Vernacular Notions of Reverie: St. EOM’s Pasaquan as a Utopia

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VERNACULAR NOTIONS OF REVERIE: ST. EOM’S PASAQUAN AS A UTOPIA

by

VICTORIA LAUREN CANTRELL

Under the Direction of Susan Richmond, PhD

ABSTRACT

During the early twentieth century, a growing trend among Americans was to collect and display “oriental” objects from the American Southwest and Asia in museums and the domestic interior, often as an escape from American culture. *Vernacular Notions of Reverie: St. EOM’s Pasaquan as Utopia* explores the impact of the “Oriental Aesthetic” in American material culture on the works of St. EOM, born Eddie Owens Martin (1908-1986). EOM emulates outsider cultures at *Pasaquan*, his seven-acre art environment in Buena Vista, Georgia. I argue that as EOM created *Pasaquan*, he was also creating his own utopia in order to escape the Western environment he grew up in and rejected. Evidence for this argument includes his writings, sketches, a scrapbook, which contains numerous photographs from *National Geographic Magazine*, and interviews with Tom Patterson, an author who spent time with the artist in the last year of his life.

INDEX WORDS: Self-taught art, Orientalism, 20th century America, Material culture
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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Art

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2017
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Georgia State University
May 2017
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Kevin and Tammy Cantrell, and brother, Ryan Cantrell, who have always supported and encouraged me in my personal endeavors and research interests.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Susan Richmond, and my committee members, Dr. Maria Gindhart and Dr. John Decker, for their continuous support throughout my graduate career and thesis.
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1. INTRODUCTION

St. EOM’s Pasaquan has been a fixture in the small Georgia community of Buena Vista for over forty years. The Kohler Foundation, Inc., finished its two-year restoration of the site in 2016, bringing Pasaquan back to its 1986 state. The restoration included care and cataloging of EOM’s sculptural home, works on paper, paintings, jewelry, clothing, and statues, most of which had not been seen before by the public. Pasaquan is a unique art environment that has not been the subject of analysis, especially with consideration of the artist’s works outside of the site. The most detailed writing on Pasaquan is in the form of Tom Patterson’s St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan: The Life and Times and Art of Eddie Owens Martin wherein Patterson interviewed EOM the year before the artist’s death. However, there is no critical evaluation within the work, only discussions with the artist. Pasaquan—and the related artwork—demonstrate St. EOM’s desire, after he had a set of visions in his late twenties, to construct a utopia in which to live. The influences of non-Western art in his works are evident as he looked to them for inspiration. He used early twentieth century American material culture, which often quoted “Oriental” art to achieve Pasaquan’s aesthetic.¹ Based on his works on paper and interviews, it is clear that St. EOM was familiar with numerous non-Western teachings and doctrines, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Native American religions. At the same time, I question the depth of knowledge the artist had about the cultures he drew inspiration from and how the Orientalist discourse in America during his formative years as an artist may have affected his perspective of foreigners. With these attributes in mind, his work does not adhere to the traditional notions of Self-Taught and Folk Art as the dichotomy of the insider and outsider of mainstream media and art history is

¹. Tom Patterson, St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan: The Life and Times and Art of Eddie Owens Martin (Asheville, NC, United States: Jargon Society, 1987), 215.
often how vernacular artists are divided – outside of the populous and ignorant of broader cultural ideas. However, EOM was very much interested in popular and mainstream culture, even though he pushed against it, and his sources were part of material culture in America during his active years as an artist (1920s-1986).
2. ST. EOM’S BEGINNING

EOM created Pasaquan over the span of three decades. Pasaquan sits on a seven-acre piece of land and consists of over 900 feet of masonry fence, totems, sculptures, paintings, and a home he converted into part of his self-taught visionary art environment. Pasaquan acted as a domestic and ritual space for St. EOM as he built the compound. The structure as it stands now is an extension from the home he inherited from his mother. The addition includes five rooms: two that served as extra living space, a kitchen, a workshop, and an oratory [Figure 2.1]. The latter three rooms included images of the Pasaquoyan landscape and peoples. The exterior of the home is fashioned with mandalas, mountains, and the faces of people from Mu and Pasaquan. Mu was a fictional island - located in the same place as the mythical island of Lemuria - that inspired EOM artistically and philosophically.²

Due to EOM’s outsider relationship with non-Western cultures, idealized notions of their lives culminated with images and stories out of material culture to form a pan-non-Western narrative that mirrors the pseudo-archeological endeavors of someone like James Churchward and his mythical island, Mu. In his Lost Continent of Mu, the Motherland of Men (1926), James Churchward presents a lost civilization’s origin through the alleged discovery of tablets which detail the, invented, society’s story. In this book, and accompanying volumes, Churchward claims to have learned the secrets of this lost continent from a priest while he was in India.³ In his writings, he pulls from an amalgamation of sources to show evidence of how Mu impacted civilizations internationally. Guided by catastrophism, the belief in lost continents stems from the

2. Ibid., 31.

questions and issues surrounding the origins of languages and cultures. For example, in India the Dravidian languages cannot be linked to any other language family, including Sanskrit. This has become known as the Dravidian Problem. Mythical islands such as Lemuria and Mu offered an explanation for anthropologists to the rational evolution of cultures and languages – they must have originated from a source now lost. Like the Dravidian languages, some people believed that a lost island’s inhabitants could have been responsible for the dissemination of other parts of culture, such as symbols and rituals. This approach would influence St. EOM as he felt that Churchward was correct in his beliefs as well. EOM cites that the totems are of the people of Mu that, after a cataclysmic event in their culture, spread out through the world and influenced other cultures. Trusting the idea that Mu could be seen in cultures internationally, EOM sought out their similarities, sometimes focusing on specific cultures. He built Pasaquan to create a world where only the natural man existed, and to shut out the world that wanted him to conform. Apart from the home stands 33 walls, 34 totems, a pagoda, a kiva, an auto shed, a tank shed, a sand pit, and a cottage [Figure 2.2]. Each of these elements carries its own specific set of symbols and imagery from non-Western cultures and Mu.

