

## 22.12.24 Piping Up For Community Hour

SM Sarah McConnell  
BD Brian Donaldson  
CK Christopher Kardamibikis  
JG Jessica Gardner  
MW Mary Wright

MUSIC  
(BAGPIPE PLAYS)

SM  
Bagpipes have a long and storied past in small mining towns throughout Scotland. In the county of Fife. Miners used to give a penny of their salary to the local pipe band to perform at community gatherings.

BD  
And then that became disastrous when Margaret Thatcher caused domains and all these little villages became ghost villages. That was really, really bad.

SM  
From Virginia Humanities, this is With Good Reason. I'm Sarah McConnell. Today, piping up for community. Later in the show, the unique history of zines and the punk scene in Washington D.C. But first, Brian Donaldson has been playing the bagpipe for almost 60 years. He's one of the most accomplished pipers in the world, winning many of the major awards, and even performing in front of the Queen of England. Now he's the pipe band director at Virginia Military Institute. He says Queen Elizabeth was a huge fan of bagpipe music.

BD  
She particularly love the bagpipes and anything to do with the bagpipes. I was pretty successful, you know, winning many competitions. And her majesty mentioned to the commanding officer one day, "I see Donaldson won the London competition." And of course, the commanding officer didn't know nothing about it like, "Oh, of course, your majesty." And then I got a phone call from the commanding officer when we got back to barracks, you know. "Pipe major why would her Majesty asked for you personally?" I says, "Well, you know, I've played for her enough time sir, you know?"

SM  
Because she so loved Balmoral – am I pronouncing that right?

BD  
Balmoral.

SM

Balmoral.

BD

That's it.

SM

Because she so loved it, do you think she especially appreciated that you yourself are a Scotsman?

BD

Yes. I mean, our mother was Scottish, and she very much loved Scotland, as most of the royal family do. That's a holiday get away from all the public duties that they have to do throughout the year. They love going to Scotland. They can go stalking deer, riding, have parties. Her Majesty held many what they call Ghillies Ball. It's a dance, an evening dance for our ghillies, the men and women that you know, take hunting parties out and look after the (INAUDIBLE), you know, so I played it quite a few Ghillies Balls.

SM

Is there one song that calls to mind the many times you've played for her?

BD

Yes, of course. This one's called 'Scotland the Brave,' and we used to play it very regular on parade.

MUSIC

(BAGPIPE MUSIC PLAYS)

SM

You grew up in a small Scottish town with a daddy who was both a miner and a bagpiper.

BD

Yes, I did. Yeah. I was taken a very, very early age, by the fact that my father played the bagpipes. And we'd get dressed up regular to play at various gigs on the weekends if he wasn't down the mines digging for coal. And I remember distinctly getting dressed up in his kilt and his (INAUDIBLE). When he would hang it up, you know, after he'd come home, I was just fixated with it. And I really, really wanted to play the bagpipes. And I pestered my father and pesetered him, and pestered him until he said, "right, okay, come on. I'm going to teach you." You know, I was five years old when I started.

SM

Why was bagpiping a thing in that community?

BD

Well, the small mining communities throughout the county of Fife, of

which there were many, they all had pipes and Drums, or pipe bands, as we used to call them. And they also had brass bands, where each miner would give a penny of their salary every week to go towards the upkeep of the pipe bands and the brass bands. They performed for the community on a regular basis. They used to have miner community outings where the kids would do races and, you know, they didn't have any bouncy castles at that time, you know, but they would arrange all sorts of events for the kids. And we would have picnic boxes and, you know, all that kind of basic stuff which we thought was fantastic. And then each kid would get a penny as well, you know, to spend at the shop and get some sweets.

SM

Times were good.

BD

Times were really good. Yeah, fantastic.

SM

Those mines, those small villages still there?

BD

Bits and pieces of them, yes. They've changed through the years. This was in the early 60s, into the 70s, during which the pipes and drums of pipe bands and the brass bands flourished for several years. And then that became disastrous when Margaret Thatcher closed the mines and all these little villages became ghost villages. It was really, really bad.

SM

When you were 15 you won a contest in that community, right? So you aged up very well with your bagpipes.

