

# **Columns: The Mary Washington Humanities and Social Science Journal**

Volume II (Spring 2023)

## **President**

Kathleen Gruber

## **Vice President**

Richard Munoz

## **Secretary**

Erin Mahoney

## **Treasurer**

Liam Kiely

## **Editorial Board**

Emily Nolan

Elisa Luckabaugh

Liam Kiely

Erin Mahoney

Kathleen Gruber

## **Faculty Advisor**

Dr. Dawn Bowen

**Cover Artwork:** “Collaboration” by Kathleen Gruber (President), April 2023



# **C O L U M N S**

UMW HUMANITIES AND  
SOCIAL SCIENCE JOURNAL

## Table of Contents

---

Letter from the President	1
The Deconstruction of the ‘Male Gaze’: Mari Katayama <i>By Gabriella Alexander</i>	2
“All go in his yard before his door”: Gizzard Stones and Spaces of Community Resistance <i>By Vonne Daszkilewicz</i>	10
Masculine Palingenesis in Socialist Realist Art <i>By Erin Mahoney</i>	20
The Thrill of Hunting for Treasure: Exploring the Gamble and Risk in Reselling <i>By Emily Nolan</i>	33
Meet the Editorial Board	44



## Letter from the President

---

Dear Reader,

This volume you are about to read is special. As this is the second volume of *Columns*, we have really hit our stride. We learned from the mistakes and expanded upon the successes from our first volume in the fall and are so proud of what is being presented this spring. This volume holds work from a variety of disciplines: historic preservation, anthropology, and art history. The cover art for this volume was created intentionally, with the goal of depicting the collaboration between all of the disciplines in the humanities and social sciences in this volume.

When asked what they like about the University of Mary Washington, many students cite the small class sizes and meaningful relationships with professors. However, here at *Columns*, we are encouraging students to step outside of the classroom and explore what excites them about their particular field. We hope to inspire students to lean upon and collaborate with their mentors, professors, and peers to grow their discipline. Research at Mary Washington is held up by each of the humanities and social science disciplines. However, the drive and motivation that each of these featured students brings to the university is an inspiration. I hope to see these students continue to challenge themselves through original research, such as is celebrated here, throughout their careers.

I would like to thank the students in leadership and on the editorial board for *Columns* for all of their hard work over the course of the entire 2022-23 school year. Their dedication, creativity, humor, and passion has driven this project to be the success that it has been. I look forward to seeing how it grows in the following years under their leadership. Additionally, *Columns* would not be possible without the continued support of the humanities and social science departments and Dr. Betsy Lewis, the Assistant Dean of Arts and Sciences.

However, this volume is not only special for the students, the university, and the editorial board, it is also special for me. As I am graduating in May, this is my last volume. As president and co-founder, it would be an understatement to say that *Columns* has been important for me. Through *Columns*, I have learned many lessons about who I am as a leader and what I am able to accomplish. I cannot wait to visit UMW and see how *Columns* will grow. I wish the *Columns* editorial board endless luck, not that they need it.

Lastly, I want to thank you. Without you, *Columns* would not exist. And for that, I am forever indebted.

Au revoir,

Kathleen Gruber

# The Deconstruction of the ‘Male Gaze’: Mari Katayama

**GABRIELLA ALEXANDER**

*University of Mary Washington*

*Advisor: Dr. Julia DeLancey*

*Course: Art History, Art and Gender*

*Date of Project Completion: December 9, 2022*

---

**Abstract:** Antebellum plantation owners sought to establish control and power through the strict management of the natural landscape. Enslaved African American communities utilized yard spaces to assert ownership and aspects of autonomy on the plantation landscape through place-making activities such as raising poultry, maintaining personal property, and socializing. This paper examines yard maintenance and cultural resistance by presenting a “biography” of gizzard stones recovered from Sherwood Forest plantation. Comparative sites provide insight into the archaeological evidence of yard spaces, and oral histories told by emancipated African Americans illustrate their distinct individual and communal identities. While enslavers planned and controlled the layout of the plantation landscape, enslaved individuals and households were able to appropriate outdoor spaces for their own practical needs and to claim a degree of agency over their lives.

**Keywords:** Mari Katayama, photography, feminism, male-gaze, disability, able-gaze, social hierarchy, theory, intersectionality

---

Mari Katayama (1987- ), a contemporary Japanese photographer deconstructs the ‘male gaze’ in her work through the lens of disability studies. Specializing in self portraiture, Katayama displays her physical disability to question how a viewer may place her within a preconceived social hierarchy. At the age of nine, Katayama’s two legs were amputated due to a congenital limb disease contracted as a child. As an artist, rather than hiding her atypical appearance, she has capitalized on her physical disabilities to question what it means to have a ‘correct body’. In a 2022 interview with ARTNews, Katayama spoke on the ambiguity of the division between natural and artificial (Matsumoto 2022). In standardized visual media, the human body is represented in an idealized way. However, the lack of bodily variation within this idealization makes the image artificial. Katayama is confronting the artificial nature of media by displaying her natural body. In her statement, she says “the ‘correct body’ is thus the body that society presupposes”(Matsumoto 2022). Her experience outside of having a ‘correct body’ has resulted in Katayama’s deep consideration of how modern society ostracizes those with bodily variation. She conveys her reality of not having a ‘correct body’ in her self portraits, thus asking the viewer to reconsider the dominant gazes that may be applied to her image.

In a foundational document on the definition of the ‘male gaze’, author Laura Mulvey analyzes the submissive role that women are given in the context of narrative cinema. As stated by Mulvey, “In their exhibitionists role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (Mulvey 1975, 19). The categorization of women as submissive leaves men to take the active role, or the ones doing the looking. However, Mulvey’s analysis and description of the ‘male gaze’ has been deemed essentialist in nature by art historians such as Edward Snow. The claims posed in her article are largely supported by the Freudian school of

thought which is widely considered a problematic and outdated theory. When dealing with a widespread concept, such as analyzing how viewers may look at the depiction of a person, one must avoid making gross generalizations. It must be acknowledged that not all male viewers are guilty of sexually objectifying the female body, regardless of its physical state. Additionally, the ‘male gaze’ is not the only lens in which an individual is viewed through. Rather, many dominant gazes are placed onto those being looked upon. In his article, “Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems,” Edward Snow identifies the issues that arise when looking at the ‘male gaze’ with an essentialist perspective. Rather than placing viewing into a homogenous category split between gender, Snow urges acknowledgment of looking as “a place neither of possession and display nor of mythic plenitude but of splitting, separation, spacing, and the weaving and traversing of gazes” (Snow 1989, 31). In his argument, Snow identifies that within modern media there is a multitude of gazes which define and propagate methods and modes of oppression, expectation, and normalcy.

Amongst the polysemy of gazes within our society, the dominant gazes work to alter conceptions of human ‘correctness’ leaving those who stray from the preconceived ‘normal’ to be labeled as ‘other’ (Gannicott 2018, 213). For example, the male gaze affects not only depictions of women in art and literature, but it has also come to represent the patriarchal expectation of femininity. As a result, women who deviate from that expectation are deemed undesirable under the male gaze (Gannicott 2018, 213). The same can be said for individuals that do not confine themselves to the racial, imperial, or able gazes. When falling outside of the dominant gaze in any of these categories, the individual is subject to social ostracization or deemed un-sexual in nature.

Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, described the social implications that arise from the act of viewing. In his words, “We are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world” (Gannicott 2018, 215-217). According to Lacan, the gazes placed upon an individual often causes them to identify with the ‘objet petit a’ or the unattainable object of desire. Thus, a relationship between the true-self and the ideal-self is formed. When an individual cannot physically conform to the expectations set by dominant gazes, they may feel they will be viewed as undesirable or inadequate by their society. In accordance with this reality, a disabled individual becomes aware of a difference between themselves and the culturally propagated definition of ‘normal’. The concept of normal in accordance with the able-gaze is defined as an individual that is un-impaired, physically and cognitively unburdened, and physically ‘complete’. As a result, disabled individuals often attempt to repress or mask the physical and social signifiers of otherness to better adhere to the able-gaze. The act of masking one’s true form causes the image to become artificial, thus perpetuating the unattainable nature of modern media.

