A NEW PARADIGM FOR THE EVALUATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE OBJECTS: THE PROCESS OF ATTRIBUTING VALUE AND SIGNIFICANCE TO DIANA MANTUA’S *CHRIST AND THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY*

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Honors Degree in Major with Distinction

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ABSTRACT

Assigning significance or value to cultural heritage is a crucial process within institutions to inform decision-making processes for allocating resources towards collections care and management. The field of cultural heritage economics adapts traditional economic theories of monetary value to define some aspects of significance in cultural heritage objects. However, because cultural heritage has both tangible significance, referring to physical aspects of the object, and intangible significance, referring to the significance of cultural uses and associations, economic methods of valuation alone are insufficient. Using the United Kingdom’s Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport’s (DCMS) “Valuing cultural heritage and capital: a framework towards informing decision making” and the Collections Council of Australia’s Significance 2.0 as theoretical frameworks, this paper develops a new paradigm for the evaluation of material culture. The paradigm evaluates a cultural heritage object by assessing its value in creation, value in purpose, value in existence, and value in memory. To test the effectiveness of this paradigm, it was used to evaluate Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery (1575) by Italian Renaissance reproductive printmaker Diana Mantua (1547-1612). Diana was chosen as a test subject to challenge the paradigm, given the relatively limited scholarship surrounding early female professional artists. Results of this assessment were discussed using an autoethnographic approach to reflecting on the process of evaluation. While time-consuming and subject to constraints based on access and resource availability, the
paradigm seemingly proved effective for collating information on heritage objects from marginalized groups and producing a clear line of reasoning for their significance. Ultimately, the development of a qualitative argument for the significance of a cultural heritage object through analysis of its tangible and intangible qualities yields the most useful comprehension of its value.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

People like things. I like things. My bedroom is a shrine to my ardent materiality. Atop my dresser rests a tiny bookshelf overflowing with several dozen volumes, dutifully arranged by the color of their spines. The bureau itself is stuffed so full of clothing that half the drawers refuse to shut. There are other small assemblages around my space, too: a shelf of minerals with handwritten labels, three gallery walls populated by thrifted posters and my own art, and enough throw pillows to stock a Homegoods. The volume of objects on display here suggests a lifetime of accumulation. In truth, I have only lived here since last June. However, in only a matter of weeks, I must move out. Limited by the cubic footage of my Subaru Outback, I will be forced to determine which of my possessions matter enough to return with me to Virginia, and what will be discarded in Delaware.

My bedroom dilemma is but a microcosm of broader challenges regarding the limited availability of resources for collections care and display. In the spring of 2020, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conducted a survey which estimated that there are more than ninety-five thousand
museums globally. Cultural institutions that house their own unique collections exist on all seven continents, to include a museum-cum-post-office in Antarctica operated by the government of the United Kingdom. In the United States alone, there are over nine thousand public libraries that house a combined two billion objects in their collections. These estimates exclude private collections of objects — like those present in my room — and are heavily biased towards data provided by the United States and Western European nations. Thus, there are likely many more objects around the world than those included in these reports individuals and societies feel are worthy of preservation and display.

The challenge, then, is determining just how to allocate resources towards maintaining these collections. In the words of American historian David Lowenthal,

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“stewardship [is] so all-embracing [that it] drains both material resources and mental and moral effort.”

Caring for public and private collections alike requires difficult decisions regarding finances, human resources, and physical materials and space. Furthermore, the inherently subjective nature of attributing significance to cultural heritage makes such decisions more difficult; how can an institution balance the multiple and possibly conflicting priorities of governing bodies, community members, and other stakeholders when caring for cultural heritage? There is a clear and present need for a standardized process for the evaluation of art and artifacts to streamline the process of resource allocation in museums and cultural institutions.

For this paper, I investigated current practices for articulating the value of cultural heritage objects, contextualizing them within the lens of economic theories of value and the field of cultural heritage economics. I aimed to address how economic considerations inform these current evaluation methods, while simultaneously emphasizing that the value of cultural heritage cannot be fully expressed in such simple terms as price. In conducting my initial review of such processes, I noticed that a majority use quantitative measurements or checklist formats to determine the value of art. Although these texts stress a need for objectivity, I believe that it is impossible

to be anything but subjective when evaluating heritage objects. As obvious as it seems, objects are significant to different people for different reasons. Furthermore, the guise of objectivity often hides prejudice against historically marginalized groups, including women. I wanted to create a framework to articulate these multiple forms of importance that coexist within an object and provide transparency regarding the biases of the evaluator.

Based on the formats and criteria of these other frameworks, bearing in mind my overarching goal, I developed my own paradigm for crafting a qualitative argument for the value of an object. I applied this paradigm to the print *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* by Italian Renaissance printmaker Diana Mantua (1547-1612). Diana was a professional reproductive printmaker working in Mantua and Rome at the end of the sixteenth century. Her print depicts a Biblical narrative of Jesus forgiving a woman for her sins. Although highly regarded in her own era, Diana has largely fallen out of the canon of Western art by virtue of her gender and artistic medium. I chose her and her work as a case study because I wanted to address how evaluation methods fail to fully express the importance of women’s art.

Finally, using an autoethnographic approach, I reflected on the successes and limitations of my paradigm, as well as the broader experience of evaluating an object of cultural heritage. The technique of autoethnography works to address my own biases and individual perspective in the evaluation process. My life experience informs what I value, and I want to discuss how this impacts the effectiveness and
applicability of my paradigm. I do not believe that subjectivity is a bad thing when valuing cultural heritage, but it must be discussed.

In concluding this experiment, I argue that any evaluation of cultural heritage must be based around a qualitative argument, as opposed to a definite, quantitative measure, to account for subjectivity and the inherent mutability of social values. This argument should collate relevant scholarship about an object, identify specific aspects of the object that contribute to its value, and establish a clear line of reasoning as to why these values are significant enough to merit continued stewardship.
Chapter 2

BACKGROUND

To begin, we must first investigate monetary theories of value. I acknowledge that price is perhaps the most direct means to express the value of a cultural heritage object. Furthermore, funding is a critical issue in relation to the acquisition, care, and display of such objects. Therefore, I wanted to give myself a stable foundation in the evolution of fiscal significance when developing my paradigm for assessing the value of material heritage.

Theories of Economic Value in Objects

One of the earliest theories for ascribing a price to an object is based in labor and exchange. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that the trade of any two objects must be a trade of equivalents. His theorem exists in two parts. First, “market exchange is motivated by mutual need,” and second, that it is “regulated by relative ‘value.’”6 The objects engaged in the trade thus appease some desire, and the factors involved in the production of each object are agreed upon as essentially equivalent. The resulting exchange rate, or price, then accounts for only the cost of production.

Subjective desire initiates the exchange of objects, but it is not consequentially a part of their assigned value. However, unlike the later economists whose theories I will explore shortly, Aristotle’s definition of value is more concerned with attributing value to the act of labor itself as opposed to attributing value to an object based on its required labor.\(^7\) In doing so, he prioritized the value of human skill as opposed to an element innate in the physical object. This crucial distinction emphasizes the human element of creation, an aspect that I consider to be critical in the formation of tangible cultural heritage, and thus in its evaluation.

The thirteenth century philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas expanded upon this theory of exchange, and the connected concept of exchange value. Aquinas’s theory proposes the concept of “just price” regarding “independent enterprisers,” a category which includes the artisan and craftspeople who would have produced the types of objects now extant in cultural collections.\(^8\) Contemporary scholars posit that the “just price” Aquinas conceptualizes extends beyond the notion of merely cost covering and includes “the well-being of all who are parties to a given transaction and


the good of a larger community.” The hypothetical “just price” of a print, for instance, would compensate the artist for materials like paper or ink and the labor of engraving and pulling a print, in addition to less quantifiable aspects such as the aesthetic enjoyment of the purchaser. Therefore, Aquinas’s just price is, in keeping with Aristotelian theory, relative. It is personal and highly subjective to individual circumstances. Finally, it is also an ideal more so than an observed reality; not every market exchange will be a just exchange. Operating within this philosophy, value assigned to a cultural heritage object will not be universal but contingent upon the perspectives of stewards of the object as well as stakeholders. This value will, to an extent, correlate to the effort, time, and skill that the object’s creator put into its construction but may also extend into intangible cultural values that are more difficult to quantify and highly subject to the bias of the evaluator.

Jumping ahead to the eighteenth century, Scottish economist and philosopher Adam Smith offers his own supposition for the determination of price and value. In *The Wealth of Nations*, he contends that “value” can encapsulate “value in use” as well as this “value in exchange.” Smith also recognized price as relative to labor. His work helped to define the labor theory of value, wherein an object is endowed with


innate economic value due to the work put into its creation. Labor in Smith’s eyes, thus, “is the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities.”\footnote{Smith, The Wealth of Nations, 26.} This concept accounts for a paradox present in Smith’s multiple identities for value. “Value in use” refers to how practical an object might be, while “value in exchange” refers to that social agreement upon an object’s worth which might permit it to be traded for other goods. However, an object of high use might not be of high exchange value, and likewise an object of high exchange value may offer very little utility. Smith accounts for this in that theory of labor value: the more work necessary to produce an object, the higher its exchange value. With this perspective in mind, objects of cultural heritage that require either more or more specialized labor in their construction would then theoretically be more valuable.

Karl Marx would later build on and amend this theory through the concept of necessary labor in the evaluation of commodities. In Das Kapital, Marx defines a commodity as “an object … that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another.”\footnote{Karl Marx et al., Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production, vol. 1 (London, England: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey, & Co., 1887), 1, https://go-gale-com.udel.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CU0113080040&v=2.1&u=udel_main&it =r&p=MOME&sw=w.} He goes further to specify that a commodity is a useful material thing.
The price of such an object then is an “exchangeable value expressed in money.”\textsuperscript{13} In other words, money is not the value itself, but merely an expression of the value. In \textit{Value, Price, and Profit}, Marx attests that the inherent value of a commodity remains the same regardless of how that value is expressed.\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, the thing and its equivalent exchange — for example, money — must then also be equivalent to a third thing. This, Marx claims, is labor.\textsuperscript{15} He asserts that the value of this labor comes from the necessary time it takes to produce the object based on the social conditions in which the object is produced. This labor thus should utilize all available tools and technology. When considering Marx in terms of evaluating cultural heritage, it seems that all such objects are endowed with value by virtue of the act of their creation. However, the concept of “necessary” labor may be trickier to characterize based on unique cultural practices regarding the creation of art and objects, or when considering cultural objects that were appropriated or adopted from alternate circumstances, such as the ready-mades of the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{16} Labor in cultural heritage

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\textsuperscript{14} Marx, \textit{Value, Price, and Profit}, 15.
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\textsuperscript{15} Marx, \textit{Value, Price, and Profit}, 16.
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\textsuperscript{16} Ready-mades are works of art made from mass-manufactured goods that have been recontextualized into a fine arts space.
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evaluation must encapsulate not only the physical act of making, but also creativity and intellectual labor.