BD

Yes, I did. Of course. Throughout the community they had competitions, both in the brass bands and the pipe bands. And the Fife championships solo piping competition was revered as a high caliber competition to win. And I won it at 15 years old. My father won it before me, he was 18 years old. And then I went in at 15 and I won the same competition, the Fife Open Championships.

SM

Would you play for me a couple of licks that would illustrate just how high level those contests were?

BD

Yes, of course. Yeah. This is a tune called the 'Abercairney Highlanders. 'And it's competing style two-four march.

MUSIC

(INSTRUMENTAL BAGPIPE MUSIC PLAYS)

BD

The finger technique is most important for a bagpipe maker to produce clean movements through the piece.

MUSIC

(BAGPIPE MUSIC CONTINUES)

BD

Here's another one. This is strathspey this time and it's called 'Highland Harry.'

MUSIC

(BAGPIPE MUSIC PLAYS)

BD

Well a lot of these tunes were composed by pipers for friends and characters within the local little communities that they lived in throughout Scotland. You know, characters which there are many and galore throughout Scotland.

SM

Why did bagpipes evolve in Scotland? Why are they so associated with Scotland? How did they come up?

BD

Well they're centuries old, and they go back to the year dot. No one can put their finger on the actual date that they came into existence. But in the early, early days, they were used as a means of communication to gather the clans for battle, or for get togethers. So it's not unlike the smoke signals by the Indians. The regimental march past is the 'Highland Laddie.' And that would be played to gather the soldiers together to get prepared for battle.

SM

It's called Hill and Laddie?

BD

The Highland Laddie.

SM

The Highland Laddie?

BD

Highland Laddie, yeah.

SM

Oh, of course. Would you play a little bit of that for me?

BD

Yes, of course.

MUSIC

(BAGPIPE MUSIC PLAYS)

SM

Tell me a little bit about your career. So when you went off to join one of these regiments, what was the first one and how long were you there?

BD

Well, before I joined the regiment, I apprenticeshiped at 15-years-old in making bagpipes in Edinburgh – Stockbridge and Edinburgh – with Jimmy Tweedie is the gentleman that taught me how to make bag pipes. Now, Jimmy Tweedie was revered as one of the best bagpipe makers in existence. And he worked for both MacPherson's and Sinclair's before branching out on his own. And I became his first ever apprentice, and learned the trade of handcrafting bagpipes.

SM

How do you make them? So there's the bag and then there is turning these wooden parts?

BD

Yes, all the wooden parts are turned on a lathe. They're bored, they've got certain measurement bores in them to give you a certain sound. Once you get the bores right, which are all too important, obviously, you put the piece of wood on a lathe and you turn it to the elaborate shape (INAUDIBLE). And then you'll obviously mount it with adornment. Silver, ivory, etc, etc.

BD

Do you ever remember him rebuking you for a bad turn?

BD

No, no, I was I was never rebuked for producing a bad instrument. I remember distinctly standing, just watching him handling the tools and how he turned with the tools. And I picked up a lot just by watching. I'd always hankered to join the military. My father indoctrinated that thought into my head at an early age. He always wanted to join the Scots Guards, but my grandmother will let him. She wanted him at home. She says "you could get killed if you go in a war." But the old man always used to say "But Mother, you know, I can get killed down in the pit, you know?" "It's no the same son, you're not home," you know?

So that was how it went with the old man. However, he supported me in the fact that I wanted to join the Guards and lo and behold, I did. Enlisted in 1978, served 22 years with the colors and retired. And when I retired, it came full circle, and I ended up running the

business that I apprenticed in. The business was originally in Stockbridge and Edinburgh, and I moved it when I came out of the military to Auchtermuchty and Fife.

SM

Tell us about Virginia Military Institute and why they would like to have a man of your stature and skill with bagpipes.

BD

Well, the cadets all have the opportunity to come on board and learn how to play bag pipes and drums. And, they have the opportunity to play an elite instrument.

SM

Is there an existing pipes and drum band at VMI?

