Archiving the Folk:
An Historiographic Inquiry into Folk Art in England, 1945-2005

by

Gillian Hilda Bourke

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Supervisor: Erin Morton, PhD, Department of History

Examining Board: David Frank, PhD, Department of History, Second Reader
Sean Kennedy, PhD, Department of History, Third Reader

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For my Godmother Pat -
with love and gratitude.

Abstract

This report provides an historiographic analysis of the ways in whichart historians, curators, and scholars categorized English folk artbetween 1945 and 2005. After examining literature that approaches the study of folk culture critically, this report surveys the historiography of English folk art in particular. It argues that since folk art is an art historical and a museological category advanced by those seeking to locate cultural producers living in opposition to urban capitalist modernity, examining the context of folk art in the birthplace of industrialism is particularly significant historically. It then uses Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane's 2005 exhibition "Folk Archive" as a case studyto examine folk art as an interrelated artistic and social category. It concludes by demonstrating that "Folk Archive" expands the folk art category in the twenty-first century, by displaying objects and images that challenge previous categorizations of English folk art.

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Introduction

The category of folk art conventionally brings to mind objects created simplistically from ordinary materialsand in traditional communal settings.However, the category does not have a concrete definition and there are many interpretations of what constitutes folk art. Generally, art historians and curators working in art museums define folk art as aesthetic and cultural productioncreated by people who are not academically trained, who produce in rural or marginalized settings and away from mainstreamart institutions, and who create things to appeal primarily to themselves and to those in their surrounding community. Modern art historians often usethe folk artcategory to define objects that they excludefrom other art historical classifications, most often in distinction from fine art of the academy. In contrast to fine art produced by academically-trained or professional artists, folk art is frequently thought to be produced by "the folk": people who are often characterized as being simplistic and pure andwho are perceived to live in opposition to urban capitalist modernity and industrialization. For this reason, situating folk art within the context of England becomes particularly significant historically. Specifically, art historians and curators who have situated folk art within the English context have had to negotiate England's position as the birthplace of modern capitalist industrialization, which displaced the pastoral lifestyle normally thought necessary for the production of folk art in the first place.

This report explores the ways in which English folk art was categorized from 1945 to 2005 by applying an historiographic analysisto writings by art historical scholars, curators, and professional artists. The focus of this study will be to assess how these

writers reconcile folk art with English histories of industrialization, modernization, and capitalist technological progress in urban settings. This approach is important, since there are currently very few critical scholarly inquiries into evolving uses of the term folk art, English or otherwise.This study will therefore offer a critical survey of major literature on English folk artin order to chart the ongoing scholarly, museological, and artistic negotiation of folk art as a category of artistic expression in England. In doing so, this research will offer insight into the malleability of the term folk art, as well as into the ways in which scholars, curators, and professional artists alike have perpetually changedthe category's definition, attributes, and characteristics according to the cultural value systems of their particular historical moments.

This report is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1: Conceptualizing the Folk providesan examination of interdisciplinary historiography that critically investigates the "folk" as a social category and "folk art" as a material application of that category in art historical and museological circles. This provides a foundation from which tocritically explorethe category of English folk art, using a wide lens to establish where the categorization of the folk and folk art originate. Chapter 2: The Englishness of Folk Art explores how the concept of folk art is applied to the specific context of England through the examination of historiographical writings pertaining to its advancement. This analysis will demonstrate the malleability of the concept of English folk art, by focusingspecifically on the parameters that art historians, curators, and professional artistshave used to define the concept of folk art in England, what characteristics they associate with the category, and whether the authors believe that folk art can exist in the contemporary moment.Chapter 3: Archiving the Folk: A Case Study then usesthe

historiographic analysis provided in the first two chapters to examinea particular case study, curators and professional artists Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane's 2005 exhibition "Folk Archive."As Chapter 3 demonstrates, "Folk Archive" is a significant case study with which to examine folk art as an interrelated artistic and social category. In particular, "Folk Archive" explicitly questions what can constitute folk art in the twenty-first century, by displaying objects and images unlike any others contemplated in the historiography of English folk art.Thehistoriographic analysis outlined in Chapter 2is therefore critical to establishing the ways "Folk Archive" fits within the varying and overlapping definitions of the form outlined in this historiography, and the extent to which Deller and Kane's exhibition represents a departure from such definitions.Chapter 3 arguesthat even though Deller and Kane include objects and images unlike any that scholars, curators, and professional artists have previously considered English folk art, their selections can still be viewed as maintainingthe category without providing an extensive critique of it.

The artworks explored in this report will not always be strictly categorized as "English" cultural production, asobjects and imagesfrom elsewhere inthe United Kingdom will also be considered in some instances. Yet, in situating this examination of folk art within the English context, this reportseeks to explore the dominant culture's representation infolk art literature and exhibitions, in which it is typically framed as "English" butsometimes defined as "British." The muddling between "England" and "Britain" points to the cultural tension within the current geographical boundaries of the

United Kingdom, in which the "English" are the presumed dominant society.[1] When considering nationality, "British" is often used as a synonym for "English," a conflation that ignores the existence of not only the Welsh, the Scottish, and the Northern Irish populations of the UK, but also themyriad other ethnicized and racialized peoples who have historically livedthere.[2]Moreover, most scholarly and popular writings that ethnicize populations and associate them with folk culture in Britain, including Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Celtic, and Cornish cultures, have situated the English as the dominant culture in relation to such subordinate folk societies.[3]In short, these writings imply that while the English shape modern technological and industrial progress, the Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Celtic, and Cornish only react to itsimpact on their traditional ways of life.

This report will therefore examine the ways in which those invested in the folk art category, namely scholars, curators, and professional artists, have conceptualized it within the English context. In particular, it will attempt to read the dominant narrative of "Englishness" against itself, rather than making comparisonsbetween English folk culture and those marginalized populations in Britain whose cultures are more often perceived to be "folk." This approach to the advancement of English folk art as a culturally distinct category builds on Tony Bennett's seminal study, *The Birth of the Museum*, in which he examines how museums have represented English rural history through the lens of

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[1] King James VI and I invented the name "Britain" in 1603 after the incorporation of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales under the authority of the English monarchy. The aim was to persuade the king's non-English subjects to unify under the new monarchy. The origin of the name "Britain" is therefore a testament to the English being the dominant society within the geographical area currently encompassing Great Britain. See Nicholas Canny "The Origins of Empire" in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, vol. 1: The Origins of Empire*,ed. Nicholas Canny et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.
[2] Mike Storry and Peter Childs, *British Cultural Identities* (London: Routledge, 2002), 4.
[3] Simon Bronner, *Following Tradition: Folklore in the Discourse of American Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press 1998), 141.

folklore. In particular, he explains that theNorth of England Open Air Museum at Beamish (est. 1970) uses folk culture to promote a ruralized and nostalgic conception of the "English way of life." As Bennett explains, "The consequence is that the story of industrial development in the North East, rather than being told as one of ruptures, conflicts, and transformations, emerges as a process that is essentially continuous with a deeper and longer history of a countryside in which the power of the bourgeoisie has become naturalized."[4]Ultimately, Bennett argues that the museum at Beamish is one example of a larger process of romanticizing industrial regions in Britain during the post-industrial period, one that serves to neutralize "the engines of progress" in order to advance a "distinctively bourgeois countryside of the mind."[5] According to Bennett, the selective reconstruction of the past on display at the Beamish museum defines folk culture as an English tradition uninterrupted by modern industrial expansion, since it is a space in which the countryside becomes a place of urban bourgeois leisure rather than of rural landed labour. Folk culture, in this context, is to be enjoyed and consumed as an artifact "relating to the daily lives and customs of 'ordinary people'," and thereby operates in ideological distinction from rural working-class rural economies and the labour patterns that shape them.[6]

Despite the historical tendency to meld English folk culture seamlessly with capitalist industrial expansion in museological settings such as in Beamish, the idea of folk artexisting in contemporary Britainoften evokes a skeptical response.As newspaper

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[4] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 114.
[5] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 117.
[6] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 117.

columnist WaldemarJanuszczak articulated in a 2005 review of Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane's exhibition "Folk Archive," for example:

> It is quite hard to envisage fully functioning British folk art. Other places – Bavaria, Catalonia, Poland – seem to have more of it. Think of folk art here and you surely feel a simultaneous sense of loss. It's gone. The modern world got it. Sure, it pops up at harvest festivals and the like, but these sorts of occasions have huge quotation marks around them these days, and are deliberately regressive, and nostalgic. Making jam is a leisure pursuit today, not an act of cultural pertinence. In the world of Tesco, there are no harvests.[7]

Januszczak suggest that folk societies are more likely to be found within specific regionalized areas, typically in opposition to the historical industrial core of Western European society. While he considers the possibility that a folk society may haveonce existed in Britain, he contends thatthey have long disappeared and focuses onidentifying other regionalized areas in Europe in which to locate folk art in the contemporary moment. His contemplation regarding the existence of folk art thereby reaffirms the tension between dominant and subordinate cultures in the ongoing definition of folk art. In other words,he perceives the concept the "folk" itself to be in opposition to dominant British culture. Januszczak's review thus prompts the question: how can folk art exist as a product of dominant, rather than of subordinate, regionalized, and ethnicizedculture, in a given historical and geographic context?

Unpacking this question necessitates a brief acknowledgement of Britain's role as the dominant worldwide imperial power from the end of the seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth century – an endpoint that coincides precisely with the development of widespread interest in English folk art. Through this period, Britain controlled the largest

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[7]WaldemarJanuszczak, "Power to the People," *The Sunday Times*, May 15, 2005, 17.

modern empire in existence, which at its height governed a quarter of the global population.[8]Yet British imperialism represented much more than military or political control, since its maintenance also necessitated the worldwide dissemination of British culture in order to "civilize" colonial populations under the modernization ideal. What is more, advancing colonial authority at home and abroad meantsome incorporation ofthe traditions it colonized into the British cultural commonsense.[9] British imperialism was further justified by a racist cultural logic that ascribed characteristics of inferiority to colonial populations in order to maintain the racial superiority of British peoples. Colonial conceptions of British national identity were thereby loaded with associations of race, empire, and moral hierarchy.

A crisis of national identity occurred at the end of the nineteenth century in England as a result of the transformation of British culture due to imperialist cultural assimilation. Further, there were also numerous developments threatening England's imperial power, as domestic industrial production slowed and other industrial nations sought global power. As Georgina Boyes explains, an English Folk Revival was initiated in response to this cultural crisis. Led by middle-class, university-educated urbanites, the English Folk Revival, from 1890-1914, sought to find survivors of the traditional English national culture, and gather their songs, dance, and stories.[10] The intention of the English

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[8] Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), ix.
[9] Robert Johnson, *British Imperialism* (Gordonsville, Virginia: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 204.
[10] Notably absent from the English Folk Revival is folk art. Significantly, there are no publications whose subject was exclusively folk art in England until 1945, overlooking folk art an expression of the folk in the English Folk Revival. Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology, and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

Folk Revival was to stress the uniqueness and importance of English culture, as well as to justify imperialism and class stratification.[11]

The conclusion of Britain's global dominance was facilitated by the Second World War, which ushered in what cultural studies scholars Jon Stratton and IenAng summarize as "the breakdown of traditional British class cultures as a consequence of mass consumerism and the proliferation of mass-mediated culture" and ultimately signaled"the end of the Era of British world hegemony."[12] These events, coupled with a surge of immigrants to Britain from Asia and the West Indies in the postwar period, facilitated another "cultural crisis" in Britain that disrupted the previous hierarchy of British class and culture based on both domestic industrial power and colonial authority.

What many hegemonic British authorities understood as "cultural crises"were therefore, in reality, widespread challenges to centuries of British socio-economic and colonial hegemonies. Such impassesallowed for the questioning of the dominant cultural structures in Britain and, in scholarly circles of the postwar period, provided the underpinning of the formation of cultural studies as an academic discipline.[13]In general, British cultural studies sought to critically investigate the position of subordinate, marginalized, and resistant populations in Britain. One important aspect of this investigation was that it probed the status of racial minorities within the conceptualization of "Britishness," resulting in thequestioning of the racialization of national identity. In the influential book *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack,*for example, Paul Gilroy argues

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[11]Boyes, *The Imagined Village*, 9.
[12] Jon Stratton and IenAng, "On the Impossibility of a Global CulturalStudies: 'British' Cultural Studies in an 'International' Frame" in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*,ed. David Morley et al. (London: Routledge, 1996), 376.
[13] Stratton and Ang, "On the Impossibility of a Global Cultural Studies," 376-377.

that national identity is highly racialized within British society, with people from African or Asian descent being "constructed as a problem or threat against which a homogenous, white, national 'we' could be unified."[14]Gilroy suggests that the racialization of national identity as "English" invites the conclusion that racial minority groups are "incompatible with authentic forms of Englishness."[15]

Further, as British cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall argues, "many of the new nationalisms are busy trying, often on the basis of extremely dubious myths of origin and other spurious claims to produce a purified 'folk'....Here, real dislocated histories and hybridized ethnicities of Europe, which have been made and remade across the tortured and violent history of Europe's march to modernity, are subsumed by some essentialist conception of national identity, by the surreptitious return to 'tradition' – often of the 'invented' kind... – which recasts cultural identity as an unfolding essence, moving apparently without change, from past to future."[16]In other words, Hall suggests that the citizens of nation-states in the West have never been "ethnically pure." Rather, they are "ethnically hybrid" as a result of centuries of conquest and absorption.[17]Thus, he states that in a post-Second World War context, the "construction of a particularly defensive, closed and exclusive definition of 'Englishness' [is] being advanced as a way of warding off or refusing to live with difference."[18]English folk art, then, as innocuous as it may

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[14] Paul Gilroy, *There Ain'tNo Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 46.
[15] Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, 48.
[16]Stuart Hall, "Culture, Community, Nation," *Cultural Studies* 7, no. 3 (1993): 356.
[17]Hall, "Culture, Community, Nation," 356.
[18]Hall, "Culture, Community, Nation," 356-7.

appear, can function as a symbol of protecting postwar English identity as white and working-class, especially in the face of increased challenges to this hegemony.