For St. EOM, the creation of Pasaquan appears to have stemmed from the desire to create a utopia for himself out of his beliefs and the materials that surrounded him. Like many


5. Ibid., 92.

6. Patterson, St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan, 208.

7. Ibid., 215.

8. Ibid., 211.
self-taught artists, EOM created his buildings, mandalas, walls, and totems using everyday materials such as concrete, wood, and outdoor house paint. These materials show resourcefulness and drive by the artist whose main focus was to bring his visions to light. Comparatively, other visionary artists, such as Marcel Storr and Jan Gluszek Dagarama, do not always seek to create a tangible, physical world out of their visions— they only created two-dimensional works. Both artists drew and painted architectural pieces to show alternative spaces and worlds. EOM claimed he was building this place and specific works because, “I built this place to have somethin’ to identify with, ‘cause there’s nothin’ I see in this society that I identify with or desire to emulate. Here I can be in my own world with my temples and design and the spirit of God.”

By creating works that showed his beliefs and placing them in and around his site, the distance grew between the conformist world and his utopia.

In most utopian myths, the creation of an ideal society occurs after a type of cataclysm takes place, whether it is war, famine, or natural disaster. The period wherein a savior comes to power is considered to be the utopia. For example, according to Buddhist eschatology, once the world is void of all Buddhist doctrine, a person will be born with the knowledge to bring peace and religion back to the world. In this instance, Maitreya, the future Buddha, will bring the True Dharma back after the last of the Buddhist monks are killed. In doing this, Maitreya creates a utopia that would reinforce living by the Buddha’s doctrine. Worries often arise

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12. Ibid., 118-119.
regarding cataclysms when changes happen socially and the overarching system wants to maintain social order. The period before Maitreya’s return is considered to be a dystopia in which outsiders, enemies, or others govern the world. However, after a long period of time, someone would save them from the hopelessness and destruction. Through these types of events, inversions of the status quo are created in myth and visual culture to show the devastation caused by outsider or foreign ideals. This is but one example of myriad utopian myths that exist in societies and it contains specific elements wherein each character plays a role in creating the utopia and dystopia. The steps of becoming a prophet more or less mirror EOM’s growth – his vision, evolution in becoming a Pasaquoyan, and creation of his utopia in *Pasaquan*.

*Figure 2.1 Aerial View of Pasaquan. Detail of home highlighted. 1959-1986. Pasaquan, Buena Vista, GA.*
Figure 2.2. Aerial View of Pasaquan. Detail of sculptures and structures highlighted. 1959-1986. Pasaquan, Buena Vista, GA.
3. VISIONS

St. EOM, born Eddie Owens Martin, was born on July 4, 1908 and had his first vision at age 27 in 1935. He moved from his home in Buena Vista at the age of 14 to start over in New York City. During this phase, he began working as a prostitute, drug dealer, and fortuneteller. His experiences in the city, and in his travels around the country, allowed him to interact with a variety of people from all walks of life, and these cultures would help influence his artistic vision for Pasaquan. These people include those he met while traveling America during his twenties and thirties, the people that “lived” within the pages of the National Geographic Magazine, and those who were portrayed through museum objects. While visiting his home in the spring of 1935, he became gravely ill and fell into a fevered sleep. He recalls during an interview, in Tom Patterson’s St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan, feeling as if he had left his body and embarked on a spiritual journey. In this state, EOM had his first vision of what he would later call “Pasaquoyans:” “I encountered this vision of this great big character sittin’ there like some kinda god… this great big man said to me, ‘If you can go back into the world and follow my spirit then you can go, but if you can’t follow my spirit, then this is the end of the road for you, and you can’t go back.’” EOM agreed to do as the giant told him and began recovering from his two-week-long illness.

13. Patterson, St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan, 128-138.


15. Ibid., 166-167.
Believing his illness and vision were consequences of his lifestyle - not necessarily a punishment but rather a sign for a new beginning - EOM returned to New York a short time later to start over again. He describes realizing that his vision was from God:

But I listened to that inner voice, and I recovered, ‘cause I had just had a new revelation. That’s when I really began to reach for the occult and for things that the average person don’t know nothin’ about. And I began to look back behind the scene, behind the façade, in all kinda religions. And then I realized that God had just spoken to me, and that I was to follow his advice.

His second vision appeared to him on May 28, 1935 as he was drawing a picture of Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia, copied from an issue of the New York Times. From Selassie’s face emerged another figure, one with long hair, which was “swept up.” This figure gave EOM his new name and told him that he would be the first “Pasaquoyan.” It would be another twenty years before EOM would begin building Pasaquan, however this marked the beginning of his most prolific works on paper, adornment pieces, and practice of body arts.

Inspired by his visions, EOM believed that man had lost his divine rituals and only followed rituals of the earth now, namely greed and labor. He saw the contemporary world as

16. Patterson, St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan, 166. “I gargled up all this phlegm, and it was like I was getting’ rid of all the evil and confusion that had welled up in me from years of not bein’ myself.”


18. Before his visions, EOM often copied images in magazines and newspapers; however after they began, the focus turned from American culture to that of non-Western cultures.