A self-portraiture that conveys how a disabled person is looked upon through the ‘able gaze’ and the ‘male gaze’ is *My Body #001* (2017) by Mari Katayama. This image adheres to the sexual fantasy projected onto women by many cis-gendered, heterosexual men. Katayama is dressed in highly ornamented lingerie while reclined on a floral patterned loveseat, however, the imagery of a typical fantasy ends there. Katayama’s legs are raised up on the arm of the seat, revealing her scars. Katayama displays her prosthetic legs and feet on the couch, a table, and the floor which further reminds the viewer of her atypical physiognomy. While addressing the objectification of the female body, Katayama is simultaneously speaking on the underrepresentation of bodily variation through the display of her prosthetics. The eye contact



made between the subject and the viewer invites the audience to question how they are perceiving her image. The directness in her body positioning and gaze is working to deconstruct both the 'male gaze' and the social perception around disabled bodies and their sexuality.

Disability, as viewed within Western tradition, is a socially constructed concept. Society has produced the term 'disability' to label bodies that deviate from physical normalcy as 'other' (Gannicott 2018, 218). A disabled body is only seen as a negative experience because society has created barriers to accessibility. A lack of accommodations further places those with bodily variation into a separate category. Thus, an 'able-gaze' becomes prominent, especially within visual culture. The 'able-gaze' comes from a position of power and privilege, revealing the hierarchical social power dynamic between the able bodied and the disabled (Gannicott 2018, 220). Culturally, there is an assumption that having an atypical body equates to suffering, which leads the disabled life to be labeled as inferior and non-sexual. Katayama is actively questioning the dehumanization of the physically disabled through her sexualized self-image in *My Body #001*. Katayama's work asks the viewer to question where she should be placed in their social understanding of sexual beings, is she inherently sexual in this image because she is an undressed woman? Or would society label her 'undesirable' because of her atypical body?

In Western society, the human body is the subject and object of aesthetic production (Siebers 2010, 1-2). However, all bodies are not equally prized in their aesthetic response. The taste and disgust of individuals dictates which body may be favored over another. The commonly held aesthetic preferences of society combines aspects of feminist theory and disability studies. The two fields are intertwined, especially in the context of representation. Contemporary feminist theorists, such as Rosemarie Garland Thomson, claim that being a woman is a disability within a sexist society (Garland-Thomson 2011, 2). This idea stems from women and the

disabled historically being labeled as helpless, dependent, weak, or having incapable bodies. Thus, both identities, being disabled and being a woman, are subject to a position of lesser power within the hierarchical social dynamic of the Western world. Women and individuals with atypical bodies are often subjected to comparison. The disabled body is encouraged to achieve normalcy in their physical and mental state whereas women are prompted to value beauty. There is an expectation that individuals have pliable bodies that can be shaped to conform to the set standard of 'normal' and 'beautiful'(Garland-Thomson 2011, 5). However, normalcy and beauty are often unattainable standards which leaves those outside of the perimeters to be labeled as substandard. Katayama's work explicitly engages with her body, thus critiquing the idealist aesthetic of the human form.

Katayama's work represents the push towards socially accepting a disability aesthetic which prizes physical and mental difference as significantly valuable itself (Siebers 2010, 19-20). Rather than confining to the idealized expectations set by popularly held aesthetic values, disability aesthetics does not embrace an aesthetic taste that defines harmony, bodily integrity, and health as standards of beauty. Additionally, it does not support the aversion to disability that is required of the traditional conceptions of social perfection. Instead, disability aesthetics support the movement towards the representation of bodily variation within modern media. The works being created by Katayama adhere to this principle by highlighting her uncensored physical form in an effort to break down the artificial nature of visual culture.

Katayama's work prompts viewers to remove her from the social binaries of femaleness and disability. The intersectionality of her existence results in an inability to place her within a single category. Katayama identifies that she could be considered sexual because of her clothing and pose, while simultaneously un-sexual because of her physical disability. Thus, to analyze her

work is to consider the intersectionality of feminist theory and disability studies. Women and the disabled community relate to each other in being expected to achieve bodily perfection. In response to her experiences with these identities, Katayama's work deconstructs the nature of dominant gazes.



Mari Katayama  
*My Body #001*  
2017

References

- Gannicott Ash. "Disability, Performativity, and the Able-Gaze." In *Exclamation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2018.
- Garland-Thomson Rosemarie. "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory." *NWSA, Journal* 14, no. 3. (2002): 1-32.
- Matsumoto, Masanobu. "Meet the Rising Japanese Artist Who Uses Her Amputated Legs to Question: What Is a 'Correct Body.'" *ARTnews*. April 27, 2022 Accessed October 25, 2022.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16, no. 4 (1975): 6-18.
- Siebers, Tobin. *Disability aesthetics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- Snow, Edward. "Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems." *Representations*, no. 25 (1989): 30-41.

# “All go in his yard before his door”: Gizzard Stones and Spaces of Community Resistance

**VONNE DASZKILEWICZ**

*University of Mary Washington*

*Advisor: Dr. Lauren McMillan*

*Course: Historic Preservation, Artifact Analysis*

*Date of Project Completion: October 21, 2022*

---

**Abstract:** Antebellum plantation owners sought to establish control and power through the strict management of the natural landscape. Enslaved African American communities utilized yard spaces to assert ownership and aspects of autonomy on the plantation landscape through place-making activities such as raising poultry, maintaining personal property, and socializing. This paper examines yard maintenance and cultural resistance by presenting a “biography” of gizzard stones recovered from Sherwood Forest plantation. Comparative sites provide insight into the archaeological evidence of yard spaces, and oral histories told by emancipated African Americans illustrate their distinct individual and communal identities. While enslavers planned and controlled the layout of the plantation landscape, enslaved individuals and households were able to appropriate outdoor spaces for their own practical needs and to claim a degree of agency over their lives.

**Keywords:** Gizzard stones, Archaeology, Sherwood Forest plantation, yard spaces, enslaved communities, cultural resistance, place-making

---

From 2015 to 2017, the Department of Historic Preservation at the University of Mary Washington conducted archaeological excavations at Sherwood Forest, the site of a mid-nineteenth-century plantation in Stafford County, Virginia. The site underwent occupation by the Union Army from 1862 to 1863 as a field hospital and winter encampment. The project aimed to identify additional housing quarters lived in by enslaved laborers, and to investigate overall changes to the landscape. During excavations surrounding the extant duplex quarter, a feature was identified and interpreted as an antebellum planting bed that had been filled in during the Union occupation (McMillan 2019, 112-128). While archaeological investigations did not uncover the locations of additional housing, excavated artifacts provided valuable information on the lives of the African American community enslaved at Sherwood Forest. Two gizzard stones were recovered from Layer A of Unit 49 within the planting bed feature (University of Mary Washington 2017). These artifacts are interpreted to indicate the maintenance of yard spaces for activities such as raising poultry, cooking, gardening, and socializing. Yard spaces represent cultural resistance against the plantation owner's total control of the landscape, through the modification of outdoor spaces for functional needs and socialization. By shaping their environment for their own use, African American communities mediated some of the conditions of enslavement and exercised a degree of autonomy over their lives.