Considering the postcolonial and post-industrial context in which increased interest in English folk art developed after the Second World War, it is important to recognize the ways in which this particular period shaped folk art in England as a social and cultural category.Indeed, the postwar proliferation of books and exhibitions on English folk artsuggests that the so-called "cultural crises" in Britain led those invested in white working-class culture to find ways to reinscribe its past onto the contemporary moment. This search for the English folk past, which intensified after the Second World War and continues to the current day, can be considered as an exercise in what cultural theorist Lauren Berlant refers to as "thinking about feeling historical." As Berlant sees it, thepresentistnegotiation of the past is less about the particulars of the contemporary than it is an ongoing emotional debate about the "historical present"– a "disturbed time [that] suggest[s] a shift in historical proportions in the terms and processes of the conditions of the continuity of life."[19]In short, Berlant argues that the historical present is destabilizing, and that it often represents "the incoherence of [its] subjects – their capacity to hold irreconcilable attachments and investments, the complexity of motives for disavowal and defense – and the work of the normative in apprehending, sensing, tracking, and being with, the event."[20] In a British context, perceptions about the ongoing"crisis" of British national identity since the Second World War has led people to "feel historical" about an English folk past that existed in harmony with industrialization, even ifsuch

[19]Lauren Berlant, "Thinking About Feeling Historical,"*Emotion, Space and Society* 1, no.1 (2008): 5.
[20]Berlant, "Thinking About Feeling Historical," 4.

conceptualizations are at base a fallacy. Folk art has, in other words, functioned as an emphatic outlet for people to cling to romantic notions of a unified national identity in times of crisis, a process that has not gone without resistance, or without compromise.

Chapter 1: Conceptualizing the Folk

If English folk art has functioned as an escape from the disorienting historical present in the postwar period, through revisiting previous historical moments associated with national unity in Britain, it is a material culture that has also helped to sentimentalize the past. As a result, those who have invested in the category of folk art, among them art historians, curators, and professional artists, tend to construct complex rubrics of what can be included within its framework. Yet with the advent of cultural studies as an academic discipline in Britain beginning in the 1960s, there also exists a growing body of literature that is critical of the romanticization of rural working populations as "folk." This chapter will therefore examine major examples of scholarly work that critique thefolk category, beginning with those that address the British context but also branching out to include North American literature that builds on it. In particular, the focus will be on scholarly literaturepertaining to the history of antimodernism, to the "folk" as a significant social category within that history, and to folk art as an aesthetic and material application of that category in museological and art historical circles.

Much of the scholarship that addresses the construction of folk culture as an antithesis to capitalist modernity draws on the work of British cultural historian Raymond Williams. In his seminal 1973 book *The Country and the City*, Williams argues that the idealization of a romantic country life in England occurred in response to urban alienation and wasat odds with the agrarian transformation of industrial capitalism. Through an analysis of perceptions concerning the country in English literature, he attempts to refute the idea that the country, in contrast to the city, is a simple, timeless

place without capitalist development. Williams argues that manyEnglish writers came to frame the "city" as the place where capitalist exploitation took place, whereas they narrated the"country" as a haven from the grind of industrialization. Williams refers to this romanticization of the agrarian past as the myth of the "Golden Age," one that"could be then used, by the landless, as an aspiration."[1] Williams argues that the "country" and the "city" do not necessarily need to exist in conceptual opposition. Rather, he suggests: "Most obviously since the Industrial Revolution, but in my view also since the beginning of the capitalist agrarian mode of production, our powerful images of country and city have been ways of responding to a whole social development. This is why, in the end, we must not limit ourselves to their contrast but go on to see their interrelations and through these the real shape of the underlying crisis."[2] The myth of the country, and the constructed category of the folk who live there in rural peasant communities, are therefore interrelated since both are imagined as an escape from the oppressive urbanization of modernizing capitalist society.

Historian T.J. Jackson Lears built on Williams's work in 1981 by naming an international cultural reaction to capitalist modernity that began at the end of the nineteenth century. He refers to this process asantimodernism, which he defines as "the recoil from an 'overcivilized' modern existence to more intense forms of physical or spiritual experience supposedly embodied in medieval or Oriental cultures ... antimodern sentiments affected more than a handful of intellectuals; they pervaded the middle and

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[1]Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), 43.
[2] Williams, *The Country and the City*, 297.

upper classes."[3]Lears argues that antimodernismdescribes the bourgeois reaction to entrepreneurial capitalism's replacement by corporate capitalism, as theyperceived theirclass identity to be under attack by the forces of modernization. This means that antimodernism was not a sentiment explored by those who were industrial and agrarian workers. Rather, those who were benefitting the most from industrial capitalism were those who, paradoxically, also sought most to escape it. Lears explains that these antimodern impulses were fulfilled through the pursuit of an authentic experience defined by its perceived distance from modernity.[4] For example,Learspoints out that the revival of handicrafts began and thrived amongst the bourgeoisie, and that Arts and Crafts philosophy "came usually from among the business and professional people who felt most cut off from 'real life' and most in need of moral and cultural regeneration."[5] Those involved in handicraft production were crafting goods for recreation rather than for necessity, seeking a physical manifestation of their desired and idealized past.

The country, although an imagined and often antimodernist category, has definitive attributes, whereas the category of the folk is entirely constructed. In his1992 article "Notes on Deconstructing the Folk," historian Robin D.G. Kelley argues that the folk category is a social construction that historians themselves often apply to people and cultural traditions imagined to be remnants of a preindustrial age. Therefore, there is no such thing as the folk, unless someone who exists outside of the category imagines it according to an antimodernist way of thinking. Furthermore, he suggests that "'folk' and

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[3]T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), xiii.
[4]Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 300.
[5]Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 61.

'modern' are mutually dependent concepts, embedded in unstable historically and socially constituted systems of classifications. In other words, 'folk' has no meaning without 'modern.'"[6] He argues that we must then view the term "folk" as being constructedsocially and as advanced consistently by those invested in its maintenance,including historians who continue to police the boundaries of its authenticity. Likewise, folklorist Charles Keil argues that the "folk" only exist in the minds of the bourgeoisie and professional or amateur folklorists. Offering a critical perspective on the entire field of folklore studies, Keil states, "peasants by nearby urban centers ... might make us feel guilty or ashamed if we could not transform them into charming sources of inspiration."[7]Further, Keil critiques folklorists who are so invested in the"folk" construct that they often perform many of its traditions after they identify them: "as always, the pros do it better. Sixteen or sixty-four tightly rehearsed whirling couples in matching costumes are certainly a lot more impressive than a bunch of shit-kicking villagers wearing whatever it is that villagers actually wear these days."[8]Both Kelley and Keil challenge not only those upper- and middle-class people who construct the image of who the folk are, and what they should be doing, but also the academic and intellectual investment in the ongoing definition of the category.

In the same vein as Kelley and Keil, historian Ian McKay's 1994 book *The Quest of the Folk* argues that urbanites constructed "the Folk" as a reflection of everything they disliked in the urban; as McKay puts it, "the Folk were less people in their own right and

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[6]Robin D.G. Kelley, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Folk,'" *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 1992): 1402.
[7] Charles Keil, "Who Needs 'the Folk'?," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 15, no.3 (Sept-Dec 1978), 263.
[8]Keil, "Who Needs 'the Folk'?," 264.

more incarnations of a certain philosophy of history."[9] Using the specific case of Nova Scotia as a lens for this analysis, McKay argues that middle-class Nova Scotians in the period from 1927 to 1960 were fascinated with rural life, and that they applied the term "Folk" to the province's rural people who they assumed to be isolated from modernity.[10] McKay explains the origin of the concept of the folk as "one of the great abstractions of Romanticism" and charts the conceptualization of the category of the folk back to the Romantic period with Johann Herder.[11] His concept of the folk was "turning to the 'barbaric' and the 'primitive' as ways of countering the stresses of modernity, positioning tradition and custom as almost sacred elements of collective identity" as a response to an aspect of the Enlightenment that viewed tradition as an emblem of "ignorance and fanaticism."[12] In the same way that Williams discusses how the English countryside became romanticized, the construct of the folk was built around a vision of a pastoral society and sentimentalised peasantry. McKay explains that "the folk" of Germany "came to be regarded as the epitome of simple truth, work, and virtue. The antithesis of all that was overcivilized, tired, conventional, and insincere."[13] Therefore, the idea of "the Folk" is both a product of and a reaction to modernism – an invention of romanticism, rather than a discovery.

McKay explains that the constructed category of the folk has historically been positioned in opposition with the urban; the so-called folk were simplistic and pure, not

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[9] Ian McKay, *Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 14.
[10] McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 9.
[11] McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 12.
[12] McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 10-11.
[13] McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 12.

yet corrupted by industrialized society. Part of the interest in the folk was the claim that folk customs, which urban Nova Scotiansperceived as unchanging traditions, could provide an insight into the character of the nation-state, since the folk were viewed by urbanites as a more primitive version of modern citizens. Importantly, the advancement of the folk construct in Nova Scotia is also one that has beenpositioned around race. In a Canadian context, those who are imagined to be the folk are found in regional pockets across the country, including Nova Scotia, and are always of European descent, a conceptualization that not only excludes those of non-European descent and indigenous populations but also reifies the myth of a pastoral settler nation-state. In this way, the classification of who is imagined to befolk becomes a social category of exclusion, one that also has important implications for the advancement of nationalism.

One chapter of McKay's bookcentres on the influence that folklorist Helen Creighton had in the creation of the cultural identity of "the Folk" in Nova Scotia. Creighton adopted the title of folklorist when she travelled throughout rural Nova Scotia in search of authentic ballads. McKay argues that Creighton's process of cultural selection was based on the assumption that Nova Scotia was a cohesive society that "shares an underlying core of traditions."[14] Consequently, Creighton's selections of folk ballads were viewed as being representative of all Nova Scotians' identities and traditions, and above all, authentically "folk." Creighton defined "folk" authenticity by collecting from those who were telling what she perceived to be original versions of the stories and ballads, rather than from those who were creating or adapting such narratives

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[14] McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 101.

on their own terms.Thus, authenticity was marked by those who were the "passive recipients of tradition, not its active shapers."[15]McKay discusses the ways in which the folk construct is inherently contradictory, since hegemonic cultural selectors in Nova Scotia, including Creighton, molded it to categorise people not normally associated with peasant society.For example, he explains that Nova Scotia coalminers were considered to befolk by urban elites, despite the fact that their subsistence was dependant on industrialization. The construct of a Romantic European peasantry as folk was adapted in Nova Scotia to suit the particular realities of advancing the folk construct, demonstrating itsmalleability, and reinforcing its status as one imagined by those who see themselves as existing outside of it.

In her book *In Search of Authenticity*, folklore studies scholar Regina Bendix argues that part of the role offolklorists such as Creighton has been to search for and, subsequently, to discover those who could be deemed authentic folk. Bendix states that the concept of authenticity has a broad range of meanings, although "the search for authenticity is fundamentally an emotional and moral quest"since declaring something "authentic" can legitimize both the subject and the authenticator.[16] She argues further that folklorists locate the authenticity of their subject matter by its distance from modernity, and that this criterion for authenticity is what differentiates folklore studies from other cultural scholarship.Bendix notes that folklorists' criteria of authenticity have evolved historically, and that concepts of what they consider to be authentic are not static, much like the concept of the folk itself. She states that previous conceptions of folk

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[15] McKay, *Quest of the Folk,* 21.
[16] Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 7.

authenticitybefore the 1960s depended on the lack of an individual source of production. For example, when Creighton was collecting folk ballads in Nova Scotia, authenticity was ascribed based on a ballad being passed down orally from generation to generation, the traditions associated with it, and the economic circumstances of the community. Bendix elaborates that the absence of authorship, the repetition of conventions over time and space, and the social and economic situation of the communities were understood by folklorists as the hallmarks of authenticating the so-called folk.[17] However, individual producers of objects became the interest of folklorists in the 1960s, rendering the requirement of anonymity as a necessity of authenticityless relevant.

Developing in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, individual self-taught producers gained increased attention within the art market, as so-calledfolk production was increasingly appreciated for its aesthetic qualities, rather than an ethnographic treatment. Simon Bronner details the relationship between people and material objects in his 1986 book *Grasping Things.* He argues that people from different backgrounds bring different meanings to objects, stating "Objects do not speak for themselves. They are interpreted."[18] He argues that those who take interest in definingobjects as "folk" do so as a nostalgic expression for a simpler, preindustrial way of life, in the same way that antimodern desires manifested in the handicrafts revival. Posing the question: "But if the folk art object in the aesthetic view is not social and cultural, then what is it?" and asserting that folk art "is a thinly veiled commodity – a commodity not necessarily, although often, to make money, but one to offer or suggest excitement, reality, and taste

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[17]Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 15.
[18] Simon J. Bronner, *Grasping Things: Folk Material Culture and Mass Society in America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 212.

for a distinct social world.... [Folk art] is a matter of economics, of education and of social status."[19]Bronnerthereby suggests that folk art challenges the aesthetic assumptions of academic fine art, even ifthe academic system also supports folk art and ifthe authority associated with the academy itself reinforces its standards of judgment. In other words, thesetwo seemingly polar opposite categories, folk art and fine art, are mutually reliant upon each other for legitimacy, particularly when it comes to displaying folk art in a fine art setting such as an artmuseum.