All the theories of economic value so far discussed are in some regard connected to each other: use value, exchange value, and labor value. They are also, to an extent, attempts at identifying an objective quality which could predict the value of any given object. However, Austrian economist Carl Menger, who published his theories towards the end of the nineteenth century, resisted the idea that there is an objective quality to value at all. Instead, he asserted that “exchange always involves subjective estimation.”¹⁷ Individual points of view will always play some role. For instance, Menger also declares that perceived scarcity is the root of economizing action.¹⁸ A person in want of but lacking a certain good will exchange something else that they personally perceive to be of lesser value to obtain that new good. They may continue this system until they reach the point at which they have something they value too greatly to trade. In other words, people attribute their own value to things based on individual wants and desires. Menger refers to this as the subjective theory of value. Economic value, thus, cannot be considered wholly objective: monetary value is still a social construct based on the arbitrary preferences of humans. This


consideration is particularly crucial when valuing cultural heritage. Different peoples will attribute greater value to certain objects. These unique tastes and priorities are shaped by both their individual experience and the broader cultural groupings within which they exist. Therefore, it is more than likely that no two people will agree on the value of a cultural heritage object. Ultimately, this subjectivity is what necessitates the development of a paradigm to evaluate heritage objects from a multiplicity of potential values to formulate an argument for its significance.

Values in Cultural Heritage

Defining value in an economic sense is useful in terms of visualizing how monetary price may be attributed to an object, given the limits that available funding places on the ability to care for and maintain cultural heritage. However, as famed heritage economist David Throsby notes, “the determination of prices cannot be isolated from the social context in which these processes occur.”19 While economic theory may account for market behavior, it fails to consider many of the intangible and less quantifiable values that humans attribute to the things they care about. The assessment of cultural value is mutable and multifaceted.20 The perceived value of an


object can be altered by material or contextual changes, such as deterioration, dissociation, or display. To establish a paradigm to assess cultural value, identifying precisely what these intangible attributes are and determining the extent to which they affect the perceived value of an object is key.

Throsby, for instance, suggests attributing a numerical score to categories of potential values to produce such a formal assessment. I take issue with this approach. Purely numerical scores offer limited, if any, context as to why the ranking was given. The subjective nature of value in cultural heritage requires explanation when assigning this significance. Throsby also offers non-monetary categories for the value of an object: “aesthetic, spiritual, social, historical, and symbolic.”

Here, Throsby identifies significance in physical aspects, like visuals and material, previous cultural use, and potential for ongoing or future cultural use. The value of heritage objects lies not just in what they are, but what they could be. However, only one of Throsby’s categories considers the physical aspects of an object. If you cannot articulate why the physical object matters beyond a sense of “beauty” or “harmony,” why should an institution justify maintaining the tangible object? Furthermore, aesthetic value may not apply to all cultural objects. Material culture that was intended to be utilitarian as opposed to an art object may lack this aesthetic value. Conversely, a utilitarian object

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22 Ibid.
may gain aesthetic value over time. Throsby does not account for this mutability.

While Throsby begins to distance cultural heritage from a singular economic standard unit, his framework does not adequately allow a user to explain why different facets of an object of cultural heritage endow it with significance.

Conservator Barbara Appelbaum actually applies Throsby’s idea of numerical scoring as a means of determining what she refers to as the “ideal state” of a cultural heritage object.\(^\text{23}\) Appelbaum’s quantitative technique is intended to be a guide for determining appropriate levels of conservation intervention, emphasizing the argument that evaluation paradigms are crucial towards decision-making processes that intimately affect objects of cultural heritage. This “ideal state,” explained by values that result from the object's biography, define treatment goals. Appelbaum defines the ideal state itself as the state where the “most important” values are at their highest, and all other values are minimally adversely affected. Like Throsby, she offers her own list of potential values: “art, aesthetic, historical, use, research, educational, age, newness, sentimental, money, associative, and commemorative” value, as well as the idea of “rarity.”\(^\text{24}\) With the introduction of this final value, Appelbaum invites one to consider


the value of a cultural heritage object not merely in isolation, but relative to other objects of the same type.

In Appelbaum’s framework, separating art value from aesthetic value successfully acknowledges the unintentional beauty in utilitarian objects. Furthermore, placing value on rarity serves to increase the value of extant works by historically underrepresented creators, such as women. However, age and newness present a paradox in the evaluation of material condition. “Age,” per Appelbaum, is not just the physical age of the object but whether or not the object “looks old.” Newness is the opposite. Thus, these two values are inherently at odds with each other. Valuing one will always devalue the other, resulting in a confusing assessment of the overall significance of the object. Furthermore, prioritizing the appearance of newness favors objects that have already had resources allocated for their maintenance. To keep an object looking new, it must have undergone some preservation treatment in the past. Therefore, Appelbaum also fails to acknowledge the mutability of value.

In concluding her argument, Appelbaum states that an evaluation like hers would be unbiased and objective. This is untrue; human subjectivity will always influence perceived value evidenced in earlier discussions of economic value. Nonetheless, she also poses the question of cultural versus personal value: is the object of broad importance to a population, or does it only matter to a handful of individuals

with concrete personal ties to the item? This, too, she reasons, can affect value as the more people who universally agree upon the importance of an object, the more valuable such an object becomes.\textsuperscript{26} Appelbaum’s claim acknowledges the role that stakeholders play in determining the value of an object. There is a direct correlation between the number of people who care about an object, and the subsequent economic and cultural value afforded to that object. The more people invested, fiscally or emotionally, the stronger an argument there is for its worth within a cultural institution.

The concept of relative cultural value is further explored in Joel Taylor and May Cassar’s paper “Representation and Intervention: The Symbiotic Relationship of Conservation and Value.” Unlike Appelbaum or Throsby, Taylor and Cassar assert that value is not a strict, gradable scale, but a spectrum. Certain values are inherently at odds with one another and preserving one value will cause another to depreciate.\textsuperscript{27} For instance, changes in the material aspects of cultural heritage — like discoloration on the paper of a print — may affect use, financial, or aesthetic value, but may not change spiritual value, age value, or rarity. Furthermore, this potential for devaluation depends on how change is perceived in the first place. If it is viewed as detrimental, or

\textsuperscript{26} Appelbaum, “Values Analysis,” 230.

damaging, then change lowers the value of an object. If stakeholders see the change as positive, as with an interventive conservation treatment, then the value of the object may increase. In some cases, change may even be viewed as entirely neutral, merely part of the lifespan of an object. I find this lack of set categorization to be particularly effective for evaluating heritage objects. Subjectivism and relativism coexist at the heart of cultural heritage evaluation, and unintentional bias in favoring one distinct value over another seems inevitable. How can the idea of the evaluation paradigm be executed objectively?

The governments of both the United Kingdom and Australia have begun tackling this question regarding their national heritage collection. The United Kingdom’s Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS), alongside the Arts Council England and Historical England developed a framework for assessing the tangible monetary value of cultural heritage objects with an emphasis on policymaking. Conversely, the Collections Council of Australia, in accordance with the Australian government’s Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage, and the Arts, produced a means of evaluating the intangible value of an object: significance. These two distinct approaches to viewing cultural heritage — one fiscally-focused, and one peoples-focused — will inform my proposed new paradigm for the evaluation of cultural heritage objects.

The document from the DCMS, “Valuing cultural heritage and capital: a framework towards informing decision making” provides a “formal approach to
valu[ing] culture and heritage assets.” The DCMS’s evaluation process is intended to be a supplementary document to Her Majesty’s Treasury’s “Green Book,” to guide decisions on how taxpayer money should be spent on cultural heritage projects in the United Kingdom. Authors Harman Sagger, Jack Philips, and Mohammed Haque developed the “Cultural and Heritage Capital Approach” to respond to what they call a lack of an “agreed method for valuing the flow of services that culture and heritage assets provide,” ultimately asserting this gap implies that such services are “implicitly valued at zero.” In essence, because there is no standardized way to articulate the worth of cultural heritage, such assets then seem to have no worth at all. Although this conclusion appears extreme, it provides a much-needed impetus for the formulation of


30 Sagger, Philips, and Haque, “Valuing Culture and Heritage Capital.”
an evaluation. If an institution cannot provide specific evidence as to why an object of cultural heritage matters, then reason follows that the institution should not prioritize the care of that object.

This introductory section of the text reveals how the authors view the value of cultural heritage: not a good, but a service. Sagger, Philips, and Haque, like Throsby, do not see cultural heritage objects entirely regarding their material aspects, but for the utility they offer to a community. I find this interpretation to be particularly intriguing, as I argue any evaluation of cultural heritage that focuses solely on the physical aspects of the object is inadequate. However, an object of cultural heritage nonetheless is a tangible thing, and this factor cannot be ignored.

The DCMS text continues with a brief breakdown of capital within economics in order to inform a subsequent definition of cultural capital. Capital, the authors state, can exist in three forms: physical, human, and natural. These forms have two defining characteristics. One, capital cannot fully be consumed and offers return over time. This return could be monetary, such as revenue generated from ticket sales for a museum gallery, or non-monetary, such as the educational benefit of learning about the history of printmaking from the gallery exhibition. Capital also has the capacity to depreciate or lose value over time. Taylor and Cassar successfully articulated this concept of mutable value in cultural heritage in their discussion of the impact of

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31 Ibid.
change. With these economic considerations in mind, the DCMS document defines cultural capital as “an asset which embodies, stores, or gives rise to cultural value in addition to whatever economic value it might possess.” Here, cultural value is interpreted as distinct from economic value. I disagree with this interpretation. Even within the economic theories of value, social context was paramount to defining the value of an object. Therefore, I argue that economic value is merely one facet in cultural value.

