2009

Self-fashioning, consumption and japonisme: The power of collecting in Tissot's Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais, 1869

Catherine Elizabeth Turner
University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the American Studies Commons

Scholar Commons Citation
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/58

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
Self-fashioning, Consumption, and Japonisme:

The Power of Collecting in Tissot’s *Jeunes Femmes Regardant des Objets Japonais*, 1869

by

Catherine Elizabeth Turner

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Art and Art History
College of The Arts
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Heather Vinson, M.A.
Elisabeth Fraser, Ph.D.
Noël Schiller, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
November 6, 2009

Keywords: Napoleon III, Second Empire, *bibalot*, fetish, commodity

© Copyright 2009, Catherine Elizabeth Turner


## Table of Contents

List of Figures .................................................................................................................................................. ii

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................................ iv

Introduction ...................................................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter One: A Social History of Collecting in Second Empire Paris and Tissot’s Prelude to *Japonisme* ................................................................................................................................. 20

Chapter Two: The Function of Freudian Fetish in *Jeunes Femmes Regardant des Objets Japonais* .............................................................................................................................. 42


Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................................... 85

Bibliography .................................................................................................................................................. 89
List of Figures

Figure 1. James Tissot, *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais* (1869). Unknown

Figure 2. James Tissot, *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais* (1869). Private Collection, London, England

Figure 3. James Tissot, *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais* (1869). Cincinnati Museum of Art, Cincinnati, Ohio

Figure 4. James Tissot, *Le Retour de l’enfant prodigue* (1862). Private Collection

Figure 5. James Tissot, *Quiet* (1881). Private Collection

Figure 6. James Tissot, *The Letter* (1867-78). National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Figure 7. James Tissot, *Boarding the Yacht* (1873). Private Collection

Figure 8. James Tissot, *Journey of the Magi* (Matthew 2:2) (1894). Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Figure 9. James Tissot. *Japonaise au Bain* (1864). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, France

Figure 10. James Tissot. *Jeune femme tenant des objets japonais* (1865). Private Collection

Figure 11. Claude Monet. *Madame Monet in a Kimono (La Japonaise)* (1876). Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts


Figure 13. James Tissot. Detail, *Japonaise au Bain* (1864). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, France
Figure 14. James Tissot. *Portrait of Tokugawa Akitake* (1868).
Museum of the Tokugawa Family
(Shōkōkan), Mito, Japan.................................................................38

Figure 15. James Tissot. Detail of Signature, *Portrait of Tokugawa Akitake* (1868).
Historical Museum of the Tokugawa Family
(Shōkōkan), Mito, Japan.................................................................39

Figure 16. James Tissot. *La Rencontre de Faust et de Marguerite* (1860).
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.................................................................40

Figure 17. Alfred Stevens. *Lady with a Japanese Doll* (1894).
Private Collection........................................................................50

Figure 18. Jan Vermeer. *Woman Reading a Letter* (ca. 1662).
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden ........................................51

Figure 19. James Tissot. *Une Veuve* (1868)
Private Collection........................................................................53

Figure 20. Willem Kalf. *Chinese Bowl with Nautilus Cup* (1662).
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid............................................54

Figure 21. James Tissot. Detail of Shipping Crate. *Jeunes Femmes Regardant des Objets Japonais* (1869).
Cincinnati Museum of Art, Cincinnati, Ohio...............................61

Figure 22. Jean Léon Gérôme. *The Reception of Siamese Ambassadors at Fountainebleau.* Chateau de Versailles, France ......................67

Figure 23. James Tissot. Detail of Altar. *Jeunes Femmes Regardant des Objets Japonais* (1869).
Cincinnati Museum of Art, Cincinnati, Ohio...............................78

Figure 24. Eugene Atget. *Planche 48: “Intérieur de Mr B Collectionneur de Vaugirard.”* (c.1910).
Musée Caranavalet, Paris................................................................79