Writing in 1976, curator Daniel Robbinsstressed the idea that "folk" artists needed to be "discovered" in their rural environment by art-world experts who could bring folk art the legitimacy it deserved. Robbins was critical of the concept of twentieth-century American folk art, and posed the question: are there any folk left in America? Further, he stated that "Folk sculpture and painting in a culture without folk is selected by some collectors primarily on the basis of its irrelevance to or removal from the primary conditions or sensations of modern life,"[20]which points to the historical importance of art collectors in constructing the folk art category for museum audiences.The genealogy of making folk art a museum object is apparent in sociologist Julia Ardery's 1998 exploration of the self-taughtKentucky woodcarver Edgar Tolson (1904-1984).Arderyexplores the context and implications of the development of a late twentieth-century folk art field in the U.S.,by usingthe intellectual and museological interest in Tolson's woodcarving as a case study. While there are numerous works on

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[19]Bronner, *Grasping Things,*196.

[20] Daniel Robbins, "Folk Sculpture Without the Folk," in *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*, ed. Michael Hall, et al. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 57-8. Originally published in *Folk Sculpture USA,* ed. Herbert W. Hemphill, Jr. (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1976).

folklore studies, there are few critical works on folk art studies, a notable gap that Ardery's study helps to fill. Specifically, Ardery argues that what defined Tolson as an authentic folk artist for art-world elites who came into contact with him were the social and economic conditions of his life – that he had eighteen children, had no teeth, and lived in a "three room shack."[21]Ardery's work critically assesses this claim to authenticity that professional artists, curators, collectors, and academics who became interested in Tolson advanced. WhileArdery uses the specific parameters ofthe Tolson case to critique the intellectual interest in folk art, her book is particularly important because it remains one of the few studies to offer a nuanced perspective on folk art rather than on folklore more generally. In particular, Ardery offers insights into the distinction between professional artists and those who they imagined to be folk: "While fine artists strove for corporate commissions, folk artists appeared naïve – at least they were still poor. While urban artists plied their resumes, working up the line of reputable galleries, folk artists like Tolson had no telephones, lived on rocky hillsides, at the end of mountain roads."[22] The opposition to the social and economic conditions that fine artists experienced is part of what defined Tolson as an authentic folk art producer for the art-world elites that took interest in his work, which ultimately led to the inclusion of Tolson's woodcarvings in such prominent museum collections as the Smithsonian Institution.

Ardery investigates the ways in which galleries and collectors sought outTolson'scarvings, in order to demonstrate that the folk artist label was not one that

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[21]Julia S. Ardery, *The Temptation: Edgar Tolson and the Genesis of Twentieth-Century Folk Art* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 176.
[22] Ardery, *The Temptation,*3.

Tolson himself crafted. The process of authenticating folk art is one that Ardery describes as requiring a discoverer, and someone who has to be found, and thus authenticated. Her research reveals that patrons involved in the fine art industry elevated Tolson's work to the status of art, and their influence also shaped the aesthetics and content of Tolson's art itself with their influence. For example, Tolson's *Uncle Sam* was suggested to him by photographer Rick Bell, while his "Adam and Eve" series was proposed by Carl Fox of the Smithsonian with the assurance that Tolson would receive payment for completed works.[23] Ardery's analysis demonstrates that those who are perceived as authentic folk producers may be influenced directly by those who consider them thusly, and that paradoxically the involvement of outsiders in aesthetic and creative choices does little to disrupt their folk status. In Tolson's case, people from academic and fine art institutions were responsible for both representing him as a folk artist, and for ensuring that his wares conformed to their idealization of the folk art category in terms of subject matter and style. The conception of authentic folk art in Tolson's instance was rooted in the patron's creation of the category itself, which resulted in the constitution of a commercial gallery market for folk art objects that fine art collectors actively sought out.

The historiography examined in this sectionoffers important insights into the discourses of antimodernism and authenticity as they pertain to constructing the folk art category. Read together, the works analysed here illustrate that the social and aesthetic construction of folk art is connected to histories of capitalist expansion and industrialization, to disciplinary constructions of folklore as an object of study, and to

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[23] Ardery, *The Temptation,* 233; 115.

aesthetic hierarchies of art and culture. However, these critical inquiries into both the study of folklore in general and the folk art category in particular distinguish themselves from authors who have advanced these concepts historically in museological and scholarly circles. Examining the writings of art historians, curators, and professional artists invested in the maintenance of the folk art category provides evidence that critical scholarship on folk art has not halted its conceptual advancement. The following section will therefore critically analyse the discourse of English folk art as a case study, in order to demonstratehow perceptions of the construct have changed over time and to assert that while there remains no definitive categorization of the folk art form, there exists an active and ongoing defense of the category. In doing so, it will build on the work of those who provide a critical investigation of the folk art category, byultimately seeing it as constructed rather than as discovered.

Chapter 2: The Englishness of Folk Art

In the context of England, folk art is on the defensive, since it exists in the birthplace of modern industrial capitalism. This chapter will analyse majorwritingon English folk art by art historians, curators, and professional artists from 1945 to 2004, focusing on the ways in which these authors define folk art, and on what characteristicsthey attribute to the category. This section will set the stage for a discussion of the ways in which the objects and images displayed in Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane's 2005 exhibition "Folk Archive" are a significant departure from what had previously been categorized as English folk art, even if Deller and Kane also engage with many of the same trends identified in this historiography.In conducting this historiographic analysis, this chapter aims to expand on curator Martin Myrone's arguments in his 2009 article, "Instituting English Folk Art." In it, Myrone provides an overview of the contemporary issues surrounding the categorization of folk art and explains how this is an especially contested field in England.

Specifically, Myrone surveys the ways in which folk art has been "instituted" in British museums and traces the ways in which the analysis of folk art shifted from an ethnographic to an aesthetic approach.[1]As such, Myrone's article provides a thorough overview of changing trends in folk art exhibitions in England. Part of Myrone's analysis explores the flexibility of the term "folk," which, as he notes, has existed in the English context alongside its "enduring kindred terms – 'popular', 'naïve', 'primitive',

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[1] Martin Myrone, "Instituting English Folk Art," *Visual Culture in Britain* 10 (March 2009): 29.

'vernacular'."[2]While his primary undertaking is an exploration of the ways in which English folk art has been exhibited in a museological context, this report will build on Myrone's workby focusing on the literature published outside of the curatorial field. Building on Myrone, this study will examine objects and images of art and culture that are often not specifically categorized as "folk," but that are encompassed within such "kindred terms." By analysing objects and images that skirt the folk art construct, this study will provide a critical inquiry into its boundaries.

Myrone argues that there are three periods of "particular intensity" in exhibiting English folk art. The first (1909-1912) was a part of the larger "Golden Age" of interest in folk culture, known as the English Folk Revival, when numerous cultural societies and organizations formed around the international arts and crafts revivalist movement in order to preserve the material remains of a national heritage. There were calls by these groups to create a national folk museum, in order to commemorate England's rural heritage that revivalists understood industrial capitalist expansionas displacing. Myrone refers to the second period (1929-1934) as one of "Ideal Visions," since it was part of a pan-European interest in folk life, and demonstrated renewed attention in opening an open-air national folk museum. During this period, museums and galleries in England started to display smaller collections of folk art. The third period (1949-1953), which Myrone defines as "New and Commonplace," once again saw an interest in the development of a national folk museum renewed, now coupled with a neo-romantic

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[2]Myrone, "Instituting English Folk Art," 28.

search for a "'deep' English identity" to instill a revived British nationalism.[3] Since this period, there has been a lack of effort to establish a national folk museum by both government and cultural societies. In its absence, the value of English folk art has been dependant on collecting practices of individuals and institutions, making folk art consumer driven and a "heritage commodity."[4]

The published works that I will examine in this study sprout from the last period that Myrone examines, in which authors concerned with the folk art category used it to revive a unified sense of English identity. Specifically, this period saw an attempt to strengthen English identity by reflecting on the historical artistic works of the country's so-called "common people," which were, in turn, thought to be easily appreciated by the contemporary public at large. However, this was in a primarily backwards-looking way of establishing the folk art category, in that it focused on objects and images from the past and paid little attention to defining contemporary folk art. For example, Noel Carrington's 1945 book *Popular Art in Britain* establishes the view that popular art could faithfully reflect the national character of England. Carrington states that the objective of his book is to inspire readers to take an interest in popular arts, a subject area that he laments has been in decline for many years. From the outset, Carrington states that he prefers the term "popular" over "folk," because despite having the same meaning in origin, he believes that the word "folk" has a museum accent. His definition of popular art is "art as practiced by artists of the people for the enjoyment of the people," which is

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[3]Myrone, "Instituting English Folk Art," 38.
[4]Myrone, "Instituting English Folk Art," 42; 45.

based on communal tradition, and is dependent on the satisfaction it gives to its viewers.[5] Carrington argues that the machine and factory production of goods displaced the native craftsman, and rendered the production of handmade crafts unnecessary. His point stresses the connection to industrialization as the catalyst for both the shift away from the production of handmade goods and as the search for a preindustrial folk past. Carrington elaborates on this point by stating that factory-produced consumer objects must appeal to a wide variety of tastes for mass consumption, as opposed to the craft of popular art that must appeal to the artist's individual patrons and to the community in which the artist works.[6] He states that contemporary examples of popular arts in England are rare; however, he refers to a few contemporary works that he believes can be considered popular art.

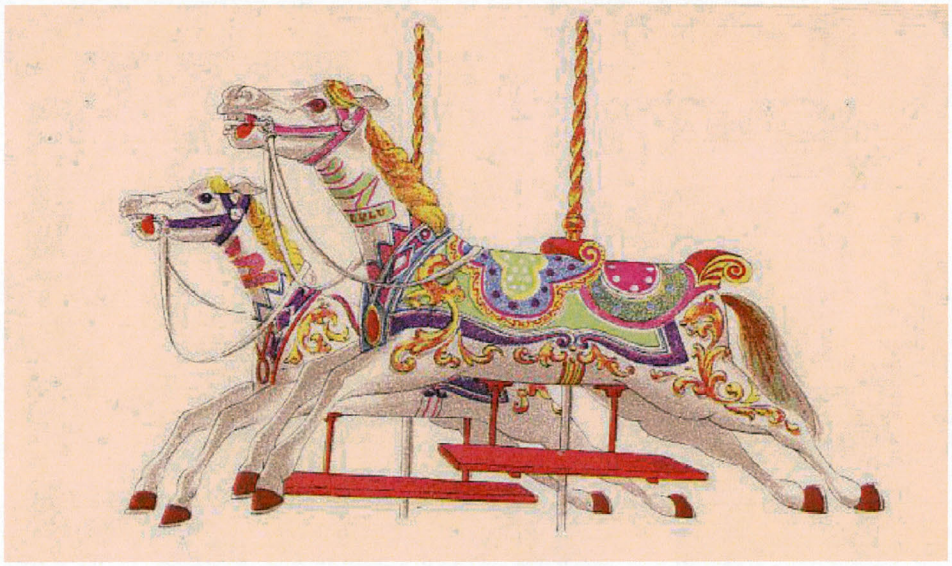

Figure 1: ***Painted Wooden Horses from a Roundabout.*** **Image Source: Noel Carrington,** ***Popular Art in Britain*** **(London: Penguin Books, 1945), plate 20.**

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[5]Noel Carrington, *Popular Art in Britain* (London: Penguin Books, 1945), 5.
[6]Carrington, *Popular Art in Britain*, 5.

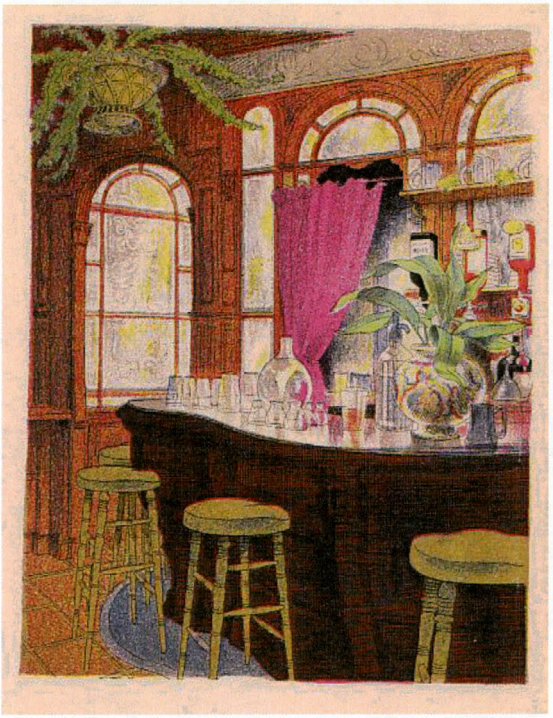

Figure 2: ***The Red Lion, Duke of York Street, St. James's Square, London.*** **Image Source: Noel Carrington,** ***Popular Art in Britain*** **(London: Penguin Books, 1945), plate 32.**

Carrington asserts, "the fair and circus remain amongst the very few places where genuine popular art may be seen, even though the fair is being invaded by other influences."[7] He considers merry-go-round horses to be an example of contemporary popular art, as the carving of the figures was made by hand, and traditional patterns are closely adhered to (fig.1). The fair is a public event, where people from the community gather to be entertained. According to Carrington, then, the horse carvings can be considered popular art because of their communal appeal and hand craftsmanship, despite their use in a commercial venture. Carrington's second example of contemporary popular art is a sketch of the *Bar at The Red Lion in St. James's Square, London*, (fig 2.) explaining "the public house [i]s one of the last repositories of popular art. ... [C]ertainlyno atmosphere could be more popular than the saloon bar."[8] Here, the public house itself is considered folk art, rather than the sketcher's rendition. The artistic merits of the pub include a depiction of a carved mahogany bar and of engraved glass windows. The public house does not fit into the general view of what popular art is, but it fits Carrington's criterion

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[7]Carrington, *Popular Art in Britain*, 9.
[8]Carrington, *Popular Art in Britain*, 29.

of a creation by an artist of the people, for the enjoyment of the people. In Carrington's view, English popular art encompasses works to which all English people can relate. By taking folk art out of the past and placing it in the present, and by rejecting the notion that it is reserved for the rural, Carrington establishes the idea that such an art form does exist, and can be appreciated in an everyday context, rather than in a museum.