19. Patterson, St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan, 167-168.

20. Ibid., 169.

21. Ibid., 169.
having lost its values and began searching for these values to better his life and others’ lives as well. In essence, the modern world became EOM’s dystopia, and Pasaquan was the emergence of his own personal utopia wherein he could one day be at peace. Comparably, this site can be interpreted as a quasi-monastery dedicated to multiple religions at once or as a parallel universe similar to Marcel Storr and Jan Gluszak Dagarama’s works, which show environments for the artists to dwell.\(^{22}\)

Part of the disdain he had for Western society was the practice of Christianity, often citing the Bible as the reason for slavery.\(^{23}\) I posit here EOM’s meaning of the word God is a general higher power, rather than a specific deity because of remarks throughout his interviews. His push against Christianity provides evidence that “God,” as it is used frequently by the artist, is a broader entity or even entities from which EOM receives visions. By following a new religious path, EOM began to look at the metaphysical world in new ways and would experiment with the doctrines of religions that he saw as wholly different than Christianity. Similar to other eschatological stories, he looked at society’s critical view of his own lifestyle: he was a gay man with a middle school education, who connected with groups that were often considered the “Other.” Even within his own gay community, he became ostracized after beginning to practice his new beliefs, leading him further away from the cultures he knew. He began to embrace those who were on the fringes of Western society more, as he believed he was one of them. Through discussions in publications such as the National Geographic, his understanding of outsiders grew to include non-Westerners, and they became the focus of his life.


\(^{23}\) Patterson, St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan, 229.
For EOM, outsiders represented all that was good in the world and together they could create a utopia, somewhat illustrating the concept of the salvage paradigm by simplifying their beliefs into a single system. EOM’s idea of a paradise of man and hopes of recreating it played on millennia-old myths and legends regarding a better time and a future in which a paradise would return to Earth.24 In these myths, the storytellers often critique their society or give advice to make a better world.25 Rather than a mere storyteller though, EOM appears to act as prophet for the Pasaquoyans, preaching their message while building the religion. While these are older beliefs, they still exist in contemporary society in the forms of nostalgic yearnings for better times.


4. MATERIAL PASAQUAN

EOM’s overarching push against the status quo was first realized in his embrace of the Sikh religious practice of Kesh, or not cutting one’s hair to show respect for God’s creation.\(^{26}\) He felt that this practice brought Sikhs closer to nature and therefore closer to God. EOM’s first foray into researching non-Western societies was through the study of their body arts, namely of the hair. Both of the figures in his visions appeared to have long hair and beards that were swept up together and bound at the top of their heads.\(^{27}\) He claims to have found images in Egyptian and Mayan hieroglyphs that showed this hairstyle.\(^{28}\) He felt that the hair was a vehicle to be pulled into another realm and believed that at times, this is what was shown in artwork from various cultures.\(^{29}\) After viewing a film about Sikh hair rituals in the early to mid-1940s, EOM began wearing his hair in this manner and would continue to do so until his death in 1986.\(^{30}\) Unfortunately, this is the only information that EOM gives about the film; he omits the date, venue, and film title. In his *Primative [sic] Scrapbook*, EOM placed images of the ritual practice of binding one’s hair along with several images that noticeably influenced him on site [Figures 4.1, 4.2]. The image and practice of binding one’s hair is ubiquitous in EOM’s work, both in concrete and on paper. By practicing this body art, the artist showed his devotion to the type of society he was creating at Pasaquan based on his numerous visions. In addition to showing devotion, he was presenting the inversion of the clean-shaven male that was accepted by modern

\(^{26}\) Patterson, *St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan*, 171.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 169.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 169-192.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 169-170.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 171.
American standards. The performance of Kesh, like many other body arts, transforms the body into a site of living devotion. While doing this, he situates himself further into his ideal place that he was creating.

EOM’s beaded necklaces are another omnipresent image found in his works on paper and jewelry [Figures 4.3, 4.4]. These necklaces are based on Hindu prayer jewelry created from Rudraksha seeds, worn for devotional purposes, which can also be seen in images of gods and goddesses. An example of what was available to EOM is the necklace Prayer Beads at the Natural History Museum, originally from Myanmar [Figure 4.5]. In Rudrakha: A Review On Mythological, Spiritual And Medicinal Importance, the authors point out the importance of Rudraksha in Hindu culture. The beads are used as a tool to reach enlightenment, acting as a link between the earthly and spiritual realms. Drawings in EOM’s loose works on paper show advertisement-like sketches for these necklaces with phrases surrounding the yogic sitters such as “meditating beads,” “for budding gurus,” and “Indian look” [Figures 4.6, 4.7]. This evidence shows the direct influence of the prayer necklaces on EOM’s aesthetic as he continually created jewelry in the same tradition. The Rudraksha seed was an expensive good that EOM would not have been able to afford, and much like his other materials, he improvised to make them seem like the original. Rather than using the Asian seed, he used sweet gum balls and shaved them down to achieve a similar look to their more expensive counterpart. In addition to this, symbols


of devotion and meditation are seen within his works that show his integration of the religions into his life as well.

In 1950, his mother passed away and EOM periodically tended the farm, moving back and forth between Georgia and New York. In 1957, he acquired sixty acres from the estate and decided to make his move to Georgia permanent. It was during these next two years that the opportunity to implement the American Oriental visual and material culture in a less ephemeral space presented itself. From 1957 to 1986, EOM’s most repetitive imagery comes from his visits to museums and libraries and his search for acts of meditation – the yogi, the dancer, and symbols of Buddhist devotion [Figures 4.8, 4.9, 4.10]. His fascination with the religious aspect of meditation through images of yoga is evident in his written works, and in his visual representations as well. The dancer image, which he drew innumerable times, can be traced back to a few singular images in his Primative [sic] Scrapbook. [Figure 4.11] The symbols of Buddhism and Hinduism can be found in numerous places in his works and include the elongated ears of the Buddha.