Figure 25. James Tissot. Detail of Model Ship. *Jeunes Femmes Regardant des Objets Japonais* (1869).
Cincinnati Museum of Art, Cincinnati, Ohio...............................81
Self-fashioning, Consumption and *Japonisme*

The Power of Collecting in Tissot's *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais*, 1869

Catherine Elizabeth Turner

ABSTRACT

This study examines self-fashioning and the practice of collecting in Second Empire Paris as manifest in James Tissot’s *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais* (1869, Cincinnati Museum of Art). The painting, exhibited in the Salon of 1869, conspicuously portrays Tissot’s own collection of exotic Asian collectibles and the artist’s private luxe interior. When scholars investigate and interpret *Jeunes femmes*, it is regularly defined within the prescriptive realm of Tissot’s later London paintings, or of his well known series, *La Femme à Paris*. I argue for a less circumspect engagement with the painting, by focusing on the portrayal of the collectible objects and the decadent interior as evidence of bourgeois self-fashioning and the decorous display and consumption concomitant with Second Empire Paris.

This thesis considers the history of collecting in Second Empire Paris; in particular, the early impact of *japonisme* on Tissot’s artwork. Recent scholarship largely regards Tissor’s initial engagement with *japonisme*, as demonstrated by *Japonaise au bain* (1864, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon) and *Jeune femme tenant des objets japonais* (1865, Private Collection), as trite. I argue that such categorizing biased sound consideration of *Jeunes femmes*. I investigate Tissot’s interaction with Japanese
aristocracy and contend that his appointment as drawing instructor to Prince Akitake marked a turning point in his artistic career and in his reputation as a collector.

This thesis also explores the role of fetish as an operative analytical tool. By employing the theories of Freudian and Marxist fetish, I am able to scrutinize the collectible objects’ inclusion and meticulous representation, account for the obsessive nature of the collector and investigate specific strategies of posturing and self-promotion. Moreover, I can discuss the painting, and the collection it portrays, as a producing agent for Tissot’s own artistic and social legacy. Ultimately, I conclude that *Jeunes femmes*, a richly detailed painting of Tissot’s collectibles and interior space, is implicitly concerned with bourgeois self-fashioning and Tissot’s own need for financial and social legitimization.
Introduction

In 1869, James Tissot painted three compositions entitled *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais*. Each of the three paintings depicts two young women gazing at valuable Japanese collectibles. Of particular interest, these paintings were all staged in Tissot’s new home on the upscale Avenue de l’Imperatrice and all of the luxury collectibles and furnishings portrayed were part of Tissot’s personal collection. Of the three paintings, the first version’s whereabouts are unknown (Fig. 1),¹ the second version is part of a private London collection (Fig. 2), and the third version, which was exhibited at the Salon of 1869, now resides in the Cincinnati Museum of Art (Fig. 3).² The Cincinnati *Jeunes femmes* was the only version Tissot chose to display publicly, and it is this painting that is the primary focus of this research.

When it was displayed in 1869, the Cincinnati *Jeunes femmes* did not go unnoticed. Its small size (28 x 20 in.), its color palette, as well as the intimate domestic