To determine which assets affect the value of cultural capital, the authors enlist the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)’s definition of cultural heritage. There are two types: tangible, and intangible. Tangible, the authors argue, is easy to define and quantify the value of, although they also question the appropriateness of applying a definite value to any type of cultural heritage. By doing so, the authors acknowledge the influence of bias and their own subjectivity. Ultimately, however, they concede that the need to apply such a definite value is necessary to “inform resourcing and management decisions.” The tangible qualities, like material and aesthetics, determine how the intangible qualities, like educational capacity or spiritual significance, are translated to the object’s audience.

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32 Ibid.

33 Tangible significance acknowledges physical aspects of an object, while intangible significance deals with associations regarding said object.

34 Ibid.
Per the DCMS paradigm, these assets and the benefits accrued from them are identified, which allows for the value of the asset to then be readily quantified.

To compare their assessment to others, the DCMS investigated academic and “grey literature”\textsuperscript{35} to determine the prevalence of market versus non-market evaluation in current scholarship. They determined that non-market evaluation was more common in academics, while market, or strictly economic, evaluation was more prominent in the grey literature. The authors hypothesize that this is largely due to the need for concrete, definitive policies when practically applying evaluative paradigms, while academic literature permits space for more conceptual considerations of the value of cultural heritage.\textsuperscript{36} A more ideal paradigm would need to balance both the practical and theoretical concerns.

Sagger, Philips, and Haque ultimately argue that market prices should then not be the only means of evaluating art. This is further true as cultural heritage can be readily consumed freely, and many attribute cultural value to objects without direct

\textsuperscript{35} The DCMS uses the term “grey literature” to refer to texts that are not published within an academic context, including blog posts or reports.

consumption of the services offered by these objects themselves. Furthermore, in their findings, the authors assert that market values in the available literature are frequently based on use value. Sagger, Philips, and Haque challenge this notion by identifying three critical non-use values: existence value, or the cultural value of an object merely existing; altruistic value, or how a person might benefit from it in the present; and bequest value, or how future generations could potentially benefit from engaging with such an object.\textsuperscript{37} Arguably, any interaction between the public and an object of cultural heritage could be conceived as “use.” These three values do not necessitate financial involvement in their use, and so hypothetically exist outside of that market realm. Yet, this document is intended to advise the allocation of government tax dollars regarding cultural heritage, and therefore exists entirely within the financial realm. Nonetheless, the authors still conclude that monetary considerations alone cannot dictate the significance of a cultural heritage object.

The Australian publication \textit{Significance 2.0: A Guide to Assessing the Significance of Collections} encourages stewards of cultural heritage to develop qualitative arguments as to why cultural heritage is valuable. This document is an updated version of \textit{Significance}, which was published in 2001.\textsuperscript{38} It is intended to be a

\textsuperscript{37} Sagger, Philips, and Haque, “Valuing Culture and Heritage Capital.”

guide for decision-making processes for heritage preservation, interpretation, access, and funding allocation. *Significance 2.0* insists that qualitative arguments are the best practice for cultural heritage evaluation, as objects in collections possess the unique ability to reflect the lives of people throughout time and space and contribute to a sense of individual and group identity. Furthermore, ideas of significance change substantially over time, and vary based on the people at hand. A qualitative argument acknowledges the mutability of value and allows for a more nuanced and accurate evaluation than a singular quantifier.

*Significance 2.0* defines the titular concept as the combined “values and meaning” of an object.\(^{39}\) To determine that significance, the Collections Council of Australia advises a twofold assessment first through “primary criteria,” and then through “comparative criteria.”\(^{40}\) These primary criteria are intended to identify specific values, while the comparative criteria are intended to assess the degree of significance of those values in comparison to other, similar, objects. The four primary criteria *Significance 2.0* offers are historic value, artistic or aesthetic value, scientific value or research potential, and social or spiritual value. The four comparative criteria are provenance, rarity or representativeness, condition or completeness, and

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\(^{39}\) Russel and Winkworth, “Significance 2.0,” 1.

\(^{40}\) Russel and Winkworth, “Significance 2.0,” 10.
interpretive capacity.²⁴¹ This multi-part assessment thus acknowledges the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage, as well as the ideas of singularity and multiplicity. The *Significance 2.0* paradigm invites the user to consider how cultural heritage exists in relation to itself, as well as within a broader context.

The document further encourages this idea of universality in cultural heritage through the concept of a “Distributed National Collection” (DNC).²⁴² This is the sum total of objects of cultural significance that are held throughout multiple collections and individuals, and largely divided into four collecting domains: archives, galleries, libraries, and museums. Thus, *Significance 2.0* posits that cultural property can be both individually and collectively significant at once, and once more recognizes the idea of individual significance within the broader context of collective significance.

Finally, *Significance 2.0* notes that their assessment is a framework rather than a strict checklist.²⁴³ Each criterion is a suggestion for research, exploration, and collaboration to ultimately produce that qualitative argument as to why an object or collection matters. Significance, as established by the authors, is not a definite ranking but a means of identifying a portion of an object’s importance, and thus why institutions should allocate resources towards its care. This holistic approach, while admittedly more time-consuming than the DCMS’s quantitative measurements, allows

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²⁴¹ Ibid.


for a multiplicity of opinions to be represented or validated when dealing with any
given object, thus reducing singular bias. Additionally, by accumulating and collating
the volume of research that the *Significance 2.0* approach requires, it ultimately
produces a wealth of educational resources which foster a more meaningful
understanding of the object at hand. Finally, but not attributing a set value to the
object, the *Significance 2.0* approach provides allowance for changing views of value
in the future.

This survey of current approaches to the evaluation of cultural heritage yields
several crucial insights into which factors of material culture should be investigated to
produce a holistic appraisal of an object’s significance. First, cultural heritage objects
have both tangible and intangible significance. In economic terms, an object of
cultural heritage may be important both as a good or for the service it provides to
those who engage with it. Both tangible and intangible significance can be either
quantitatively or qualitatively assessed through the idea of value.

Next is the question of to whom cultural heritage may be of value. It could be
an individual; a small, mostly homogenous culture such as a family or a tribal
grouping; or a larger, predominantly heterogeneous culture, such as a diverse nation-
state. Furthermore, the significance of a cultural heritage object may span
internationally, extending beyond distinct cultural or political frameworks and into an
idea of a universal, collective heritage. As mentioned in the earlier analysis of
Appelbaum, the more individuals to whom an object is significant, the more likely that
object is to be assigned a higher value.
Finally, both the economists and cultural scholars discussed in this section have identified their own metrics for assessing the overall value of cultural heritage. Aristotle, Aquinas, Smith, and Marx acknowledge the importance of labor value and use value in determining an object’s exchange value. Menger’s concept of subjectivity complicates these seemingly objective metrics by acknowledging the impact of individualized desire on value. Moreover, Throsby, Appelbaum, the DCMS, and the Collections Council of Australia provide itemized lists of potential areas of value. Although they differ somewhat, these four all agree upon the importance of aesthetics and age in influencing the recognized significance of cultural heritage. At least three of the texts that focus strictly on heritage economics also posit the importance of educational potential, scientific potential, relative rarity, and social or spiritual value. Together, these gauges uphold the concepts of tangible and intangible significance, while simultaneously recognizing the role of individual and collective perspectives.
Chapter 3

A NEW PARADIGM FOR THE EVALUATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

From this preliminary research, I argue that a new paradigm for the evaluation of cultural heritage objects\(^4\) should seek to address and define significance in the following aspects: creation, purpose, existence, and memory. Thorough analysis of these four key points should be used to yield a qualitative argument towards the importance of a given object.

Value in Creation

1. What was the technical labor, skill, and knowledge required to produce this object?
2. What creative or intellectual processes did the maker go through to produce this object?

The more complicated the creative process, the more valuable the object should be. Value in creation recognizes the value of labor and labor value. Furthermore, I intentionally expand the definition of “labor” here to include mental as well as physical labor, specifically to account for cultural heritage objects that are more conceptual in nature.

\(^4\) For the purposes of my paradigm, I view cultural heritage as objects that provide a service. These “services” can range from a more passive aesthetic enjoyment to a very active use in spiritual or religious ceremonies.
Value in Purpose

1. Why was the object made? What use(s) did it serve?

2. For whom was it made?

3. How was it intended to be seen or experienced? What was the extent of the impact of this experience?

Value in purpose highlights both the practical utilitarian value of objects, as well as spiritual use of cultural heritage. I further argue for two key considerations to be made when assessing value in purpose: breadth and depth. Investigating breadth will answer the question of the multiplicity of uses an object might have, as well as the number of individuals and cultures who were impacted by this object. In turn, depth reveals how thorough that impact is. The greater both the breadth and depth of the object’s purpose, the greater the value assigned to the object itself. Furthermore, breadth and depth exist symbiotically. A lesser breadth of significance does not inherently mean that the object lacks significance, particularly if it has a great depth of significance to that finite group of people.

Value in Existence

1. What do we gain from the physical object?

2. What aesthetic insights are present in the physical object?

3. What scientific or analytical data could be gleaned from studying the materials of the object?
4. What condition is the object in? How does this affect its purpose, either original or current? If there were any detrimental changes in condition, to what were they due?

Examination of the cultural heritage object as a tangible thing yields insight into its value in existence. Ultimately, this category questions why it is important to have an extant physical object at all. Value in existence combines ideas of material value, age, aesthetic value, scientific and research value, and relative rarity. The more information available to be collected and interpreted from the palpable thing, the higher its value in existence.

**Value in Memory**

1. What associations exist among the cultural heritage object and people, places, and events?

2. What associations and relationships exist between this object and other cultural heritage objects?

3. How has this object changed over time, in relation to its original use, purpose, or intention?

4. How can the object be used for education or cross-cultural understanding today, and should it be used for these purposes?

Objects connected to significant individuals, locations, or occurrences will likely have a higher value in memory. An object may increase in significance through
contextualization within a collection or exhibition. Furthermore, all these associations may serve to increase the overall value of an object that is determined to have a low existence, creation, or purpose value. Value in memory focuses on the legacy of cultural heritage objects. I believe that we must consider objects both as discrete things and as part of a larger narrative within human history, noting how changing contexts influence their significance, and ultimately, their value.