Both gizzard stones are triangular in shape with rounded edges and sides. The surfaces of the artifacts are overall smoothly worn, while still featuring light patterns of abrasions (Image 1). One item is grey stone. Its three sides measure 1.7 centimeters, 1.5 cm, and 1.4 cm. The smaller item is composed of the paste from a ceramic sherd, likely white-bodied earthenware based on its light tan color. It measures 1.1 cm, 1.0 cm, and 0.8 cm on each side. The weight of the stone

object is 0.8 g, while the ceramic object weighs 0.3 g. Any glaze on the ceramic object has worn off, and both artifacts lack ornamentation.

These artifacts likely date to the late antebellum or pre-emancipation period. This time range is informed by the *terminus post quem* of 1862 for Context Layer 49B, above which the artifacts were recovered. This *TPQ* was justified by the presence of a copper eagle button and the Union encampment at the plantation (University of Mary Washington 2017). Layer 49B also contained artifacts interpreted as gizzard stones. The rounded, worn appearance of these artifacts likely formed through rotational movements in the gizzard, an organ present in domestic fowl including chickens and turkeys. While foraging, poultry may ingest grit, stones, and small ceramic shards, which then help to break down coarse feed such as nuts and seeds as the gizzard contracts (Goode 2009, 12-13). In an investigation of artifacts recovered from nineteenth-century contexts associated with enslaved African Americans at the Hermitage plantation, Russel (1997) describes reports of broken “old blue dishes” intentionally fed to chickens (76). Feed mixed with grit is also used by modern farmers to aid in poultry’s digestion. The varying physical characteristics of gizzard stones, such as shape and surface texture, can be explained by differences in material and retention time in the gizzard (Wings 2004, 27). Since larger gizzard stones remain in the gizzard and are not regularly excreted, the artifacts were likely removed from a bird after butchering (Goode 2009, 13).

Provenience information from plantation sites supports the interpretation that gizzard stones are associated with outdoor spaces maintained by enslaved households and individuals. Site 44LD539 in Loudon County, Virginia, occupied by enslaved Black field laborers from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, provides a comparative context (Goode 2009, 1) (Image 2). Gizzard stones were recovered from filled-in features such as trash and borrow pits,

similar to the context of the artifacts recovered at Sherwood Forest (Goode 2009, 2-3). The gizzard stones in Context Layer 49A were excavated from the Civil War midden, previously used as an antebellum planting bed located in the duplex area (McMillan 2019, 124). Gizzard stones are commonly recovered from yard areas near outbuildings associated with enslaved African Americans, where domestic fowl were kept and slaughtered (Goode 2009, 14). While wealthy landowners often dined on a variety of poultry, enslaved individuals had the primary responsibility of caring for, slaughtering, and preparing the birds (Williams-Forsen 2006, 16).

Sherwood Forest plantation featured a “purposefully built landscape” that served to project a sense of landowner Henry Fitzhugh’s power and control. The entrances of the duplex quarter, which housed enslaved workers, were visible from the back stairs of the main plantation house. This meant that the quarter occupants’ activities could be monitored from the enslavers’ space at the mansion (McMillan 2019, 118). By determining housing condition, structure, and location, white enslavers aimed to assert their control over the natural landscape and all aspects of enslaved people’s lives (Campo 2015, 39-40). However, enslaved African Americans were often able to arrange the outdoor spaces around their dwellings. These yards can be understood as artifacts “imbued with ingenuity and inventiveness that make powerful cultural statements” (Fesler 2010, 28). While yards were “spaces” in the sense of physical dimensions, they also represent the transformation of living areas imposed on enslaved communities into functional and meaningful “places” (28). Enslaved households adapted to the restrictions of enslavement, such as the dark, enclosed spaces of dwellings, by extending the activities and place of the home outside into the broader landscape (Campo 2015, 41).

Within the constrictions of the plantation landscape, enslaved residents managed cleared yard spaces to support their individual needs and to form collective identities. Maintaining



spaces such as a yard or garden would have tangible economic benefits, as enslaved people often bartered and sold the products of outdoor activities, including vegetables, small livestock such as chickens, and eggs (Wilkins 2017, 440-441). Household tasks such as cooking also occurred in the yard space. These outdoor activities created a place for individuals to socialize with their community (Fesler 2010, 33). Emancipated African Americans often recalled their yards in first-hand accounts of their experiences during enslavement. One freedwoman described how enslaved households cleared and maintained spaces during their available time: “When farm work was not pressing, we got all of Saturday to clean up 'round de houses” (Adeline Jackson [Westmacott 1992, 18]). Others described gardening activities and noted yards as places for household chores and socializing during the evenings. As Marriah Hines ([Perdue 1976]) recalled, “we would spin on the old spinning wheel, quilt, make clothes, talk, tell jokes. We would have candy pulls, from cooked molasses, and sing in the moonlight by the tune of an old banjo picker” (141). These accounts demonstrate assertions of autonomy through place-making, or the alteration of outdoor space to define places of collective cooking, work, and social interaction (Wilkins 2017, 442-443). Place-making activities helped to form communal identities through the shared use and understanding of yard space. The use of yards as functional extensions of housing quarters, and their role in defining a social sphere between households, supported a community identity that was distinct from the plantation management (Wilkins 2017, 441-443).

In a society that deemed enslaved African Americans as the property of their enslavers, acts of personal ownership allowed them to reclaim a sense of control over their lives (Campo 2015, 37). Enslaved communities demonstrated a means of ownership when maintaining yard space by appropriating the planned landscape around them. They used yard spaces to maintain

personal property as well, including chicken coops, beehives, hogs, and small gardens (Image 3) (Penningroth 2003, 95). Faced with restrictions on their mobility and living spaces, enslaved households made the home, including yards and gardens, a “locus of authority” over their property (Penningroth 2003, 104). The items that African Americans claimed were often stored in their yards, both for practical keeping and for the social importance of displaying property to others in the community. One person’s items and animals could be difficult to distinguish due to close living quarters. Among enslaved communities, counting and measuring property in the yard helped secure the acknowledgment of individual or household claims of ownership (Penningroth 2003, 95). One freedman referred to the keeping of poultry in yards in his testimony to the Southern Claims Commission, recounting that his neighbor’s birds “were so near to mine that I counted them to know the difference ... I was living close by him and knew as much about his things as he did himself” (Southern Claims Commission [SCC] n.d., 3-4). Neighbors turned the counting of property into a public display and occasion to socialize with one another: “I used often to count them when he fed them,” recalled Henry Harris about his neighbor Samuel Osgood’s hogs. “We used to brag over things, and see who would get the most” (SCC n.d., 6). “We staid door to door to each other,” remembered Clarinda Lowe, “and when we got any thing new we always showed one another” (SCC n.d., 7). Counting expressed autonomy by securing ownership, and by allowing opportunities for socialization that strengthened community relationships. Samson Bacon, a freedman from the Low Country, referenced yard space as a specific location for displaying property: “I know it was his because every man on one place know every other man’s property ... [H]e can’t help from knowing it. All go in his yard before his door” (SCC n.d.:11). While plantation owners designed enslaved quarters with their own interests in mind, enslaved African American communities asserted autonomy and used the

landscape to their advantage by managing yard spaces to both hold their property and relate it to each other (Penningroth 2003, 96).

African Americans utilized activities that expressed agency, such as community involvement, ownership, avoidance, and defiance to cope with the stresses of enslavement (Campo 2015, 3). Randall Ward, a formerly enslaved carriage driver held in bondage at Sherwood Forest plantation, revealed events that demonstrated outward defiance towards plantation owners in his testimonies. Ward related being beaten and jailed in Fredericksburg for professing his support for the Union. He also described landowner Henry Fitzhugh's beating and abuse of an elderly enslaved woman who aimed to protect her daughter from his sexual exploitation. These public acts of defiance show explicit resistance against enslavers, visibly challenging and rejecting Fitzhugh's supposed control over the plantation environment (McMillan 2019, 120-121). Fesler (2010) connects yard maintenance to an implicit assertion of autonomy described as cultural resistance, or the use of space in a manner that affirmed a person's identity as someone other than an enslaver's property (45). The enslaved residents of Sherwood Forest and other plantation sites likely did not maintain their yards as an explicit way to defy and threaten the institution of slavery. However, by utilizing the planned environment for their own functional and social needs, they still expressed a form of resistance and challenged the idea that an enslaver could control every aspect of their lives.