---

¹ Preparatory sketches for this painting and documents relating to it are housed at the Tate Gallery in London.
² The painting is documented as Salon 1869, no. 2270. Tissot scholar Michael Wentworth suggested in 1984 that it is the London version that was displayed at the Salon. He bases this supposition on the existence of Goupil photographs, which sometimes documented Salon entries. See endnote 13 in Michael Wentworth, “‘Tissot and Japonisme’ in Japonisme in Art: An International Symposium, ed. Yamada Chisaburō (Tokyo: Committee for the Year 2001, 1980) 145. I base my assertion on publications from the late 1990’s to early 2000, all of which show the Cincinnati version in reference to the Salon. The Cincinnati version also seems to better visually support the Salon reviews. Critiques such as “we seem to see two beautiful birds in their golden cage” are not as easily locatable in the other two compositions. See James Tissot: Victorian Life/ Modern Love, eds. Nancy Rose Marshall and Malcolm Warner (New Haven and London: Yale Center for British Arts, 1999) 44.
Figure 1. James Tissot, *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais*, 1869. Oil on Canvas. Location Unknown.
Figure 2. James Tissot, *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais*, 1869. Oil on Canvas. Private Collection, London.
Figure 3. James Tissot, *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 71 x 51cm. Cincinnati Museum of Art
Figure 4. James Tissot, *Le Retour de l’enfant prodigue*, (1862). Oil on Canvas.
setting, all marked a departure from Tissot’s earlier history paintings (Fig. 4). The
depiction of the finely dressed young women, pressed uncomfortably close to the picture
plane, surrounded by luxurious, exotic objects prompted one critic to comment that the
painting should be titled “Objects looking at young ladies.” Specific scholarship on
Tissot’s genre paintings produced prior to both the Commune and his flight to London is
lacking; however, Tissot’s sumptuous rendering of the ladies’ clothes and their
environment have supported the current trend in scholarship to read these and his
subsequent paintings of women as commentaries on the role of the nineteenth-century
bourgeois woman in both the domestic and public sphere. My thesis attempts to shift the
current direction of research by focusing not on the women in these paintings, but on the
domestic interior itself, and the collectible objects that this space contained. By directing
attention to the importance of collecting and consumption as salient self-fashioning tools
of the Second Empire Parisian bourgeois male, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that the
Cincinnati Jeunes femmes is, for Tissot, a highly self-referential painting involved in the
process of Tissot’s self-fashioning and self-authorization. This approach suggests several
thematic questions: How does the cultural history of collecting in Second Empire Paris,
including the japonisme movement, inform Jeunes femmes (Chapter I)? In what manner
does Tissot’s early japonisme-inspired works and his later paintings of bourgeois women
bias a critical reading of this painting (Chapter I)? How does the size of the painting (28 x
20 in.), its verisimilitude, and its subject matter function to secure Tissot’s artistic and

---

social legacy (Chapter II)? Finally, given that the collectibles, as well as the interior space portrayed in *Jeunes femmes*, belong to Tissot, as scholars Michael Wentworth, Ikegami Chūgi, and Nancy Rose Marshall have demonstrated, how does the determined and meticulous portrayal of this domestic space in a publicly displayed painting serve to propagate Tissot’s secure affiliation with the bourgeoisie, legitimize his financial success and make visual his personal prowess (Chapter III)?

It is with these questions in mind that I embark on my research. In order to better understand the visual implications of this painting in regard to the above-mentioned questions, I begin with a visual analysis.

**Collecting Impressions: A Visual Analysis of *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais* (1869)**

In this composition two young ladies stand side-by-side admiring a model Japanese trading ship. The woman on the right, stooped close to the miniature, is a visitor to the collection, as suggested by her costume and the fact that she has yet to remove her muff or her gloves. The young lady behind her, gazing intently at the ship, is dressed in a peignoir, a domestic gown, which indicates that she is the hostess. The highly detailed ship that holds their attention is supported by a packing crate, just barely concealed by a stretch of Japanese fabric. The crate is also obscured from immediate view by three legs of a Japanese side-table. To the far left of these objects is a silk curtain, pulled forward enough to prohibit a clear view of the model ship and of the left-hand side of the room.

The right side of the composition is dominated by a Japanese altar. Positioned behind the women, it functions not as a religious altar, but as a showcase for Japanese

---

dolls, of which three are visible. The reflectivity of the golden surface adds to the opulence of the object, while giving a sense of depth. The actual size of the altar, however, cannot be determined, as it falls off into the right-hand side of the composition. Even the open drawers are cut short by the altar’s placement.