Textile artist Enid Marx and writer Margaret Lambert reach similar conclusions to Carrington about the definition of English folk art in their book 1946 *English Popular and Traditional Art*. However, Marx and Lambert expand on Carrington's argument by asserting that popular art exists in England as a symbol of national unity. Marx and Lambert take a positive approach to popular art in their contemporary moment, and argue that it can be used as a tool for uniting English people. In contrast to Carrington, Marx and Lambert do not believe that popular art has been displaced by industrialization. Instead, they define popular art as "the art which ordinary people have, from time immemorial, introduced into their everyday lives, sometimes making it themselves, at others imposing their own tastes on the products of the craftsman or the machine, in contrast to the more sophisticated art made by specialists for wealthy patrons."[9] Marx and Lambert's interpretation of popular art is not limited to that produced by peasants, or to something relegated to the rural past. They explain that the book is an attempt to show that England has a long tradition of popular art that continues into the present, despite technological industrialization.

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[9]Enid Marx and Margaret Lambert, *English Popular and Traditional Art* (London: Collins, 1946), 7.



Figure 3: ***Fair-Ground Horse from a Roundabout at Kew Bridge, London.*** **Image Source: Enid Marx and Margaret Lambert,** ***English Popular and Traditional Art*** **(London: Collins, 1946), 35.**

Marx and Lambert suggest that popular art reflects the characteristics of the English nation, thus seeking out an inwards looking nationalism to form a collective identity. Importantly, this reflection of the nation does not strive for a retreat into pre-industrialization, or to invent a peasant population. Rather, the authors attempt to establish how popular art still exists without being regressive. Extending their analysis beyond that of Carrington, Marx and Lambert view the fairground horse as a trueexample of contemporary popular art that reflects national characteristics, as it integrates elements of art and machine (fig. 3). Contemporary fairground rides were a product of the industrial revolution, as they are an artifact of the shift from hand power to steam engine power in the nineteenth century. The engine-powered ride is a product of the industrial revolution that originated in England, and the craftsmanship and artistry involved in the decoration was intended for the pleasure of the people attending the fair. The ability of a fairground ride to consolidate aspects of English nationalism, by gathering members of the community to enjoy the ride, shows that popular art as defined by Marx and Lambert could potentially be reconciled with industrialization, commercialization, and imperialism. In contradiction to these intentions, the book primarily discusses objects from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, signifying a clear focus on the past. The authors fail to provide any examples of contemporary folk art

beyond the fairground horse, and instead focus throughout the book primarily on examining historical English folk art.

The definitions of popular art that Carrington and Marx and Lambert provide do not limit the works to pre-industrial objects; conversely, the belief that popular art was in decline prevailed. While these authors locate popular art primarily as a cultural form of the past, their conceptualization of popular art did not necessarily exclude present manifestations. The authors did not want to secure popular art in England as solely an object of the past; rather, they sought to focus attention on collective national identity through objects and places that all English people could identify with, historical or contemporary. However, the authors fall short of providing numerous examples of contemporary folk art objects, thereby relegating English folk art, and perhaps an idealized national unity, to a preindustrial past. Both of these books demonstrate a common aim to promote English nationalism by means of an inwards looking gaze, a reflection of a unified, if historical, popular cultural tradition.

The "third movement" of interest in English folk art that Myrone identified as occurring between 1949-1953, and thatCarrington's and Marx and Lambert's work exemplifies, demonstrates a level of accommodation ofthe category with industrialization. In particular, this "third movement"made the concept of folk art flexible in order to integrate the construct with the realities of late-capitalist English life. While thisperiod demonstrated a positive view about the continuation of folk art production in England, this optimistic postwar perception aboutpopular art's unifying nationalist power was not sustained. With the rise of American-style consumerism in the 1950s, the

consideration of what English folk art could mean in the present day changed, and it came to be viewed as an absurd and ironicnotion in the contemporary.

The transition period between the view of English folk art as a positive tool of nationalism, and the perception that folk art ceased to exist in England after the influx of mass postwar consumerism, is marked by artist and art critic Geoffrey Fletcher's 1962 book *Popular Art in England.* In it, Fletcher maintains the notion that folk art existed after industrialization, but argues that it belongs to the past, and is no longer genuinely created in a late twentieth-century context. Fletcher states that popular art is the same as folk or peasant art in other countries, but that these words cannot be applied to England, since there are no longer folk or peasants to be found there. He argues that popular art did not disappear with the peasants in England, but rather it transformed with the industrial revolution to adapt itself to the machine age.[10] Fletcher's definition of popular art puts it in opposition to those who are concerned with the high art of the academy, as he states "popular art is produced for the pleasure of the masses, and not at all for the specialist. It is, therefore, very general in its appeal, usually to persons of more or less unsophisticated tastes."[11] He deduces that the people who enjoy folk art do not have the education or the ability to understand fine art and asserts that popular art is a form of escapism, as a way to "brighten up, or entirely step out of, the drabness of one's own surroundings."[12] Unlike the authors previously discussed, who believed that popular art is something that can be used to unite English people under a nationalist vision of a common traditional culture, Fletcher considers popular art to be mainly of interest to the uneducated viewer.

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[10]Geoffrey Fletcher, *Popular Art in England* (London: Harrap& Co., 1962), 13.
[11]Fletcher, *Popular Art in England*, 15.
[12]Fletcher, *Popular Art in England*, 12.

Fletcher argues that popular art belongs to the past, and that any examples that exist in the twentieth century represent the form's exceptions, since these are anachronistic relics of what used to exist. He does not provide a specific date or event for when popular art ended, but rather argues, "we have wiped out the old-fashioned lower classes and their art with them, and hung up our colour reproductions of French Impressionists."[13] He states that contemporary examples of English folk art do exist, but these are objects of "false popular art [that are being] imposed on the public from above," giving the example of mass-produced coffee mugs that were made for the Royal Coronation of 1953. The mugs were produced for the enjoyment of the public, and categorized in opposition to high art by Fletcher. However, he argues that the mugs cannot qualify for the category of popular art because they are ordinary, cheap, and used for gratification.[14] Fletcher's view of folk art differentiates from the writings of Carrington and Marx and Lambert in that he generally lacks a nationalistic tone, this despite his lament of folk art's replacement by French Impressionism in terms of collection priorities. While he entertains the idea that folk art existed after the industrial revolution, he remains skeptical of the presence of contemporary English folk art in the era of mass consumerism. Fletcher's writing thereby marks the end of the neo-romantic phase of English folk art, a period marked by the search for the material roots of English identity.

The next phase of writings about English folk art confines the form to a relic of the past housed in museums, arguing that such objects ceased to be created after the

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[13]Fletcher, *Popular Art in England*, 79.
[14]Fletcher, *Popular Art in England*, 15.

industrial revolution. For example, in his 1968 book *Folk Art of Europe*, HelmuthBossert asserts that English folk art has not existed since the Industrial Revolution. He argues that folk art was practiced exclusively by peasants and fishermen, whose place in society was much the same throughout Europe before the industrial revolution. With the process of industrialization, Bossert suggests, the machine age ushered out the creation of folk art in Western Europe, and by the end of the nineteenth century, it was rare to find any true examples of folk art there. Bossert defines folk art as "the sum total of the traditional art forms common to a particular people," and refers to it as the "stepchild ... of art."[15] He looks down upon those who he identifies as creating folk art, arguing that their works reflect the transmission of tradition, and that such artists did not have the freedom of either originality or spontaneity. Bossert declares in a patronizing tone that it was "incredible that such varied and delightful artwork could have been executed by uneducated folk, and by hands accustomed to toil."[16] His examples of English folk art are limited to decorative plates and vessels from the collections of museums of rural life, demonstrating his belief that the art form is a remnant of a pre-industrial past.[17] Unlike the previous authors examined here, Bossert does not even entertain the idea that folk art could exist in an industrialized society.

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[15]HelmuthBossert, *Folk Art of Europe* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1968), 5.
[16]Bossert, *Folk Art of Europe*, 5.
[17]Bossert, *Folk Art of Europe,* Plates 21 and 24.

Not all of the works examining English folk art during this time perceived it in such a negative light. The 1968 collection *European Folk Art*, edited by H.J. Hansen, takes a more positive approach to folk art, but still asserts it to be a genre of the past. Hansen defines folk art as "articles decorated in traditional styles, associated with specific communities."[18] However, he recognizes that folk art does not have a definitive definition, and allows each contributor within the collection to define what he or she believes it to be. However, the contributor of the section on English folk art does not provide an alternative definition of the category.[19] Unlike Bossert, the contributor does not declare that the end of folk art in England was due to the industrialization. Rather, theyargue that the best achievements of the art form are in pottery (fig. 4), which "is a forceful demonstration that folk art is not limited to peasant communities; far from being crushed by industrial growth, it often drew inspiration from the potentials of mechanical methods."[20] Despite the assertion or the suggestion that mechanization led to innovations in folk art, the section on English folk art firmly roots the form in the past. The most recent example dates from 1827,



Figure 4: *Charles II in the Tree*, Staffordshire, Late Seventeenth Century. Image Source: Hans Jurgen Hansen, ed., *European Folk Art.* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968), 136a.

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[18]Hans Jurgen Hansen, ed., *European Folk Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968), 14.
[19] The contributors are listed at the beginning of the book, so it is unclear which contributor authored this section.
[20]Hansen, ed., *European Folk Art*, 69.

implying that folk art in England is no longer practised as a living art form.[21] Within this collection, the section on English folk art is much smaller compared to its continental counterparts, emphasizing that folk art held a less prominent position there than elsewhere in Europe.

Unlike Hansen's collection, which offered limited attention to folk art in England, art historian and curator James Ayres strove to bring British folk art to the fore. His 1977 book, *British Folk Art*, was the first academic text entirely dedicated to the subject. Ayres approaches the subject with caution, and the definition that he provides is one of exclusion. He states, "ultimately, the definition must be subjective, as must the application of those outrageous generalizations 'fine art' and 'applied art.'"[22] He argues that since no specialists can agree on what folk art is, his selections are based on what is outside the territories held by scholars and collectors of fine art, and academic artists. He believes that folk art appeared when serfdom was eliminated, because money became available to a wider class of people. Ayres states that folk art was not widespread in England, because the nation was non-provincial. In contrast to other writings, Ayres argues that industrialization was not the demise of English folk art, as there wereexamples of folk art emerging in the nineteenth century. Rather, he argues that the culture of prosperity ensured the downfall of folk art, stating, "the wealth generated by the exploitation of the Empire financed a cultural superiority."[23] Additionally, he argues that the rise of technology led to its final demise. According to Ayres, folk art flourished in England between 1603 and 1914, after which technology had absorbed abilities that

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[21]Hansen, ed., *European Folk Art,* 77.
[22]James Ayres, *British Folk Art* (London: Barrie and Jerkins, 1977), 6.
[23]Ayres, *British Folk Art*, 10.

once found expression in the production of folk art. In accordance with his contemporaries, Ayres believes that there is no vibrant practice of English folk art, lamenting "today we view this work as the product of a garden of Eden before the fall."[24] His work fits into the theme of the other writings of the period, as he views English folk art as a thing of the past, not even entertaining the idea that there could be contemporary examples. Still, Ayres brought a renewed enthusiasm and perspective to the subject by conducting a book-length academic study.

Ayres became the most prominent writer on English folk art, and was able to bring the subject into the larger field of English art by securing a more prominent place for examining the form within the academic writings. He demonstrates this in his contribution of a section entitled "Folk Art" to the 1983 edited volume, *The Arts of Britain*. In this piece, Ayres declares that English folk art is a "sub-division" of the visual arts known as naive, primitive, non-academic, or vernacular.[25] Ayres further elaborates on his argument that English folk art as a living genre no longer exists, stating that all of the examples that survive are cherished because the values and modes of production associated with them are now lost.[26] Throughout his work, Ayres makes clear that he firmly believes that English folk art does not exist in the contemporary moment, and that the precious few examples remaining are exclusively museum pieces, thereby placing his work within the same line of argument as Fletcher, Bossert, and Hansen. However, Ayers's interest in the cultural significance of the genre, and the cultural, economic,

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[24]Ayres, *British Folk Art*, 6.
[25]James Ayres, "Folk Art," in *The Arts of Britain*, ed. Edwin B. Mullins (Oxford: Phaidon, 1983), 61.
[26]Ayres, "Folk Art," 66.

political, as well as technological dynamics implicated in its rise and fall, sets his analysis apart from these other writers.

Ayres's work laid the foundation for the further academic study of English folk art. This was followed up by Peter Brears's 1989 book, *North Country Folk Art,* which was the first book to be published on regional English folk art. Brears defines the art form as "the practical creative element in the lives of ordinary working people. It has little or no connection with the academic art nurtured in country houses and art galleries, but ... it forms an essential component in the life of all traditional communities ... it springs from a human reaction to the total physical and social environment, rather than the mainstream artistic culture."[27] He believes that because England was a powerful centre of a robust culture, which spread throughout the Empire, there was no need for the introverted nationalism that is revealed in folk art, which Carrington and Marx and Lambert were promoting. Thus, according to Brears, there are few examples of true English folk art, and he argues that these need to be preserved in a government funded museum. He points out there have not been any state initiatives to have a national folk museum because the government believes that there is no such thing as English folk art.