The dancer figure, as seen in his sketches, emulates the figure of a dancer, which was most likely cut out of a magazine or newspaper in the 1930s or 1940s [Figures 4.11, 4.12]. The image is not only seen in his works on paper though, as the figure reappears in his three-dimensional work, including his Oratory [Figure 4.13]. The continuation of the dancer image in the space of the Oratory, a semicircular room built at the end of EOM’s addition to the original home, shows a ritual purpose for the image. The space was used for various chants, meditations, and dances for the artist and to include the dancer gives her a new meaning that he created for her.
The yogi image is seen within EOM’s works on paper, sculptures, and paintings. In many of these works, he creates a self-portrait; by doing this he is not only creating his new world, but situating himself within the landscape of Pasaquan. The yogic figure that sits in the side-porch, facing west is a larger-than-life nude self-portrait of the artist and also shows him practicing his hair rituals [Figure 4.14]. Here he places his own figure in an atemporal location – the ephemerality of his presence and the materials of paper and canvas do not exist in the same way as in the concrete. In this instance, he is immortal in his representation and in the space. Yoga is an integral part of EOM’s imagery because it was a non-Western practice and it fit into his idea of reaching enlightenment through the body. Becoming enlightened was a concern for EOM as he continually hoped to have more visions from the Pasaquoyans.

The portrayal of the elongated ear in EOM’s three-dimensional work at Pasaquan depicts his interest in the symbolism of Buddhist enlightenment. The walls at Pasaquan are where the images of elongated earlobes show up the most as seen in these medallions on a western wall of the site [Figures 4.15, 4.16]. In her article, “Symbolism in Asian Statues of the Buddha,” Cristina Richie discusses the elongated ear lobes on the Buddha as a symbol of leaving behind material possessions so one can achieve enlightenment.33 Before the Buddha considered leaving his princely life, his jewels weighed his ears down and stretched them.34 By showing the ear lobes as elongated, the works suggest that the enlightened one is still connected to his past, even though


he has given up their material goods. Presenting Buddha in a simplified form shows him as a representation or symbol of enlightenment rather than an expanded discussion.

The Buddha was not the only directly referenced figure from non-Western religious doctrines: Shiva and other multi-limbed Hindu gods became a staple in this art. EOM created a statue of Shiva soon after creating the first walls at Pasaquan to protect him and his creations [Figure 4.17]. He describes the work as the “dancing god Siva” and placed the cement work at the border of the walls to let people know that the God protected him. In addition to Shiva, EOM often looked to other forms of Hindu art, including erotic art, distant from what was acceptable by the contemporary standards of his day.

Throughout Pasaquan and EOM’s works on paper, he uses various media to portray men and women copulating. In “The Erotic Sculptures of India,” Y. Krishna describes erotic art in India being different from its counterparts around the world. India’s erotic art is religious, as seen in the Temple of Vishvanatha, while Greco-Roman, Japanese, and modern Western European erotica are limited to secular objects [Figure 4.18]. The imagery in the erotic art may have been interpreted as “freer” than the status quo of Western society by EOM. The embrace of two individuals is a personification of the religious experience felt by people who achieve moksha, or enlightenment, and can be compared to the experience of being with another person. In Mithuna Couple Medallion, he shows an abstract representation of two people


36. Patterson, St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan, 204.


having sex [Figure 4.19]. In Hindu and Buddhist teachings, spiritual meaning can be derived from the copulation between man and woman. Erotic images such as these can be seen in artworks from this period of time as well such as Charles Marion Russell’s paintings. Though, Russell often painted another non-Western culture that is also found in EOM’s works.

Like Russell, EOM would turn to both Southeastern and Southwestern Native American cultures. Russell painted romanticized images of Southwestern Native Americans, furthering misconceptions of the cultures he portrayed. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were many discoveries and interpretations surrounding the Mississippian cultures that appeared to show a ceremonial tradition that transcended a large space. It is certain that he did own a copy of the book *Sun Circles and Human Hands the Southeastern Indians Art and Industries* (1957), which explains what was understood, during the time period, to be Southeastern Native American art and history in detail. The main thesis of *Sun Circles and Human Hands* is formed around the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex [SECC]: that the communal aesthetic of the Mississippian cultures is related through shared religions and heritage. Since he owned such a text and was avidly making visits to libraries and museums, mainly in New York, the interpretations from this particular theory assist in understanding EOM’s interest in emulating non-Western cultures’ practices rather than merely fantasizing

39. In discussing a couple in coitus, the term used is “mithuna,” while an individual taking part in a sexual act used is “maithuna.” Krishan, “The Erotic Sculptures of India,” 332.

40. Fred Fussell (Former Curator, Friend of St. EOM) in discussion with the author, July 2014.

41. Although this theory has been widely disproven, EOM was working and learning within the capacity that this was the most up-to-date research and would have treated it as such.
about them. St. EOM included SECC symbols in his jewelry work as a form of spiritual power.\textsuperscript{42} These objects are thought to give the wearer protection from threatening forces and signal their status in the community. While all of his pieces of jewelry are marked with some type of spiritual motif, two pieces from his estate show the same symbols from \textit{Wall A South} and \textit{Wall D South} [Figures 4.20, 4.21]. The symbols are the snake and the cross. In this context, the snake on the bracelet alludes to protection against malevolent snakes and the shamanistic qualities of the snake that St. EOM often followed [Figure 4.22].\textsuperscript{43} The second bracelet shows the cross symbol, which indicates the wearer is given the power of the earth and the four primary forces of the world [Figure 4.23]. According to the SECC theory, Native Americans would show these symbols on everyday objects, but most importantly their ceremonial pieces. These pieces of jewelry are indicative of how he implemented the Pasaquoyan way into every facet of his life. The symbols featured in his textiles, jewelry, and sculptures were part of both his mundane life and his rituals. Each building he constructed had a significant purpose, often pulled from a mixture of his own imagination and sources such as the \textit{National Geographic Magazine}.

