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Daily OPINION

On curation and the death of inheritance



A blue handkerchief lies across a table, decorated with white embroidery. Alicja Jakubowska embroidered this piece and holds the title of folk artist.

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Who died and made me staff writer? Yes, the rumors are true, I've fallen down the traditional English major to writer pipeline. But writing for the Daily Campus keeps the past alive (my favorite pastime, pun intended) even though the people who started it are long-gone. Although they are gone, both they and their work are remembered.

When I lost my grandfather, he left me a Moroccan Barbie doll and his favorite blue checkered handkerchief. Having a doll that vaguely resembled my family made me feel more connected to a cultural identity. I felt like a part of something bigger. When he left me those objects, it seemed that he had some kind of premonition that I would grow up to love fashion and need a pocket square. Maybe he made me love fashion by leaving them to me. Or maybe he heard my cough from growing up with childhood asthma. I'll never know. But having something to cough into is more gentlemanly, more polite.

That blue piece of cloth sat on one of my two (overflowing) bookshelves in my room and watched me grow up when he could not. He had salt-and-pepper hair that I thought gave him a distinctive look, and I wanted to look like him—to be like him. So, when I grew my first white hair in middle school, I plucked it out and folded it into his handkerchief.

When I lost my grandfather, he left my mother with his jewelry. They would go to the old shops in Morocco to look for pieces and commission bespoke clothing for the next big wedding. A celebration of life. A memory. I see her think of him when the lights flicker. He's there when a piece of her jewelry sparkles in the sun. He was full of light. And he trapped that light and life in jewelry he bought my mother.

By no coincidence, I also happen to love jewelry. I was raised to twist my rings (most of them gifted) across my fingers. An unconscious habit. It was either that or counting prayer beads. That repetitive motion and the shine of silver or gold keeps the memories alive. I see my mother and her father working hard to afford to make their children shine. To shine is to be alive.

My family keeps memories by wearing them. Because of them, I shop with a purpose and I curate collections. Both the visuals and the creation process of things the I own mean something to me. I follow my family tradition of buying objects that have a story. But such curation is difficult when most advertisements are trying to cast such a wide net.

In the age of social media, everything is curated for you. Algorithms know what you want before you even want it. The curation of a personal aesthetic is done for you. It is impersonal and sanitized. Cheap jewelry is made to eventually turn your fingers and neck green, only for you to rebuy it. It saves money in the long-term to spring for the more intentionally made pieces rather than wasting money on things that break. And in the past, before people bought things, they were influenced by their real-life environment. We are now losing the stories behind our goods and are fed hyper-specific looks without context. Social media trends have a way of making people feel unique for engaging with them yet connected to a greater collective. Nicheness has become commodified and the accessories that make up niche and specific looks are getting mass-produced.

Personalization is an art form. During the rise of capitalism, labor specialization was pushed to make production easier and more scalable. The production of goods was broken down into small steps by large businesses for optimization. Every production line worker knows only one step of how to make an object. They are part of a well-oiled machine—completely replaceable. They don't have any investment in the final product of what they are making. This replaceability of creators and mass-production has made the objects we buy worse in quality. Oftentimes those objects are intentionally made to be less durable and fail early so that we rebuy sooner. Planned obsolescence has trained us to expect worse of the things we spend money on and killed the idea of inheritance. And because of downgrades in materials of mass-production, we are also harming the environment at an exponential scale, as the goal of capitalism is always more.

As a reaction to the nosedive in the average quality of goods, many online small businesses have taken over the role of tailors, cobblers and jewelers. Etsy and Instagram are filled with creatives that handmake and personalize their work. They infuse stories into their creations and craft them with intentionality. They make things that can be inherited— things to be proud of. And the price of those items that will last is far less than brand-name designers. By supporting artists and businesses that take the time to hand-make each piece, you receive both a story and something for your loved ones to inherit.

Buy things with the strong intention to keep them, from people who have the strong intention to make them. Goods fall apart when they are rushed through production lines to keep up with ever-changing trends.

You deserve something that is specifically made for you. Commission an artist to make it or go thrifting. Go get something that you can gift to the people you love, even if you intend on keeping it at first. Revive the idea of inheritance.