Brears provides expanded insights into the reasons for the decline of English folk art as a cultural form, which he believes occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. He argues that due to industrialization, English people moved from the country to urban centres, and experienced improved standards of living and higher incomes, resulting in the ability to purchase goods rather than make them. Further, he cites the employment of

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[27]Peter Brears, *North Country Folk Art* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1989), 1.

women outside the home as a contributing factor to the decline of the art form, as they had less time to devote to the practice.[28] He also notes that new forms of entertainment affected the production of folk art. Brears argues that because of these factors, folk art is now "quite dead" and that those works that do survive should be treated as museum pieces as a branch of the fine arts.[29] In surprising contradiction to these conclusions, Brears presents a few contemporary examples of English folk art. He notes that the heart was used a symbol of love and fidelity throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and then provides examples, including several from the late twentieth century. These contemporary examples, what he entitles *Graffiti on a Newcastle Inter-City Train*, a heart with an arrow and the writing "Phillip for Jackie 12.3.78" and *The Double Heart Cut into a Bedroom Window Sill at the Royal York Hotel*, with the writing "Dave + Helen 1/1/82" within the hearts (fig. 5).[30] Disappointingly, he does not provide a commentary about the ways in which these recent examples fit into the folk art category. However, their inclusion provokes the thought that English folk art may exist in the contemporary moment, albeit through the use of different mediums or techniques than those of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century producers.

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[28]Brears, *North Country Folk Art*, 3.
[29]Brears, *North Country Folk Art*, 4.
[30]Brears, *North Country Folk Art*, 15.

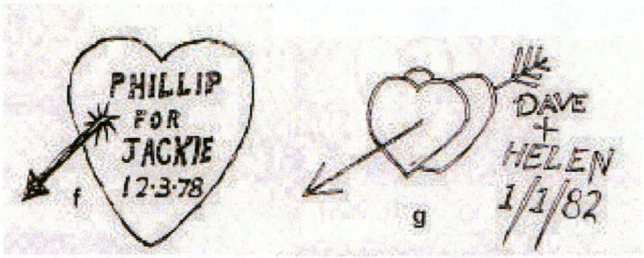

Figure 5: ***Graffiti on a Newcastle Inter-City Train*** **(left) and** ***The Double Heart Cut into a Bedroom Window Sill at the Royal York Hotel*** **(right). Image Source: Peter Brears,** ***North Country Folk Art*** **(Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1989), 15.**

The writings that have been examined thus far have either argued that English folk art perished with the peasants of England as a result of industrialization, or that it was in sad decline after the Second World War. All of the writings considered here historicize English folk art production between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, with most of the objects being considered housed in museums. Even the most optimistic writers, Carrington and Marx and Lambert, declare that contemporary examples of the folk art form are rare and difficult to find. These authors discuss English folk art autonomously, sometimes making broad comparisons with the European continent. In the latter quarter of the twentieth century, there were an increasing number of comparisons of British folk art to U.S. American folk art. This likely sprouted from the renewed interest in twentieth-century folk art in the United States, which promoted introverted nationalism through U.S. American folk art exhibitions. For example, the catalogue of the 1959 exhibition "American Folk Art from the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection" states in the introduction that the value of folk art is the "freedom of expression, documentary value, and artistic charm combine to make it a significant part of our

American culture."[31]Similarly, there is a connection between folk art and U.S. cultural values in the 1969 exhibit "American Folk Art: The Art of the Common Man in America,1750-1900"held at the Museum of Modern Art. As the introduction to the accompanying catalogue states, "[folk] art mirrors the sense and the sentiment of a community, and is an authentic expression of American experience."[32] Both of these examples suggest the values of representing the United States through contemporary examples of folk art, which is in stark contrast to the values associated with English folk art at the time, since these chiefly comprised looking at museum objects from the past.

The differentiating values associated with U.S. American and British folk were juxtaposed in the 1976 exhibition "American and British Folk Art" held at the United States Embassy in London to commemorate the bicentennial of U.S. American Declaration of Independence. The purpose of the exhibition was to display the shared heritage of the U.S. and Britain, and hence to present "the art of a free people."[33] Ayres, as co-curator of the exhibition, states in the introduction of the catalogue that folk art was more common in the U.S. than in Britain, because the whole of the British Isles was metropolitan in relation to its Empire. This helps to explain why works of U.S. American folk art vastly outnumbered the British pieces displayed in the exhibit. Ayres develops his earlier explanation of the causes for the genre's decline in England, stating that folk art in

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[31] Nina Fletcher Little, "Introduction," in *American Folk Art from the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection* by Colonial Williamsburg, inc., and Abby Greene Aldrich Rockefeller (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, 1959), 13.

[32]Holger Cahill, "American Folk Art," in *American Folk Art: The Art of the Common Man in America, 1750-1900* by Museum of Modern Art (New York: Published for the Museum of Modern Art by Arno Press, 1969), 28

[33] James Ayres, "Introduction," in *American and British Folk Art: Bicentennial Exhibition July 1-31, 1976, United States Embassy, London*, by American Museum in Britain and The John Judkyn Memorial Organization (London: United States Embassy, 1976), n.p.

Britain disappeared after the First World War with the emergence of technology, and the decline of crafts. The contents of the exhibition, as well as Ayres's introduction, demonstrate that U.S. American folk art was a source of introverted nationalism, whereas British folk art was marginalised, dwarfed by the nation's characterization of being the metropolitan centre of the empire.

The comparison of these two nationalist categories of folk art reveals one perspective as to why critics and scholars considered folk art to be thriving in the U.S., and yet understood the form as being marginalised in England. Avis Berman, a U.S. American art historian and critic, gives an outsider's insight into English folk art in the 1997 article "Folk Tales." She describes the ways in which U.S. American folk art has been seen as a testament to national fortitude, arguing that it is a validation of democracy and proof of an authentic U.S. American tradition. Berman declares that while the United States continues to worry about its cultural inferiority, the English can bask in their long history of cultural superiority.[34] Berman argues that U.S. Americans view folk art as the triumph of egalitarianism and a unification of all Americans, but that in England, folk art has negative connotations, as it is thought to be the art of poor people. According to Berman, this is part of the reason why the English have not taken a keen interest in their own folk art, or granted it much status in scholarly literature or museum.

Returning to Myrone, who argues that since there is an absence of a national folk museum in England, and that no major galleries have taken an interest in English folk art, it is clear that the category of English folk art has depended historically on

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[34]Avis Berman, "Folk Tales,"*Art & Antiques* 20 (1997): 87-89.

individualcollectors, therefore making folk art consumer driven.[35] The conception of a consumer driven art market is not unique to English folk art, since, as Julia Ardery and Daniel Robbins argue, the desires of consumers, and more specifically collectors of the form, drove the U.S. American folk art market. As Arderypoints out, "by the 1970s in the drama of the visual arts the collector had been relegated to a spot behind the scenes, and the artist ... was overwhelmingly the pivot point of renown. In the field of folk art, however, collectors could continue to dominate ... [t]he power of collectors has in turn shaped the ways museums – and artists themselves – address folk art."[36] In the United States, the attention that many collectors paid to categorizing folk art helped to generate wider interest in the art world.

In England, as opposed to the U.S., there has not been a large-scale interest in domestic folk art. As one commentator noted, "We are so toffee-nosed in Britain about aristocratic art, it took a Hungarian to say that English naive art is worth preserving."[37] The commentator here refers to AndrasKalman, who has been the major driving force behind the preservation and collection of English folk art since the 1960s. Kalman writes the preface of Ayres's 1980 book *English Naïve Painting*, in which he suggests that folk art is "the 'endangered species' of the English art world."[38]Kalman believes that U.S. Americans take more interest in folk art, as they do not have a long inheritance of elite art production upon which to scaffold their national culture, and therefore cherish art of the

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[35]Myrone, "Instituting English Folk Art," 42.
[36] Ardery, *The Temptation,* 178-9.
[37] Sir Peter Wakefield quoted in Alison Beckett, "Looming Threat of Loss of Innocence – English Art,"*The Times*, January 15, 1993, quoted in Myrone, "Instituting English Folk Art," footnote 111, page 46.
[38]AndrasKalman, "Introduction," in *English Naïve Painting*, by James Ayres (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 7.

common person. He states that the inspiration for his folk art collection was his enticement by depictions of daily life that were created with "honesty, warmth and simplicity...[and] childlike surprises and humour."[39]

In her 2004 article "Vanishing Breed," Elspeth Moncrieff discusses the British Folk Art Collection at the Compton Verney Gallery, principally comprised of works donated from the Dorothy and AndrasKalman Collection of English Folk Art. As Moncrieff points out, this collection has been one of the most popular displays at the gallery, but was almost split up and sold abroad before the intervention of the Peter Moores Foundation. Moncrieff argues that museums and the public should take more interest in British folk art, since otherwise it risks being sold and collected by national museums outside of the UK. Moncrieff discusses "Folk Archive" and the reception it has had at the Tate Gallery, where it was exhibited as a part of the Tate's exhibition "Intelligence: New British Art 2000." A few years prior to the exhibition, the Tate turned down a gift of a substantial collection of British folk art. Moncrieff quotes from the Tate website, which notes that "Folk Archive" "represents [Deller and Kane's] joint interest in creative practices and artifacts from outside the art world."[40] Moncrieff states in response, "if folk art is presented as trendy and relevant to political and cultural issues then it is OK, but it is still not art."[41] As artists and art critics gained interest in "Folk Archive," comparisons were not drawn between this exhibition and other writings about English folk art, or the folk construct, demonstrating a lack of interest in previous works about English folk art, or a disconnect between "Folk Archive" and previous conceptions of

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[39]Kalman, "Introduction," 8.
[40] Elspeth Moncrieff, "Vanishing Breed," *Museums Journal* 3 (July 2004): 25.
[41] Elspeth Moncrieff, "Vanishing Breed," 25.

English folk art. Perhaps this was because on the surface, Deller and Kane's presentation of folk art was new and exciting, so drastically differentfromprevious ideas of what encompassed folk art, or because there were two well-known contemporary artists assembling the collection. Either way, "Folk Archive" reinvigorated the question of what can constitute present day folk art, challenging previous conceptions of what can be classified as folk art.

Within the examined historiography, none of the writers critique the concept of folk art itself; rather, some of them criticize the idea of those whom they imagine to be folk existing at all within a British context. Reviewing this literature suggests that there are contradictory, ever-changing definitions of folk art, and that the construct is made malleable in order to fit the authors' desires. The idea of a folk populace is consistently romanticized within the literature, whether it be through an agrarian folk past which has been lost to industrialization, or a resilient folk present that continues somewhere beyond the industrial British landscape. When evaluating this literature on English folk art against the arguments presented by the authors examined in Chapter 1, it is clear that these authors do not employ criticality when approaching the category of the folk.[42] Rather, theircritiquetargets the existence of the folk construct itself in a post-industrial context. This historiographic foundation is crucialfor understanding the ways in which "Folk Archive" fits within the construct of English folk art, despite displaying objects and images that are radically different from those previously contemplated in the limited literature on the subject. "Folk Archive" is therefore a particularly useful case study, in

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[42]Myrone is the exception to this generalization of these works lacking criticality. Yet, although Myrone critically assesses folk art in England, he does not explore how the category is constructed.

that its curators expand the category in order to fit the particular historical circumstances of the present moment. The next chapter will provide a critical analysis of the ways in which "Folk Archive" functions within Englishfolk art historiography, as well as the broader conceptual historiography on the development of folk art as a cultural form. Using examples from the "Folk Archive" exhibition will help to illustrate the ways in which Deller and Kane question and affirm what can be classified as folk art, and the extent to which such classifications remain dictated by the historiography on the subject.

Chapter 3: Archiving the Folk: A Case Study

As discussed in the previous sections, an analysis of folk art historiography demonstrates the flexibility of the category of folk art in the postwar period, which often means negotiating it alongside histories of industrialization and mass consumerism. Upon first glance, Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane's 2005 exhibit "Folk Archive," which debuted at the Barbican Arts Centre in London, appears to be a significant departure from previous considerations of folk art in England. However, a more in-depth analysis of the folk art category using this exhibition as a lens of examination will demonstrate the similarities and differences between "Folk Archive" and prior examples of English folk art represented in the historiography and in exhibitions on the subject.

In the preface to the exhibition catalogue, Deller and Kane state that they curated "Folk Archive" in response to the Millennium Dome's corporate representation of the UK. In 2000, the UK government funded the £1 billion Millennium Dome along with the exhibition "The Millennium Experience," which intended to display important aspects of British cultural life. The exhibit generated negative response from the mainstream press as well as from academics, with articles emphasizing that it was both a corporate representation, rather than a celebration, of British culture and a waste of taxpayers' money.[1] In reaction to the Millennium Dome's representation of British cultural life, Deller and Kane posed the question, "what might constitute present day folk art"?[2] Their answer to this question was the objects and images assembled for "Folk Archive."

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[1]Storry and Childs, *British Cultural Identities*, 12-13.
[2] Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane, *Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK* (London: Book Works, 2005), 1.