EOM’s structures often quote various religious buildings, such as the \textit{Pagoda}, \textit{Kiva}, and \textit{Sand Pit}. His \textit{Pagoda} is modeled after the traditional pagodas of China, Japan, and India [Figure 4.24].\textsuperscript{44} Traditional pagodas are used as pilgrimage sites that are built over a relic.\textsuperscript{45} The

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} Throughout the process of restoration, many members of the community told conservators that Eddie had the ability to talk to snakes. Not only that, but he could also call to them and make them appear. It is obvious that snakes were a large part of his personal mythology.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Patterson, \textit{St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan}, 216.
\end{itemize}
structures usually have no interior space for worshippers and only one level. The height of pagodas give the impression of being multi-storied, however, the roofs are stacked upon one another in ascending fashion, often symbolically.\textsuperscript{46} EOM, on the other hand, used his for meditation and getting dressed before making his way to his \textit{Sand Pit} where he would perform his ritual dances [Figures 4.25, 4.26] This use of his \textit{Pagoda} may illustrate an emphasis of the aesthetic over purpose as he did not use or create the space with the pagoda’s original significance in mind. Such consideration highlights a misunderstanding of the culture’s intentions for such a space, which occurs throughout the site.

The interior of the \textit{Pagoda} is filled with floor to ceiling mandalas to aid the artist in meditation [Figure 4.27]. Leading up to the door of the structure are stairs that lead down to the \textit{Sand Pit}. The \textit{Sand Pit}’s enclosure is adorned with images of the cosmos and faces gazing upon the performer [Figure 4.28]. Most likely pulled from medicine wheels, the use is quite similar. The \textit{Big Horn Medicine Wheel} is a wheel pattern on the surface on the ground, which is created from a circle of stones that have a midpoint and 28 spokes that radiate from the middle to the rim.\textsuperscript{47} In John Eddy’s discussion in “Astronomical Alignment of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel,” he discusses the “wheel” through the Pan-Native American lens.\textsuperscript{48} Eddy explains that Native

\begin{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{46} Notably, he did mention in his interviews with Tom Patterson that the well, which is directly below the \textit{Pagoda}, would one day be used for healing by pilgrims coming to the site. Patterson, \textit{St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan}, 216.


\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 1035.
\end{flushleft}
Americans most likely used the wheel for personal spiritual pilgrimage or performances because
of its size and structure, citing multiple Southwestern Native American cultures’ legends.49

Another Southwestern Native American structure that EOM borrowed from was the kiva.
The Kiva was the last structure that EOM created on site, and it remains incomplete [Figure
4.29]. The nose of a planned totem shows future plans by the artist. The structure is partially
obscured by the hill adjacent to it, lowering the Kiva slightly below the rest of the site’s
elevation. A sacred structure for EOM, with snakes flanking the stairway, previous evidence
suggests the use of the structure would be similar to the original Southwestern kiva. Kivas were
religious ceremonial rooms created next to the domestic quarters of communities but put at a
lower level to symbolize man’s ascent in their creation myth.50 Kivas are also “umbilici mundi”
and are part of making contact with the spiritual realm. Of note, this is the only set of snakes on
site that are not rattlesnakes - images of rattlesnakes have been used throughout the world as
messengers and protectors for the underworld. Bringing these various structures together in
Pasaquan is another example of how he used non-Western sacred material and visual culture to
exemplify his beliefs and create his ideal environment.

On Wall A North and Wall E North, there are more symbols from the Sun Circles and
Human Hands featured such as the bi-lobed arrow, cross, and the sun circle [Figures 4.30, 4.31].
Both on Walls A and E, bi-lobed arrows are shown in various styles.51 The definition of a bi-

49. Ibid., 1036.

Magazine, September 1925, 228.

51. Emma Lila Fundaburk, and Mary Douglass Fundaburk Foreman, Sun Circles and
Human Hands the Southeastern Indians Art and Industries (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama
Press, 2001). This was previously referred to as “Southern Cult.” These terms refer to the
lobed arrow is that it, “consists of two kidney-shaped lobes separated by a down pointing arrow… A band connects the lobes at the mid-point…” On Wall A, St. EOM shows the arrows with cross symbols in the middle, adding a decorative element indicative of his work. On Wall E, the arrows are abstracted and mirrored with one another. The motif itself holds a celestial message, which is that it, “operates as an instrument of soul flight, by which the bearer magically projects soul essence into the upper world.”52 On Wall A North, St. EOM creates a complex iconography showing crosses and sun circles alongside the bi-lobed arrows.

In the various Native American traditions these symbols are often found on a variety of items, but rather than being placed there for a decorative purpose, these symbols have a deeper symbolic meaning. When placed on vases, for instance, they held a ceremonial purpose because the stepped design, cross, and sun circle represents lightning, the four corners of the world, and the sun [Figure 4.32].53 It appears that EOM used these symbols in a similar fashion, adorning textiles, walls, buildings, jewelry, and sculptures. However, when combined with other cultures’ symbols, it becomes unclear the depth of knowledge or understanding EOM may have had about each of the varying religions and their societies.

patterns and traditions that have been observed by the Mississippian cultures over a long period of time and space.


53. Fundaburk, Sun Circles and Human Hands the Southeastern Indians Art and Industries, 88-89.
Figure 4.1. St. EOM. Primitive Scrapbook. Unknown Date. Columbus State University Library Archives, Columbus, GA.

Figure 4.2. St. EOM. Primitive Scrapbook, Detail of Hair Practices. Unknown Date. Columbus State University Library Archives, Columbus, GA.

Figure 4.3. St. EOM Selling Beaded Necklaces, Archival Photograph, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, GA.
Figure 4.4. St. EOM. Beaded Necklace. Date Unknown. Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, GA. 12 in x 4 in. Sweet gum seeds, wooden beads, cotton thread.

Figure 4.5. Prayer Beads. Acquired 1900, Natural History Museum, New York. Myanmar. 11.81 in x 1.4 in. Rudraksha seeds, cord.

Figure 4.6. St. EOM. Sketch for Beaded Necklaces Advertisement, 1. 1959-1986. Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, GA.
Figure 4.7. St. EOM. Sketch for Beaded Necklaces Advertisement, 2. 1959-1986. Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, GA.