MUSIC

There is, yes. It has been in existence for 20 years. My predecessor, Mr. Burt Mitchell, started the pipes and drums program near 20 years ago. And he'd done a great job. He built a good program. And I, when I took over from him after he retired, he passed on 40... 40 pipers and drummers all told within the program. So yes, it's, the program has been in existence for 20 years.

SM

Are there holiday pieces that you've loved over the years that you could share with us?

MUSIC

Mostly hornpipes and jigs people will ask for. Reels are very exciting to play as well. A good jig would be 'the Seagull,' and it was composed by Donald MacLeod. 'The Seagull.'

MUSIC

(BAGPIPE MUSIC PLAYS)

BD

Now reels, reels are good. And my, one of my favorite reels is 'Ca' the Ewes.'

SM

What does that mean?

BD

Well, the ewe, a ewe, is a sheep. 'Ca' the Ewe.'

SM

(LAUGHS) You knew I wouldn't get that right.

BD

(LAUGHS) Yeah.

SM

All right, let's play 'Ca' the Ewes.'

BD

Yeah. No problem.

MUSIC

(BAGPIPE MUSIC PLAYS)

SM

Brian, this has been such a pleasure. Thank you for playing and talking with me today on With Good Reason.

BD

Well, thank you very much. It's a pleasure for me indeed to come along and, you know, have a chat with you because piping and drumming is very much in your DNA now. It's been here. It was introduced almost 200 years ago by the Scots and Irish settlers that come to the United States. And you can't go to a city throughout the United States without coming across, whether it be a fire service Pipes and Drums, a police service Pipes and Drums, and all the hundreds of little community Pipes and Drums throughout the United States now.

SM

Brian Donaldson is the Pipe Band Director at Virginia Military Institute.

SM

Zines and 90s Punk culture are intimately linked. Iconic punk bands like Bikini Kill relied on zines to gain a following and spread the word.

SM

(PUNK MUSIC PLAYS)

SM

My next guest says Washington D.C. was the spot for zines and the underground punk scene. Christopher Kardamibikis is a Professor of Printmaking at George Mason University.

SM

Christopher, what are zines? How are they different from, let's say, magazines?

CK

A general way to think about it is that a zine is a DIY, or do it yourself, magazine. Magazines, as a periodical are published at very large numbers and meant for national, if not international,

distribution. Zines, on the other hand, are produced either by one person or a very small number of people in smaller numbers. The intent is still distribution. And while the reach can encompass a national scene it's almost always far more local emphasis versus a national concern.

SM

How old were you when you fell in love with them?

CK

When I first encountered zines I was very young, because I was very, very into comics. And fortunately, the comic shop that was around the corner from my father's sandwich shop also sold many comics. So I got to pick up some like DIY comics, very small run comics at that shop. And that kind of dovetailed into my interest in zines, and just small press and DIY publications in general. 10 years after I discovered many comics is when I was an undergraduate at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, and I got to know more of the zine scene in Pittsburgh.

SM

And what did you find the zine scene was?

CK

it's incredibly varied. In Pittsburgh, there was a lot of political zines, there's a lot of music zines, and there was of course, like some, some comics zines. And when I got into it and started to produce my own zines, because I was an art nerd, and was going to art school, the way that I wanted to produce them was as art zines. So the topic was a local art scene. And we were publishing new work by my friends, by other younger artists in the city. But the topics that zines did or could have covered in Pittsburgh was wide ranging. Pittsburgh has a huge music scene. There's a big punk scene, there's a big anarchist scene. There's a lot of local politics that younger people would be putting through the zines. So it was a really interesting landscape.

SM

Why do I associate them with punk culture and anarchy, right?

CK

Yeah, I think for, well for a couple reasons. One is that it is a tool to distribute information across a local landscape, and specifically to support communities that are largely ignored by the mainstream. So that fits into our understanding of the punk scene really, really well. And I will say that this history of zines goes back to like the 1920s, 1930s. But our current understanding of them are probably really rooted in the early 90s with a music and cultural phenomenon known as riot girl, which is an offshoot of, of punk or like a sub genre of punk. And actually, our local area, Washington, D.C., and hereabouts, was one of the major loci of riot girl. Another major

community was in Olympia, Washington. And bands like Bikini Kill would come up and the zines were being produced as a way to both document the bands and document the scene of people, the young women who were invested in riot girl.