My proposed paradigm encapsulates the ideas of value proposed by the economists and cultural heritage experts discussed earlier but uses expansive categories and guiding questions rather than a strict set of criteria. “Cultural heritage” as both a concept and term are broad, and an evaluation of such should provide space for debate and multiple interpretations of areas of significance. Furthermore, the development of a qualitative argument regarding the value of a cultural heritage object is more useful than a quantitative means of measuring value. As previously mentioned, value is subjective and ever-changing. A verbal argument collates research and data regarding an object while also offering a transparent and comprehensive justification for its value assessment. Thus, future stewards of cultural heritage will understand why an object was or was not deemed significant in a given time and place and can potentially reassess the evaluation within their new context.
Chapter 4

APPLYING THE PARADIGM

The Printmaker Diana Mantua

To test the paradigm I described in the previous chapter, I wished to identify an artist and artwork that would both challenge the constraints of a rigid evaluative process, yet simultaneously afford enough information to sufficiently analyze each aspect of the paradigm. Therefore, I selected the Italian reproductive printmaker Diana Mantua. In this chapter, I will offer a brief personal and professional biography of the artist, as well as elaborate on the aspects of her life and career that make her an apt test subject for my paradigm. Finally, for the purposes of this paper, Diana Mantua will be referred to only as “Diana,” given the nature of Renaissance naming conventions and the fact that she produced prints both before and during her marriage.45

In the late sixteenth century, there was a robust European market for artwork either made by or depicting works of famed masters.46 Therefore, the reproductive print came into fashion as a relatively inexpensive and easily duplicated means of


offering the broader public access to these notable paintings, sculptures, drawings, or
other art forms. Prints were largely produced via artists’ workshops, where under the
guidance of a master, a team of apprentices worked to design, engrave, and pull
prints.47 Workshops were often family businesses as well, where knowledge of the
printmaking trade could be passed from parent to child: typically, father to son, but
occasionally father to daughter. Diana, one of the earliest female printmakers, from
whom there still are extant signed works, is an example of one such artist who learned
the profession from and in tandem with her male family members. She ultimately
produced as many as 62 known prints throughout her career,48 offering an ample
oeuvre from which to select an artwork for evaluation.

Because of her gender, Diana could not formally train in male-dominated
academic settings nor hold a formal apprenticeship.49 Diana’s route into the field of
professional artistry was heavily restricted by social conventions of her time.
Regardless of her own skill, this limited access to training may initially appear to limit

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019, 147. doi:10.2307/j.ctvnwbzp0.

48 Judith K. Brodsky, “Some Notes on Women Printmakers.” Art Journal 35, no. 4

49 Evelyn Lincoln. “Making a Good Impression: Diana Mantuana’s Printmaking
the perception of the quality of her work. Recent studies demonstrate that through the ages, artwork by women is generally valued at lower monetary rates than artwork produced by men. In a 2021 article, authors Abigail LeBlanc and Stephen Sheppard note that in the secondary art market\footnote{The primary art market refers to works sold directly from a creator to a patron. The secondary art market encapsulates any subsequent exchanges of the artwork for money or other goods.} — the market in which prints by Diana are sold today — there exists a 13 to 19\% “gender discount.”\footnote{Abigail LeBlanc and Stephen Sheppard, “Women Artists: Gender, Ethnicity, Origin and Contemporary Prices,” \textit{Journal of Cultural Economics}, 2021, 12. \url{https://doi.org/10.1007/s10824-021-09431-6}.} In other words, women’s artworks are valued and ultimately sold at lower prices than those of men. The authors attribute this to several factors, among them the gap in traditional artistic training. Other possible determinants include the prohibitive costs of certain art forms due to required materials, and differences in risk-aversion in women versus men. Women are, for instance, less likely to enter risky, and thus potentially more rewarding, markets.\footnote{LeBlanc and Sheppard, “Women Artists,” 12.} Although this data is based on the practices of contemporary female artists, the ideas of access to field, materials, and profitable markets can nonetheless be applied to the life, legacy, and evaluation of Diana and her prints.

Diana was born in 1547 in Mantua, Italy, and died in Rome in 1612. She was one of at least three daughters of artist Giovanni Battista Mantua.\footnote{Lincoln, “Making a Good Impression,” 1105-6.} Along with her
brother Adamo Scultori and family friend Giulio Ghisi, Diana learned copperplate engraving in her father’s workshop, forming a quartet that some scholars refer to as the *Incisori mantovani*. Giovanni Battista, the master of the foursome, was a well-regarded engraver and sculptor for the Gonzaga court. He himself trained with printmaker Giulio Romano, of whose work Diana would also produce copies. However, despite his work for the Gonzagas, Giovanni Battista was not considered a court artist, but rather an “artist-at-court.” Therefore, he had “no [official] salary and no title.” However, this lack of an official appointment afforded him greater freedom in the public market. Were he an official court artist, Giovanni Battista would not have been permitted to undertake commissions for other patrons outside the royal family. In only producing work for the Gonzagas “as needed,” the need to supplement this income through other avenues allowed him to develop a wider network of consumers from whom Diana would later benefit.

By fortune of birth then, Diana was not only


56 Dawn Elizabeth Hewitt, “Diana Mantua: Becoming the First Female Engraver,” (Masters’ thesis, Texas Christian University, 2015), p. 12,
able to learn copperplate engraving from one of the finest printmakers of Mantua but was also aided by her father’s courtly connections and public patrons to form a base commercial network for the distribution of her prints. Thus, the devaluing factors of training and market access should be of lesser concern in the evaluation of her artwork.

Maintaining these professional relationships was a different matter altogether than establishing them. As she aged from a teenager into a woman, the expectations — and restrictions — of producing and maintaining a family could have affected her status as a professional printmaker. Fortunately, Diana’s first husband instead afforded her increased artistic freedom and protection. Diana married architect Francesco da Volterra sometime between 1567 and 1575, with some scholars citing the year of their marriage as late as 1576. As her husband was also an artist, Diana was permitted to continue to create and sell her art without appearing too divergent from the social expectations of women at the time. Furthermore, through Francesco, she was able to gain membership into fraternal organizations for their “artisanal work.”

This would broaden Diana’s creative network, forming new professional affiliations

https://www.proquest.com/openview/39c955eca589abfe5b2c12f713cceb2db1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750.

57 Pagani, Review of Adoma Scultori and Diana Mantovana, 75.


which facilitated the exchange of aesthetic ideas and techniques and connected her to new patrons. Finally, in marrying Francesco, Diana took advantage of new family ties. Several of her husband’s kin were engravers, including a woman — Suor Elisabetta, a nun.\textsuperscript{60} Unlike other female reproductive printmakers of the Renaissance, such as the daughter of the Dutch printmaker Crispijn de Passé, Magdalena, Diana’s career did not end with marriage. Her decision to wed Francesco meant that Diana would continue to retain access to the materials and markets necessary to remain a professional printmaker.

Thus far, I have only discussed Diana’s career in relation to the men around her. However, Diana also frequently used her own identity as a woman to her professional advantage. She represented herself as a “well-bred and charming young lady,” permitting her to stay in the good graces of her patrons and the court by portraying herself as a gracious, well-mannered woman producing artwork with morally upright themes and content.\textsuperscript{61} Her reproductive works focused predominantly on biblical, mythological, and architectural subjects. Additionally, the actual act of creating reproductive artwork was seen as more fitting for a woman, as it was thought not to require the same level of manual skill or artistic ingenuity as original work — a task that would be better suited for a man. Diana created non-controversial works

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61} Lincoln, “Making a Good Impression,” 1111.
through a non-controversial medium, which permitted her to preserve her reputation to then maintain an audience for her art. The impact of such subject matter and medium on the economic and cultural value of her work will be explored in the following chapter.

It should be noted that this savvy approach to self-fashioning as a woman artist is what permits us to know so much about her works today. Diana was careful to sign each of her prints with her own name — a woman’s name. Her name has been the subject of some scholarly debate and confusion over the centuries. Some texts erroneously identify her as “Diana Ghisi,” largely due to eighteenth century confusion regarding her family’s association with Guilio Ghisi. Other scholars refer to her as “Diana Scultori,” identifying her via the adopted surname of her father and brother, who professionally went by Giovanni Battista Scultori and Alamo Scultori, respectively. However, there is no evidence that Diana ever chose to use the name herself.” Instead, the name Diana most frequently chose to sign her work with was Diana Mantua, referring to her status as a citizen of Mantua and strengthening her connections both with the history of copperplate engraving in Mantua and the Mantuan court. Diana’s signature evolved somewhat when she married Francesco and

62 Lincoln, “Making a Good Impression,” 1103

switched her practice to Rome, signing her work as “Diana da Volterra.” As with the name Mantua, this label served a twofold purpose: emphasizing a sense of pride in her new citizenship, and firmly establishing her professional relationships. Despite the effects it might have had on the value of her work at the time of its creation, through her signature, Diana firmly identified herself as a woman artist and a woman citizen of multiple Italian provinces. In terms of evaluating her work now, signatures and inscriptions also act as a means of tracing the provenance of her prints. In a practical sense, we know who made the prints, who published the prints, and when. This in turn provides insight into the relative scarcity of each print, as well its age and place of origin, all of which inform its value.

Diana utilized relationships and her identity as a woman to create and market her prints. By far the most compelling example of this practice was her pursuit of a papal privilege. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century in Rome, by order of the Pope, “no one may print, nor engrave, nor keep [for sale] an image of a Crucified Christ with five figures below without [his] permission.” Given that much of Diana’s work depicts scenes from biblical history, such a restriction would have affected the art she could create, and in turn, her audience and professional standings.

64 Lincoln, “Making a Good Impression,” 1115.

However, one could get around this restriction through being granted a privilege by a papal brief. These privileges were not the equivalent of a license, or permission to publish, nor were they necessarily a copyright. 66 Nonetheless, a papal privilege would grant Diana legal rights to her own artwork, preventing others from using her work without permission under threat of excommunication from the church and a fine of fifty gold ducats.67 Pursuing a privilege was, at a base level, a means of Diana protecting her investments in the materials, time, and effort of engraving her copper plates and manufacturing prints. Therefore, the privilege is an indication of the extent to which Diana valued her own artwork.