Figure 4.8. St. EOM. Primitive Scrapbook. Unknown Date. Columbus State University Library Archives, Columbus, GA

Figure 4.9. St. EOM. Primitive Scrapbook. Unknown Date. Columbus State University Library Archives, Columbus, GA
Figure 4.10. St. EOM. Primative Scrapbook. Unknown Date. Columbus State University Library Archives, Columbus, GA

Figure 4.11. St. EOM. Primative Scrapbook, Detail of Dancer. Unknown Date. Columbus State University Library Archives, Columbus, GA.

Figure 4.12. St. EOM. Sketches for Dancers. 1959-1986. Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, GA.
Figure 4.13. St. EOM. Oratory, Detail of Dancers. 1959-1986. Pasaquan, Buena Vista, GA.

Figure 4.14. St. EOM. Yogi Statue Self-Portrait. 1959-1986. Pasaquan, Buena Vista, GA.

Figure 4.15. St. EOM. Buddhist Medallion, 1, 1959-1986. Pasaquan, Buena Vista, GA.
Figure 4.16. St. EOM. Buddhist Medallion, 2, 1959-1986. Pasaquan, Buena Vista, GA

Figure 4.17. St. EOM. Shiva Sculpture. 1959-1986. Pasaquan, Buena Vista, GA.

Figure 4.18. Mithuna Couples, detail of the North Side of the Vishvanatha Temple, Khajuraho, India, 1000 CE.
Figure 4.19. St. EOM. Mithuna Couple Medallion. 1959-1986. Pasaquan, Buena Vista, GA.

Figure 4.20. Wall A South. Pasaquan. St. EOM. 1957-1986. Buena Vista, GA.

Figure 4.21. Wall D South. Pasaquan. St. EOM. 1957-1986. Buena Vista, GA.

Figure 4.22. Bracelet, Pasaquan, St. EOM, 1957-1986. Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, GA.
Figure 4.23. Bracelet, Pasaquan, St. EOM, 1957-1986. Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, GA.

Figure 4.24. Pagoda. Pasaquan. St. EOM. 1957-1986. Buena Vista, GA.

Figure 4.25. Sand Pit. Pasaquan. St. EOM. 1957-1986. Buena Vista, GA.
Figure 4.26. Ritual Dances Performed in Sand Pit by St. EOM. Video. Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, GA.

Figure 4.27. Pagoda. Interior. Pasaquan. St. EOM. 1957-1986. Buena Vista, GA.

Figure 4.28. Sand Pit. View Facing North. Pasaquan. St. EOM. 1957-1986. Buena Vista, GA.
Figure 4.29. Kiva. Pasaquan. St. EOM. 1957-1986. Buena Vista, GA.

Figure 4.30. Wall A North. Pasaquan. St. EOM. 1957-1986. Buena Vista, GA.

Figure 4.31. Wall E North. Pasaquan. St. EOM. 1957-1986. Buena Vista, GA.

Figure 4.32. Illustration showing the designs from the Middle Mississippian Valley, Plates 51 and 52, Sun Circles and Human Hands the Southeastern Indians Art and Industries.
5. ORIENTALISM AND THE OTHER

St. EOM’s continuous visits to museums and libraries, as well as his habit of reading magazines – the Natural History Museum and The National Geographic Magazine for example – during his time in New York prompted him to develop ideas about non-Western cultures and their meanings to him.\(^5\)\(^4\) It is clear that he sought out media such as The National Geographic because of the images found in his Primative [sic] Scrapbook [Figures 5.1, 5.2]. For example, pages taken from the book show pictures cut from the September 1928 article “Four Faces of Siva: The Mystery of Angkor.”\(^5\)\(^5\) National Geographic Magazine was a means for the middle class to explore foreign cultures without leaving the safety of their own. The publication fostered global awareness through its articles and images on international affairs, however this was always through the lens of American culture.\(^5\)\(^6\) This lens was tinged with the imperialist nature of American culture and is evident within many of the photographs and texts since the magazine's inception in 1888. In light of criticism from contemporary scholars, readers saw the National Geographic in a variety of ways, depending on their status in life. For instance, readers could use the publication as a way to escape from, learn about, and understand the world.\(^5\)\(^7\) With these uses, the popularity and ubiquity of the magazine grew to homes, offices, and schools creating a

\(^5\)\(^4\) Patterson, *St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan*, 170-174.


space for this material to become a part of American culture. Although EOM had the intentions of creating a open-minded environment, within the spaces of Pasaquan the Western concepts of pan-Native American and Pan-Asian cultures appear.

While on the surface the National Geographic Magazine is a material for education and research, it is not without its own biases about the peoples with whom the authors interacted. Whether writers were pushing their elitist views of the “primitive” cultures they visited, sometimes subtle and sometimes overt, it was made evident where the writers stood. For example, the peoples in National Geographic became the subject of the Western gaze because of the authors and editors’ tones within the text and illustration captions. Most often no name would be attached to the images, only a vague description such as “In The Silkworm Nursery and Industrial School At Pnompenh” is shown beneath two separate photographs of women weaving on looms. By choosing to leave the women anonymous, National Geographic denies the people agency and gives the viewer a sense that they are stereotypes or objects. This tone and view of those in the photographs only increased the distance between the audience and subject.


60. Robert Casey, “Four Faces of Siva: The Mystery of Angkor,” The National Geographic Magazine, September 1928, 309. “The French Administration in Cambodia is endeavoring to revive the native arts and industries of that colony. At the left a Cambodian girl is handling cocoons preparatory to their conversion into silk thread. At the right the silk yarn is being wound,” is written under the caption. The focus is on the French administration, not the people or individuals of Cambodia.

