued in order to become a particular museum's property. The forger does not exist either, because there are no duplicates.

If one is to be overwhelmingly concerned with the fact that the author is "invented", then this could go as far as to say that all the "fakes" are the originals. Invented author (or invented biography of the author) does not necessarily mean that the pictures that are ascribed to this particular author (Dogu Bankov) are the fakes. One thing is to construct fictional biography, the other thing is to create authentic pictures in relation to classical literature. The author can be X, but the pictures are real. The entire anti-Picasso idea is to send a simple message: **an author as a source of authenticity of an art work is unnecessary for the acknowledgment of the original work.**

But the world wants to be deceived as the ancient Roman writer Petronius has said (or at least as these words are ascribed to him) in Latin: *Mundus vult decipi, ergo decipiatur*. There is enough persuasion that such an artist as Bankov *could have* existed and he *could have* made namely these particular pictures. Then the dialectics of the original and its fake is for the intellectual pleasure of the art society, not only for the purpose of sending anti-Picasso message.

The intellectual pleasure lies in the combination of the two: a mixture of an invented biography on the basis of many documentary facts as well as on the dia-

lectics of the original and its fake. Without this would be difficult to explain why the collections exhibited in the 21st century are made of 100 year old interwar period material of the 20th century. Once the narrative of Dogu Bankov is established, then it becomes self-explanatory why he used the clippings of the publications from 1920s and 1930s. It is not an optical deception. It is a conceptual deception. It is not an optical deception, because all the collage pictures are made of the "original" material of the 1920s and 1930s. It is another matter how the original material of the 1920s and 1930s was obtained. Suffice to use imagination...

However, it is a conceptual deception, because the art society is lured into a belief that Dogu Bankov was not "invented"; in addition to this, the art society is lured into a belief that his biography as it "really was" is available to us today thanks to the memoirs written by Agnes Shaunegger, who was the cook of the café where Dogu Bankov used to indulge into his collage picture making. The idea is that his pictures made in the café L'Ané Rouge belong not just to him, but more importantly they belong to the epoch of the Golden Age of Modernism. The café L'Ané Rouge indeed existed in Paris during the interwar period.

But the following question is why Paris' interwar period deserves so much attention in the 21st century? Was not it all about Modernism? Is there a deeper purpose in the effort to promote Modernism in the epoch of Post-modernism? The answer *could be* "yes". The idea might be that we are allowed to create art in the 21st century without the trauma

of World War II. Imagine that the Second World War has never happened, – we hear the idea behind all this.

If one is to pay attention to the mood of the pictures, then all the collections (with the exception of “War Requiem” and possibly with the exception of “Quere-ll de Brest”⁵) are about happiness. That strengthens the idea that we should have

art in such a way as if the Second World War II has never happened. In addition to this, it is especially peculiar how the artist Bankov managed to create a distinct style in each collection of his pictures for different exhibitions when the material of the collage is from the same period and, moreover, the pictures contain the same mood of happiness.

COLLAGE PICTURES AS INDIRECT ILLUSTRATIONS TO CLASSIC LITERATURE

In this sub-chapter the focus is on the pictures as indirect illustrations to classic literature: Federico *García* Lorca’s “The Public”, Wilfred Owen’s poetry as it is used in Benjamin Britten’s “War Requiem”, and Petronius’s “Satyricon”. When it comes to the latter, it is important to highlight that the exhibition titled “300 pictures to Satyricon” does not have an artist’s name. Dogu Bankov is not mentioned. Nor any other artist’s name is mentioned. However, due to similarity in style and due to the collage material (same material of 1920s and 1930s) and due to the mood of happiness, it is reasonable to include this collection into Dogu Bankov’s oeuvre, since it fits here better than anywhere else.

As we know, the book “Satyricon” – ancient novel in Latin – could be called the Bible of hedonism with lots of scenes of love that includes paganism and pagan sin-free attitude towards homosexuality and bisexuality, sex slaves. “Satyricon” also has the scenes on the abuse of money and pride, yet in a poetic approach. Food eating festivities is also a big part, but all of it not without a mock-

ery and irony. The reader sees a great sense of humour applied for the purpose of the revelation of the decadence of high culture that Petronius evidently witnessed (Petronius 2020).

But why the material of 1920s is used for the collage pictures that are in such a strong affinity with Petronius text of ancient Roman times?

One of the potential answers – convincing or utterly unconvincing – is that the artist chose freedom to remain anonymous by following two manifestos: “The Inventionist manifesto” and “the Concrete Art Manifesto”. These two manifestos not without a reason were placed on the wall during the exhibition “300 Pictures to Satyricon”. From these manifestos we learn that an artist is not supposed to sign art works. We also read there: “Don’t Search or Find: Invent,” as Edgar Bayley would say in promotion of “The Inventionist Manifesto” (Danchev 2011). With the manifestos in mind, these pictures as illustrations to “Satyricon” could be regarded as standing on their own, whereas Petronius text could be a pretext for the imaginary of Bankov.

That imaginary of the artist led him to a creative visual playing with the assemblage of the material from 1920s and 1930s – photos, journal clippings, advertising, cards, knives, feathers, buttons, etc. Then the artist no longer has to be concerned with the fact that his collage material of the early 20th century is used for illustrations of ancient times, especially keeping in mind that the illustrations are indirect,⁶ symbolic.