Inopposition to previously discussed curators, professional artists, and scholars writing about folk art in England, Deller and Kane do not seek to define what can be included inthe categorization of folk art. Rather, they elaborate that the objects in the exhibition are a reflection of their personal tastes, stating: "We have made a partial account of popular art in this country: for everything that we have included there are a hundred objects or events that we have left out through ignorance or our own preference."[3]They state further that the main objective of the exhibit is to "celebrat[e]...the creative life of Britain."[4]

What is more, Deller and Kane attempt to reconcile seemingly opposed concepts of folk art and industrialization, urbanization, and technology within "Folk Archive." Even though the curators do not seek to define folk art, they do write about what they view as some of the characteristics of folk art. Specifically, they outline their collecting practices for the exhibition, stating: "We looked for works which have attributes including: humour, modernity, insight, a unique voice or perspective, motifs we recognize and ones we don't, attempts to tackle ambitious subjects, refreshing directness or effectiveness, endeavours beyond normal expectation, pathos or just something extra."[5] They elaborate that they attempt to seek "how popular art may have developed in light of recent social, technological and cultural changes. If art practice has changed in recent decades, then what might be considered folk art has similarly changed and we must take into account performance and action, video and installation."[6] By explicitly

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[3]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 1.
[4]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 1.
[5]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 2.
[6]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 1.

stating that modernity was a sought after characteristic of their folk art collecting practices, and by utilizing different technological mediums within their collection of folk art, Deller and Kane set apart their construction of the folk art category from all of the others previously discussed.

The exhibition catalogue is broken down into fifteen sections, each of which will be examined in this chapter. The focus of this examination will be a visual analysis of the material, upon which comparisons will be drawn to previous writings regarding English folk art, as well as to related art historical categories, in order to illustrate how Deller and Kane consider the work included in their exhibition to be folk art.

The first section, entitled *Performance* charts a series of town fairs, competitions, dramatic performances, carnivals, and parades. This section contains photographs of people participating in these events, indicating that they are part of the performance of the event. All of the events charted in this section involve the coming together of a community, and the participationin an event that involves creativity. In the writings of Carrington and Marx and Lambert, they stress that communal tradition is a key aspect of folk art. Both works considered the fair as one of the last places to view folk art, but they focused on the objects at the fair, such asthe carved horses of the carousel. In contrast, Deller and Kane focus on the communal tradition of the fair in which people participate. They have a collection of photographs from the "World Gurning Championships" held at theEgremont Crab Fair (fig 6).[7] The fair dates back to 1267 when King Henry III granted a Royal Charter for a weekly market and an annual fair. Gurning is a competition where

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[7]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 10-11.

contestants put their head through a horse collar and distort their faces. The contestant



Figure 6: *Clive from Cheshire, 2004* (left) and *Kath Taylor, Women's Champion, 2004* (right). Image Source: Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane, *Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK* (London: Book Works, 2005), 10.

with the most gruesome gurning face is crowned the champion. The origins of the competition are not clear, but the authors suggest that it may have something to do with the imitation of the village idiot, or the face being made after taking a bite of a crab apple.[8] The photos show a variety of people participating in the act of gurning: men dressed in suits, older women, and young children. This competition gathers people from all walks of life to partake in a communal tradition that is intrinsically defined as a folk celebration. The collection of photographs documenting the event is included in the category of folk art by Deller and Kane, because the event is rooted in communal tradition, and is for the pleasure of the people of the community.

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[8]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 10-11.



Figure 7: ***The Parade of Beasts, Banbury, Oxfordshire, 2000.*** **Image Source: Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane,** ***Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK*** **(London: Book Works, 2005), 20.**

Although most commonly associated with the conceptualization offolk life, events do not have to be rooted in the distant past to be considered within Deller and Kane's categorization of folk art. For example, the *Parade of Beasts, Banbury*(fig. 7), is described as an event with a hobby horse theme, displaying "a unique convention of animal costumes and Morris sides, and traditional events and plays."[9] The photos of the event show town people with their homemade costumes lining up for the "Parade of Beasts" as well as children riding push scooters with horses heads attached. In opposition to the Egremont Crab Fair, this festival is a recent invention, debuting in 1999, although it still has the merits of communal tradition, and handmade objects by people who would not consider themselves primarily artists.Thus, Deller and Kane's inclusion of so-called folk customs extends to their creation as well as to their historical origins. Further, the inclusion of morris dancing as a part of the festival, which Barbara Jones referred to as "defiantly folk" in her 1951 writing *The Unsophisticated Arts,* affirms the merits of this town festival to be considered folk art.[10]

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[9]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 20.

[10] Morris dancing is a ceremonial dance that dates back to the fifteenth century, which is often viewed as being a uniquely English tradition. Morris dancing received interest in the 1900s English Folk Revival and, as Theresa Jill Buckland describes, "morris dancing transformed from a local cultural activity to that of a

The introverted look into the national character of Britain that Deller and Kane partake in through exploring communal festivals is similar to the "New and Commonplace" period in folk art, which includes the writings of Carrington and Marx and Lambert. In Myrone's discussion of the period, he argues that the 1951 exhibition "Black Eyes and Lemonade," curated by Barbara Jones, was the centrepiece of the renewed interest in folk art. The exhibition was part of the "Festival of Britain" held at the centenary of the opening of the Crystal Palace in 1851, although this festival only included Britain and excluded commonwealth and foreign countries that had participated in 1851. The festival was intended to represent the nation, to "testify to national pride and a sense of community based on the continuity of British traditions" in ways that"would improve morale at home, [and] demonstrate to other countries – and especially to the United States – how resilient the British could be in adversity."[11] The festival's organizers attempted to provide an introverted look into Britain's success, and "Black Eyes and Lemonade" intended to highlight the creative elements of British life in particular.

Specifically, Jones included objects easily found in households and public areas across Britain, but rarely found in museums and galleries. Jones stated that for visitors

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nationally distributed recreation, performed mostly at weekends throughout the summer months. Morris dancing increasingly since the 1920s came to be perceived in England as a somewhat anachronistic affair, revived by aficionados who came from a more privileged social and economic background than that of its former practitioners, who were principally drawn from the laboring classes." See Theresa Jill Buckland, "Being Traditional: Authentic Selves and Others in Researching Late-Twentieth-Century Northwest English Morris Dancing," in *Dancing from Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities*, ed. Theresa Jill Buckland (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 202. Barbara Jones, *The Unsophisticated Arts*, (London: Architectural Press, 1951), 9.

[11]F. M. Leventhal, "'A Tonic to the Nation': The Festival of Britain, 1951,"*Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 27, no. 3 (1995): 448-449.

viewing the objects on display, "the museum eye must be abandoned before they can be enjoyed."[12] The works in the exhibition were thereby not intended to receive the same aesthetic gaze as works of fine art in galleries. Instead, Jones highlighted the British virtues of the objects – vigour, humour, and precision – as their primary point of engagement. Her writing fits within the same themes as Carrington'sand Marx and Lambert's, by advancinga national sentiment about popular art that was intended as an introverted look atEngland. Myrone states of the exhibition: "Far from affirming a securely ruralist, nostalgic vision of England, the exhibition used 'folk' art to challenge and revise a collective sense of identity whose horizons were defined, not by a 'deep' history, but by the limits of personal memory: it was, in that regard, emphatically contemporary."[13]Myrone's use of quotation marks around the word "folk" signals that he is applying the folk construct to the work rather than Jones,since Jones does not entertain the idea that these works could be folk art in the catalogue.[14]

Jones's work is continued in the book *The Unsophisticated Arts*, published the same year she curated the "Black Eyes and Lemonade" exhibition, which elaborates Jones's categorization of the vernacular arts. The objects of consideration that she includes in her volume include taxidermy, tattooing, the decoration of food, and town festivals. This book does not fit within the other writings, as Jones explicitly separates

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[12] Barbara Jones, *Black Eyes and Lemonade: A Festival of Britain Exhibition of British Popular and Traditional Art* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1951), 5.

[13]Myrone, "Instituting English Folk Art," 40.

[14] To clarify this argument, Myrone states: "I am not concerned here with testing the authenticity or otherwise of 'folk' forms, or the legitimacy of folk as an analytical term among the humanities and social science; rather, in exploring the historiographical and museological functions of 'folk art' as a concept in Britain, and the mutability of the term itself...the present investigation, conducted at some distance from the academic discipline of folklore or folklife studies, may be at liberty to hold these issues of definition at a certain critical distance." Whereas my study seeks to critically assess Myrone refers to as "issues of definition" through anhistoriographic examination. Myrone, "Instituting English Folk Art," 28-29.

"folk" and "vernacular" arts and states that her inclusions are not works of folk art. She states:

> A wavering and uncertain boundary can be sketched out to separate the folk from the vernacular arts. Most of the folk arts are dead, or self-consciously preserved by societies. Most of them were handicrafts; we can say with certainty that smocking, quilting, morris dancing, mumming, corn dollies, weaving, and so on, are defiantly folk. The things that were made by machines, or at least outside the village on a wholesale scale, have a different flavour altogether; the toy theatre, the fair, fireworks, waxworks and shop signs have quite a new quality, difficult to define, but harder, cruder, brighter, much less tasteful. We might consider these as the vernacular arts.[15]

Although Myrone considers such work to be folk art, Jones herself excludes them from the categorization of folk art. Consequently, for the purpose of this study, Jones's book is not included within the historiography of those who examine English folk art. Instead, both Jones's 1951 exhibition "Black Eyes and Lemonade" and her 1951 book *The Unsophisticated Arts* will be used as a comparative example for the "Folk Archive" case study.

The objects that Jones locates outside the folk art category, including tattoos, food decoration, and shop signs are precisely the same as the objects Deller and Kane include in their exhibit under the folk art category. Specifically, Deller and Kane's following catalogue sections, *Tea and Cakes* and *Foods*, deal with the same objects that Jones includes within the chapter *The Decoration of Food* (fig. 8). Jones speaks about the merits of decorated foods to be included within the arts, stating: "This tradition has not only survived the rationing of two wars and a terrific drop in time spent cooking, it has also survived a far more insidious evil – refinement." She elaborates, writing,

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[15]Jones, *The Unsophisticated Arts*, 9-10.

"theresurvives into this age of hurried meals and shop-preparation, an iron-hard tradition

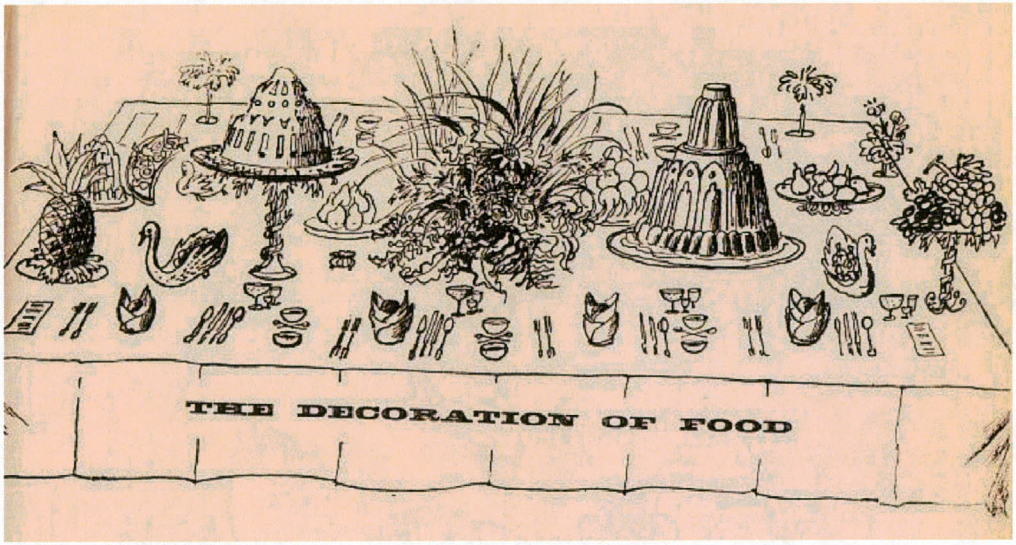

Figure 8: *The Decoration of Food*. Image Source: Barbara Jones, *The Unsophisticated Arts*, (London: Architectural Press, 1951), 107.

of food decoration so deeply inbred that the rawest novice making his first pie finds his fingers tweaking pastry into instinctive ornamental shapes as old as flour and water."[16] The passing of tradition, as well as the unspecialized creator of the product, are the merits that Jones attributes to the production of decorated food as fitting within the category of vernacular arts. Jones's chapter includes only completed pastries and sweets, whereas Deller and Kane's section comprises mainly shop signs, as well as photos of baked goods and other novelties associated with tea time. The similarity between the two exhibitions illustrates that the determining factor of what is considered folk art is at the discretion of the curator.

The defining line separating the objects that Jones considers vernacular art from those objectsdiscussed in the literature examinedin Chapter 2 lies in their relationship to a

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[16] Jones,*The Unsophisticated Arts,* 110.

contemporary moment defined by modernity and industrialization. All of the authors considered within the historiography of English folk art define it to be a historic relic. Despite attempts by some optimistic "New and Commonplace" authors, who do not write off contemporary examples of folk art completely, the objects they examine are historical and thereby contribute to a romanticized interpretation of the past. In contrast, neither Jones's 1951 exhibition or booknegotiates the category of folk art, sinceshe explicitly states that the objects that she contemplates therein cannot be included within the category. Jones's rejection of the category of folk art, and Deller and Kane's embracing of the category attest to the malleability of the categorization, especially since many of the objects examined in Jones and in Deller and Kane's exhibitions are nearly identical in terms of aesthetics, content, and execution. Despite the difference in nomenclature,Deller and Kane's expansion of the folk art category ultimately includes many of the same objects that Jones defines as vernacular art, even if these same objects were not previously considered in English folk art historiography more generally. Thus, even though Jones uses the term "vernacular" rather than "folk," the sentiments and purpose of her work achieve the same goals of other folk art writers of her time, further blurring the distinction between folk art and its interrelated categories.

