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artists of issue 03

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MARY CASSAT AS A REVOLUTIONARY WOMAN IN ART

(WOMANS DAY SPECIAL)

HISTORY



Mary Cassatt, Woman Sitting with a Child in Her Arms, 1890

Mary Cassatt was an American painter, and the only American among the impressionist painters in the 19th century. Within her art, she revealed her feminist side and depicted women's individualism. She also emphasized their importance in a men-dominated society, breaking the traditional view of femininity in those times. She brought attention to womanhood and motherhood, depicting the struggles and beauty of this vital role they performed.

"She is one of the most important female painters to art history and feminism."

The main theme in her art is the portrayal of maternity. She was heavily inspired by early paintings of 'Madonna and the Child', and as a result, the subject matter of most of her compositions is a mother with an infant. Keeping the status quo of a 'nuclear' family clear, she emphasized the vital role of the woman as the primary caretaker of children. By putting aside the presence of men in the workforce, she did not highlight women's absence;

instead, she showed their roles, struggles, and value.

In her article, Sarah Bochicchio states that Mary Cassatt "(...) was a champion of women's ability to stand alone—but it was also radical."

What is intriguing is that Mary never married or had any children. It could be, therefore, argued that she had no 'right' to express motherhood without any experience. Yet Cassatt dedicated her whole life to her art. We could perhaps take time and wonder: was Mary Cassatt more dedicated to being an artist or a feminist revolutionary, sworn to change the outdated perception of women in 19th-century society?



Mary Cassatt, Motherhood, 1890

She once stated that her paintings depict women outside of their relationships with men, expressing their strength and abilities in society, which men of the 19th century should have been in awe of.



Mary Cassatt, *Breakfast in Bed*, 1897



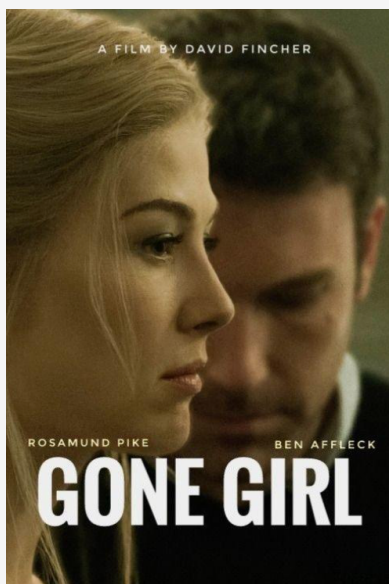
Mary Cassatt, *Young Mother Sewing*, 1900

THE FINE ART OF FEMALE FURY

"That night at the Brooklyn party, I was playing the girl who was in style, the girl a man like Nick wants: the Cool Girl. Men always say that as the defining compliment, don't they? She's a cool girl. Being the Cool Girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping, who plays video games, drinks cheap beer, loves threesomes and anal sex, and jams hot dogs and hamburgers into her mouth like she's hosting the world's biggest culinary gang bang while somehow maintaining a size 2, because Cool Girls are above all hot. Hot and understanding. Cool Girls never get angry; they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let their men do whatever they want. Go ahead, shit on me, I don't mind, I'm the Cool Girl.

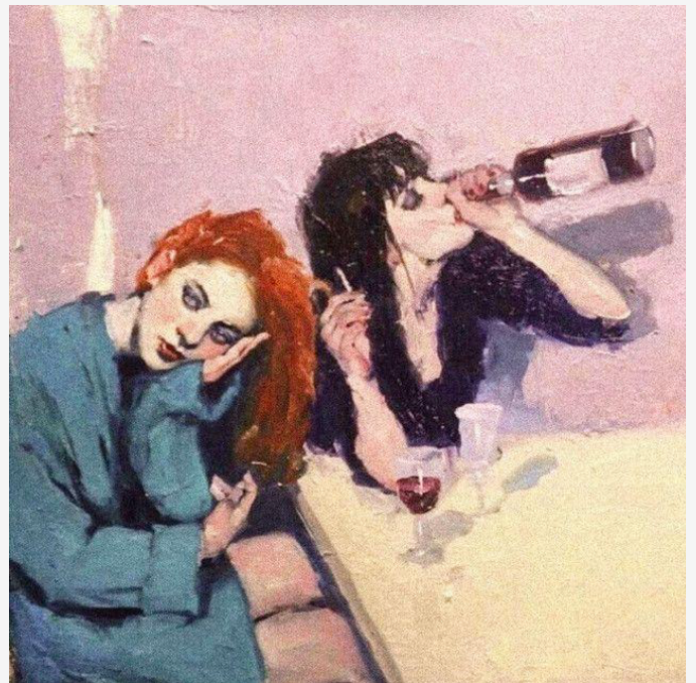
Men actually think this girl exists. Maybe they're fooled because so many women are willing to pretend to be this girl...Oh, and if you're not a Cool Girl, I beg you not to believe that your man doesn't want the Cool Girl. It may be a slightly different version—maybe he's vegetarian, so Cool Girl loves seitan and is great with dogs; or maybe he's a hipster artist, so Cool Girl is a tattooed, bespectacled nerd who loves comics. There are variations to the window dressing, but believe me, he wants Cool Girl, who is basically the girl who likes every f***ing thing he likes and doesn't ever complain. (How do you know you're not Cool Girl? Because he says things like "I like strong women." If he says that to you, he will at some point f*** someone else. Because "I like strong women" is code for "I hate strong women."

-Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*'s classic Amy Dunne monologue.



The monologue is scathing and persistent in its criticism and mockery of a typical male fantasy—the Cool Girl. It emphasizes the unattractiveness of rage in women and how submission is seen as desirable. This issue appears frequently in movies and literature, and when investigated attentively, it reveals itself to be a reflection on the intrinsic and societal perceptions of femininity.