The gizzard stones excavated from the planting bed midden at Sherwood Forest plantation represent a group of artifacts associated with the maintenance of yard spaces by enslaved households and individuals, as well as outdoor activities such as the keeping of poultry. Yard maintenance was a mechanism of survival that allowed households to create a semblance of stability and personal satisfaction. Enslaved African Americans reclaimed agency by altering

their restricted environment for practical uses, to hold property, and for socializing and community building. Through yard space maintenance, their communities were able to adapt to the unimaginable restrictions of enslavement by creating and inhabiting places for their own fulfillment.

## References

- Campo, Allison M. "Nineteenth Century Enslaved African Americans' Coping Strategies for the Stresses of Enslavement in Virginia." PhD. diss., College of William & Mary, 2015.
- Fesler, Garret. "Excavating the Spaces and Interpreting the Places of Enslaved Africans and Their Descendants." In *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery*, edited by Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsberg, 27-49. Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Goode, Charles. "Gizzard Stones or Game Pieces?" *Journal of Modern History* 12, no. 1 (2009):1-23.
- McMillan, Lauren K. "A Quixote in imagination might here find...an ideal baronage": Landscapes of Power, Enslavement, Resistance, and Freedom at Sherwood Forest Plantation." *Northeast Historical Archaeology* 48, no. 8 (2019):111-134.
- Penningroth, Dylan C. *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Perdue, Charles L. *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976
- Russell, Aaron E. "Material Culture and African-American Spirituality at the Hermitage." *Historical Archaeology* 31, no. 2 (1997):63-80.
- Southern Claims Commission. *Testimony of Abner Wilson in claim of Albert Wilson*, 3-4. Liberty County, Georgia. Southern Claims Commission, n.d.
- Southern Claims Commission. *Testimony of Henry Harris in claim of Samuel Osgood*, 6. Liberty County, Georgia, n.d.
- Southern Claims Commission. *Testimony of Samson Bacon in claim of Prince Stevens*, 11. Liberty County, Georgia, n.d.
- University of Mary Washington Center for Historic Preservation. *Sherwood Forest Plantation Duplex Area Unit 49 Summary*. Manuscript, Sherwood Forest Plantation Project, Fredericksburg, VA, 2017.
- Westmacott, Richard. *African-American Gardens and Yards in the Rural South*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992.
- Wilkins, Andrew P. "Tactics, Strategies, Spaces, and Places: The Spatial Constructions of Race and Class on Virginia Plantations." PhD. diss., University of Tennessee, 2017.
- Williams-Forsion, Psyche. *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Wings, Oliver. "Identification, Distribution, and Function of Gastroliths in Dinosaurs and Extant Birds with Emphasis on Ostriches (*Struthio Camelus*)". PhD. diss., University of Bonn, 2004.

## Constructing Virtue in Socialist Realist Art

**ERIN MAHONEY**

*University of Mary Washington*

*Advisor: Dr. Eric Gable*

*Course: Anthropology, Anthropology of Art*

*Date of Project Completion: December, 2021*

---

**Abstract:** How do images serve to construct societies? Art held an incredibly significant hold on Russian Revolutionary politics, both in 1917 and throughout the Soviet Union. The changing cultural capital of certain types of art forms and messages within them reflected the specific values that the Soviets wanted to portray as central to a new type of society. This particularly took the form of the state-endorsed socialist realism. I argue that the themes present in this type of art are particularly reflective of a sort of idyllicism of masculinity as being associated with civilization and rationality. This, of course, comes at the cost and alienation of women as an implied symbol of both nature and capitalist irrationality. How does socialist realism in turn reflect the broader scope of gender politics and the political life of the Soviet body?

**Keywords:** Socialist Realism, Soviet Art, New Soviet Man, Art History, Feminism, gender, art.

---

In this paper I will explain the appropriation of a specific type of masculinity that was used in socialist realist art in the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik revolution. Referencing the Western cultural binary of the masculine as ‘civilization’ and the feminine as ‘nature’ I draw upon the theories of Marxist-Leninism and how the Soviet Union attempted to create a totalitarian regime that was hyper-rational in nature and the use of evocative imagery on the human body – particularly the masculine human body. Socialist realism was used to display an ideal society under a totalitarian regime through its hypermasculinization in a form of bodily palingenesis, as the bodies in socialist realism were meant to portray an ideal life, and typically depicted the life of the worker – the worker, in the Soviet sense, is industrious, virtuous, and overwhelmingly male. Body symbolism is many of the most recognizable pieces of Soviet Art depicting only men – although the Soviets were vocal advocates of equality among the sexes, the binary between them still existed in consciousness, and therefore the role of the woman was inevitably either closer to nature, and in another sense one can observe that the way women were depicted in Soviet art was more masculinized than the artistic portrayal of women in other parts of the west. The values of the Soviet Union were that it was even more progressive and rational than the outer capitalist world. The Russian Revolution is typically thought of in two stages – the Revolutions of 1917 which resulted in the dissolution of the Romanov dynasty during the October Revolution, and the end of the Russian civil war in 1923, which led to the Bolshevik faction taking control over the new Russian government. When analyzing the types of art that were produced during these periods, one can see how the revolutionary ideology changed from rejecting the old status quo, linked to the popularization of avant-garde art and poetry, to establishing a new type of Bolshevik dogma through the circulation of socialist realism. Essentially, through analyzing the importance of imagery with a focus on palingenesis and the



body being used to portray philosophical ideologies, one can see how the Soviet Union used this to portray communism as being rational and depictive of a virtuous society by appealing to masculinity. I will first discuss the history of palingenesis in western art since the decades preceding the Industrial Revolution, a Marxist analysis on art markets, then move into discussing the proliferation of radical thought in Russia and its connection to aesthetics in various contexts such as film and paint, and then analyze how the use of imagery can be dovetailed into Sherry Ortner's perspectives on society's usage of the gender binary system.

A continuity in the history of western arts is the proliferation of imagery in a tailored manner to suggest certain forms of belief and behaviors. For example, the visual arts have been a popular form of military propaganda that drew upon idealized concepts of the past. This practice of invoking a glorious mental image of an unfortunately bygone era is known as Palingenesis, which has been certainly prominent in the west since the decades leading up to the Industrial Age. One instance most widely known in the public eye is the neo-classical art movement in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the most famous of this type being the works of Jacques-Louis David. Take, for example, his painting *The Death of Socrates*. Upon a close look, the detail to commenting on Athens is intricate; while Socrates points to the heavens, we see symbols of what we value from Greek culture, such as a lyre hidden in the shadows, under the bed. Perhaps this was meant to symbolize that the culture we romanticize as producing Socrates was also the culture that executed him. The sense of movement in David's bodies are extremely emotive; the positioning of the bodies allows the eye to move from the distressed and twisted bodies of Crito and others, and up to Socrates' hand pointed towards the heavens to symbolize his famous acceptance of the death of his body. Also noting the evocative use of contrapposto in David's works – it goes without saying that the body is used to reflect a sort of moral quality. When bodies are on display

to represent a group, their physicalities become the vessels of moral energy for the culture of subject. This art movement came about during an age of ideological turmoil succeeding the Enlightenment's ideas on natural rights and liberal democracies, which upset the status quo of absolute monarchy. The usage of Greco-Roman imagery to stand for liberalism did not solely exist in the French Revolutionary sense like in the case of David; the United States modeled its government buildings after various temples, as well as Thomas Jefferson's home of Monticello. Similarly, Greco-roman architecture is a popular style in contemporary universities and banks to signify power. The common phrase "America is the new Rome" can also be interpreted as palingenesis through the form of popular lexicon; although it is not necessarily artistic in the sense that language's place in the western schema of art is conditional, there is such an emotional attachment to the Romans in popular culture that to compare anything to an empire, typically Rome is the schematic image of such. In conclusion, palingenesis has been used to the advantage of a wide array of ideologies, specifically in instances of ideological change. Oftentimes, this palingenesis asserts that some time in the past was inherently more progressive than the conditions of the modern day, and that by regressing it is possible that there is also progress embedded in it.