The objects and images that Deller and Kane include within the sections *Tea and Cakes* and *Foods*, seem as though they would be difficult to situate within the categorization of folk art. Many of the objects considered by Deller and Kane serve a specific commercial purpose, such as the numerous shop signs that are included in the section. However, when considering Deller and Kane's idea of who the folk are, the photos display small businesses and activities that do not engage in corporate

representations. An example of this are two photos taken of *Grocery Sign, Geronway Supermarket, Essex Road, Islington, London, 2004* (fig.9), displaying advertisements for the goods and the prices of items sold in the store.[17] The signs are handmade by an anonymous author, do not refer to corporate logos, and serve a purpose to the community shoppers. Parallels can be drawn here between Carrington's inclusion of a public house in the folk art category, as discussed in Chapter 2, and the shop signs included in "Folk Archive."In particular, these signs are readily relatable to the public, and involve a creative process in terms of their execution.



Figure 9: ***Grocery Sign, Geronway Supermarket, Essex Road, Islington, London, 2004.*** **Image Source: Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane,** ***Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK*** **(London: Book Works, 2005), 40.**

[17]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 20.

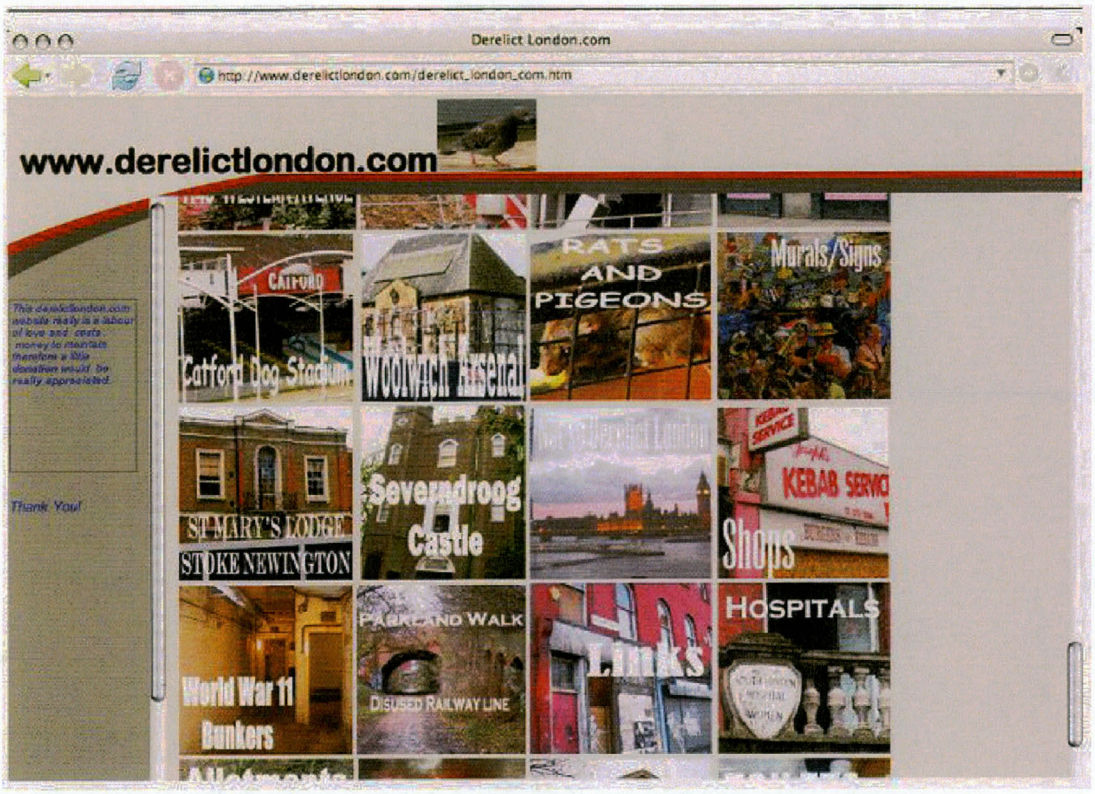

Figure 10: ***www.derelictlondon.com, 2005.*** **Image Source: Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane,** ***Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK*** **(London: Book Works, 2005), 45.**

The next section in the "Folk Archive" catalogue,*Publishing,*shows that folk art can manifest in ways that utilize contemporary publishing. Many of the examples are screen shots of webpages dealing with a diverse subject matter, from online discussion forums about custom cars to protest organisations (fig. 10). Deller and Kane explain the inclusion ofinternet content, by noting that the "single most significant new platform for creativity is the Web, with its immediacy and its democratic ability to reach worldwide audiences. It is a limitless platform for enthusiasts, pressure groups and people who just want to show the world what they do or like or hate."[18] The webpages included do not engage in corporate representations, and are places where likeminded people can gather.

[18]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 44.

In essence, these pages are presented as a communal gathering in a similar way to county fairs or festivals, even if they not occupying the same physical space because of their virtual nature. Communal appeal, as discussed in the previous chapter, is often considered a hallmark of folk art. Through this example, the flexibility of the attributes associated with the category of folk art can be applied to contemporary uses of technology.

Another common association with the category of folk art is that it is a form of escapism, and as Fletcher describes, a way to "brighten up, or entirely step out of, the drabness of one's own surroundings."[19] This statement may be a suitable description for the catalogue sections *Home* and *The Street,* including such instances as painted exterior of homes, garden designs, and wall paintings. One example, *Garden Design, Bermondsey, London, 2004* (fig.11) is a photograph of the decorated area



Figure 11: *Garden Design, Bermondsey, London, 2004*. Image Source: Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane, *Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK* (London: Book Works, 2005), 53.

[19]Fletcher, *Popular Art in England*, 12.

surrounding the base of two palm trees planted in a yard.[20] A large ring in the ground that is painted white and red separates the soil and the lawn. Painted white rocks are placed on the soil, with one prominently featured rockpainted with the English flag, and a yellow caricature of the sun is staked between the palm trees. It can be assumed that the person, or persons, who created this work was seeking to decorate their surroundings, and to add a personalized, yet nationalistic, work of art to their yard. Nationalism within folk art can be traced back to the arguments that Carrington and Marx and Lambert presented, which asserted that folk art could be used as a tool to instill nationalism. In the case of the previous writers, who were seeking out this nationalism through a regressive look at museum pieces, Deller and Kane look to the contemporary moment to convey a sense of uniting nationalism amongst the producers in the exhibition.

Marx and Lambert, as discussed in the previous section, argue that folk art is made by ordinary people, for everyday life, who are either creating the works themselves, or "imposing their own tastes on the products of the craftsman or the machine."[21]But the distinguishing feature of folk art for the authors is that it is not associated with the academy, or with wealthy patrons. According to this definition, certainly the works within the "Folk Archive" catalogue section *Transportation* fit within the category of folk art. This section features vehicles that have been customized by the owner to suit their own tastes, such as *Painted Car Promoting Rastafarianism, Piccadilly, London 2002*(fig. 12). Deller and Kane include this photograph of a black car that has various words and images hand painted all over the vehicle, including a handmade roof attachment, which

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[20]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 53.
[21]Marx and Lambert, *English Popular and Traditional Art,*7.



Figure 12: ***Painted Car Promoting Rastafarianism, Piccadilly, London 2002.*** **Image Source: Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane,** ***Folk Archive*****: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK (London: Book Works, 2005), 69.**

allowed the makers to impose their own creativity onto the machine. What makes this vehicle folk art within the Marx and Lambert's classification is that ordinary people created the work, by embellishing a carusing their own creativity, and with no concern for wealthy patrons or the academy. This is an example of how folk art can be reconciled with technology, which is one of Deller and Kane's central motivations for "Folk Archive."

In numerous writings discussed in the previous section, many authors contemplate when folk art ceased to exist in England. Ayres argues that 1914 was the end date of folk art production, blaming its finality on "the emergence of technology" that absorbed the abilities once found expression in the production of folk art, whereas Brears argues that folk art's demise came at the end of the nineteenth century as industrialization rendered the production of folk art obsolete.[22]What these two writings have in common, as well as the writings of Bossert and Hansen, is the belief that folk art ceases to exist in the contemporary and that all the works that do survive are historical pieces found in

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[22]Ayres, *British Folk Art*, 10; Brears, *North Country Folk Art*, 3.

museum collections. Even when considering the more positive writings about folk art, the main objects of consideration are those housed in museums. Deller and Kane challenge the view that folk art has to exist as a museum object, and even the concept that folk art has to exist as a permanent material object in the first place. In the catalogue section *Ephemeral*, all of the depictions included in this section are fleeting, and the objects could not be permanently preserved in a museum or gallery.Part of the folk art merits of these works relies on their situation within the original setting, and taking the objects out of this context would diminish the folk art qualities of these works. For example, the person or group who created *Speedboat Sandcastle in Daymar Bay, Cornwall 2004* (fig. 13),



Figure 13: *Speedboat Sandcastle in Daymar Bay, Cornwall, 2004.* Image Source: Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane, *Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK* (London: Book Works, 2005), 73.

was likely an untrained artist, who made the sandcastle for the pleasure of themselves, and the enjoyment of those in the community. If the sandcastle were taken out of the context of the beach, the ephemeral quality of the piece would be lost.

The inclusion of photographs of short-lived works of folk art rejects the idea that folk art can only be seen in the contemporary moment in museum collections that store objects from decades past. This further demonstrates that Deller and Kane understand folk art as a cultural form thatcan be enjoyed outside of a museum setting. Art historian Donald Preziosi discusses the ways in which art museum objects have multifaceted functions, suggesting that the interpretation of these objects does not rely strictly on what the object is.He poses the question: "The act of collecting and exhibiting artifacts, of passing them across the exhibitionary threshold, is much more than an act of removal from some prior place, context, or condition. The object is not simply transported but *transformed.* This raises the question of what, then, is the nature of the museum object?"[23] The object's interpretation also relies on the setting it occupies and the meaning that is conferred upon the people, place, and nation it represents. Deller and Kane's inclusion of objects from outside of the academy, such as the sandcastle, brings new meanings and connotations when placed in an art gallery through its representation in a photograph. Thus, Deller and Kane's inclusion of ephemeral pieces challenges gallery viewers to reconsider what folk art can mean outside a gallery setting, since they seek to demonstrate that folk art does not have to be viewed within an exhibitionary context.

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[23] Donald Preziosi, "Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible," in *A Companion to Museum Studies,* ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 50.



Figure 14: ***Banners at Countryside Alliance Demonstration, London, September 2002.*** **Image Source: Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane,** ***Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK*** **(London: Book Works, 2005), 81.**

The nextsection of the "Folk Archive" catalogue, *Politics,* primarily deals with protests and social issues that have mobilized groups and communities, the art of which is encompassed within the act of resistance itself, as well as in the handmade protest signs associated with it. Brears defines folk art as that which "springs from a human reaction to the total physical and social environment, rather than the mainstream artistic culture."[24] This statement is especially fitting for the *Politics* section of "Folk Archive." The first inclusion within this section, *Banners at the Countryside Alliance Demonstration, London, September 2002* (fig. 14)includes photographs of handmade banners created for the purpose of this demonstration, in protest of the 2004 Hunting Act, which outlawed hunting with dogs in England and Wales. Banners included in *Folk Archive* range from simple writing on posters including: "BLAIRE-EWE ASS THE WEAKEST MINK GOODBYE" "HITLER BANNED HUNTING, COUNTRYSIDE NOT GENOCIDE" and "BLAIR'S A PEST! LETS HUNT HIM!" Also included are posters that

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[24]Brears, *North Country Folk Art,* 1.

showcasemore elaborate images, including one depicting a fox with the face of a caricaturized Tony Blair and displaying the word "HUNT" underneath, as well as banner declaring "YOU CAN'T BREAK MELBREAK" with a cheerful fox and hound flanking either side of the frame. These protest signs are a manifestation of a communal gathering, in response to the social and physical environment, fit withinBrears's definition of folk art. However, protest signs had previously not been considered folk art within the historiography of English folk art, possibly because of their political nature, which would have contested the image of a passive folk culture.

The inclusion of these protest signs within Deller and Kane's understanding of the folk art category relies on the creative output of those handcrafting them, as well as on the communal gathering staged in reaction to the surrounding local environment. Significantly, Deller and Kane indicate that they are more interested in processes of communal gathering and their resulting creative outputthan they are on the political message of the subject matter, and they demonstrate this by including counter-protest posters relating to the same demonstration. The *Counter-Countryside Alliance Demonstrators, London, September 2002* (fig. 15)includes a sign, crafted withmarker on cardboard that declared, "WHILE YOU LOT ARE HERE, MY MATES ROBBIN YER

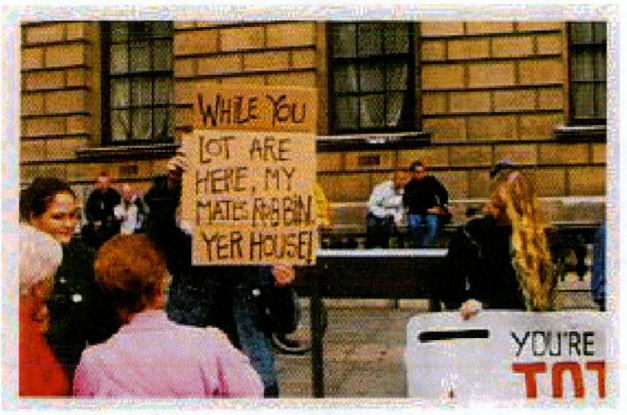

Figure 15: ***Counter-Countryside Alliance Demonstrators, London, September 2002*****. Image Source: Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane,** ***Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK*** **(London: Book Works, 2005), 81.**

HOUSE!" Another inclusion is from the *Class War Flyers, 2005* stating "Bollocks To The Countryside Alliance! When They Are Not Shagging Sheep They Are Killing Foxes!." The presentation of both sides of the debate indicate that for Deller and Kane folk art can be politically motivated, and that opposing sides to a debate caneach be considered folk art.