And thinking about the zines as a place to share information, to find community, to write each other letters, to write about their, their lives, what they were going through. And to put those out to people traveling to see these shows. So that zine aesthetic that you're probably thinking of, like black and white, photocopied, cut and paste collage style, folded and stapled, a standard eight and a half by 11 piece of paper folded up, probably a little bit like, wrinkled and ripped up, that really comes from riot girl.

SM

Zines are not online, they're something you hold in your hand, right?

CK

I fell in love with zines because it is a tactile object, and I think that our current interest in zines can be tacked to the rise of web culture and web publications. So as the internet became more and more of a thing, and message boards, social media, and all this became more widespread, there was this, like longing or like pendulum swing back to the haptic qualities, the physical qualities of zines or books you can hold on to. But that being said, there are publications that exists online, in addition to print or online only. And as an example, I will bring up a project called GenderFail, which was produced and is currently being run by Be Oakley.

Be Oakley is an artist and publisher currently living in New York City. But they got their graduate degree in Richmond. So they founded the GenderFail project while they were in Richmond, in Virginia. And if you go to their website, you can find zines available for purchase that they will mail to you. But you can also download any of their zines as PDFs. And I think what's so wonderful about Be Oakley and the GenderFail project, which is a feminist press that focuses on gender and sexuality, is that they are committed to making their work available to anyone across multiple platforms. I think that that project can really hone in on some of the values of what makes zine zines independent of their physicality.

SM

What are some of your other favorite zines now?

CK

Two other artists and publishers that I will name that are from the Virginia area. First is Ayana Zaire Cotton, and she's a graphic designer and artist currently based in Virginia. And she has two projects that I think are fascinating and super smart. One is the Seeda Syllabus, and it is her approach to creating a syllabus for what

she calls unlearning. It is a tool for anyone who picks it up to really start to question what they do or do not know. And prompting the reader to come up with their own study questions for this self-guided study. And she's currently working on an expanded notion of this project called the Seeda School, which is specifically focusing on Black feminist scholars with an emphasis on coding. And trying to think about not just coding as in what we put into the computers to create programs, but also the syllabus as a code, cultural coding.

And the other group that I would highlight is called Late Comeback Press. And that is run by Caroline Kim and Rachna Soun, right here in Fairfax, Virginia. And their zines are this really interesting combination of a zine or mini comics that really emphasize a play with form. So Caroline, and Rachna really emphasize a play with materials and format, so it is still a zine. But it can also be a little mini viewfinder where they've taken the circular disk that has all the, like cellophane images you can see through whenever you hold it up to your eyes, and replaced that with some of their own drawings to create a little mini comic out of that. Or playing with transparency and vellum to really transform what that printed object is, but still keep it at a price point that would mark it as a zine that is meant to travel, to move, to be distributed.

SM

You know, I also love the images on your own website. Talk with me about the themes your own art explores. For instance, Cronos in Greek mythology.

CK

Yeah, so I've been one of the more recent series of works is called Chronomachy, which is on the website. And that is a way for me to reinterpret stories of Greek mythology, specifically the story of Cronos, the Titan who preceded the Olympian deities. And it is a book project that pairs this understanding of Greek mythology, this mythological origin story for not just the Greek gods, but also the planet, or perhaps the galaxy. And it pairs this story with a bit of astrophysics, trying to think about the beginnings of black holes, and how we can understand what black holes are.

And the story that is woven through this series of prints, and through this book, joins the two so that Cronos, the titan, who in his desire to hold on to power was eating his children who are prophesized to turn up, or turn against him. His punishment ends up becoming, in my version, to become the super dense black hole at the center of our Milky Way, slowly spinning everything else towards him. Sometimes I feel like my work can be described as apocalypse pop. So this idea that there might be something that is very hard to deal with, or an uneasy or anxious feeling, but there is still something to be celebrating about what's happening right now and about our lives currently. And I want to hold on to both of those ideas.