Diana received her official papal privilege on June 5, 1575. For any individual artist — much less a female one — to receive such a privilege was uncommon. Most privileges regarding printed art were either granted to booksellers, or to “those who received offices and appointments, like Michelangelo.”68 Furthermore, the papal office Diana petitioned, the Segretaria Breviorum, was not typically concerned with printing privileges; rather, it was intended to support the well-being of women and usually addressed issues regarding marriage and dowries.69 Diana’s support for and

68 Lincoln, “Making a Good Impression,” 1116.
arrangement of her privilege came from Claudio Gonazaga, a member of the Mantuan court. Diana’s acquisition of a papal privilege is a result of both the network of contacts she developed through her husband and father, and her using her gender to her advantage. Therefore, I can conclude that there was a level of agreement among certain powerful individuals as to the merit and high value of Diana’s work. Indeed, ten years prior to gaining her privilege Giorgio Vasari lauded her printmaking skills in his 1568 edition of Lives. Diana’s artmaking then was worthwhile enough for men of social and political power to employ that power to further her career.

The privilege names five of her prints: Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery, The Feast of the Gods, The Procession of the Horsemen, The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and St. Jerome. All the prints depict either biblical or mythological scenes, in keeping with the public persona Diana crafted for herself. Furthermore, the approval of a privilege for these specific works also demonstrates the societal value placed upon such content by influential individuals.

Diana’s dual identities as a woman and as a reproductive printmaker challenge my value paradigm: works by women are historically undervalued due to issues of

70 Ibid.
accessing the training and markets necessary to be a professional artist. Furthermore, in modern times, copies are largely considered less significant than original works. Yet, as exemplified by Diana’s personal life, signature, and the acquisition of a papal privilege, she successfully maneuvered around the perceived issues of her gender and chosen medium and had a fruitful and influential career. Additionally, in her own time, the public support she received from friends, family, the Mantuan court, and papal offices for her artmaking further demonstrates that concerns of originality or artistic genius affecting the value of her prints are unfounded. Signed with her own name, Diana used the relationships afforded to her by her family to produce prints that were legally protected as her own creation.

Evaluating *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* also evokes the most profound use of my paradigm: the ability to validate and celebrate the work of underrepresented groups. In researching the life of Diana Mantua for this biographical section, I found very limited secondary scholarship. Most survey texts framed Diana as the token woman and attributed her skill and professional success to her father, brother, or husband. In fact, many authoritative surveys on Renaissance prints failed to mention women at all. In the almost four hundred pages of David Landau and Peter Parshall’s book “The Renaissance Print: 1470-1550,” there are only two paragraphs that discuss women artists.³³ Furthermore, neither of these instances are in reference to

women in reproductive printmaking or women in Italy. The most in-depth recent studies of Diana’s life and work were written by women, to include Evelyn Lincoln and Hilary Letwin whom I frequently cite throughout this thesis. These female art historians are tasked with the burden of writing women artists back into a narrative that men erased them from. With my evaluation of Diana’s work, I continue this work by emphasizing her contributions to the art of the Italian reproductive print, as well as her legacy as one of the first professional female artists.

**Evaluating Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery**

Diana’s 1575 *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, one of the five prints listed on her papal privilege, depicts a scene from the Gospel of John. It is inscribed with her name, an acknowledgement of the privilege, and a dedication to Leonora of Austria.

**Value in Creation**

Diana was trained in the technique of copperplate engraving. This is a form of intaglio design, where marks are scraped into the surface of the metal. The engraver would inscribe a design onto a sheet of copper, charge it with ink, and with the aid of a
machine, press and pull the print onto a sheet of paper. This is, of course, an oversimplification of the process.

*Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* could not exist without the paper it was printed on. In the eighteenth century, French writers first documented the techniques and process of papermaking. Prior to widespread industrialization, papermaking was an extremely lengthy and laborious process. The first step was the refinement of fibers. Rags of hemp fiber and raw flax were most common, but these plant fibers were darkly colored and thus required lightening before being turned into paper. To lighten them, workers soaked the rags in water in preparation for bucking. “Bucking” involved boiling water and ash to produce a liquor in which the rags would be steeped for several hours. They were then placed in the sun and kept constantly damp, before going through the bucking process again. This cycle would be repeated over a dozen times to ready the rags for the next step, souring, which involved the application of acid. Again, rags underwent a cycle of soaking and rinsing, although


76 The acid applied was typically either derived from soured dairy milk, buttermilk, or fermented rye or bran meal in water. In Barrett, “European Papermaking Techniques 1300–1800.”
they were allowed to dry fully after souring. To produce a rag of uniform lightness often required six to eight months of this painstaking labor. Because it took so much time to achieve the desired product, this process was reserved to produce fine papers only, such as the kind used in artisan trades.

Millworkers, typically women, sorted the sufficiently bleached rags in preparation for retting and stamping. Retting involved fermenting the rags by heating them in an aqueous solution, so that when they underwent agitation, they would readily come apart into their constituent fibers. This agitation process was known as stamping. Wooden hammers fitted with metal nails reduced the rags into pulp. Millworkers then washed the pulp to ready it for sheet-forming.

Workers dipped molds consisting of wire mesh stretched over a wooden frame into the pulp mixture. Over this mold was then a second wooden frame called a deckle. After shaking the mixture across the mold so that it was even, the sheet was then covered with a piece of damp felt. Millworkers used large wooden presses to squeeze extraneous liquid from stacks of interwoven paper and felt. The paper was then hung to dry, after which the sheets were immersed in a sizing agent,


78 Ibid.

79 I had the firsthand opportunity to make laid paper in the fall of 2020, in Brian Baade’s course on Materials and Techniques of Drawing in the West.

dried once more, and smoothed. Similar techniques of making paper across Europe were used up until the late 1700s. Thus, it is appropriate to assume that similar techniques were also used in the paper mills of Italy, and therefore available as a material to Diana.

Prior to reaching Diana, the substrate onto which she printed her impressions of *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* was already embedded with value thanks to the skill and expertise of papermakers. This exhaustive process and the underappreciated laborers who executed it, all of which are reflected in the extant print, is one reason that Diana’s print is significant.

Like the paper, the ink is also evidence of labor and scientific innovation. Until the eighteenth century, printmakers, or their workshops, made their own ink. Printing ink was oil-based, as it needed to be viscous to adhere to the metal plates.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 For additional justification of this claim, please see the section in “Value in Existence” wherein I identify a watermark on Diana’s print of Hercules and link it to a specific Italian site for papermaking.

84 In that same class with Professor Baade, we also made bister ink and iron gall ink. It was incredibly difficult to grind the oak galls down using our own strength and a mortar and pestle. Most of the powder the class produced still retained larger chunks of fiber that needed to be sifted out prior to using the ground gall to make ink.

Printmakers ground vegetable and mineral ingredients into fine powders, added them to a liquid base, and then heated them to both to thicken the ink to a usable consistency and to trigger chemical reactions to produce inks of certain colors.\(^86\) Exact recipes and processes for ink production varied from printer to printer, due to issues of climate and paper, and were often kept secret as a part of the trade.\(^87\) Nonetheless, even this very general description of the ink-making process demonstrates another level of practical and scientific skill that Diana would have learned and mastered in crafting her prints.

The actual engraving of the copper plate and subsequent pressing of the print were the final steps on the winding road towards creating *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*. For reproductive prints, a design would first have to be translated from the source material into a secondary drawing, and then copied over to the copper plate. Diana herself was no draftswoman; she was not taught the skill of drawing in the workshop of her father. Instead, she copied the drawings of others, crediting their names directly onto her print.\(^88\) For this piece, Diana worked from a now-lost drawing...

\(^86\) Johns, “Ink,” 108.


by Giulio Romano, who developed the composition based on a tapestry by Raphael for the Sistine Chapel. As with the physical labor of manufacture, the intellectual labor of designing the print was not solely undertaken by Diana. The resulting composition reflects an interpretation of Biblical text transposed through three separate minds.

With this drawing, Diana would have resized it to fit the plate and then traced it onto the copper using either chalk or needle-pricks. Diana used a tool called a burin to engrave the lines into the copper plate. It took a firm, yet steady hand to produce even lines. Occasionally, engravers would place their copper plate onto a soft object, such as a sandbag, and move the plate itself rather than the burin to encourage additional consistency in their linework. These incised marks held the ink that Diana would then have applied. The thick ink was spread onto the plate and then heated to encourage the ink to melt into the grooves. As it cooled, the ink would regain its viscosity, and excess ink would be wiped away. Finally, Diana would have laid the plate onto a sheet of dampened paper and run it through a rolling or “star wheel” press


91 Ibid.
to generate the final print. The combination of pressure and capillary action from the moistened paper would pull the ink from the grooves. The acts of engraving and pressing most intimately demonstrate the physical and mental labor Diana went through to produce *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*. With her bare hands, she directly manipulated the tools and materials of printmaking to produce her own interpretation of Giulio Romano’s composition.

The complexity of the creative process in developing both the materials for the print and the creation of the design for *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* in themselves demonstrate a profound amount of significance. This print is not solely the work of one woman, but of dozens of craftsmen, artisans, and unskilled laborers. Thus, resulting impressions of this print have a very high value in creation.

Value in Purpose

Reproductive art in the modern and post-modern eras is sometimes seen as reductive or lacking. Philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin declared in his essay 1935 “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” that reproductions lack the presence of time, space, and history that an original contains, ultimately arguing that “the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric

92 Ibid.
of tradition.” In other words, translating an image from an original drawing, sculpture, or other object inherently removes a degree of value from the resulting image. However, this philosophy was not the case prior to 1800. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, reproductive prints were viewed as expert works of art in their own right. Therefore, negative views on the artistic merit of the reproductive print are wholly modern and cannot be retroactively applied to the time in which Diana lived. When determining a work’s value in purpose, it must be analyzed regarding the context of its creation.

As mentioned in previously, the reproductive print could serve an educational purpose, with the content of the printed image and its small, portable size offering its viewer access to art forms to which they might not otherwise experience firsthand themselves. However, given that Diana addressed this print to Leonora of Austria, who was both of the house of Medici and the wife of Vincenzo I Gonzaga, the Duke of Mantua, this purpose seems unlikely due to Leonora’s nobility, wealth, and privilege. Instead, to determine Diana’s purpose and the subsequent value of such


95 Ibid.

for Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery, it is necessary to investigate the story of the biblical scene itself as well as the dedication and corresponding letter that Diana offered to Leonora.