As a whole, the composition is flattened into shallow pictorial space. The curtain does not permit entry, and blocks, to some degree, the dimensions of the room. The altar also compresses the composition, pushing against the space between the women and the wall. Ultimately, the viewer is positioned looking into the corner of the room. From this view, the room is tightly arranged with the women sidled between the enormous altar on one hand, and a boat and a curtain on the other. Moreover, the meticulously detailed rug and tile run at a horizontal angle, drawing the eye across, but not into the composition, therefore aiding in the appearance of flattened space. The heavy barred walls also emphasize this sense of compression, while their design is then reiterated in the bars of the altar doors. The abundance of articles: the ship, the table, the plants—both in the planter in the foreground and the ones that are growing wildly in the corner behind the women—the altar, the dolls, the replication of colors, and the repetition of Japanese motifs, all produce a dizzying, almost claustrophobic effect. This effect is only made stronger by the painting’s small size (28 x 20 in.), wherein the collectible objects’ size, detailed representation and proximity to each other imbue them with a life and vitality beyond their own materiality.

Privileging a Gendered Gaze: Assessing the Critical Fortunes of Tissot and the Historiography of Tissot Scholarship
Many aspects of *Jeunes femmes* have gone uninvestigated due to a lack of focused research on this painting and of Tissot’s œuvre in general. Until the 1980’s, historically sound research on Tissot was sparse. Tissot’s first biography, *Vulgar Society: The Romantic Career of James Tissot*, written by costume historian James Laver in 1936, is most noted for its humorous, though erroneous biographical information and for the characterization and promotion of Tissot’s art as indispensable for fashion and costume historians. Any formal attempt to re-evaluate Tissot’s artistic merit would not occur until the first retrospective exhibition of his work in 1968. The exhibition catalog from the *James Jacques Joseph Tissot: 1836-1902, A Retrospective Exhibition*\(^6\) marked the first attempt to re-investigate Tissot’s artistic practice, as well as to provide more historically sound biographical information.\(^7\) While the catalog expanded Tissot scholarship beyond the limited scope of Laver’s research, it was not until the mid-1980’s that new exhibition catalogs and more substantial literature would be published. Christopher Wood’s *The Life and Work of Jacques James Tissot 1836-1902*\(^8\) classifies Tissot’s art into distinct periods of artistic production. In attempting to organize the various phases of Tissot’s career, Wood demonstrated the versatility of the artist, resolutely renouncing the

---


\(^7\) In the catalog’s introduction, Henri Zerner makes a distinct point to link Tissot to major French artists like Edgar Degas and Gustav Courbet, yet Zerner’s scholarship is ultimately more concerned with the artistic production of Tissot’s London years—a scholarly trend that continues today. He places a new emphasis on the psychology of the paintings, suggesting that the London women in Tissot’s paintings are types that are a projection of Tissot, himself. While I am not comfortable with the unsubstantiated psychoanalytical reading of Tissot’s London paintings, it is Zerner’s exploration into the psychology of Tissot’s œuvre that reframes scholarly inquiry away from viewing Tissot as a fashion illustrator, and instead places him uneasily amongst the official painters of the nineteenth century, and the avant-garde.

conceptualization of Tissot as a “fashion-plate artist.” It is from Wood’s investigation of Tissot that four main branches of Tissot study take shape: Tissot as a painter of women, whom Wood, like Zerner, sees as well dressed stock figures who “are simply images of Tissot himself (Fig. 5);” Tissot as a painter of “ambiguity” and “paradox” whose paintings are as complex as the artist himself (Fig. 6); Tissot as humorist, comically capturing the mores and foibles of London’s social climbers and nouveau riche (Fig. 7); and lastly, Tissot as a religious painter (Fig. 8), whose paintings of modern life are framed by the medieval, mostly religiously based historical paintings of his early career, and the biblical illustrations on which he worked until he died. These subsets of scholarly interest are again indicated in a catalog from 1984, James Tissot, edited by Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz, in which the chapters are organized into comparable categories.