Female anger bursts through a suffocating cloud of stereotypes that show women and girls in a repetitious and superficial way, which stems from a long history of awfully written female characters in cinema and literature. The media has cultivated various clichés and stereotypes that simply please the male gaze, from the girl next door (innocent, gentle and the very stereotype of the word "feminine") to the manic pixie dream girl (inspires a greater appreciation for life in a male protagonist, character tends to be portrayed as "quirky" and "different"). Anger is frequently the driving force behind more complicated and gloomy characters—characters you can't look away from on screen. Women in fiction are rarely represented with such agony, unless they are the femme fatale: an archetype that portrays female power as entirely sexual.



When a female character is written with rage or strength for the sole goal of achieving what she desires—other than a man's attention or affection—she is able to live outside of the destructive and objectifying assumptions that are used to represent women in the media. The more we push those boundaries, the closer we get to authentic and multifaceted female characters. It abandons subtlety in favor of uncompromising narrative.

Protagonists portrayed effectively aren't always supposed to be pleasant or even nice people. This is truly applicable to characters that fall under the category of feminine anger. For example, novelist Ottessa Moshfegh is well-known for portraying unlikable characters. Her main protagonists throughout most of her work are deranged, unstable women who are festering in their own agony. Regardless, they are undoubtedly genuine and, of course, furious.

When there is variable judgment or a gray area in a character's perceptions, it's generally an indication that the subject is well written, much like real individuals have differing judgments about one person. Female characters such as Rue, Jules, Cassie, Maddy, Lexi, and Kat are notable examples. During the release of season two of *Euphoria*, there was a lively weekly online discussion about each episode. The debate focused on these women's objectives, values, and choices, rather than their love interests.

Rage serves as a trigger for everything women and girls are told not to be or feel. However, the anger fostered in female characters is frequently what causes them to reflect reality so successfully. In fact, women are frequently confronted with disapproval of their temper or annoyance; seeing it played out in fiction empowers women to reclaim their agency.

THE STREET ART OF BERLIN

For many centuries, Berlin has represented the control centre of Europe and the European power. German political leaders play vital roles in international politics: that might be one of the reasons why street art in Berlin touches so many social, humanitarian and political issues.



Thierry Noir, East Side Gallery

Street art is a particular type of a visual statement and one of the most public forms of self-expression – people can admire it while walking to school, taking the bus or eating at a restaurant. The majority of the pieces focus on specific issues that one might see in the society, criticising the capitalistic world we live in. Most of them are political statements that the artists show to the world, to let the observers contemplate about the current issues. The techniques used in such pieces depend strongly on the author. Very often you may notice street art in the form of cartoons, such as the work of Thierry Noir (Picture 1), but many show complex artistic techniques. Moreover, many people also take into consideration and appreciate illegal graffiti drawings that are more reachable by us. These often look like specific signs or words that may be significant to the artists, such as a name or a signature saying. Illegal graffiti is often a way to convey your feelings and disclose ideas, especially for young, unpopular or undervalued artists. However, it may be still considered a disadvantage as illegal paintings often are not done professionally, contain curse words and violate the urban landscape.

BARBARA MIELECH MARCINIAK

Walking through Berlin, you are likely to spot at least one piece of graffiti on almost every street, building or fence. After all, the city was for many years divided by the iron curtain – and somebody had to take care of the design of the wall. Especially since then, one can see that the population of Berlin takes artistic expression very seriously. The longest remaining part of the Wall of Berlin, about 1,300 metres, is full with more than 100 artworks by a plethora of artists from different nationalities. But what meanings can we spot behind those paintings?

The most popular piece that can be seen on the remaining part of the wall, the present East Side Gallery, is the My God, Help me to survive this Deadly Love mural by Dmitri Vrubel. The work is a replication of a picture made during the celebration of the anniversary of the creation of the German Democratic Republic and presents two male politicians kissing each other. It displays the relationship between the Germans and Russians during the 20th century. The artist successfully contrasts the two main ideas: in the painting, we can see love and integration when in reality, it is located on the Berlin Wall, which represents the division between the nations.

The majority of the pieces in Berlin are done professionally, on a large scale, and focus on many complex aspects of the world such as war or inequality. They depict the true colours of modern-day society and the problems it is facing.





THE BEAUTY OF THE "I'M FLYING" SCENE FROM TITANIC



Two protagonists watch the sunset together. One stands on the edge of the ship with closed eyes, trusting the other with her life, while the other is holding her tightly. Many consider the "I'm Flying" piece in the *Titanic* the ideal movie scene.

The main reason for why we consider the scene so captivating is the director's ability to capture the minute, the passing moments. The camerawork enables the viewer to experience "the sublime", which could be felt even more when watched on screen in the cinema, as it traditionally was. Edmund Burke developed the concept of "the sublime" in the mid-eighteenth century. It describes the beauty and pleasure of feeling insignificant when in the face of the magnitude and power of nature. This can be seen when we see Rose and Jack's heads in contrast to the large ocean (image 1) or when the camera is situated at the bottom of the vessel to capture the 53-meter-tall ship (image 2). These effects are used to show how trivial the two lovers are in the face of the gallant ocean and ship. It also illustrates their fragility and hopelessness in comparison to the powerful forces of nature and that their relationship will soon end. This is highlighted by the fact that they meet at sunset, which symbolically means the end of something. We can also notice that if Rose or Jack move in the wrong direction, they will fall into waters and die, foreshadowing the victory of nature over the human life.