In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, the rise of Marxist thought proposed that communism was the most progressive organization of society based on an emphasis on the role of the relationship a certain society has with its mode of production. In his *Communist Manifesto*, Marx argues that all of history can be looked at through a class struggle, whether that be serf and lord, king and subject, or in the post-industrial age, bourgeoisie and proletariat . Because capital moved the concept of property into an abstract resource rather than a material one, it becomes unsustainable. Capital as a concept is not only a personal relationship between

itself and its owner – rather it becomes an agent of social power over the society as a whole. Thereby, those with the most social power dictate the prevailing philosophies of the society. In this case it is the bourgeoisie, who own 90% of the property which, at this point in history, is the means of industrial production. In the artistic context, this can be reflected in the fact that there is a separate market for the collection and selling of art as a commodity than the group dedicated to its creation. This creates a fetishization of certain forms of art, for example, the infamous scandal in which paintings that were supposedly the work of Vermeer were actually painted by another artist with less social capital resulting in a dramatic decrease in the painting's monetary value according to the art collectors. This shows that there is an added value to certain artworks by the collector circle that is not based on artistic skill alone. This is in direct opposition to Marx's labor theory of value, which asserts that the value of anything is determined solely by the labor put into its production. Rather, art that carries an attachment to certain names creates its own social capital by its exclusivity. The development of capitalism in the creative arts had effectively separated the artistic realm into the sphere of its production and the sphere of its commodification.

On the contrary, early Marxists had their own ideas on how art should operate under a socialist mode of production, for example, an excerpt of a letter written by Engels about the novel *Die Alten und die Nuen* by Minna, which described the daily life of salt-mine workers in Vienna:

Thus the socialist problem novel in my opinion fully carries out its mission if by a faithful portrayal of the real conditions it dispels the dominant conventional illusions concerning them, shakes the optimism of the bourgeois world, and inevitably instils doubt as to the eternal validity of that which exists, without itself offering a direct solution of the problem involved, even without at times ostensibly taking sides.

Evidently, one can see the early conceptions of socialist realism in Engel's personal letters. The focus on portraying real, material objects, and dedication to revealing the tragedy of life under capitalism in the arts, which serves as an avenue to introduce socialism to the masses as being favorable.

Revolutionary sentiment in Russia had existed since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, most notably with the Narodnik movement, which began with the intent to radicalize the peasant majority to overthrow the tsardom and establish 'communal socialism,' which believed that by drawing upon the traditions of peasant life, Russia could skip the capitalist stage that Marx has argued was necessary for society to evolve into socialism. They believed that the peasant was a 'natural socialist' and that by infiltrating their circles the peasant class can be radicalized to overthrow the tsardom. One could argue that the Narodnik ideology was existential about the industrial revolution, given the fact that unlike many other European nations Russia was still largely agricultural by the late 19th Century.

The Narodniks had their own set of aesthetic values pertaining to revolutionary fervor. One such example is the artist Illya Repin, a realist painter and a member of the Narodnik volya party. Repin created many different works of art, ranging from sketches to paintings which depicted the everyday Russian civilian. Controversially, Repin created the work "Arrest of a Propagandist" in response to a high profile Narodnik being turned over to Russian authorities by the peasantry class for spreading radical sentiment [Tretyakov Gallery Magazine, 2019]. This is reflective of one of the failings of the Narodnik movement in that by assuming an innateness to the peasant class it created a paternalistic sense of radicalization that did not account for the fact that to assume a peasantry class inherently desired a new world order. The Narodniks became

disillusioned with the state of their revolutionary ideas, and thereby surrendering their aesthetics to the new avant-garde movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Russian avant-garde rose in prominence with the increasing political turmoil in Russia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the socialist parties gained in popularity and sophistication. The so-called neo-primitivists, spearheaded by artists such as David Burluik, of whom the use of intense color and general emotiveness created its own emotional connection to the ideal peasant class by returning to a mythical tradition predating industry, thereby operating as its own form a palingenesis through the abstract [Bowl, 1974]. The namesake, Neo-Primitivism, is itself a reference of Picasso's earlier primitivist movement based on his own perception of what artistic ideals were in Africa. Marx's work referenced a type of *primitive communism* that he argued to exist in hunter-gatherer cultures. Thus, the neo-primitivist movement functioned as not only a rejection of the current dogma of the international art market, but evoked a type of nostalgia for an invented projection of the past. This, of course, cannot be divorced from its racist connotations either, with its bearing similarity to the noble savage archetype that pervaded in the dominant culture. The intent was to purposefully reject the conventions of western art at the time, which reflected this initial revolutionary sentiment to reject the conventions of the society at large during the years leading up to the February Revolution of 1917, as Tsar Nicolas II abdicated the throne to which the liberal Provisional Government was put into place. The October Revolution, however, set the stage for the philosophy of the new socialist state. The two main factions of the Russian revolution, being the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, which were led by Lenin, though initially aligned for the overthrow of the Tsardom, now broke out into civil war, as the Bolsheviks advocated for a more radical form of government, which ended up succeeding in 1921.

Succeeding the victory of the Bolsheviks, Russian art took a drastic turn toward the realistic. Avant-garde became simply too decadent and post-modern to the new Soviet state, and eventually socialist realism became the state recognized art form in the 1930s under the rule of Joseph Stalin. By controlling the style of media that could be distributed, Stalin's aim was to portray socialism as free from the decadence of the avant-garde because of its perceived frivolity. Instead, the simple, realistic portrayal of an idealized socialist life that focused on the working class that supposedly had no sense of the possible esotericism of neo-primitivist art or cared to dissect the equally as unconstrained avant-garde poetry form known as zaum was considered moral because this assertion was populist, whereas avant-garde was considered to be elitist and exclusionary to the average Soviet worker.

The Soviets held the idea that socialism was a heightened moral state of man – he was rational and virtuous. According to Lenin, ‘the struggle for the consolidation and completion of communism is the foundation of communist morality’ [Geller, 1988]. The Soviets had to portray themselves as innately more civilized than the greedy capitalist society in order to justify itself on the world stage. Out of this came the philosophy of the New Soviet Man, also nicknamed the Scientifically Organized Man, Industrial Man, and the Perfect Soviet Man. Stalin advocated that the Soviet worker *should* be ideologically reduced to an object of labor – a radical self-denial that was a needed vessel for the perfect society. One may argue that this was emblematic of Russia's continuous identity struggles with western individualism and eastern collectivism. In this sense, the body of the Soviet is objectified as a mode of production. In order to consolidate this message across the masses, the Soviets took to the arts, which aimed at establishing a moral superiority of communism.

Another example of this is the painting “Guy From the Urals.” By Vasili Neyasov. The Ural mountains in Russia acted as a sort of ideological barrier between civilized, industrial part Soviet Russia and the largely agricultural, and relatively un-industrial Siberia because it creates the border between Europe and Asia. In the painting, a muscled factory worker leans against a railing whilst a fire burns behind him. We are made to assume that this fire is intentional and a part of everyday factory life, as his expression is tranquil while he gazes towards the bright light. The symbolism of this painting extends beyond the visual component of it. The title of the piece refers to the subject not as ‘man’ or ‘person’ but informally as a ‘guy.’ The guy from the Urals, portrayed against the fires of the modern factory, are symbolic of the Soviets achieving what the Narodniks could not; to rehabilitate the peasant class into the bodily agents of socialism.