Since Tissot’s death, there have only been three monographic exhibitions on the artist resulting in three critical catalogues. Tissot’s works have only just recently been featured prominently in other exhibitions of nineteenth-century French painting. In addition, Tissot has been the subject of two critical catalogue raisonnés. Of the critical literature published on Tissot, this thesis is most indebted to Nancy Rose Marshall’s careful visual analysis of the Cincinnati Jeunes femmes in the catalog James Tissot: Victorian Life/ Modern Love (1999) and to the scholarship of Tamar Garb and

---

9 Wood, 11.
10 Ibid., 12-13.
Elizabeth Prelinger,\textsuperscript{14} whose essays in the book \textit{Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tissot}\textsuperscript{15} were published the same year. Tamar Garb focuses her research around the portrayal of the women’s costume in Tissot’s \textit{La Femme à Paris} series, positing that the decorously dressed French bourgeois woman is a status symbol for the austere masculine subject. Her ultimate argument, that Tissot’s paintings of Parisian women function to offer the female to the intended male viewer for conspicuous consumption, takes a

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure5.jpg}
\caption{James Tissot. \textit{Quiet} (c.1881). \newline Oil on Canvas, 27 x 36 in. \newline Private Collection.}
\end{figure}


Figure 6. James Tissot. *The Letter* (c.1876-78).
Oil on Canvas. 28 ¼ x 42 ¼ in.
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada.
Figure 7. James Tissot. Boarding the Yacht (1873).
Oil on Canvas.
Private Collection
Figure 8. James Tissot. *Journey of the Magi*. 1894. Oil on Canvas. Minneapolis Institute of the Arts.
Freudian bent as she suggests that Tissot’s construction of femininity, the fashionable rendering of the woman’s costume and her dainty comportment, and the social atmosphere in which the woman is portrayed, all serve to distract from the medusa beneath—a symbol of the threat of castration and the possible unleashing of “the hideous monster which fuels the fetishized image of Woman known as the ‘Parisienne.’”16

It is Elizabeth Prelinger’s contention,17 like Garb’s, that the women in Tissot’s paintings are portrayed as commodities,18 and she links the repetitive appearance of fur and velvet in Tissot’s paintings to female genitalia, an explicitly Freudian evocation of fetish.19 The overtones of Garb and Prelinger’s research are evident in the synopsis of the Cincinnati Jeunes femmes, written in the catalog James Tissot: Victorian Life/Modern Love. In her description, Marshall identifies some of the Japanese collectibles that Tissot portrayed in the composition, and offers the most extensive visual analysis of the painting to date. Similar to Garb and Prelinger, she concludes, “Though the women may view the Japanese objects, they are themselves objects to be viewed.”20

Scholarship on Tissot has expanded in both scope and methodology since the 1980’s. Nevertheless, while the still-current practice of understanding the well-dressed female players in his paintings as mere commodities may have been useful for having

---

16 Garb, 116.
17 Prelinger, 185-212.
18 Prelinger, 200.
19 Ibid., 202.
offered a greater variety of critical perspectives on Tissot’s work at the time, arguably this approach is becoming both trite and prescriptive given more art historical contributions to studies of gender. Rather than assume that all of Tissot’s paintings of Parisian women, both from his pre-Commune and post-London years, can be read as a cohesive testament to the artist’s obsession with feminine decorum and fashion, my thesis attempts to locate *Jeunes femmes* in the explicit socio-historical background in which it was created, the waning Second Empire, in order to investigate Tissot’s painting, and his artful construction of self as a bourgeois collector. What did it mean to collect rare, foreign and expensive *objets* in a burgeoning capitalist market that offered more opportunities for collecting than ever before? Why might one choose to seek and collect these objects in the shadow of the Empire? And furthermore, what might it mean for an ambitious artist to possibly emulate the collecting practices of Empress Eugénie?

**Chapter Outline**

With these questions in mind, my thesis begins by providing a socio-historical analysis of collecting in the Second Empire. As collecting had a long, varied history, Chapter One primarily provides a backdrop for the time in which Tissot collected and painted. It also addresses the rise of the erudite or “true” collector according to privileged, male members of the bourgeoisie, and collecting as a masculine, competitive endeavor intrinsically linked to showmanship.