Another aspect of the beauty of the scene is the physical attractiveness of the characters. Rose, who is portrayed by Kate Winslet, is considered beautiful by many. There are many similarities between her and the goddess in Sandro Botticelli's painting, *The Birth of Venus*. She is alabaster-skinned and has auburn hair, which was deemed attractive in Ancient Greece. Both Venus and Rose have oval faces, which was prized in 18th century France. Her face is quite symmetrical, without any visual asymmetries. This directly pertains to Plato's and Aristoteles's theories linking beauty with symmetry, something which was also reflected in Ancient Egyptian culture. Moreover, we can see that she has a healthy and slightly curvy silhouette, highlighting her femininity, which is in line with the classical idea of beauty: Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual love and beauty, was portrayed having a softer figure, with full breasts and wide hips. In that, her body is similar to *Venus from Milo*, a sculpture by Alexandros of Antioch.

Although Venus doesn't have hands, Rose has her eyes closed and is held by Jack, which shows that she is passive and dependent on a man.

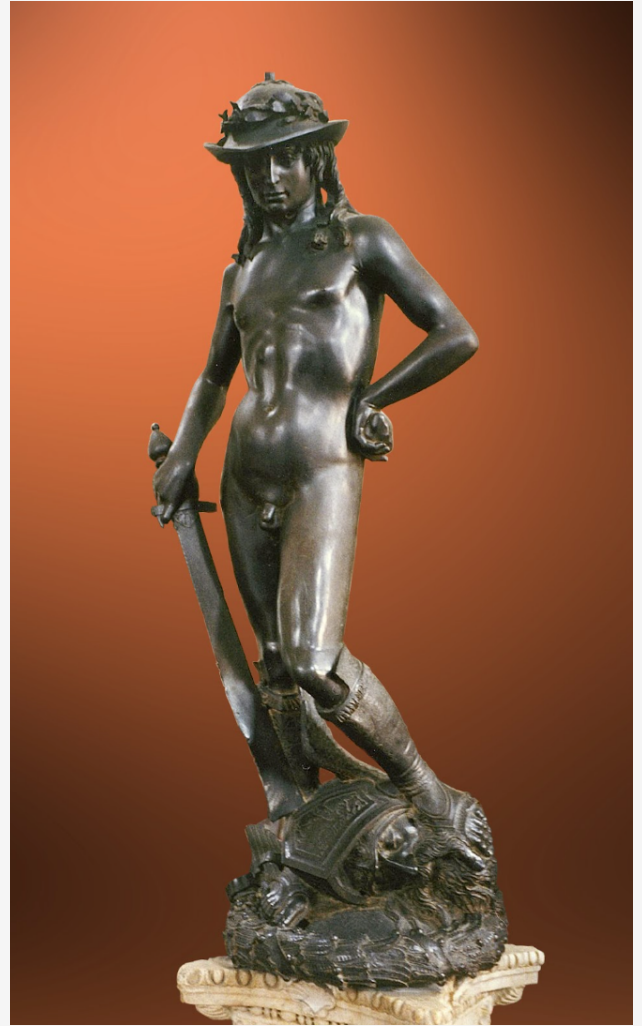


"Venus from Milo", Alexandros of Antioch



"The Birth of Venus", Sandro Botticelli

Furthermore, Jack, who is played by Leonardo DiCaprio, is considered to be the primary example of attractiveness and beauty. In the words of Aristotle, "the chief forms of beauty are order, symmetry, and clear delineation," which is precisely how we Jack's face could be described. Similarly to Rose, Jack also has fair skin, which symbolized wealth in many historical cultures. His body and face appear more adolescent, thus, he can be compared to David's *Donatello*, who is thin and looks like a young boy.



David's "Donatello"

The music also influences our perception of the moment. The whole vocal melody is calm and smooth, so it does not distract us from what is happening, and it makes us feel relaxed. Throughout the entire scene, we can hear a high-pitched voice singing the "ah" vowel on a melisma, and accompanying instruments like the piano. Moreover, the music is legato and consonant, so all the notes are within the key of D, which creates a progression that is easy to follow and pleasant to the listener. The piece often utilizes the perfect cadence, once again mirroring classical concepts of beauty and symmetry, thus reflecting on the fated love between the two main characters. Furthermore, the music is in major tonality, which makes us feel contented. Lastly, we can hear that there is a very small crescendo, which makes the piece more interesting, which is also a part of its beauty.

VIVIENNE WESTWOOD: A QUEEN OF PUNK

Vivienne Westwood was one of the most brilliant fashion designers of all time, a rebel who injected her love for anarchy, fun and the avant-garde into her iconic designs. She pushed the boundaries of color and print shaping the UK punk movement and street style in the 70s.

Vivienne Westwood, born in a village in Derbyshire in 1941, was the daughter of a factory worker and cotton weaver. As a teenager she moved to London with her family where she later became a primary school teacher.

That's also where she met an art student and a future manager of the punk band "Sex Pistols". It was him who gave Westwood the opportunity to harness a natural flair for dressmaking. Together they pursued a career in fashion, initially operating Let it Rock, a stall selling second hand 1950s vintage clothing along with McLaren's rock-and-roll record collection. Westwood produced clothing designs based on his provocative ideas. She created their customized T-shirts, which were ripped and embellished with shocking anti-establishment slogans and graphics, as well as their bondage trousers. Those were black with straps inspired by sadomasochistic costumes.

Their boutique's "Let it Rock" name soon changed into "Too Fast to Live", "Too Young to Die", "Sex", and finally "Seditionaries". It became a center of attention for the British youth, however their erotically focused fashion image enraged Britain's right-wing press. Not too long after Westwood and McLaren created their first commercial ready-to-wear collection called "Pirates" in 1981, they ended their personal relationship. They remained professional partners for five more years, but Westwood soon established her identity as a leading designer.