SM

There are also a lot of beautiful phrases you've woven in with the art. "A stricken bell throws gravity waves across a wine-dark void," for instance. You've really enjoyed the poetry and these images and stories.

CK

Yeah, and I think that is a very recent turn that my personal artwork has made. I am growing a bit more confident with my own language. And I feel like that mythological tone has helped me to lean into some of my tendencies. And that might be more of a throwback to the comics that I loved as a kid with some of their purple prose, but also the language of mythology. I actually would say that I got into comics because of mythology. And that kind of mythic language I was always really drawn to. I really appreciate you saying that, as I am still trying to figure out my way with written language versus relying solely on visual information, which is a world that I'm far more comfortable in.

SM

I do love your work. And what a pleasure talking with you. Christopher Kardamibikis thank you for sharing your insights on With Good Reason.

CK

Thank you so much for having me, Sarah. It's been a pleasure talking with you.

SM

Christopher Christopher Kardamibikis is a Professor of Printmaking at George Mason University. This is With Good Reason. We'll be right back.

SM

Welcome back to With Good Reason at Virginia Humanities. Being a mom is hard, but it can also be one of the most joyous experiences of life. Jessica Gardner is a mom, an artist and a Professor of Art at Northern Virginia Community College. Her ceramic artwork explores the good, the bad and the ugly of motherhood in the modern era.

SM

Jessica, how can ceramics reflect motherhood?

JG

You know, I think that clay is a really expressive medium. So for a long time, I made functional vessels, and then moved more into sculptural works. And a lot of them incorporate some abstract figures, and other things that we would consider really feminine. So small, pinched details that look like florals, definitely a lot of really soft colors, because I want to encourage the viewer to approach the

work and to have that really intimate experience where they're viewing something that's like small and delicate. But then as they explore the piece, they get more of those ideas of like, nurturing, and also some of the challenges that come with being a contemporary mom.

SM

I read that you work in slip cast multiples and refired found objects. I'm intrigued by the idea of refired found objects. Like what?

JG

Well I have a piece called 'Sleep When the Baby Sleeps' and stacked up on these found plates and then these handbuilt clay pillows is a found Madonna figurine. And I put decals of text about what happens to your body when you don't get enough sleep. And I also put a, sort of a decal across her eyes to indicate that she was trying to sleep. But that title for me 'Sleep When the Baby Sleeps' was probably one of the most frustrating things that people would say when my children were really small, right? "Oh, well sleep and the baby sleeps." But when the baby sleeps is when you do things like dishes and shower. So I think really exploring young motherhood in those pieces. And then as my children have grown up, I've really started to look at different ways that nurturing them, what that means as they get older. And so they're just a constant stream of inspiration.

SM

Motherhood is really amazing, because it's so hard and also so rewarding. And it's always both, right?

JG

Yes, I think one of the things that was really hard when I went through undergrad and grad school was that all of my female mentors, all these amazing women artists, had chosen not to have children. And so I was really nervous knowing that that's something I wanted in my life, to continue to sort of pursue my career and pursue my art. I think the best advice that I ever got from one of them was that you can have it all, but not all at once. And so there are definitely times when I have to pour myself into my kiddos, and there's just nothing left between teaching and the kiddos there is nothing left for the studio. But then there are other times when, you know, things have calmed down a little bit. I'm really inspired. And then I can take all of those notes and sketches that I've been pouring into my sketchbook and I can go and, and explore those, you know, when I have that time and energy.

SM

Was there a lowest moment you can remember when you first became a mother and tried to keep your work standards up?

JG

So it's, it's potentially the most embarrassing story ever. So during

during COVID, I was on a conference call with our women's committee on the Alexandria campus. And just to like put that in context, it's women on the faculty and staff who are mentoring younger students. And it's really important to me because I want students to know that they, yeah, they can have a family and they could have a career. So I'm on a conference call during COVID. So I'm home alone with my at that time four and six year old. And Jill Biden is on this committee, Dr. Jill Biden...

SM

I forgot she teaches at Northern Virginia Community College, which is near D.C.