But there is something quite literally missing from the picture, so to speak. This utopian view of the new society, along with constructing a new type of man, is focused on only half of the Soviet Union’s population. The New Soviet Man gets to be wise, rational, and productive. Meanwhile, Stalin’s women are still mothers and homemakers. Soviet women, thus, are once again the second sex. Despite the fact that the initial Russian Revolution brought radical change to women’s rights, such as the right to vote, the right to participate in the labor force, and abortion the material granting of laws that protect the rights of women do not inherently dismantle the cultural narrative of being male as being the civilized object of the Soviet mentality. The Soviets used hypermasculinization in their artwork to portray the New Soviet Man; the bodies are the subjects in many pieces of propaganda, depicting a muscular, healthy worker, typically with an expression of hope towards the future. Take, for example, the series of artworks dedicated to fostering a relationship with the newly communist Republic of China. The series included almost exclusively men, and as the archivist jokes, ends up portraying

homoeroticism because of the depiction of hyper masculinized bodies on their own, and by the relative proximity towards each other that can be interpreted as a level of physical intimacy. It is as if women simply do not exist. The masculinized bodies are made to reflect the ideal worker; one who was liberated in the body as a physical mark of dedication to the socialist cause. The imagery of masculinity conveyed a sense of civilization and, more importantly, power and rationality.

This masculinization was meant to portray the Soviet ideology as being something that has intellectually progressed past western capitalism. There are multiple different art pieces that depict masculinization as symbolizing industry and by extension sophistication. Take, for example, the piece entitled 'Bread' by Tatiana Yablokaya compared against Neyasov's "Guy from the Urals" and the sexual division of labor. Yablokaya's piece depicts women harvesting grains. Men are generally not involved in this action, thus asserting this aspect of socialist life as a feminine one. The Soviet woman is commonly seen in the agricultural sphere. Although the Soviet Union prided itself on egalitarianism, women's roles in the Soviet workforce were the roles that were closer to nature, in a sense. Although the Soviets made distinctive advancements in women's rights within the legal sphere, 'woman' remains a category that is secondary to the intellectual Soviet man because the male body is the cultural essence of itself.

Women will always be considered as the second sex - an unfortunate deviation from a presupposed male universal. While there are less popular works of socialist realist art that depict women in various roles, such as agrarian work, The socialist realist focus on masculinity as its primary representation of the good society comes alongside bans on abortion and restrictions on divorce in a response to declining birth rates (Seigelbaum). Gender roles, now under the simulacrum of liberation, forced women to work full time in their day jobs along with



homemaking and raising a family. The industrious and virtuous Soviet male also committed mass gang rape during World War II. (Beevor, 2002) Unlike the indulgent capitalist, however, the Red Army viewed themselves as ‘sex-starved’ victims. Former Red Army officers continued to believe themselves to have been entitled to gang rape decades after. Women, then, remained to be only secondary collateral damage to even the Soviets. While the ideal Soviet citizen is painted to be male, it reflects a wider sentiment of womens’ objectification and construction as deviant from socialist values.

Therefore, the Soviet’s use of masculinity helped portray its ideals as inherently more intelligent, progressive, and above all more human than capitalist societies. It does so by invoking an emotive retelling of what the moral man is, based on an idealized sense of the peasant that could be explained by Russia’s historical dilemma because of the socialists’ aim to skip the liminal space between serfdom and communism, which was thought to be the industrial capitalism of the modern era. Appealing to certain gender expression was effective even when materially there was a desire for equality among the sexes because masculinity still held an emotive ideal of humanity and depicted the feminine as still closer to nature. The economic factors of the art market, being reflective of the material socioeconomic conditions as a whole.

References

- The Art Story. 2021. "Socialist Realism - Important Art." Accessed November 22, 2021.
- Beever, Antony. 2002. "The Russian Soldiers Raped every German Female from Eight to Eighty." *The Guardian*.
- Bowlt, John. 1974. "Neo-Primitivism and Russian Painting." *The Burlington Magazine* 116, no. 852.
- De George, Richard. 1964. "The Soviet Concept of Man." *Studies in Soviet Thought* 4, no. 4: 261–76.
- Engels, Friedrich 1885 . "Engels to Minna Kautsky," November 26, 1885. *Marx Engels on Art and Literature*.
- Faulkner, Neil 2017. "Lenin and the Bolsheviks." In *A People's History of the Russian Revolution*, 52–87. Pluto Press.
- Soviet History. 2015. *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*. "February Revolution," May 22, 2015.
- Geller, Mikhail. 1988. *Cogs in the Wheel : The Formation of Soviet Man*. New York : Knopf : Distributed by Random House.
- Huhn, Ulrike. (2017). "Reconciling Failure and Success: Soviet Elites and the Collectivized Village: The Adventure of Individuality. Visual Representation of the Post-War Soviet Village and the Ambivalences of Ethnographic Photography during Late Stalinism and the 'Thaw.'" *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 65, no. 3: 362–400.
- Mikheyev, Dmitry. 1987. "The Soviet Mentality." *Political Psychology* 8, no. 4: 491–523.
- MONTEFIORE, JAN. 1994. "Socialist Realism and the Female Body." *Paragraph* 17, no. 1: 70–80.
- The Museum of Russian Art. 2019. "Opening Reception: The Body in Soviet Art," January 15, 2019.
- "Narodnik | Russian Social Movement | Britannica." Accessed December 7, 2021.
- Neyasov, Vasili. *Guy From the Urals* . 1959. Oil on Canvas.
- "Olga Vladimirovna Rozanova | Russian Artist |." 2021. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.
- Origins: Current Events in a Historical Perspective. 2021. "The October Revolution in Russia." Accessed December 7, 2021.
- Ortner, Sherry. 1989. "Gender Hegemonies." *Cultural Critique*, no. 14: 35–80.

Petrov, Petre M. 2016. *Automatic for the Masses: The Death of the Author and the Birth of Socialist Realism*. 2016. University of Toronto Press.

Rare Historical Photos. 2021. "The Unintentionally Homoerotic Chinese-Soviet Communist Propaganda Posters" May 18, 2021.

"Russian Revolution - The February Revolution | Britannica." 2021. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

"Socialist Realism | Art | Britannica." 2021. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Soviet Art. 2018. "Soviet artist Vasily Nikolayevich Yakovlev 1893 -1953," January 28, 2018.

Socialist Alternative. 2016. "Women's & LGBT Liberation in Revolutionary Russia," January 16, 2016.

The Tretyakov Gallery Magazine. 2019. "Repin as the Mirror of the 'People's Will'. REFLECTIONS OF THE 'NARODNAYA VOLYA' MOVEMENT IN THE ARTIST'S WORKS. April 22, 2019.

Yablonska, Tatiana . *Bread*. 1949. Oil on Canvas, 370 cm x 201 cm .

# The Thrill of Hunting for Treasure: Exploring the Gamble and Risk in Reselling

**EMILY NOLAN**

*University of Mary Washington*

*Advisor: Dr. Laura Mentore*

*Course: Anthropology, Ethnography and Arguments in Anthropology*

*Date of Project Completion: December 8, 2022*

---

**Abstract:** This essay explores the activity of reselling through fieldwork within a second-hand store. The findings indicate that resellers feel a sense of excitement and thrill from the risk involved in thrifting. Multiple informants confess to feeling constant uncertainty about whether they will make a profit. However, they continue to remain engrossed in this activity, dedicating a large portion of their life to thrifting. Through Clifford Geertz' concept of deep play, the motivations behind these resellers are explored. The thrill of hunting for treasure transforms the risk involved in reselling into a sense of enjoyment.