Independently, Westwood built her own fashion empire, operating numerous boutiques and producing two menswear and three womenswear collections annually. She also designed bridal clothes, shoes, hosiery, eyewear, scarves, ties, knitwear, cosmetics, and perfumes. On April 1, 2004, a retrospective devoted to her creations opened at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. "Vivienne Westwood: 34 Years in Fashion" was the largest exhibition the museum had ever dedicated to a British designer.

Westwood died on 29th of December 2022 but the brand she created will continue to live on.

Not so long before her death Andreas Kronthaler took over the role of creative director overseeing the designs for Westwood's collections, allowing the designer more time to focus on other causes.

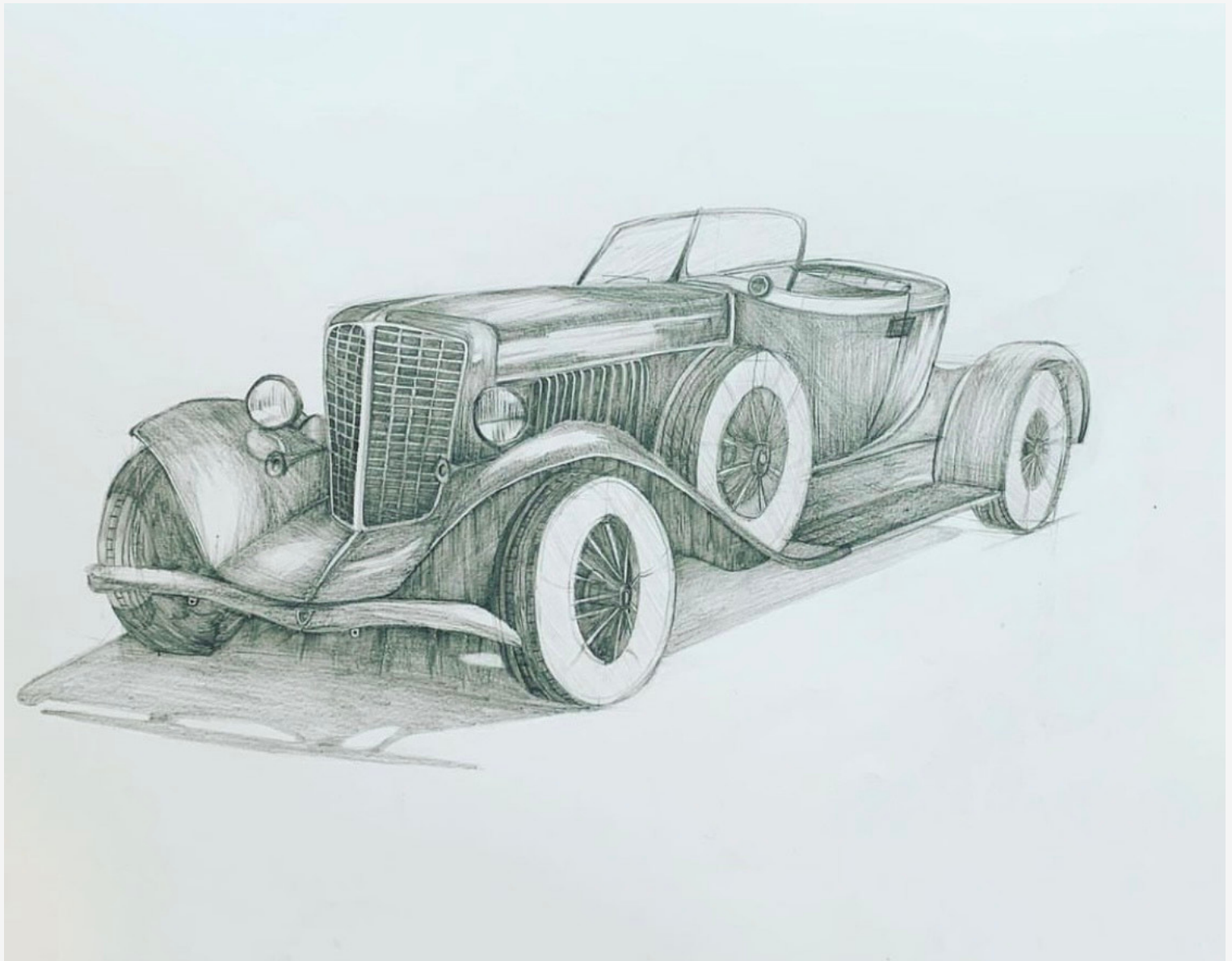
In the last decade of her life the designer's heart had moved on from fashion. She was a rebel, but never without a cause, working tirelessly to raise awareness of the climate emergency many years before it was fashionable. For the past ten years, her catwalk shows have been headlined by phrases meant to spread awareness. Her priorities had changed. Instead of creating innovative looks she often paired her shows with human rights, sustainability or environmental protection. She used the runway as a stage to voice her tough, unvarnished statements. Never afraid to speak her mind, she was a vocal advocate against capitalism and the decline of the natural environment.

Westwood has created a brand that is unique, radical and rebellious and through Kronthaler's creative vision there is hope that the spirit of Westwood will live on. In a statement released after Westwood died, Kronthaler stated:

"I will continue with Vivienne in my heart ... We have been working until the end and she has given me plenty of things to get on with. Thank you darling."

Her views on fashion changed but fashion never fell out of love with Vivienne Westwood.





THE BRAZILIAN WAVE - A BRIEF HISTORY OF BOSSA NOVA

Bam, ba-duh, bam. Open beaches amongst rows of palm trees. Da-duh, bam, bam. Blindingly blue oceans filled with clear water. Bam, ba-duh, bam. Tanned women lavishing with big sunglasses sliding off their noses.