Diana’s print depicts a scene from the Gospel of John. The scribes and Pharisees bring before Jesus Christ a woman who was found in the act of adultery. Per the laws of Moses, the woman ought to be stoned for her crime. Jesus stoops to the ground, tracing words with his finger, while the men continue to call for her condemnation. Christ then stands, announces that “he who is without sin [should] be the first to throw a stone at her.” The men slowly depart, until Jesus is left alone with the woman. He asks first if anyone has condemned her, and upon her negative response, tells her that he does not condemn her either, informing her to go and sin no more. Jesus thus shows an act of extreme mercy in forgiving the woman, while also acknowledging the sinful nature of her act.

The biblical subject of Diana’s print fits within the oeuvre of her work, contributing to a sense of cohesive identity as an artist which would have been critical for maintaining aesthetic status among her professional networks. More important than this, however, is the print's ability to communicate a moralizing tale that specifically


98 John 8:7
addresses the actions of women. The term “exegesis” refers to the search of divine truth within Christian scriptures. Thus, a sixteenth century reproductive print of a Gospel story functions as a form of what Walter Mellion calls “visual exegesis.” Titian’s depiction of the same scene, for instance, is thought to have served as an “exemplum virtutis,” or a model of virtue. Diana’s own gender adds a new facet to this idea. As a professional artist, she pushed the limits of what would have been the social place of a decent woman in her day. This print, which depicts Christ himself forgiving a woman for a moral indiscretion, appears as almost an acknowledgement of her own morality. Diana is acutely aware of the lines she cannot cross, and almost appears to be asking for forgiveness for challenging these restrictions at all.

In a block of text on the lower right side of the print, Diana dedicated her print to Leonora of Austria, the Duchess of Mantua. This was in part a gracious thank you to the Gonzaga family, who sponsored her papal privilege. Thus, Diana in part used her artistry to repay a social debt to the Mantuan court. Other prints listed in the


privilege were likewise addressed to those involved in the approval of her privilege. For instance, she dedicated *The Feast of the Gods* (1575) to Cardinal Fernando de’Medici. Such acts of recognition would have both strengthened her court ties and contributed to her public image as a “gracious woman.”

The Mantuan court itself owned a set of Raphael’s tapestries after which Giulio Romano designed *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*. As an aesthetic object, Diana’s print would have “complemented the collection” of the Duchess. Therefore, Diana’s dedication served as a means of reaffirming the wealth, nobility, and good taste of Leonora. Furthermore, the print thus also demonstrated Diana’s knowledge of the court itself. This intimate knowledge would have been passed down to Diana by her father, creating a sense of ethos. The dedication upon *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* was a way for Diana to imply that she was a rightful heir to her father’s legacy as an artist for the Mantuan court.

Translated to English, the accompanying letter that Diana sent to Leonora reads:


105 Lincoln, “Invention, Origin and Dedication,” 352.
“To her Serene Highness Lady Eleonora of Austria, Duchess of Mantua/ Diana Manuan/ I feel myself so tied to the memory of Your Ladyship’s most fortunate dominion, under which I possess, that to satisfy in par the gratitude in my soul I have been so bold as to bring this work of mine to light under her great name, in order that, returning to where it had its beginning, it serves her prince again, as a token of my service to Your Highness and your most serene house. From Rome, September 1, 1575.”

This letter exemplifies the triple purpose I argue Diana imbued in her print. First, the letter expresses Diana’s intimate connection to the Mantuan court in her mention by way of “tie[s] to the memory” of Mantua. Second, Diana is careful to verbally flatter Leonora in this rather florid thank you letter, appealing to Leonora’s nobility and social standing. Finally, Diana once more externalizes a sense of goodness in character, a necessary social view to allow her to continue to produce art. The translation uses the term “token” to refer to the print, purposefully downplaying the art’s significance in comparison to the mere existence of the Duchess. Diana presents herself as profoundly humble despite her skill and the opportunities afforded to her. She acknowledges that connecting herself to Leonora by means of the inscription is “bold,” once more implicitly asking for forgiveness for the act of creating a print as she did with the actual image itself. Diana is astutely self-aware of her place and the measures she must take to maintain it.

Diana’s print had a multiplicity of uses and was intended to deeply impact the members of the Mantuan court, particularly the Duchess. However, the variety of

purposes visible within *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* also had a profound impact on Diana herself, firmly establishing her social status as a respectable woman artist and allowing her to continue practicing printmaking without suspicion of nefarious social subversion. It is for these reasons that I argue that *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* has a very high value in purpose.

**Value in Existence**

Conservation treatment of a version of Diana’s *The Wedding of Cupid and Psyche* confirms that her work would have been printed onto handmade laid paper.\(^{107}\) In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Italian cities of Padua, Fabriano, and Trevisa largely made flaxen paper.\(^ {108}\) The virtual collections which I used to conduct my research make no note of a watermark on the extant copies of *Christ and

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107 *Coupling Gellan Gels and Electrochemical Biosensors: Real-Time Monitoring of Cleaning and Enzymatic Treatments of Diana Scultori's The Wedding of Cupid and Psyche, Youtube* (International Academic Projects, 2018), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXn1Crv_kn8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXn1Crv_kn8).

the Woman Taken in Adultery. However, a 1581 engraving of Hercules by Diana was printed onto laid paper bearing a watermark of “Fleur-de-Lys with crossed Keys in Shield with six-pointed Star.”109 Such a description matches two watermarks used in Fabriano. Thus, it is plausible to assume that Diana’s other engravings were printed onto paper made predominantly from flax fibers.

Inks for metal printing would have been oil-based to adhere properly to the plate to avoid contributing to any flaws in the final print.110 This oil base would have been heated with an oxygen-rich body to produce a dark ink. A combination of linseed oil and lampblack was perhaps the most popular combination among European printmakers.111 A pair of letters from Diana’s father, Giovanni Battista, to a Cardinal Granvelle request an ink recipe, and then subsequently thank him for said recipe.112


Unfortunately, there is no extant letter in response from the Cardinal to identify precisely what this recipe was. However, additional details provided by Giovanni Battista show that the ink was used in Germany, and that Battista himself believed the recipe to be linked to Albrecht Dürer.¹¹³ For ink production in Germany, lampblack was generally used either as the primary colorant or as a toner to enrich a less intense black colorant, such as charred vegetable matter or bone.¹¹⁴ Because Diana received her training in printmaking from her father, she likely would have inherited the recipes for materials from his workshop as well.

The physical materials of Diana’s Christ and the Young Woman Taken in Adultery yield rich potential for scientific and cultural study. Further investigation into the composition of the paper, sizing agent, and ink would provide knowledge on industry in the sixteenth century, including economic exchange between artists and


¹¹⁴ Adrianus Cornelius Jacobus Stijnman, A History of Engraving and Etching Techniques: Developments of Manual Intaglio Printmaking Processes, 1400–2000, (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2012), 242. https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?sa%3Dt%26rct%3Dj%26q%3D%26esrc%3Ds%26source%3Dweb%26cd%3D%26cad%3Drjta%26uact%3D8%26ved%3D2ahUKEwjNkJPg90Zn3AhXZjYkEHeJcAm0QFnoECBQAOQ%26url%3Dhttps%253A%252F%252Fpure.uva.nl%252Fws%252Ffiles%252F252F1835353%252F112401_1._Stijnman_proefschrift_20121109_tekst.doc%26usg%3DAOvVaw2aljAXrHjUGlOpkDg2ioec&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1650495491478791&usg=AOvVaw3PKfN	Ghz5wUYyw6H8FYVnL.
makers of artists’ supplies. This would be particularly useful for increasing scholarship on large- and small-scale production of printers’ ink, about which there is currently limited literature. Additionally, because printers often made their own ink, non-destructive chemical analysis of Diana’s ink could provide additional insight into her expertise as a professional artist.

Value in existence also encapsulates the aesthetics of a work of art. Style in Mantuan printmaking was largely shaped by the work of Andrea Mantegna, whose work emphasized strict linear forms, with distinct outlines shaded by hatch marks that almost disregarded “the direction of the outlines.”115 Diana’s style has also been compared to that of Marcantonio Raimondi, whose own technique applied “a system of marks: dense cross-hatchings, widely spaced and parallel hatchings, flecks, and dots.”116 In assessing the aesthetic significance of Diana’s Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery, I will first assess how she renders the forms of her figures and the architecture of the space, and then compare her approach to that of Mantegna and Raimondi.


The robust linework is most evident in the way Diana handles the clothing of the figures. Each fold of the fabric is enunciated by a thick, dark outline. For the

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117 The following formal analysis is based on the copy of *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* held in the collections of the British Museum; Diana Scultori, *The British Museum* (The Trustees of The British Museum, 0AD), https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_V-8-8.
figures in shadow on the right of the print, Diana employs a sharp contrast from the highlights to articulate the edges of her forms, forgoing a sense of naturalism to achieve this effect.

![Figure 2](image.png)

**Figure 2** Detail of the man in the hat, from *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* from the British Museum. Source: Diana Scultori, *The British Museum* (The Trustees of The British Museum, 0AD), [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_V-8-8](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_V-8-8).

For instance, the proper left of the figure in the cap on the right of the print is delineated by an unbroken dark boundary that juxtaposes against the brightness of the column behind him (Figure 2). Save for a few thin lines denoting fluting and some stippling, the column is largely bare paper. The figure seems to be almost glowing. The transition from light to dark on the column is extremely abrupt, and Diana excludes any shadows that might be cast by the other columns or the man himself.
Thus, Diana uses highlights and shadows not to create a naturalistic environment, but
to emphasize the curvilinear forms of the people and the geometry of the architecture.

Diana communicates this notion of light and dark in *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* through a complex language of mark-making. Evenly spaced vertical and diagonal hatch marks cast the front of the building in shadow. A combination of cross-hatching and stippling establishes the round fruits nestled in the leaves of the swags (Figure 3). Diana produces the texture of Christ’s curled hair by varying the thickness of her curved lines. She layers each of these techniques over each other, too, mimicking from afar the texture of carved stone. The precision and variety in her approach to engraving demonstrates a mastery in the technical aspects of intaglio.
There is also a profound feeling of flatness to Diana’s engraving. The picture plane is relatively shallow, with all figures densely packed into a singular line, save for two men lounging on the steps of the building. The upper right corner of the print shows a bare patch of sky, deepening the two-dimensionality of the composition by depriving the viewer of any contextualizing space. In fact, the only sense of contrast between a potential foreground, midground, or background is achieved by directly overlapping the forms of the figures with the building and one another. Once more, this choice places the focus on Diana’s linework and mark-making techniques by
eschewing a naturalistic sense of space. Furthermore, the resulting visual impression is reminiscent of Roman friezes, relating Diana’s work to the broader artistic history of the city where she lived with her husband.