The next catalogue section, *Love and Death* encompasses themes that have been considered in the historiography of Englishfolk art. Although the themes are similar, the medium used varies dramatically from previous considerations. Some essential parameters of the folk art definitions included in this historiography are that folk artists are untrained, that their work strives to appeal to themselves and those in their surrounding community, and that it is not intended to be used for commercial gain. Carrington defined popular art as "art as practiced by artists of the people for the enjoyment of the people," which is based on communal tradition, and is dependent on the satisfaction it gives to its viewers. He elaborates on this point by stating that factory-produced consumer objects must appeal to a wide variety of tastes for mass consumption, as opposed to the craft of popular art that must appeal to the artist's individual patrons and to the community in which the artist works. An illustration of this idea used within Deller and Kane's construction of the category is *Cigarette Floral tribute for Marie Ellis 2005* (fig. 16). As the catalogue explains, Marie Ellis passed away at 105 years of age. The staff of the nursing home where she had been a resident wanted to make a tribute that would reflect her personality. Marie had been a smoker up until her death, so a cigarette

made out of flowers was crafted in her honour.[25] The arrangement was made in commemoration of a community member, and not for commercial gain. The use of death



Figure 16: ***Cigarette Floral tribute for Marie Ellis 2005.*** **Image Source: Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane,** ***Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK*** **(London: Book Works, 2005), 100.**

as a subject matter has been previously articulatedwithin English folk art historiography, although the materials used to craft this memorial were a departure from previous objects under consideration.

The objects that Deller and Kane include within their construction of folk art are similar to those that are included in the category of outsider art, such as the inclusion of prison art. Both outsider art and folk art are categories of artistic expression that remain marginalized within academic fine art circles. However, the terms "folk" and "outsider" are themselves typically differentiated by the relationship that the artists saddled with them have within their respective societies. The phrase "outsider art" was first used in

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[25]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 100.

1972 by Roger Cardinal as a translation and synonym for "art brut," a term coined by the French artist Jean Dubuffet.[26] Cardinal includes three types of artists that make up this category: schizophrenics, mediums, and innocents. The category that closely relates to folk art is the category of innocents, which Cardinal defines as being those, "who for various reasons have managed to elude the full warping effects of culture, and who, despite superficial signs of indebtedness to, for example folk art...manages nonetheless to achieve a distinctly individual style."[27] Cardinal does not detail what separates the innocent from the folk, although he states that folk art is often anonymous and undermines the individual's innovation as it is placed within a cultural stereotype.[28] In a later work, Cardinal argues that the categories of outsider art and folk art are distinct, since folk artists "subordinate their ego to a collective culture or a long-established model or tradition," whereas outsider art lacks precedent or tradition.[29] Cardinal's rendering of the category of folk art is suitable for previous conceptions regarding folk art. However, Cardinal's categorization of folk art does not fit with Deller and Kane's work, as they

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[26] The term "Art Brut" was first used in 1945 by Dubuffet to categorize a collection of art that he had compiled made by untrained artists from outside of the academy. In a similar way as folk art, a person's social circumstance through their exclusion from mainstream society, as well as a lack of artistic education, was key for their inclusion within the category of Art Brut. Cardinal expanded Dubuffet's concept of Art Brut in 1972 with the category of Outsider Art, to consider art beyond the reach of the academy, based on both the material virtues of the artifact, as well as the maker's position in society. Outsider Art has attracted a wide interest by art patrons through numerous gallery exhibitions, an annual Outsider Art Fair, and mainstream press attention. For more in these categories, see in particular Roger Cardinal, *Outsider Art*, (New York: Praeger, 1972); David Maclagan, *Outsider Art From the Margins to the Marketplace* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009);Colin Rhodes, *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000);Allen S. Weiss, *Shattered Forms, Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism* (State University of New York, Albany, 1992); Vera L. Zolberg, and Joni Maya Cherbo, *Outsider Art: Contesting Boundaries in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[27] Roger Cardinal, *Outsider Art* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 30.

[28] Cardinal, *Outsider Art*, 35.

[29] Roger Cardinal, "Towards an Outsider Aesthetic," in *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*, ed. Michael Hall, et al. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 30.

embrace the works of those who have encountered the "full warping effects of culture" who are not the passive bearers of tradition.[30]

Deller and Kane argue that the distinction between outsider art and folk art does not rely upon a certain aesthetic, but rather is determined by the artist's position in society. According to this line of thinking, the outsider artist is the 'Other' of society, who does not fit within the dominant or mainstream.[31]Colin Rhodes elaborates on this idea by suggesting that the outsider artist is "fundamentally different to their audience, often thought of as being dysfunctional in respect of parameters for normality set by the dominant culture" who are usually, but not always, persons who have psychological illnesses, are criminals, or are put in this category because their cultural identity is significantly different from the mainstream.[32] The outsider is set apart from other canons because it is considered an art category without tradition. Rhodes argues that folk art is distinct from outsider art because the producers "have distinct traditions which nevertheless share characteristics in common with the dominant culture."[33]Thus, folk art is rooted in collective communal tradition with the intention to represent a society, rather than the individual. For Deller and Kane, they note in the preface to the exhibition catalogue that the curated images and objects of "Folk Archive" should not be read as outsider art. Rather, they state, "our artists are quite clear on how their work will be

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[30]Cardinal, *Outsider Art*, 30.
[31] The idea of the 'Other' relates to the 'Self,' which is generally positioned as someone living in a Eurocentric, liberal capitalist society according to Edward Said. Those who do not identify with this Self, therefore become the Other. For many individuals, including those who practice outsider art, they are defined as the Other because of their exclusion from mainstream society, which, as Said demonstrates, often has racialized and colonial undertones. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
[32] Colin Rhodes, *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 7
[33]Rhodes, *Outsider Art,* 217.

read," and seek to display objects which represent the creative output of people living in the UK.[34]

Deller and Kane explain in the "Folk Archive" catalogue that a uniting feature of the exhibitionis that the works therein "have been authored by individuals who would perhaps not primarily consider themselves artists."[35] This statement unites their archivingof contemporary folk art to previous conceptions about what is included within the category, while at the same time excluding it from other categoriesof artistic expression. Deller and Kane reject the idea that folk art belongs to a preindustrial past – one rooted in an idealized rural setting that cannot be reconciled with capitalist modernity. They are not concerned with the opposition of folk life with contemporarylife; rather, these concepts are presented as interrelated in the exhibition. Although many of the objects and images included in "Folk Archive" are different from those examined in the historiography of English folk art, Deller and Kane masterfully situate the selected objects to fit within their malleable version of the construct.

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[34]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 2.
[35]Deller and Kane, *Folk Archive,* 2.

Conclusion

This examination of the critical historiography of folk culture and folk art, combined with an analysis of English folk art historiography and the "Folk Archive" case study, demonstrates how perceptions of the form have changed since the Second World War. Moreover, it proves that while there has never been a definitive categorization of folk art as a form of artistic expression in the English context, there has remained a sustained investment in its maintenance up to the contemporary moment. Part of the reason for this is that English folk art has consistently aimed to consolidate a sense of nationalism beginning in the immediate postwar period. Until "Folk Archive," this material search of nationalism was primarily backwards looking in that it focused on historicalobjects held in museum collections. In other words, most of the historiography and exhibitionary forays into English folk art could provide only a few examples of contemporary folk art objects around which to unite the English people, to promote the concept of a strongfolkhistory, and to idealize a rural past that no longer existed.

In many ways, the historical investment in English folk art demonstrates that the categories of "England" and "folk art" have often been conceptualized in tension with each other. Specifically, art historians, curators, and professional artists have conceptualized folk art as being produced by people who are preindustrial survivors, who have somehow avoided the warping effects of modernity and industrialisation. In contrast,England has been understood as the dominant ethnic and cultural space of the industrial revolution, and every citizen has encountered itseffects. "Folk Archive" might therefore be understood as reconciling the tension between these two ideas, "England"

and "folk art,"by suggesting that English people can be imagined as "the folk" even in the contemporary moment. The particular significance of "Folk Archive"is that it explicitly questions what can constitute folk art in the present-day age of late capitalism, especially in the shadow of a former imperial power. If nothing else, Deller and Kane's exhibition has reinvigorated the question of what constitutes folk art in England, and has prompted a discussion of its ongoing relevance beyond its romanticized roots as a preindustrial relic by placing folk firmly in the present.

Yet, while Deller and Kane's definitionof folk art is not as romanticized or as nostalgic as it has been for other curators in the past, they are still part of the authoritative art-world system responsible for creating the category in the first place. That is to say, those who Deller and Kane imagine to be folk still have very little agency beyond the walls of the museum to define what their cultural production can mean, or the ways in which curators define it for art-world audiences. In this regard, Deller and Kane are simply doing what generations ofscholars, professional artists, and curators have done when it comes to conceptualizing folk art: they are expanding the category in order to fit the particular circumstances of their historicalpresent. Moreover, Deller and Kane's expertise as both curators and as trained artists gives them the authority to determine the limits offolk art within a fine art gallery setting, rather than negotiating its cultural importance with the people who make it.

Deller and Kane's negotiation of the folk art categoryin a museum context also points to questions about the motivations behind its advancement in this setting. As previously stated in Chapter 1, the construction of and investment in the folk art category is connected to histories of capitalist expansion and industrialization, with those

experiencing the greatest benefits from modernization also seeking the most to escape it. When considering "Folk Archive" in relation to ongoing discourses of antimodernism, it is clear that Deller and Kane's finished project was fuelled by antimodern sentimentalities. In particular,the fact that Deller and Kane launched "Folk Archive" in response to the corporate representation of British culture at the Millennium Dome shows that their search for the simple art of the common person was an exercise in late-capitalist antimodern logic. Rather than facilitating a grassroots, anti-corporate, activist, or community arts project, their antimodern impulses led them to collect objects under the regulated and historical authority of the museum space.

If Deller and Kane's "Folk Archive" aimed to provide an alternative representation of British culture against the corporate nature of the Millennium Dome display, it alsodemonstratedthe complexities of racializing the British cultural context. Specifically, Deller and Kane's quest for national representation was meant to includepeople of all cultural backgrounds currently living in Britain. Unlike previous conceptions of English folk art, which depended on a mythicized version of the English as those of Anglo-Saxon descent, Deller and Kane's work reconciled folk art with an ethnic and culturally diverse contemporary nation-state.Despite the limits ofthisinclusion, the vision of "Folk Archive" at least partially represents the current conditions of living in England, rather than looking backwards for a romanticized and exclusively Anglo-Saxon root to folk culture.

Nevertheless, Deller and Kane's expansion of the folk art category to suit their own curatorial needs and contemporary circumstances is not unique. As the historiographic examination of English folk art in Chapter 2 demonstrates, definitions of

the category have long been in flux in order to suit the requirements of those invested in its ongoing relevance. Yet it should be noted thatDeller and Kane's version of folk art does not rely on historical objects. Rather, Deller and Kane are seeking to display contemporary folk art in a gallery settingin ways that go beyond changing the context in which viewers look at non-academic art. Deller stated in an oral interview that he and Kane attempted to attract a broad audience to the exhibition, because of the diverse backgrounds of the people who made the included works. Moreover, Deller noted that "Folk Archive" attempted to demonstrate to professional contemporary artists that people create artworks outside of art-world circles,in order to challenge their view that they are the only artistic and cultural producers worthy of such attention.[36]In this way, Deller and Kane's exhibition provides a vehicle for gallery viewers and professional artists alike to reconsider their perceptions about art as a broad cultural category by expanding it into people's everyday surroundings. While Deller and Kane are no doubt playing the role of the folklorist when it comes to assembling "Folk Archive," their exhibition consequently encourages viewers to act as folklorists in their everyday lives.

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[36] Jeremy Deller, interview by Gillian Bourke, March 5, 2012.

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Curriculum Vitae

Candidate's full name
Gillian Hilda Bourke

Education
University of New Brunswick, Master of Arts, History (2012)
University of New Brunswick, Bachelor of Arts, History (2008)

Work Experience
Teaching Assistant, Department of History, University of New Brunswick

- HIST 1001 Past Into Present (Fall 2011)
- HIST 1008 Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft in the Medieval World (Winter 2012)

Research Assistant, "The Social Fabric of Healing in Northeastern North America," for Dr. Susan Cahill (Department of Visual Arts, Nipissing University), Dr. Erin Morton (Department of History, University of New Brunswick), and Dr. Sasha Mullally (Department of History, University of New Brunswick), Fall 2011.

Research Assistant, "Canadian Art Commons in History of Art & Education," for Dr. Mark Cheetham (Art Department, University of Toronto) and Dr. Erin Morton (Department of History, University of New Brunswick), Spring-Summer 2012.

Conference Presentations
"The Questioning of the Folk: How the Exhibition 'Folk Archive' Questions what Constitutes Folk Art," 2011 UNB/UMaine Graduate Student Conference, October 16, 2011.

"The Questioning of the Folk: How the Exhibition 'Folk Archive' Challenges the Boundaries of Folk Art," Context and Meaning XI, Graduate Visual Culture Association,Department of Art,Queen's University, February 3, 2012.

Academic Awards and Distinctions
Arts Faculty Graduate Student Assistantship, University of New Brunswick, May 2011-August 2012.

Rhoda Chapman Memorial Prize in Art History, University of New Brunswick, October 2011.

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Gillian Bourke, "The Royal Museum for Central Africa as a Colonial Museum in a Postcolonial World," *TimePieces*12 (2010-11):28-49.