Bossa nova is more than the summers of the 1960s on Brazilian beaches. It's more than elevator music, with a syncopating tambourine. It's more than The Girl from Ipanema and covers by Frank Sinatra. Bossa nova is a big part of many South Americans' identities, woven into their roots and upbringings.

The story starts in 1956, in Rio de Janeiro. Antônio Carlos Jobim, a Brazilian classically-trained musician, was commissioned to write pieces for the play *Orfeu da Conceição* (Orpheus of the Conception), which is a transplant of the Greek story of Orpheus and Eunice into the Brazilian carnival. Soon, in 1959, the play inspired the movie *Black Orpheus*, which featured Black Brazilian actors. Due to the film being a collaboration between French, Brazilian and Italian industries, it gained international attention. Receiving the Palme d'Or award at Cannes Festival in 1959, caused the fame of the two composers of the movie's soundtrack to skyrocket. Antônio Carlos Jobim soon became internationally renewed and would continue to compose together for years to come.

Stan Getz, another bossa nova star, decided to strike a collaboration with João Gilberto - they worked together for two years, releasing the album *Getz/Gilberto* in 1963. The star of bossa nova, The Girl from Ipanema, was born - quite accidentally. When recording, Gilberto's wife, Astrud was in the studio, and as she spoke English, Gilberto asked her to sing in that language on a few tracks, despite no previous experience - this allowed the record to reach international audiences. Their duet is featured on the song, which soon became famous in the States, resulting in the piece receiving three prizes during the Grammy Awards in 1965.

American artists started coming to Brazil to experience the rise of bossa nova. It was refreshing, exotic, and exciting - the perfect mix of jazz and samba, with added soft qualities. It celebrated new cultures being spread throughout the country and gave the already well-known artists an opportunity to give the audiences something refreshing.

Charlie Byrd, a famous guitarist, asked Getz to record an album together after listening to the Brazilian performing live.

Thus, Jazz Samba was born - the collaboration between the two that was released in 1962. Audiences in both Americas loved it - the soft strumming on Byrd's guitar, and Getz's smooth saxophone shining throughout the album.

North America's interest in bossa nova grew after a concert held in Carnegie Hall in 1962. Brazilian musicians gathered to perform hits and loved melodies to the excited audience, which sat many jazz stars. The wave of inspiration impacted personalities like Jimmy Smith and Oscar Peterson, as well as Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald - who were huge on the American stages. They both paid honours to Jobim by recreating their songs in his style. Even The Beatles (with songs like *And I Love Her*) and The Beach Boys (*Busy Doin' Nothin'*) joined in on the trend, adding some bossa nova spice to their songs.

No matter if you actively listen to Getz's albums or pass through a café playing his music, there is some element that hooks you in. Why is bossa nova so pleasant to the ear? It's calming, quiet, and delicate. The mellow strumming of a guitar, soft syncopated and relaxing drums paired with reverberating bass line, whispered lyrics. The rhythm is directly inspired by samba, which has roots in African cultures. The majority of the beats are written in measures of 6/8 or 4/4, with an emphasis on the second beat. João Gilberto gave bossa nova the recognisable guitar strumming pattern that he achieved by experimenting with the sound of tambourine in samba. Many of the lyrics are taken from romantic poems - Jobim used the works of Brazilian poets, like Vincinius de Moraes, who had written lyrics for the hits *The Girl from Ipanema* and *Agua de Beber*. That's why songs from this genre are nostalgic but sensual, combined with the element of dance. We can think of them while enjoying a cup of coffee with friends or resting in the bright sunlight with a drink in hand.

Although bossa nova was the style of Brazilian summers in the previous century, and some of the iconic stars of this style have passed away, the genre is still present and celebrated. Descendants of the icons continue to spread the musical part of the culture. Bebel Gilberto, the daughter of João Gilberto, has sparked a new interest in Brazilian youth with the publishing of her album *Tanto Tempo*, which became trending in the 2000s. It combines the charm of bossa nova with the excitement of electronic grooves - allowing the magic of 1960s Brazil to spread into the



Astrud Gilberto performing with a band.

SHOSTAKOVICH, STALIN AND THE SOVIET SYMPHONIES

Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich is probably known to you from his music, as it obviously tends to be with composers. Born in 1906, he lived through the Russian Revolution and composed under Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev. Throughout his life he had a tumultuous relationship with the government, oscillating between tentative agreement and fear for his life. Understanding the intent and emotions behind classical music is often closely tied to what the composer was experiencing in their personal life. Shostakovich, living in turbulent times, certainly experienced a lot to influence his compositions. Come along as I tell you all about his various rises and falls.



During his early career he was not particularly under Soviet suspicion, even as he shot to fame on the international stage. At age of 19, he became known thanks to his First Symphony. In 1927 he competed in the First International Chopin Piano Competition, right here in Warsaw. The same year he wrote his Second Symphony, patriotic in tone, subtitled To October (the month of the Bolshevik Revolution, for those less historically inclined). Ambitious and disciplined, he locked himself away to compose or practice, sometimes for weeks at a time, and refused to be a pianist if he could not be counted among the best of his time.

Soon enough came Stalin's cultural revolution, not to be confused with the one in China, and the regime began sifting through artists and picking off those whose work did not align with Soviet values. -. Shostakovich, unfortunately, found himself on the radar. In the late 20s he had adapted Gogol's The Nose into a satirical opera. It was performed in 1929, prompting an attack from the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians, provoking general confusion among critics. Aside from such politically questionable activity, however, he also worked (in reality did little to nothing at all) at a proletarian youth theatre, cleverly shielding himself from suspicion based on ideology.