Andrea Mantegna’s *The Entombment of Christ* (Figure 4) and Marcantonio Raimondi’s *The Virgin and the Cradle with Saint Elizabeth and Saint Anne* (Figure 6) each feature a series of figures against an architectural backdrop.\(^\text{118}\) Therefore, given their compositional similarities to *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, these prints will function as appropriate means to compare approaches to line and mark-making.

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Mantegna handles the folds of garments more delicately than Diana. Thinner contour lines and hatch marks paired with a lowered contrast between areas of dense ink and the lightness of the paper create a more naturalistic depiction of cloth. Unlike Diana’s strict, architectural approach to the structure of folds, Mantegna’s clothing seems almost weightless, bending in the wind and crumpling over the anatomy of the figures. Nonetheless, heavy outlines are still plainly evident in Mantegna's print. The
standing figure on the far right, for example, features thick, prominent lines that plainly articulate each individual coil of his hair (Figure 5). Mantegna’s approach to depicting the texture of the fabric over the figure’s right shoulder is also strongly reminiscent of Diana’s work. A dense outline separates the cloth from the sky, and areas of almost pure black ink emphasize the whiteness of the plain paper sky and highlighted folds.


*The Entombment of Christ* also echoes the relative flatness of *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*. Mantegna’s hatches do not follow the contours of his
established outlines, but slope almost uniformly from the lower left corner of the print to the upper right. This reduces the sense of depth and space. Like Diana, Mantegna’s figures are posed in a single line, although his inclusion of the hill in the background somewhat increases the sense of space. Through this visual evidence extant in the pressings, we see that Diana’s line use and approach to rendering dimension in a print was influenced by the legacy Mantegna left on Mantuan printmaking.

Figure 6  Raimondi’s *The Virgin and the Cradle*, print, 24.5 x 17.3 cm. Source: Raimondi, Marcantonio. *The Virgin and the Cradle, La Vierge au*
Concurrently, the language of marks that Marcantonio Raimondi uses in *The Virgin and the Cradle with Saint Elizabeth and Saint Anne* also appears in Diana’s *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*. The architectural feature on the right of Raimondi’s print employs the same even rows of parallel hatchings visible in Diana’s building. Raimondi does adjust the angle of each incised line to correlate to the angle at which the light or shadow would hit each figure and object. Diana’s marks fall somewhere between Mantegna and Raimondi, with some following the contours and some eschewing them. However, Diana uses more distinct marks than either of the two men. Raimondi focuses predominantly on straight hatches, crosshatches, or flecks that read visually more so as shortened versions of these lines than dots (Figure 7).
Conversely, Diana’s texturing and shading marks range from pinprick-sized stipple to thin curves of floral patterns to thick black outline. Diana borrows the ideas of her predecessors and improves upon them with her own virtuosity in copperplate engraving. Through visual analysis of the aesthetic aspects of Diana’s work, we learn how her print distinguishes itself amongst the scope of artistic techniques in history.

A final consideration in the existence value of cultural heritage is the physical condition of the object itself. For this, I will compare two extant copies of Christ and
the Woman Taken in Adultery to demonstrate the effect that condition has on significance.\textsuperscript{119}

\textbf{Figure 8} Diana’s Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery, from the British Museum, with condition annotations by Caroline Berger. Source: Diana Scultori, The British Museum (The Trustees of The British Museum, 0AD), [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_V-8-8](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_V-8-8).

\textsuperscript{119} I must note here that, due to constraints stemming from COVID-19, I am only able to access virtual versions of these prints. These online versions are high-definition scans that allow me to zoom in closely to view details of the pressings. Nonetheless, my following condition concerns are all educated best guesses.
The first copy was acquired by the British Museum in 1810 (Figure 8). This version was printed in 1575, making it one of Diana’s original copies. It measures 41.8 centimeters in height by 58.3 centimeters in width. The paper is cut just beyond the boundary of the copper plate. There is a spot of red-brown discoloration at the top edge of the print, above the center right column, partially obscuring the vegetal ornament of the building. There is also evidence of a possible prior conservation treatment: a faint line bisects the center left column, implying that at one point, the print could have been torn. This assumption is further evidenced by slight misalignments in the column. The curved fluting on the column does not line up properly from one side of the line to the other (Figure 10).
Figure 10  Detail of column from Diana’s *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, from the British Museum, with condition annotations by Caroline Berger. Source: Diana Scultori, *The British Museum* (The Trustees of The British Museum, 0AD),
[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_V-8-8](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_V-8-8).

The entire print appears to have been attached to a new backing support, as evidenced by a thin border of plain paper surrounding the print. This paper is more yellow than the paper visible in the blank areas of the print, distinguishing it as a possible later addition. The print itself was placed slightly askew on the paper; the bottom edge of the print intersects diagonally with the bottom edge of the paper. Finally, there is evidence of some additional discoloration at the lower end of the tear.
Figure 11 Diana’s *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, from the Fogg Museum, print, no dimensions given. Source: "*Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (Diana Scultori)(After Giulio Romano) , R741,” Harvard Art Museums collections online, Mar 25, 2022, https://hvrd.art/o/249404.

The Fogg Museum at Harvard University has its own copy of *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, gifted in 1892 (Figure 11).¹²⁰ This state was a later printing, produced after Diana’s death. The Colonna Coat of Arms in the upper right

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corner of the print implies that this copy was made in 1633. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the publisher Antonio Carezano owned several of Diana’s plates after her death. By 1633, the plate wound up in the possession of Maurizio Bona, who removed Diana’s original dedication to the Duchess of Mantua and re-addressed it to a Roman nobleman named Pompeo Colonna due to the prevalence of column imagery within the print. In doing so, Bona altered the physical condition of the plate, fundamentally changing subsequent printings and distancing those resulting copies both from the original artist and the original intention of the print. By reworking the original plate, Bona created a new state for the print.

121 Lincoln, “Invention, Origin and Dedication,” 352.
Figure 12  Diana’s *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, from the Fogg Museum, with condition annotations by Caroline Berger. Source: "*Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (Diana Scultori)(After Giulio Romano) , R741,” Harvard Art Museums collections online, Mar 25, 2022, https://hvrd.art/o/249404.

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Figure 13  Annotation key for Diana’s *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, from the Fogg Museum.
This specific state of *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* is in good overall condition (Figure 12). Like the earlier pressing, this version has spots of dark discoloration on the front of the building, above the central swag. There are distinct patches of light brown discoloration on several of the columns on the right-hand side of the print, and the paper support in general shows mottling and yellowing from age. There is also evidence of a crease line running down the center of the print, implying that it was once bent or folded.

Conditional changes that obscure the design of the print, such as the repaired tear and areas of discoloration, detract from a print’s purpose of visual communication. Additionally, regarding the Harvard print specifically, Bona’s alteration of Diana’s original plate appropriated Diana’s use of a dedication to further court connections by destroying her original writing, ultimately devaluing this print in terms of its relationship and significance to Diana.

Value in existence assesses how the material or physical aspects of a cultural heritage object contribute to its significance. The paper and ink Diana used to publish her own version of *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* are the result of physical and intellectual exchange among manufacturers, as well as her own personal connections and ingenuity. Formal analysis of Diana’s artwork helps to place her engravings within the broader context of Italian printmaking, demonstrating her own innovations even within the medium of a reproductive print. Finally, investigating the conditions of various versions of the print discloses the relationship between humans
and the physical object. The state of a cultural heritage object informs how we interact with it in the present and how we have interacted with it in the past. Extant copies of *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* thus have a high value in existence, particularly those pressed by Diana herself.

**Value in Memory**

Ultimately, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* is significant because it serves as a tangible reminder of Diana Mantua herself. Women in art history are woefully underrepresented, and there is widespread anonymity regarding professional women artists prior to the twentieth century. By signing her name to her prints, Diana inscribed her name into history itself — complete with official legal protection to ensure that legacy.

Not only does Diana reveal that women artists could practice their craft during the Renaissance, but they were well-respected and held in high esteem in their day, both as individuals and for their art. Early on in her career, Diana received a mention in Giorgio Vasari’s second edition of his *Lives*:

> “I was in Mantua to this year, 1566 … Inasmuchas this, to Giovanni Battista Montovano born … a daughter named Diana [who] engraves so well that it is a wonderful thing; and when I saw her, a very well-bred and charming young lady, and her works, which are most beautiful, I was stunned.”

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Vasari flatters both Diana’s personality, which she worked so hard to cultivate into a positive public identity, as well as her prints themselves. To receive such a resounding endorsement at the age of nineteen from the foremost influential figure in art and history speaks to her social and artistic prowess in retrospect, as well as the fact that such a positive perception of her existed with her contemporaries.

Along with the other four prints listed on her privilege, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* also exemplifies an early measure taken by a woman to preserve her own intellectual and creative property. Thus, the print also represents a woman artist seeking legal acknowledgement of the worth of her work and receiving that explicit recognition. Diana’s privilege was groundbreaking in the way it established an artist’s right to determine the condition of how their work was used and reproduced.

A cultural heritage object gleans its value in memory, an intangible characteristic, from its associations with the people, places, and events who directly and indirectly contributed to its creation and persistent presence. Therefore, in proving a high value in creation, and value in purpose, I believe that I have sufficiently proved a high value in memory. It is then worthwhile to preserve this memory by allocating resources to maintaining physical copies of *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* — especially those made directly by Diana herself — as well as the complex story behind the print.
Chapter 5
CONCLUSION

I began this research with only a vague notion to explore the “legacy of female reproductive printmakers.” Two years ago, in an art history course entitled Art of the Northern Renaissance, my instructor introduced me to Magdalena de Passe, daughter of printmaker Crispijn de Passe and an artist herself. At the time, her work was framed to me as being an “acceptable” way for women to create art professionally. The brief mention of Magdalena in the course was centered around the ideas of restriction. She was portrayed as being fully at the mercy of the society around her. She was an anomaly, a stand-out, and as soon as she was married, she disappeared into obscurity again. I desperately wanted to know more. I wanted to know what, if any, agency women artists could have.