SM

Yes, she does. Occasionally, I will see her over zoom or at committee meetings. And in this particular meeting, I had my camera off, and I thought I had my microphone off. So I get up the air popper to make a snack for my kiddos. And I hear Dr. Biden say, "is someone vacuuming?" (LAUGHTER) Oh, oh, my goodness. So I like mute it right away. I type in the chat, "I'm so sorry. I'm just trying to get my kiddos fed." So like in my head, I'm like, okay, you know, this is recoverable, like, she's never gonna remember this, it's fine. And then later in the meeting they wanted everyone to turn their camera on and introduce themselves. And to this day, I cannot tell you why.

But as I turned my camera on to introduce myself, my four year old comes running at me completely naked. Like, this little kiddo is just butt naked, and I like, grab him around the waist. And I'm like, "Hi, I'm Jessica Gardner. And this is Matthew, it's so good to meet you all today." And I turn off my camera. And I'm like, "that was... Oh, that was the, that was the low point of COVID right there." I was so embarrassed.

SM

Yeah, but your story is every mother's story. Every mother of young children during the pandemic, right? And actually, probably anybody who saw that was charmed. So in addition to the refirings of found objects, what are slip cast multiples?

JG

Yeah, so slip casting is having a plaster mold that has the negative of a figure or a piece. And then when you pour the slip in, it'll dry and you take the mold apart, and out comes a little clay figure. So for my early struggles with keeping my studio practice alive, I created some of these plaster molds. And then I challenged myself to go to the studio every evening when my kiddos were asleep, and just to do one little slip cast figure. And so every day I would alter this little Madonna figurine to represent how I felt motherhood had gone that day, which ended up being a really amazing meditative process. I just wanted to be really honest that motherhood is a roller coaster

and find a way for my art to represent that.

JG

You have a recent piece called 'Home.' Tell me about 'Home.'

JG

Yeah, so 'Home' was a piece where I, just before COVID was diagnosed with lupus, and so finding the balance in my previous work, I was really inspired by them Madonna, and how put together she always looks in, in these beautiful paintings in art history. I mean, the Madonna and never has spit up on her, you know, she's just like, glowing. And she's like this perfect, she's this perfect mother's. So, in a lot of my work, I was exploring the dichotomy between her and, and what reality of motherhood is. But then after my diagnosis, I've started to try and explore "Well, what does it mean to also have this struggle with your, your own body? And like, what does that look like?" So 'Home' is actually a rectangular block with a really calm female face on it.

I'm really thinking of about abstracting the figure. And so then this block is actually trying to push itself down through a little metal ring. And the ring is on top of this little house that just lines of steel. So it's a little steel house, with just the bare corners and the line of the roof and this figure squeezing herself down into it. And then in the center of 'Home' is a ceramic heart. And it had – an anatomical heart, although much smaller. And it has little flowers growing on the top. And then from the figure coming down through the roof, there's little flowers that look like they're about to drip down onto the heart. And for me, it was really a piece about how do you nurture yourself? How do you stay healthy and a happy person so that you can continue to nurture growth in your home, and to be that, you know, loving mom.

And so a lot of my work now is talking about that balance and how you can have all of this turmoil and chaos. But keep your kiddos away from that. And that's really hard today. I feel like society makes that hard. But it's one of the fundamental things about being a mom, is you want to keep your kids safe and help give them all the opportunities that you can, so...

SM

How do you think society now is making it harder for moms? I hear you.

JG

Yeah. So my motherhood and modernity series explores what that looks like, right? I feel like the Madonna is a beautiful historic example of this unrealistic expectation of motherhood. Right? So, she's like the quintessential mother, and then we have a fresh wave of mom-shaming online. Every time you look at it. It was hard for me because I never felt like I was fully part of one camp or another. Right? So a

working mom who breastfeeds and loves carrying my baby, but only if there's like really strong clips involved. Like the wrap thing, I never quite got the hang of it.

SM

I didn't either.