Nothing nice and convenient lasts forever, and it just so happened in 1936 that Shostakovich was viciously denounced after a January showing of his popular opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk. For two years before, it had been highly regarded and praised, both in the public and political eye. Why did opinion shift within one evening? The answer is simple - Stalin saw it and didn't like it. Alas, the life of a Soviet creative was a harsh one. Pravda, the state newspaper, called it "Muddle Instead Of Music," influencing all other press to attack it as well: poor composition, sexual tones, disharmony, discord, full of 'formalist errors'... how had they not seen these flaws before? Pravda truly knew its way around music! Shostakovich was subjected to slander from each direction. It was the year 1936, the beginning of the Great Terror. Afraid of arrest, he tried to build relations with the government, and asked for a meeting with the ever-generous Comrade Stalin, but was denied. Later on in the Terror many of his relatives and friends were killed or imprisoned, including his brother-in-law and mother-in-law, his uncle, his teacher, and general Tukhachevsky, who had reached out to make sure Shostakovich was alright following the unfortunate performance of Lady Macbeth.

Yet, he would not be confined to the government's bad side forever. In 1937 Shostakovich recovered with the Fifth Symphony, a great success with the public. After a precarious period he returned to financial stability. The Party conceded victory, but left a threat: "a Soviet artist's response to fair criticism." His rehabilitation was due to his acceptance of political demands, no more. Thanks to World War Two, he shot back to fame. Besieged by the Germans in Leningrad during WWII, he wrote his Seventh Symphony, triumphant, emotional, patriotic despite all.



Apparently, however, the zeitgeist had it out for Dmitri Dmitriyevich. He was denounced again for formalism (putting technique and intellectual value over evoking emotions) in 1948 by the Zhdanov Doctrine. Andrei Zhdanov, an important official and crude specimen who referred to Anna Akhmatova, one of Russia's greatest poets, as "half nun, half whore", launched a campaign to root out Western and capitalist influences, forcing musicians to write only for the masses. With most of his works banned, Shostakovich fell on hard times again. According to his friend Yuri Luybimov, "he waited for his arrest at night out on the landing by the lift, so that at least his family wouldn't be disturbed." At that rather apocalyptic time, and until Stalin's death in 1953, he composed for films, for the Party to rehabilitate him, and for himself, to hide in his drawer. In music and even in public statements he was forced to praise the Soviet state. In 1949 Stalin sent him and a group of other musicians to America, where he was forced to read a speech but could not finish from nerves. He regarded the entire experience as a humiliation.

Eventually, in 1960, following another personal renaissance and the unearthing of his previously hidden compositions, Shostakovich joined the Communist Party. Under Khrushchev he was chosen for the Chairman of the Union of Composers, and Party membership was required. His son recalls him crying at the event, and telling his wife he had been blackmailed. Afterwards, the composer had greater freedom of speech, but never complete - he died before the fall of Communism. In his music he touched on antisemitism, referring to a controversial poem, quoted other composers, but also commemorated Lenin and the October Revolution, staying on the safe side but refusing to play like a marionette.

Later in life his music took on a tone of looming mortality. As health worsened, he lost the ability to play and compose. He died in 1975, having been honoured with the naming of the Shostakovich Peninsula in Antarctica.

While opinions on his relationship to the state differ, I prefer to take a more sympathetic outlook. Though he was forced into acts of conformity, he never approved of the oppressive nature of the Soviet government. He was rarely able to hint at his true stance, but his personal resistance can be read from the fact that he stood by his Jewish friends and raised gentle opposition by incorporating Jewish motifs into his music when antisemitic policies were the order of the day. When he could risk it, he appealed against political arrests, and along with other figures had a hand in the release of poet Joseph Brodsky from hard labour. Above all, he did not let himself be used to churn out nothing but propaganda, but created as independently as he could in the circumstances he was faced with.

WHAT IS HOME BUT A REFUGE...?

The shining Sun takes me back

Twenty miles, eight years,

Somehow my house is still the same.

I reread the Table of Contents hundreds of times

And I manage to find minor corrections:

Misplaced cupboard here, missing rug there.

I float among sounds that are not present but should
be–

What is home but a refuge for the Wicked?

Mud clings to my shoes as I walk through

The backyard – and it's ironic that it's the only

Ever-present entity in this Ghost Town.

Even my shadow abandoned the ruins

(I cut it off at my doorstep,

It's playing tag with December and May),

But I will stay. This time, I'll stay.

What is home but amnesty for the Wicked?

I am fearless in the face of adversity.

I am strong enough to lift rubble.

I am smiling at old photographs.

I am growing a garden on chalky soil.

I am wise enough to set up camp for the cold night.

I turn back watches and calendars.

This time, I am staying, but in quiet solitude.

What is home but Nirvana for the Wicked?

UNTITLED (NEW YEARS)

How dare a blood diamond,
something so profoundly beautiful yet flawed,
exist in Nature?

Oh, but how beautiful
are the stains it leaves in the snow!
They arrange patterns, dozens of lives
carved into the pristine sheets
covering the barren soil.

I think of you on January 1st at 00:23.
I think of all the love letters I never sent.
I think of all the late-night conversations
and facing reality in the morning.
I remember treading muddy waters barefoot,
sailing the Pacific in a kayak,
walking on water when it's frozen.

You loved the weekends
when you'd pluck my body hairs one by one
and draw with the trickles of blood
on my skin. We were impure.

You were violent and vicious turbulence
(or the grateful relief of surviving).
And how dare wind exist in Nature
when I just want to rest on my holiday?

I'll think of you next year and the year after that
and maybe in 70 years when we're old and wrinkled
or when I see glistening diamond rings
or blood-stained snow in January.