61. Steet, Veils And Daggers, 14.
Although EOM had great interest in non-Western cultures and wanted to live as their practitioners did, he had an outsider understanding of symbols and practices because of his American upbringing. During the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Americans began embracing visual and material cultures other than their own. Most notably, consumers were attracted to goods and art from China, Japan, and even Native American groups – while the physical distance from these people was small, the ideological distance seemed vast. A sort of “Aesthetic Orientalism” occurs, as author Mari Yoshihara notes in *Embracing the East*, through the dissemination of material culture void of original meaning, often times with new meanings attached to such wares. By using these objects in the domestic space, Americans believed that they were participating in a ritual and may have felt a spiritual or emotional connection to the objects. However, rather than participating in an authentic ritual, they were consuming a representation of one. It is through the process of commoditization that the depiction of the culture becomes the focus of the object, rather than its original meaning. To grasp a clearer understanding of this relationship, I use Roland Barthes’ concept of the signifier and signified; the signifiers are the oriental objects, and through the lens of American Orientalist culture, they signified exoticism, excitement, and sometimes morality of a pastoral life. Aesthetic Orientalism pushed the view of a Pan-Asian culture and Pan-Native American culture through


the production and consumption of goods with interchangeable descriptions such as “Asian” and “Native American” rather than specific descriptions of “Japanese” or “Pueblo.”

Material culture surrounding Native North Americans displays the lack of individualization the groups were due and often the overarching notions held by anthropologists during the early twentieth century. One book in particular, *Sun Circles and Human Hands*, attempted to solidify the idea that while Native American groups of Southeastern North America were in fact individual, they shared religious, visual, and material cultures. Contemporary studies have greatly disproven these notions as attempts to group together vastly different cultures that were responding similarly to their environment. However, due to the anthropological climate surrounding Native American groups, the view of regional cultures was the preferred explanation. While this book pertains to the “Southeastern Native American Complex,” the same attitude held true for those in the American Southwest. Artists such as Charles M. Russell created works romanticizing Native Americans in an Orientalist context. For example, he did this by quoting such works as Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres’ *La Grande Odalisque* in his *Keeoma* [Figures 5.3, 5.4].65 Although these works were created before EOM’s formative years, the subject matter and imagery became a part of popular culture as time went on. These visual cues became stronger, solidifying romantic notions of a past and place that did not quite exist. It was in this context, along with objects from tourists, missionaries, and other artists, that Native American cultures were brought into the broader American lifestyle.

The dissemination of Oriental aesthetics was not sudden or explicit; it was a gradual process that occurred through the private and public spheres – the museum to the department store to the domestic interior. This private domestic space allowed the object to move from different stages of liminality while staying in the same position. As the owner reflected upon the work, it took on a more non-secular meaning through nostalgia and the shifted original meanings of the object. Through these transformations, pieces of material culture not only lost original meaning, but gained new functions through use as decorative objects – a ritual object from Japan could be placed in a suburban home to represent the “purity” of the Japanese peoples’ way of life. Said objects began to signify the nostalgia of a time before mechanization and an escape from Western values associated with them. Therefore, the images associated with these outsider cultures were incessantly set within these confines, shown in leisure, ritual, and contentment.

Views of Asia and its peoples spread widely because of missionaries in China and Japan as well as globalization. While frequently laden with negative tones regarding the spiritual lives of the people, the enjoyment for their material culture was evident. Objects were regularly sent home to friends and family members where they would be placed in the home. American


67. Yoshihara, Embracing the East, 18.


70. Yoshihara, Embracing the East, 6.
Orientalism during the early to mid-twentieth century relied heavily on the appreciation of the architecture, design, and craft of Asia in order for consumers to buy such goods. Though this appreciation appears positive, it is not without hints of exoticism and stylistic curiosity. According to Yoshihara, the main base for collecting these goods were white middle class women who sought out an escape through these objects as well as a representation of pure morals, which essentially meant pushing away from modernity.\(^{71}\) Due to this audience and display setting, the Orientalist discussion takes on a feminine tone and therefore an inferior one to the Western discourse of the day. However, men also collected these items to show wealth, knowledge, and power – essentially it was a symbol of the elite to have the ability to own and display such objects in a scientific manner. Educational and domestic differences aside, the main purpose of displaying objects by either gender was to escape and to reflect on exotic realms.\(^{72}\) At the same time that Americans were going to China, Japan\(^{73}\), and Indian immigrants from these countries were coming to America to work on the East and West Coast.\(^{74}\) As each party became immersed in American popular culture, Orientalism became commoditized. Through the socioeconomic ability of citizens, the supply and demand of “Oriental” goods allowed for this form of popular culture to expand greatly. This growth from the female domestic sphere to popular culture phenomenon illustrates the immersion of the “Orient” into everyday aesthetic as seen in advertisements for products such as “Jap-A-Lac” [Figure 5.5]. However ubiquitous, the

\(^{71}\) Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*, 8.

\(^{72}\) Edward P. Alexander, Mary Alexander, and Mary Alex, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2007), 6-10.


air of exoticism still lingers as one of the most appealing factors for the audience’s objects. In a film showing EOM practicing his fortune telling, Oriental objects can be seen on his fortune-telling table, insinuating a ritualistic use or purpose [Figures 5.6, 5.7]. Though, these objects are also decorative at the same time or are part of his attempt to create an exotic flair during the reading.

In the same vein as missionaries in China and Japan, missionaries in the Southwest who hoped to convert Native American peoples to Christianity often collected cultural goods because of their aesthetic and exotic qualities. While doing so, men spreading Christianity found themselves in the midst of amassing vast collections of Native American art and objects.

Similar to collectors of Asian objects, a Pan-Native American concept arose which lead to a universal view of Native American groups and their cultures. The authenticity and sacredness of these objects were the most attractive factor to the collectors in their search for objects. This attraction of the sacred object would spread from the private sphere of their collection into the public sphere of museums, and then back into the private sphere of domestic interiors, as the Aesthetic Orientalism of Native Americans became a part of American Orientalism. The allure of the exotic was not unlike the Orientalism directed at Asian wares during the twentieth century as people sought out an escape from Western Culture and look to non-Western cultures for a more “pure” worldview.