JG

I know, I was very scared. I was like, "the baby's gonna fall out. I can't." So for me, it just feels like there's so many opinions. So many mommy blogs where people are, you know, really pushing one parenting type over another. And I do think that that's new and harder than it has been in the past. Because so much of our day-to-day is social media, and calling people on the phone. And people are just more aware of, I think how we're parenting, then maybe they would have been if you were friends across the country, you know, 40 years ago. You probably wouldn't be FaceTiming and be like, "what is little Johnny having for his snack today?" And you're like, "oh, processed chips, right?" I mean, you didn't have the same... You didn't have those same awkward moments that you do now. So I think that the mommy wars are real. And it's really unfortunate, because at the end of the day, we're all just like, exhausted humans doing our best, right?

SM

Where can we send people to see your work? It sounds wonderful.

JG

Well, thank you. Um, I have a website. It's [jessica gardner dot com](http://jessicagardner.com). And I also have work in various collections around the country. And I'm part of a touring exhibition right now *Mirror Mirror*. It's currently at the Springfield Ohio Museum of Art, but it will be touring to University of Mary Washington near the summer. And I'm really excited about it because it explores not just motherhood, but being a daughter, being a wife. And so this very diverse group of women, of lots of different mediums. So there's photographers, and textile artists, and painters. And the curator Dr. Shearer brought us all together to do this exhibit that really looks at being a woman in general. And what does that mean for your different facets of your life?

SM

Jessica Gardner is a Professor of Art at Northern Virginia Community College.

SM

There's a second Arts and Crafts movement underway. And it's flourishing on social media apps like Instagram and TikTok. Mary Wright is an English professor at Christopher Newport University. She says just like the first one, the second Arts and Crafts movement is a response against consumerist culture and mass production.

SM

Mary, you're looking into how social media has given rise to a second Arts and Crafts movement. And in particular, you're looking at woodworking. How did you become interested in woodworking, and start to notice that there is a community that has grown online.

MW

So a few years ago, I took a woodworking class at a local high school, you know, your classic shop class thing. And I don't know, I guess the sawdust got into my veins in some way. So I found a week long class, and there are many all over the country, in Pennsylvania. Went up there in the summer, was smitten with the whole thing. And it was me and eight other people. And at night, I would go back to my hotel room. And I just started looking online.

So I was on Instagram, and I just... and let's just say three people, Eric, Larissa, and Rob. And each of them is posting on social media, on Instagram. Say, Rob is working on a table, Eric's working on a chair, and Larissa is working on a jewelry box. And so as they post their pictures, desiring connection with other people, they use hashtags like furniture, or woodworking, or sandpaper, you know, and those hashtags are making connections between them. And that's how they find each other.

SM

So just in woodworking, how large is the community?

MW

Huge. It's, it's huge. And it's, it's worldwide. And that's the other cool thing. I follow people in Spain, South America, the UK, and that's enabling people to find each other. And more and more, you know, it's, it first started out as sort of, "this is what I'm doing." And then I started to notice that people were making connections, and they were, you know, you're watching friendships and professional relationships manifest right in front of you to the point that some people started literally leaving their shops and going to other people's shops, and then recording their connections together. You know, like getting together and making something and posting on social media so that other people can see it. And then, you know, moving on, and you know, like, "Oh, I'm on the East Coast, I think I'll stop and see this person, this person, this person."

SM

Give me a feeling for what kind of growth you've experienced just in your craft. So you started as someone who'd never made a wooden piece of furniture before, right? And that was just six years ago?

MW

Yeah. So I didn't have any skill set when I first started. And I made

the classic little stool, and I show it to my friend, one of my friends there she goes, "Oh, yeah, all my brothers made that in shop class." And I was like, "Uh huh." And I just wanted to do more. So then I took the second class, which was making an adirondack chair. And then in my area, everything dried up, because you know, the changes that have occurred in education, where shop class was replaced with computer class. So I, that's when I started looking in woodworking magazines for other ways to learn the craft. And since then, I've made charcuterie boards, bread boards, tables that I give away. I'm currently finishing an armoire for my cousin's son. I wanted to have it done before he was born, but he's one now... because I do have the, you know, the full time job.

SM

Tell me about what you call the first Arts and Crafts movement. When was that, and what sort of people were participating in that?