Around the time I began researching for this project last fall, I spoke about it eagerly with my friends and family. I found myself constantly needing to justify my topic. The term “female reproductive printmaker” conjured up images of vaginas and ovaries in the minds of my listeners, and they struggled to move past the terminology. No, it’s not that, I clarified. They were women who produced artwork that was a reproduction of another work of art. From there, I engaged time and time again in what I’ll call the “copy debate.” No, it wasn’t that these women weren’t skilled or creative. No, it wasn’t plagiarism either. It was just the art form that was accessible to them at the time. Ironically, in attempting to assert the validity of these women as
adept professionals, I continued to downplay the significance of their art, entrapping them in the same rhetoric of restraint as Magdalena was described to me.

November of 2021 saw the beginning of this project’s evolution into an exploration of value. At the time, I was enrolled in another course, entitled *Fetish Theory*. We explored the many forms of human relationships with objects: some were sexual, yes, but also the act of collecting, of hoarding, of pawning, thrifting, and dumpster-diving. The course posed the rather potent question of why people care so deeply about things.

It was during this month as well that I began the rather arduous process of applying for graduate programs in conservation and museum education. Here, I was asked time and time again why I specifically cared about cultural heritage objects. The answer was almost too simple: things matter because of their relationships to people.

This brings us to the present, where I sit on my bedroom floor, typing out a conclusion that reads more as a companion piece to a memoir than the final segment of an undergraduate thesis. Yet, given the intimate nature of my own relationship to the object world, autoethnography feels like the only appropriate means of reflecting on the experience of evaluating Diana’s work.

Autoethnography is the practice of using personal narrative to examine and interpret cultural experience, punctuated with intensive self-reflection. It helps to

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reveal and acknowledge biases in research. I, for instance, carry the bias of living as a woman artist myself. Given this, of course I will argue for the significance of my fellow woman artists. I see myself, a piece of my own history, extant in their work. Diana Mantua, in signing a woman’s name to her prints, gives me the reassurance that women in art did not merely exist as an Angelica Kauffman here and a Mary Cassatt there, before pausing altogether until the mid-twentieth century. I feel indebted to almost overvalue to the work of women because of the service they provide me with, and to make up for their lack of recognition throughout the centuries.

At the same time, my work in collections care and management has taught me that not everything can be significant. There is only so much space in which to house objects. There are only so many hours to be spent on conservation treatments. Finally, and perhaps most critically, there is only so much funding to spend on the materials and man hours necessary to preserve cultural heritage objects. Of the eight conservation and collections internships that I have held, I was only paid for three of them. In fact, for two of them, I had to pay, both for the experience itself and to cover the cost of materials. This is not a unique experience. A 2018 report by the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) surveyed over two hundred museums


in North America. They found over sixteen million objects in collections. However, these museum operating budgets allocated under a third of their funds to “art-related activities,” where “collections care and management” was only a single bullet point of many.  

There is not enough money for everything to be important.

It is within this context that I saw the need to analyze not only why people care deeply about things, but the methods they use to determine just how deeply. It is now that I will assess my own assessment. I will reflect on the effectiveness of my paradigm itself, and the process of researching and supporting my argument for the significance of Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery.

By far the biggest benefit that I experienced in preparing a qualitative argument from my set of guiding values and questions was the ability to account for the multilayered significance of an object. I gave myself space to adequately describe why Diana’s print matters in terms of material, technique, intent, and association. The process allowed me to see how intertwined each value is. As I prepared my written assessment, I found myself jumping back and forth between each section, writing and rewriting the same sentence under different subheadings. Material value is so tightly linked to labor value, for instance, because it is the labor that creates the material. This

is in close keeping with the economic theories postulated by Smith. The act of creating cultural heritage is inherently an act of transformation; even the act of collecting and displaying raw materials requires intellectual labor to reframe these items in a new context. I copied and pasted entire sections of my text upwards of ten, twenty times, struggling to determine where what information fit the reasonably within the four values of the paradigm. In my analysis of papermaking, to substantiate the validity of my explanation of the rag refinement process, I had to first direct my reader down to the materials section where I identified a watermark present on the paper of Diana’s Hercules. Having now established the what, I could explain the how. Yet, it is the “how” that brings about the “what.” Isolating a singular element of a cultural heritage object even for qualitative evaluation is near impossible, which reiterates the benefits of building an argument over assigning a judgment. However, further refinement of my paradigm will be necessary to create a format that permits a logical narrative about the life of a cultural heritage object. Nonetheless, in collating this information, I can offer future scholars insight into these connections between different forms of value, permitting a nuanced overall understanding of the significance of Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery. Additionally, in presenting clear lines of reasoning and support that trace the story of how I arrived at my value assessments, I also offer distinct points where future scholars could specifically dissent from my opinion and justify their own alternative views. Value in cultural heritage then becomes a discussion.
I did find that it was easy to adapt my guiding questions to suit my argument. Initially, I tried to specifically answer every question that I laid out in my first chapter. I figured it would be the simplest way to start. Immediately, I was paralyzed by the inability to find certain information. My laptop insisted upon there being zero results available no matter how I adjusted my search terms, shifting quotation marks and swapping gerunds for infinitives. I had an entire document dedicated to different spellings of Diana’s name in the hopes that, if I tried each name every time, the databases might give up their closely guarded secrets. It was fruitless and frustrating.

Investigating the conservation history of Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery, for instance, yielded exactly one result: a conference recording on gellan gel, recycled into audio, visual, and textual formats. If my own academic access to documentation is limited, seeking the necessary information to craft a compelling argument of the significance of an object would be even more difficult for the public, a consideration offering a particular challenge for the care of private collections.

Ironically, in attempting to follow my questions to the letter, I was in a sense doing precisely what I critiqued in other heritage assessments: creating a checklist. So long as I could still piece together enough information to thoroughly explain why Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery mattered within multiple contexts, why should it matter whether I met every specification? What would happen if I encountered an object in the future that had a very high value in memory by virtue of association with a well-known figure, but lacked scholarship surrounding its value in purpose? Should this mean the object lacks value overall? A paradigm for the
evaluation of cultural heritage must be flexible to adapt it for assessing multiple types of objects from multiple perspectives.

At the same time, this flexibility could lend itself to vastly increasing bias in future use. I fear this bias could be disguised under the pretense of objectivity by virtue of using a paradigm for assessment at all, and skew significance to favor specific objects or specific groups. In addition to my gender bias, the more I learned about the life and work of Diana, the more connected I felt to her and her work. This newfound emotional investment led me to exclusively argue for value in her prints. I felt a sense of possession over *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, as though I had a personal relationship with the artist and the print, and it was my sole duty to let the world know her brilliance. In writing my evaluation, I had to constantly step back and reframe my thoughts to appear more neutral and filter out any emotionally charged language. The mixture of primary and secondary sources that I consulted did offer some mixed opinion on Diana’s work, particularly regarding her skill as a draftsman and I incorporated this into my assessment. Nonetheless, I had the sole responsibility of shaping the final argument and thus the power of how I would frame these critiques within my own otherwise glowing evaluation. If my self-made cultural connection managed to skew my assessment so strongly in favor of her work, pre-existing cultural connections between the evaluator and object would likely have an even greater impact. *Significance 2.0* mandates collaboration as an essential step of its evaluation process. For this reason, I believe that use of my paradigm would heavily
benefit from discussion with stakeholders were it to be used in the context of a cultural institution.

Another major drawback to my paradigm was how time consuming it was to collect and interpret the information I needed to make my value assessment. My paradigm is my undergraduate thesis. It culminates a year’s worth of work. Very few institutions, if any, have the privilege of spending an entire year compiling evidence to argue for the significance of a singular object in their collection. This time commitment is a disadvantage to any qualitative assessment, and a driving factor as to why Appelbaum or the DCMS insisted upon either a checklist or an easy-to-gauge quantifier. Budget and time constraints are prohibitive, and there is a paradox extant in needing to allocate resources to investigate whether an institution should then allocate more resources. The format of the qualitative argument could then skew evaluation assessments towards objects that already have a marked interest in them, whether this be the influence of the public or a wealthy donor. Nonetheless, I still firmly believe that if the argument paradigm is an unrealistic ideal, we should still strive to use it whenever possible. Consolidating known scholarship about an object and providing detailed context about its creation, history, and ongoing significance are crucial for future generations. Additionally, a successful evaluation using the paradigm should exemplify why the paradigm is important at all. It justifies itself.

However, as previously mentioned, for this paradigm to work, it requires access to comprehensive databases and outside collections. Otherwise, the resulting argument could lack key information, particularly from primary sources, both
furthering its bias or rendering the user dependent on the perspectives of secondary sources. To evaluate Diana’s prints, I had to rely largely on virtual sources due to COVID-19 restrictions, travel expenses, and personal health struggles. My university does afford me database access, but I was nonetheless at the mercy of digital scholarship. For small museums in particular, these kinds of barriers to research would prevent my paradigm from being used to the fullest.

Nonetheless, I believe my paradigm does possess one very critical ability: the capacity to argue for the significance of material culture from historically marginalized groups. The flexibility of my paradigm, coupled with its production of collated scholarship materials and a qualitative significance argument, provides the opportunity to clearly articulate why it matters that a given object exists as well as why it is essential that it continues to exist. In a museum or similar cultural institution, objects theoretically should receive the same level of care and dignity. However, this is rarely true. Monetary value and rarity are typically prioritized as the most important aspects of collections objects by upper museum administration. Additionally, although it might be rare that objects from underrepresented groups survive, my research suggests that market prices inherently undervalue these works. My paradigm offers a way to comprehensively voice the significance of cultural objects that extends beyond simple quantifiers.

The next steps for this paradigm would be to apply it in a practical, rather than purely theoretical sense, by using it as a guide in an actual museum setting. This will be crucial for gauging user-friendliness, feasibility under time and access constraints,
as well as reactions from the museum administration and staff. If the effort of researching and forming an argument for significance is unacknowledged or ignored, it would be difficult to justify the use of my paradigm in an actual institutional setting.

As global collections and institutions face an uncertain future in the wake of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and war, difficult decisions must be made to allocate resources towards managing cultural heritage. My paradigm offers one such guide for making those choices.


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