76. Ibid., 25.

77. Ibid., 25.

78. Ibid., 37.
Similarly, this view of the “pure” way of life of non-Westerners was how St. EOM described their cultures in his sketchbooks. The diffusion of such cultures through public and private spheres during the early twentieth century had great impact on St. EOM’s consumption of non-Western art and media. EOM took the next step to fully implement their visual and material culture into his life through his built utopia by researching and emulating their cultures, even if it was through biased sources such as the *National Geographic*. For EOM, it was not enough to revel in the exoticism of owning “Oriental” objects. EOM’s transformation from Buena Vista transplant to budding prophet may appear to happen overnight. However, this new identity introduced itself through his vision in 1935 and Eddie Owens Martin steadily morphed into St. EOM during his time living in New York and Georgia, and traveling throughout the country. Surrounded by images, people, and objects from what would be considered “outsider” cultures, EOM believed he was connected far more to them than to his American brethren. As an American artist, he responded not only to an American culture that he pushed against, but also one that he seemingly embraced when accepting the concepts of a Pan-Asia and a Pan-Native America.

After EOM’s first vision in 1935, the artist began to seek out the people that existed, or once existed, that he could emulate in order to satiate the wishes of the giant from his vision. Through lateral participation in Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and various Native American groups’ rituals and spectacles, EOM formed a cursory understanding of their religions and lifestyles. In many issues of *National Geographic*, the discussion of “jungle housekeeping” played on stereotypes of primitivism and nostalgia of simpler times.79 These articles would observe practices within non-Western cultures through the eyes of the Westerner – most often women –

and this showed the push against the modernity of the time. EOM could relate to and fantasize about the peoples and their stories, and these moments of Orientalism mark EOM’s interest in these cultures and his exploration of them further display his enthusiasm with them. In making an image of identity there is often a skewing of another’s identity to position one’s self in a particular role. In EOM’s case, he started with the traditional image - Western, Christian, heterosexual, and clean-shaven - then identified them as the “Other” to his beliefs and lifestyle. By doing this, he made the direct relation to himself and people practicing non-Western faiths and lifestyles. He used visual and material culture to solidify his observation of his identity and through this, founded his utopia. While his visions were his own, the steps EOM took to legitimize his growing beliefs were founded upon the notion that non-Western cultures somehow evolved from a singular source, a notion that has now been widely dismissed.

80. Ibid., 135-137.

Figure 5.1. St. EOM. Primative Scrapbook. Unknown Date. Images taken from The National Geographic Magazine. Columbus State University Library Archives, Columbus, GA.

Figure 5.2. St. EOM. Primative Scrapbook. Unknown Date. Images taken from The National Geographic Magazine. Columbus State University Library Archives, Columbus, GA.
Figure 5.3. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. La Grande Odalisque. 1814. Musée du Louvre.

Figure 5.4. Charles Marion Russell. Keeoma. 1898.

Figure 5.5. Jap-A-Lac New Floor Finish Made by the Glidden Varnish Company Cleveland, Ohio. 1900, Building Technology Heritage Library Collection, http://archive.org/details/Jap-a-lacNewFloorFinishMadeByTheGliddenVarnishCompany
Figure 5.6. Fortune Telling Session by St. EOM. Detail of Decorative Items. Video. Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, GA.

Figure 5.7. Fortune Telling Session by St. EOM. Detail of Decorative Items. Video. Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, GA.
6. AMERICAN ARTIST

While St. EOM’s actions show interest in cultures other than his own, his approach to their cultural works shows an exoticism comparable to others who participated in American Orientalism. Most notably though, are the steps he took to further understand them in hopes to connect them. This practice would continue in his other works that focus on Native American and Mesoamerican cultures. However, the Orientalist portrayals of those he admired were not intentionally pejorative. They were creations of the time and place, of art history, archaeology, and anthropology. It leads back to his initial interest in Churchward’s books on Mu and the thought that non-Western cultures were inherently part of the same origin. This explanation furthers the dichotomy of the Western and non-Western worlds that is still active today. Even in EOM’s attempts to create a world that accepts and explores multiple religions, he simplifies them in his works. This could simply be because his view of them is skewed by a museum’s portrayal of objects, a documentary’s tone regarding the practice of rituals, or a magazine articles choice of imagery when discussing a foreign landscape. This bias and omission of information is not without its consequences, as seen in EOM’s utopian view of non-Western cultures.

The ability to observe the impact and influence of American culture within Pasaquan skews common beliefs within the field of Self-Taught Art – the idea that folk and self-taught artists are outsiders to mainstream culture, shut-ins, and the result of divine genius. This romantic concept comes from collectors such as Jean Dubuffet’s and his use of the “Outsider Artist.” As Eugene Metcalf points out in his essay, “From Domination to Desire: Insiders and Outsider Art,” the power struggle between the dominant and marginal groups creates a hierarchy
in which the marginalized becomes cast as “primitive” or “other.” This leads to the popularization and often commoditization of the marginalized because of the mirrored identity with the dominant group. People within the “outsider” community become a stereotype with the same backstories, which are often simplified and untrue. EOM’s works fit into the traditional concept of the “Outsider Artist” because he did not attend an art institution and with this comes a narrative of seclusion and ignorance. However, evidence shows that EOM did not fit within this description; he may have been a marginalized person but he was part of a larger community, he had contact with people internationally, and continually searched for information about the world.

Through this study of St. EOM, it is possible to revisit the romantic view of Self-Taught, Visionary, and Folk Art through a critical lens. EOM is one of many artists throughout the early-to-mid-twentieth century who shows the impact of the Orientalist Aesthetic on American material and visual culture. He created this space not only to create his non-Western and Pasaquoyan utopia, but also to create works that represented his beliefs and self. St. EOM is a representation of experiences in America in relation to orientalism. He could be unknown, but his story is still important to the narrative of how the American gaze portrays the other, outsider, and primitive, even if they identify as one of those things. Due to this, he is not merely a Self-Taught artist, but an American artist who should be considered when discussing American culture.

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