MW

So the first Arts and Crafts movement started around 1874 when the Industrial Revolution originated in Great Britain. It created the disconnect between the artist and the craft, because it consumed the economic culture, if you will. So that people no longer went to a crafts person and said I need, I need four chairs and a table. They just bought them from an industrial corporation. And that really stuck with a few people who felt that the product that you make should be of the highest quality and not something that is mass produced.

And so it was like three or four people who started it, William Morris is the most, I guess, well known name. And they, they tried their best with the technology that they had at the time, which was a newsletter. But how do you find people to send the newsletter to? And they also tried to create these artists enclaves where, where people would go and you know, someone would, would donate their house, and this was... they started crossing the Atlantic at this point. So there were people in the US and people in the UK who were trying to support each other.

SM

So were these individuals who were saying, "hey, let's all make quilts," or were these master craftsmen, whose products were now being mass produced that were insisting on making various products by hand?

MW

That's a great question. And you, you might assume that they were master craftsmen who were reacting in disdain to their own craft being marginalized. But that, that, that's not how they approached this creating community. They were inclusive to the quilter, to the potter, to the textile maker. I guess if they had a prerequisite, it would just be a dedication to one's craft.

SM

How did that movement subside? Because I feel like there's always been a widespread urge to make, and to craft, and to be artistic with our hands, right? But you're saying there was an actual groundswell that eventually kind of petered out. And now we're seeing another.

MW

Part of the problem with the first Arts and Crafts movement is they felt, I think, that there were not enough of them. Even though they were eager to solicit and in... you know, increase their numbers. There just weren't that many of them because they didn't have the technology to connect with each other in ways that we do now. So it did peter out. And you know, like a lot of movements, unfortunately, we see a real urgency that then eventually, as you said, peter out. So they just, they ran their course. And the people who were trying to maintain the structure, they got old, they died, and nobody took their place.

SM

What would you say about this renaissance and arts and crafts, this movement that comes through Instagram and other online means of creating community? Has it been galvanized by the same impulses that the people felt after the Industrial Revolution?

MW

Personally, I think yes. So a lot of people envision the artist working alone. In this case of woodworker in a dusty little shop somewhere. But that's not that, you know, that that's just a myth, basically. Most people now want to think that they have company in that, you know, in that workshop. And they can stop at any minute, and stop sanding or stop creating whatever art they're creating, and hop right on social media, and post something and get an instant comment back. So there's the all of that instant feedback that helps create community whether it's geographically close, or not at all.

I've been watching this one woman who just started in her garage. And she is... she started making a name for herself slowly. Then she started getting some corporate sponsorships. Now she has started a school. She's, she's doing so well and it's just, it's a joy to have watched her evolve. And you know, the the mantra of "dirty hands clean money" kind of permeates the whole, the whole community. And, and those kinds of, you know, again, going back to the hashtag and the "at" sign, there are linguistic components to this. So repetition and you know, you see something on one person's feed and you replicate that. Or you, you know, you, you hashtag the same thing. And again, it just, you know, exponentially is opening up connections and avenues. It's really it's, it's fascinating to, to, to be an observer and a participant at the same time.

SM

And you know, it's so interesting, it's a complete opposite of the

other aspect of online and social media that make us all crazy. You know, we've all gotten to the point where there are certain places we just don't want to look anymore. We just want to go there. We don't want to hear the animosity and the hatred and the invectives spewed.

MW

Yes, right, the vitriol, yeah. You don't see that in these communities ever. No one.... on an occasion, someone might say, "I wouldn't have done it that way," or, you know, whatever. And wow. Yeah, it's so, it's so collegial.

SM

Well, I'm smitten by just hearing you describe the community, and the crafts, and the world out there. Mary Wright, thank you for talking with me on With Good Reason.

MW

Thank you so much. I appreciate the opportunity.

SM

Mary Wright is an English professor at Christopher Newport University. With Good Reason is produced by Virginia Humanities, which acknowledges the Monacan nation, the original people of the land and waters of our home in Charlottesville, Virginia. Our production team is Alison Quants, Matt Darroch, Lauren Francis and Jamal Milner. Cassandra Deering and Aviva Casto are our interns. Special thanks to Jenny Taylor for booking assistance. For the podcast, go to with good reason radio dot org. I'm Sarah McConnell. Thanks for listening.