**Keywords:** Thrill, hunt, reselling, thrifting, deep play, gamble

---

During the duration of roughly 12 weeks, I conducted research in Re-Tail, a Fredericksburg thrift store. I engaged in participant-observation by working alongside the two employees and the numerous volunteers. Additionally, I conducted informal and formal interviews with multiple resellers. The act of reselling consists of buying cheap items second-hand and selling them either online or in a different store at a higher price. Throughout my fieldwork, a pattern became evident of applying the term *thrill* to thrifting. This paper explores the gamble involved in reselling and seeks to explain why an individual would participate in this risky career. Through Clifford Geertz' concept of deep play, the motivations behind resellers can be explored. I argue that the thrill of hunting through discarded items and converting them into treasure drives these individuals to continue the gamble.

One of the resellers I met during my time volunteering at Re-Tail was Betty, a woman in her mid-sixties. Betty and I were spontaneously introduced through Re-Tail's manager when we both happened to be visiting the store on the same day. After initial greetings, I walked with Betty through Re-Tail and became acquainted with her. She wore her graying hair down, reaching just below her shoulders, and had on a plain blouse with jeans. Following this quick encounter, Betty offered to take me on a thrifting trip. She enthusiastically promised to teach me the ropes and knowledge of reselling. When I realized I had a Tuesday off from school, I immediately sent Betty a text message asking to plan the outing.

We arrived at our first destination, which happened to be Re-Tail, the shop I had become greatly familiar with. Betty began her circulation around the store, pointing out items to me and explaining their value in the world of reselling. "You don't resell plastic," Betty instructed me. We walked while Betty occasionally looked an item over, contemplating the purchase. Eventually, Betty found a candle in the shape of a snowman. However, her mood changed when

she saw the price. “Seven dollars?!” Betty exclaimed with obvious shock. Nevertheless, she placed it in her cart, mumbling, “Even though I’m cheap.” As we browsed, Betty’s cart slowly filled with other miscellaneous items. With each addition, she explained to me her thought process in making her purchases. Betty diligently located the brand of certain items and afterwards told me if those brands have a high resale value. After we went through each aisle multiple times, Betty appeared slightly disappointed in her finds. She said, “Some days I pile up my cart,” but still expressed hope that these purchases would garner a profit.

Next, Betty brought me to a small, cramped thrift store consisting of one room packed with unique finds. I was greeted at the door by David, a little mutt with a dyed blue tail. Betty absolutely loved this dog which I quickly realized as we both gushed over him. After this warm welcome, we began to peruse. Betty disclosed to me the best finds occur when the seller has misjudged the true value of an item. With better knowledge of the market, a reseller can purchase this cheaply priced item and make a substantial profit. Once more, we circled the store multiple times and I found myself losing interest. Betty seems rejuvenated and full of passion. Just like in Re-Tail, Betty detailed numerous items to me, explaining if it would constitute a smart purchase. She contemplated item after item in a strenuous process of locating profitable treasures.

After spending longer than I expected in this small shop, Betty excitedly declared she wanted to show me her own shelf at another thrift store. While we drove there, Betty explained that she hoped to obtain larger space in this store to showcase her prized items. This thrift store is set up with different vendors in each section. Each vendor must pay a certain price to maintain a spot in the store. The price differs depending on the quality of the area one obtains. Size, location, and quantity of shelves dictate the expense of an area. Betty had the cheapest option, consisting merely of a small shelf in a corner. Her shelf housed a large variety of interesting

items. An antique set of spice jars caught my eye. Instantly, I thought of my sister and announced to Betty that I had decided to make a purchase. She became ecstatic and extremely grateful, thanking me which left me momentarily perplexed. When we passed the owner of the store, Betty exclaimed that she had made a sale. She explained by around the mid-way point in October, this was her first sale of the month. In September, Betty made two sales from her shelf. This clarified the rarity of her sales, in turn explaining her audible gratitude and vibrant excitement.

I asked Betty how she handles items sitting for an extended period without being sold. Betty explained that she often re-donates items back into thrift stores. In this conversation, Betty expressed to me that whenever she makes a purchase, she can never guarantee she will be able to resell the items. All Betty can do to mitigate that uncertainty is to educate herself on popular trends, requiring constant monitoring of social media. Multiple resellers spoke to this issue of trends rising and falling without ample warning. Staying on top of these continuously shifting trends is exhausting for resellers. I met a husband and wife pair, Ed and Bee, who told me about how they stay on top of evolving trends. Unlike Betty, they strictly sell their inventory online. Reselling has been a sustainable full-time career for the couple for over twenty years. Ed informed me that in their team, Bee works as the “detective,” constantly evaluating popular trends. Ed explained, “She’s in the trends hard. She’s way deeper into the in the moment stuff.” Additionally, the idea of “market flooding” was another issue they discussed. When too many resellers capitalize on a specific fad, the customer base becomes overwhelmed with options. Bee added, “As soon as something is really big, it’ll change.” These quick shifts in popularity can prompt the sale of otherwise static items. A morbid example of this surfaced when the Queen of England died. I talked with Ed and Bee the day directly after this globally mourned death. They

explained the merchandise tied to the Queen, which had previously been collecting dust, sold immediately. An ashtray illustrating a portrait of the Queen sold within twenty minutes of her passing. Ed furthermore stated, “Kobe is also worth a few extra bucks.”

One of the most dreaded and feared circumstances for a reseller is losing their inventory. After Bee and Ed explained to me the high volume of items stored in their house, I asked them if they had assessed the possibility of a fire. I had not previously considered that the entirety of their investment could vanish in mere minutes. Bee immediately confessed, “A fire is my biggest fear.” However, she immediately followed this statement by rationalizing, “Luckily, all I need is my phone to get going again.” Through a connection from their phones, Bee and Ed could reestablish an inventory for their online store. While this imagined circumstance would be highly detrimental to their career, Bee and Ed both impressed upon me that they would not be discouraged from picking up and starting over.

To maintain a career in reselling, Ed and Bee explained to me they always retain a stock of small sale items. This consists of merchandise they are certain will sell but will not garner a colossal profit, as they are reliably valuable. The pair refer to these items as “grinders” and mentioned how other resellers use the term “bread and butter” to describe them. Although Bee and Ed view this aspect as essential for retaining enough stability to maintain this career, Ed explained, “It is not very exciting.” If they must rely on this sort of inventory for too long, they become frustrated. Ed confessed he will often think, “When am I gonna get my next big one?” However, to continue reselling, resellers must have enough money to make more purchases, creating a cycle of consumption. Betty shared that her husband gives her a limit to the money she can spend in a week thrifting. While she did not clarify the amount, Betty did say she occasionally spends up to \$200 a trip and thrifts once or twice a week. She engages in reselling



as a hobby, clearly stating, “I like to shop.” Betty explained that if she makes a sale, she can add that profit to her weekly thrifting allowance.

A sustainable reselling lifestyle requires constant available items for purchase. To truly thrive in this industry, there should be a constant stream of new merchandise. This results in a constant cycle of consumption. Endlessly buying is necessary for resellers if they hope to produce sales and generate a profit. Most conventional jobs consist of working for monetary gain before the purchase of goods. However, in the instance of reselling, one must first buy goods and sell them in order to make more purchases. If resellers are to be successful in this field, they must contribute to consumerism by dedicating immense time to shopping and selling. During the interviews I conducted with resellers, I learned that thrifting twice a week is considered the bare minimum, and numerous resellers shop every day. This speaks to a core issue within reselling. To make money, one must first spend money.