When one takes time for a slow examination of each single picture in the exhibition “300 Pictures to Satyricon”, s/he sees how painstakingly all the details of the collage material are assembled. When one takes a quicker look going through the general view, then s/he sees sort of a cartoon movie that could be on its own without any text. After all, the “cartoon movie” contains 300 pictures and takes quite some space on the walls.

But “Satyricon” as such, as a literature text in itself is a challenge for the reader due to innovative Latin language. Petronius himself could belong to the Inventionists, since his Latin language is so inventive. The word *Satyricon* is more connected to Greek than to Latin. After all Greek was the most used language in the area where “Satyricon” was written – close to today’s Naples, Italy. Firstly, *satyr* is a Greek demon with a male body, but with the legs of a ram-goat. Secondly, it is connected to *satyricus* – a poet or a writer who satyirizes. Thirdly, *satyriasis*

means abnormally strong sexual desire in men. It is also possible that the word *Satyricon* is connected to *satyria* – a well-known aphrodisiac at that time.

The English translation for this particular exhibition was made by the curator of the exhibition, instead of simply relying on the already existing translations. A need for a new translation stemmed from the multiple meanings that Petronius created with his inventive vocabulary. Evidently a possibility for additional multiple meanings were discovered in the process of artistic searching to create a picture in such a way that particular meanings of “Satyricon” would be visualised.

If the collection titled “300 Pictures to Satyricon” matches gay mood of the other collections of Dogu Bankov’s collage pictures, so it is not so with his collection titled “War Requiem” (37 pictures), which has a completely different mood. The collection “War Requiem” is oriented towards mourning of the dead soldiers. The mood is strikingly sad and meditative, as it is dedicated to the end of World War I. Not coincidentally the opening of the exhibition was November 11th, 2018, for the occasion of 100th anniversary for the end of this war in 1918. Thus, the mood is sad, unlike all other collections. Here Wilfred Owen’s poem “Anthem to Doomed Youth” (as well as his other poems) is integrated into Benjamin Britten’s symphony “War Requiem”.

“What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

[...]

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes” (Owen 1986).

As it was mentioned, the exhibition “War Requiem” by Dogu Bankov is an exception in terms of mood and dedication to the loss of lives of men in World War I. One could argue that if all the collections of Bankov were on such a metaphysical level⁷, then the discourse of Dogu Bankov would transcend cultural level of the localised café L’Ane Rouge. Then a religious and metaphysical theme would dominate lifting Ban-

kov’s ideas and his works to a different realm. As it is for now, the collection of “War Requiem” stands as an exception to the other collections, and those other ones – so humorous with a retro mood of the Golden Age of Modernism – could be summarized in the words of a new manifesto. That new manifesto would be the manifesto of Dogu Bankov and the words would be: “I chose the happy life”.

CONCLUSION

“The Concrete Art Manifesto” that no longer wants an artist’s signature is the same manifesto that was hanged in the exhibition “300 Pictures to Satyricon”. This manifesto suits the concept of Dogu Bankov. Without knowledge about the meaning of the manifesto the art philosophy of Bankov would be incomplete. The other manifesto – “The Inventionist Manifesto” – here is exceptionally important as well, because it urges artists to invent.

Dogu Bankov’s world teaches to look back at the Golden Age of Modernism as having special meaning in the 21st century. There are at least three messages to learn:

1. an artist should invent;
2. an artist should have an anti-Picasso attitude when exhibiting works without a name and a signature;
3. art quality is more important than a name.

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Images created by Dogu Bankov for the exhibition titled “War Requiem,” exhibited at the Devil’s Museum, Kaunas, Lithuania, November 11th, 2018 for the 100th anniversary commemoration of the end of World War I

Endnotes

- ¹ For the analysis of the invented biography please see the above mentioned article “Art philosophy: the Multi-layered Biography of Dogu Bankov”, which is available in the same journal *Logos*. See literature list at the end of the article: (Kavaliauskas 2020).
- ² Deividas Preišegalavičius would be one of the visitors who instead of believing in the existence of Dogu Bankov chose to take part in the discourse of his invented biography. He wrote a witty book review about a book that supposedly was written by the curator of Bankov’s exhibitions, when in reality such a book does not exist. See literature list at the end of the article: (Preišegalavičius 2016).
- ³ Another example – Andy Warhol, who sometimes would let to sign his works just anyone present in “the Factory” (Warhol’s studio).
- ⁴ See the article “Art philosophy: the Multi-layered Biography of Dogu Bankov”, which is available in the same journal *Logos* (Kavaliauskas 2020).
- ⁵ To be exhibited
- ⁶ For instance, one of the pictures from the exhibition “300 Pictures to Satyricon” includes a photo of a “bottle”, not an amphora of wine that was used in the ancient Roman times, because, as it was mentioned, the pictures are indirect illustrations. Another picture includes Arabic number “100”, not Roman “C”, because the pictures being indirect illustrations do not have to imitate the precise historic reality.
- ⁷ Wilfred Owen uses lots of Biblical symbols in his poetry, yet, unlike the teachings of Christianity, he sees no hope and no meaning in the trenches of dead bodies who died because of national flags.