Even after all these years
your flickering shadow still surrounds me.

I hope your bittersweet fantasy of me
will haunt you every cold winter too.

EXEGI MONUMENTUM

We'll build a house one day
When snow melts and reveals barren soil
When ants leave their nests
And we watch the trees unfold
You dream of cozy couches
I'm partial to warm fireplaces
We can invite our friends over
And hear them laugh in our favorite spaces

And it feels like a plagal cadence

No key is out of tune

I'll fall asleep by our piano

You'll carry me to our room

There's a light in our bed

Not a forest fire but a gentle glow

Not painkillers washed by coffee

But mornings that whisper home

In the quiet of my wardrobe drawer

Away from your curious sight

I'll keep sacred scriptures

To preserve the beauty of your light

And if you leave, I'll become a preacher

Build a temple in our home

Worship you like a godsend

Carve your statue out of stone

I'll read our love to the moon and stars

Make grown men weep with the religion I foster

Tides will turn when I speak your name

Your sanctity lives forever in my gospel

I LOVED YOU BEFORE I WAS BORN

BY LI-YOUNG LEE

I loved you before I was born.

It doesn't make sense, I know.

I saw your eyes before I had eyes to see.

And I've lived longing

for your ever look ever since.

That longing entered time as this body.

And the longing grew as this body waxed.

And the longing grows as the body wanes.

The longing will outlive this body.

I loved you before I was born.

It doesn't make sense, I know.

Long before eternity, I caught a glimpse
of your neck and shoulders, your ankles and toes.

And I've been lonely for you from that instant.

That loneliness appeared on earth as this body.

And my share of time has been nothing
but your name outrunning my ever saying it clearly.

Your face fleeing my ever
kissing it firmly once on the mouth.

In longing, I am most myself, rapt,
my lamp mortal, my light
hidden and singing.

I give you my blank heart.

Please write on it
what you wish.

focaccia

thinking of that one day,
when all seemed so simple,
a paradise, another place.

light coming from the window,
entering from above.
a transformative force,
changing all.

I remember sitting in the back,
looking around, a smile on my face.

finally, I could take a breath.

focaccia on the table,
still warm on the edges.
nothing bothered me,
a bliss like no other.

It was as if birds were flying around,
and all I had to do,
was watch them fly.

all my worries and fears,
weren't there;
it was a monday,
the beginning of nothing

people laughing,
people working,
people eating,

yet all I had to do, was smile
observe
and watch

focaccia, II

focaccia resting down,
people laughing around,
the purpose of life, magically found.

rays of sun passing through window glass,
conversations about the upper class,
harmony discovered with sounds of the brass.

teenagers awkwardly trying to find conversation topics,
a child ecstatically searching through his comics,
and I am trying to study microeconomics.

focaccia - commentary

On a February afternoon, I experienced something strange, yet beautiful. It was 12pm in Warsaw, raining.

When I entered the café and sat down on a wooden chair, I found an uncanny sense of happiness – coming from a place of peace. I felt a wave of tranquility wash over me, thus prompting me to engage in a simple activity: watching others. I spotted two gentlemen talking, awkward teenagers celebrating a reunion of some sort, and a child playing – and annoying – his mother. I sat back and let a warm, serene orange light nestle itself gently below my heart. I felt truly happy. Resting comfortably in my spot, I finally appreciated the true beauty of a free evening, not having to do anything, whatsoever.

One of the walls of the café was entirely made from glass, which allowed light to enter the place. Instead of a February winter, our little coffee shop microclimate felt like an April spring.

After writing the first poem, I felt like experimenting and wrote another one, describing the exact same situation from a different angle; I wanted every line to rhyme, making the poem more funky.



POETRY

fearful fate

swimming in white wine under stars
strings of grass wrapped around my wrists
his lips whispering secrets to my stomach
with summer wind singing me a lullaby
brown dogs running at the edge of a lake
the end of his cigarette beaming above my eyes
– i believed

watching men crack open marble
soft sounds of a trumpet tied at my ankles
waking to birds singing in the green garden
white butterfly sitting on the shards of a heart-shaped
ashtray
golden irises hiding underneath sleep while the sun rose
with his lips parted in peace and desire
– i believed

wiping his tears with my dark blue sweater
his explanations moved the tree shadows gently
my nails painted red and my knees painted purple
with pieces of glass in my body and mind
burning my lips shut not to run
watching the street lights shift across his cheekbones
– i believed

collapsing onto the dirty bathroom floor
her hand cleaned my face and stroked my back
the world spun softly so i called the wrong number
he saw my broken ribs and bleeding ankles
tucking away my hair without a word
the dirt on my body i can't scrub off with water or fire
– i believe

eating clementines peeled by her soft hands
i ran in the first snow and first sunlight
dilated pupils glance brightly from the curtain of hair
slowly disappearing into sweet smoke
breaking orange dry leaves with each step
still sending smiles and aching to touch
– i believe

POETRY

THROWING OLD OBJECTS AWAY

Yellowed and belonging to the past but it felt as though
it touched my skin not long ago
Not something I need

Something I want to see;
hold and feel-
What it once was,
to whom it belonged,
whether it had significance.

-
A barbie doll-
received one day.
I remember
playing as though she is my daughter, giving her care,
everyday I would brush her hair.

She isnt my child,
yet I feel as though I mean to her,
and she means to me-
to throw her away
I wouldnt dare.

A tiny notebook
with a large amount of glitter.
The smell is bitter and
the sparkles make me nostalgic
of times when I would not want a thing with no pizzazz

I would not wear a dress if it was not wavy when I danced.

The notebook is not even a diary.
It contains a couple of drawings,
and two thoughts I never dared to say;

"I lied to Mary about a dream I had",
"I don't wear underwear to ballet classes"

-My secrets.