Most of the resellers I talked with began by selling items they already owned and became hooked on the thrill of reselling. However, for this to be sustainable they had to eventually make their own purchases. Additionally, once a reseller purchases an item, finding a customer willing to pay an even higher price is required to make a profit. It is a never-ending cycle of consuming for the sake of consuming even more. They continue reselling because they love the thrill of thrifting, searching for the next unique find. However, as the resellers I talked with explained, no purchase results in a definite sale. I argue that the risk involved in thrifting is thrilling for resellers, and motivates them to continue the hunt.

The thrill of thrifting and reselling arises from a variety of aspects. Most significantly, a sense of passion and yearning for risk encourages individuals to partake in this activity. Every purchase a reseller makes becomes a fresh gamble. Often, items will sit in storage for long

periods of time without being sold. In extreme circumstances, these items collecting dust are donated once more into the thrifting community. To be a full-time reseller requires a surrender to the instability the career creates. What lies within the thrift stores creates the entirety of their profit. This produces a sense of risk involved in every trip and purchase. Unlike a typical 9-5 job, resellers lack a set salary to rely on. An important question then lies in why one would desire this career when instability is at its core. Clifford Geertz offers a potential explanation in his piece, “Deep Play: Notes on The Balinese Cockfight.”

While renowned anthropologist Clifford Geertz was conducting fieldwork in Bali, he witnessed the importance of cockfighting for the locals. Although this practice was illegal, they continued to organize cockfights in secret. Geertz offers an explanation for this phenomenon through the concept of deep play. Drawing a connection between reselling and cockfights may seem rather absurd. However, I would argue that these men engaging in the violent performance of masculinity through fighting with cocks is remarkably akin to an elderly woman perusing thrift stores in the hopes of selling unique items online. The parallel between these two seemingly different activities lies in the way they both exemplify “deep play” (Geertz 1972, 15).

Clifford Geertz pulls this idea from Jeremy Bentham’s piece *The Theory of Legislation* to describe the cockfights he witnessed in Bali (Geertz 1972, 15). Geertz defines deep play as, “play in which the stakes are so high that it is, from his utilitarian standpoint, irrational for men to engage in it at all” (Geertz 1972, 15). We see this sort of engagement within circumstances that incite a sense of excitement, adrenaline, and risk. Those not involved within the seemingly illogical behavior fail to understand the potential benefits. A Westerner reading Geertz’ account of the Balinese cockfights may have difficulty understanding why this group places extremely large bets on two cocks battling each other. However, by understanding the motivations involved

with this risky behavior, the deeper symbolic meanings become more apparent. Geertz found that for the Balinese, cockfighting was a way to solidify relationships and showcase societal status through cocks as an extension of their owner. While Geertz uses this concept to interpret Balinese cockfights, I argue it can also be utilized in order to interpret the thrill involved in reselling.

These individuals who participate in reselling devote a significant amount of time and energy into this occupation. The payoff, however, is not guaranteed to be higher than the sacrifice put in. Resellers often refer to themselves as “buying trash.” They have a mindset of hunting whenever they enter a thrift store. Unlike typical department stores, it is impossible to predict what the contents of thrift stores will be. The thrift store produces an air of uncertainty, as the items one can discover cannot be evaluated until they visit. Additionally, each purchase for a reseller creates a gamble where they must weigh the risk of buying an item with that of making a profitable sale. Buying does not equate to making money, which is a necessity to sustain a reselling career. The gamble of reselling warrants an analysis utilizing the concept of deep play.

Geertz explains in his piece that the Balinese are not blind to the importance of money. He further states, “The more of it one risks the more of a lot of other things, such as one's pride, one's poise, one's dispassion, one's masculinity, one also risks, again only momentarily but again very publicly as well” (Geertz 1972, 16). While this statement refers to the Balinese ritual of cockfighting, the central concepts are relevant to the discussion at hand. Money is a crucial element in reselling. To engage in this activity, one must first have money to buy items to sell. However, thrill is often more motivating for resellers than profit. If monetary gain were a sole concern, participation in a career with a stable salary would be more suitable. It is the

unforeseeable game of chance whenever they enter a store and buy an item that instills passion into these individuals.

Geertz details the intense feelings attributed to “deep play” in a compelling way. He illustrates this concept as, “The thrill of risk, the despair of loss, [and] the pleasure of triumph” (Geertz 1972, 27). Similarly, all the resellers I conversed with emphasized passion as their main motivator for participating in this career. They each explained to me that the shift from a conventional workday to one almost solely consisting of thrifting was entirely idealized. Rather than submitting to corporate life, they can make their own hours and fully engage in their passion for thrifting. As Geertz remarks in relation to the cockfights, “[It] is like playing with fire only not getting burned” (Geertz 1972, 21). In the phenomenon of “deep play,” the feeling of adrenaline overpowers the gravity of the risk involved. Reselling may seem illogical with the constant overlaying possibility that one could lose everything—from a fumbled purchase, to the extreme of a fire destroying all the inventory, relying on reselling is an incredible gamble. However, the overwhelming joy attributed to constantly consuming along with the feeling of “the thrill of the risk” (Geertz 1972, 21) retains the engagement of an increasing number of resellers.

Reselling requires a commitment to relinquishing stability and submitting to constant gambling. No purchase is a guaranteed sale which makes this career appear illogical to an outsider. Although the risk is high, the benefits motivate resellers to continue their line of work. Clifford Geertz’ deep play can be applied to explain their participation in a risky situation. The thrill instilled through the hunt gives the resellers a rush of excitement and joy whenever they find unique finds and make a sale. Pride is fostered by successfully rummaging through

discarded items and producing a profit. Generating a substantial income is not their highest priority, the thrill of hunting for treasure is what motivates resellers to participate in this gamble.

References

Geertz, Clifford. 1972. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight."  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024056>.

## Meet the Editorial Board

---

**Kathleen Gruber** is a senior anthropology major in the honors program. She is the President and Co-founder of Columns. This fall, she is going to George Mason University to pursue her masters in anthropology, with a bioarcheology concentration, with the goal of a career working in repatriation. This summer, though, she plans on swimming, knitting, reading a lot, and adopting a kitten.

**Liam Kiely** is a current senior, complainer, and double major in International Affairs and Geography -- minoring in Conflict and Security Studies. Though typically focusing his studies on East and Southeast Asian politics and security -- he is frequently distracted by video essays and wanting to go camping. Currently in an independent study on the topic of the internet and political violence -- Liam has his scholarly interests in internet studies, contemporary political conspiracy theories, and terrorism. He is also president of UMW's International Relations Organization, Treasurer and co-founder of Columns, and someone who should go to bed earlier.

**Elisa Luckabaugh** is a junior geography major in the honors program. She is an editor for Columns, as well as the President of Geography Club. She particularly enjoys studying physical geography and Earth processes and is also completing the Geographic Information Sciences Certificate. This summer, she will be interning for BlackSky as a Geospatial Analysis Intern. She is also a dedicated Washington Nationals baseball fan!

**Erin Mahoney** is a senior anthropology major. She is the secretary and co-founder of Columns. Currently, she is a semi-finalist for a Fulbright grant in Cambodia to study the intersections of gender identity and Khmer classical dance.

**Ricky Munoz** is a senior history and geography double major. His scholarly interests include Latin America, and more recently the history of American imperialism, and the geopolitics of national borders. While he is failing to respond to texts and emails, Ricky enjoys sweeping his floor and looking at pictures of birds on the internet. He is a co-founder of Columns, and serves as the vice-president of the International Relations Organization, and the co-president of the Undeniably Adjacent, UMW's improv comedy team.

**Emily Nolan** is a junior majoring in anthropology and minoring in English literature. She recently transferred to UMW and joined Columns this semester. In May, she will be studying abroad in Italy and begin an internship at the Afro-American Historical Association immediately following her return. She also just learned how to throw a frisbee!





# C O L U M N S

UMW HUMANITIES AND  
SOCIAL SCIENCE JOURNAL