I did not fear anyone would read it
or even look.

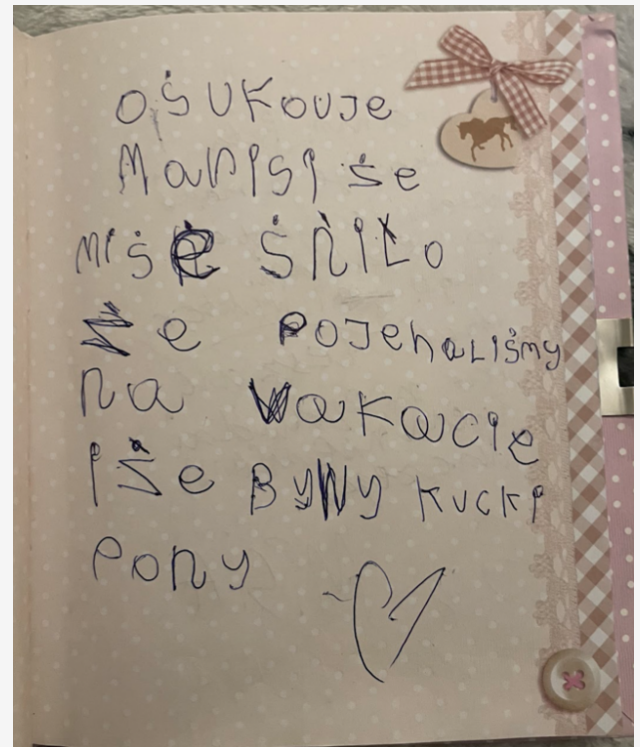
I trusted this notebook.

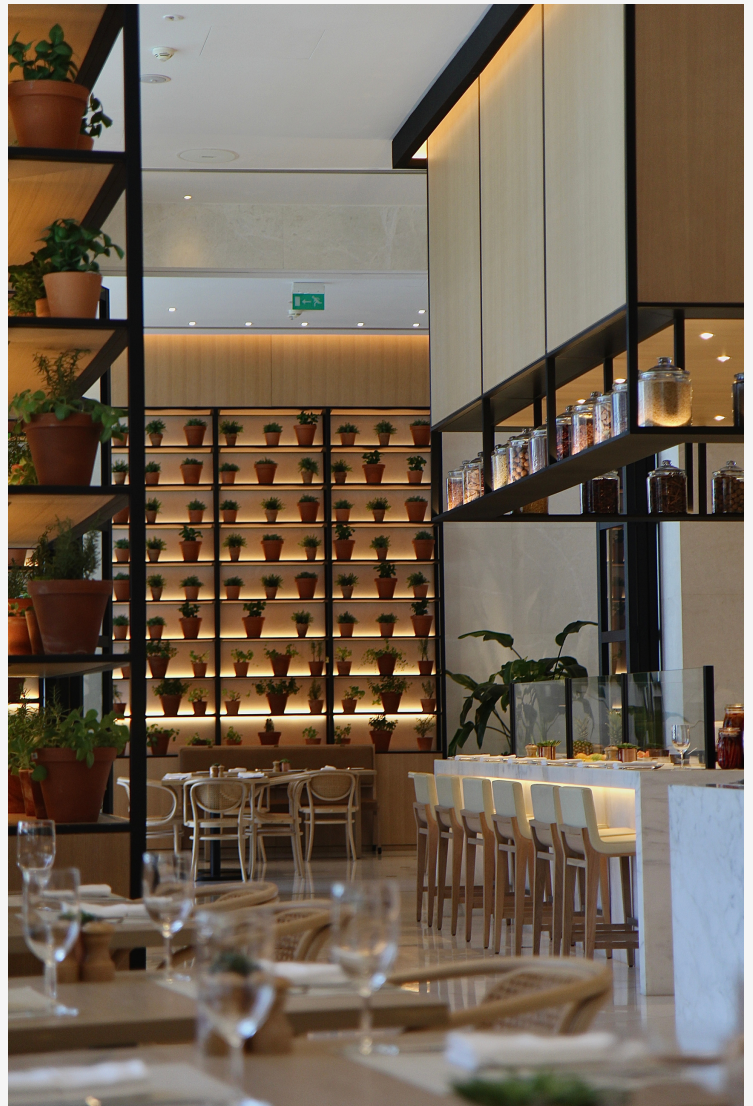
I'll keep it, and maybe I'll be able to trust it again-
whisper what I lie about,
tell it why I never cry,
speak of moments when I'd rather shout.

A family picture,
A bunch of tangled up bracelets
in a jewelery box
engraved with my name.

I hold it and feel-
What it once was,

a gone person
to whom it belonged.





BARBARA MIELECH- MARCINIAK

myself

the world around me reminds me
of mistakes i make,
of mistakes that cause me to fail,
of mistakes that make me despair;
like i only see the things that cause me to feel pain,
like my chest cannot drop all the weight,

but then when clouds move away,
they unveil the hope that once my life will be the way
i imagine.

i feel the morning sun
spreading in my house,
brightening up the life that awaits,
polishing the imperfections out there,
setting the air for today.

i finally smell happiness;
peace, light, and joy that come with spring.
i sense novelty,
freshness that i don't usually see.

i imagine
life where i feel liked and respected,
life where i feel loved and accepted,
where i am not embarrassed of who i am.

life where i can be myself.

AGNIESZKA MIELECH, 1988

THE SOUND OF MANDOLIN

We jealously protect
The measures of our existence
Cracking every now and then:

My-Your-Our

What is existence?

It's just
a hastily ripped sound
from the mandolin box...