The second half of Chapter One provides a focused account of Tissot, Whistler, and other artists’ early engagement with *japonisme*. I argue that early *japonisme*-inspired works by Tissot prejudiced subsequent considerations of *Jeunes femmes*. Lastly, this chapter explores Tissot’s appointment as drawing master to Prince Akitake, positing that
this affiliation with Japanese royalty validated both his collection and his position as a legitimate bourgeois japoniste. Such an experience and such a claim to social authority may have provoked other collectors and japonistes to jealousy, thereby leading them to discount Tissot’s collection and to criticize his representation of it in Jeunes femmes.

Chapter Two responds to the treatment of fetish offered by both Garb and Prelinger. However, rather than merely expand upon the current discourse concerning Freudian fetish and the women, this chapter adapts their theoretical lens to instead focus on the collectible objects in the painting. While the metonymic relationship implicit in psychoanalytical fetishism lends itself well to women’s clothing or feminine accoutrements, its application is not restricted to these items and should also be considered in relation to the luxurious collectibles portrayed in Jeunes femmes. As Judith Butler argues, the structure of scopophilia and the persistent possibility of the transference of an imaginary phallus sanction the reality that the phallus can be found anywhere.21 By focusing on the collectible items in the painting, my theoretical framework shifts to also include both Walter Benjamin and Susan Stewart who analyze the nineteenth-century collector’s need to acquire objects that are containers, or are that which can be contained. The juxtaposition between container and containment, exposed and hidden, is concomitant with Freud’s theory of disavowal. These suppositions are latent in Jeunes femmes, where most of the collectible objects are containers and where luxury satin and silk coverlets reveal as they conceal. I also consider Susan Pearce’s study on collecting. Specifically, I treat her conception of the collection as a memorial,

21 Judith Butler argues that if the phallus can be found in any body part than it also can be found in no part. Her conceptualization of the phallus is one that is inherently transferable. See Judith Butler, Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex (New York: Routledge, 1993), 57-92.
arguing that the collector could assuage fears of mortality through seeking immortality via his collection.

Chapter Two also engages Hal Foster’s interpretation of the uncanny in seventeenth-century Dutch still life paintings. While a contested article, Foster’s research offers an illuminating way to consider Tissot’s own work, as it is the objects that are the focus of fetish and, as in Tissot’s work, it is the verisimilitude with which these sumptuous collectibles are rendered that leads Foster to consider seventeenth-century Dutch still life painting in terms of Freudian fetish.

Rather than extend the Freudian analysis of Tissot’s paintings of women, I contend that it is imperative to locate Karl Marx’s version of fetish in Jeunes femmes. As collecting is a social practice regulated by ideologies of nationality, gender, class, value, and exchange, Marx’s conceptualization of fetish, in which the commodity and social practice play prominent roles, is a provocative starting point from which to investigate the covetable nature of Tissot’s collection and the function of the collector within that desiring exchange. In addition to discussing Marx’s version of fetish as applicable to Jeunes femmes, this chapter considers Empress Eugénie’s own collection and display of Asian collectibles as a possible prototype to Tissot’s deliberate public showcase. My methodology is informed by Karl Marx’s Capital: A Critique of Political Economy as well as by the scholarship of Arjun Appadurai, whose research into the

---

24 See footnote 23.
authority of the object is rooted in Marxist fetish and is pertinent to Tissot’s estimation and depiction of his own collection. Lastly, this chapter examines the particular collectibles that Tissot included in Jeunes femmes, the artist’s desire for them to be esteemed and publicly validated, and their conspicuous presence as evidence of Tissot’s own self-fashioning and desire for self-authorization. To this extent Thorstein Veblen and Leora Auslander are also referenced for their work on self-fashioning and the metaphorical nature of the collectible, respectively.

This thesis endeavors to posit new questions to a previously understudied painting. By shifting the theoretical framework from the women in the painting to the luxurious objects that surround them, this study is contributing to scholarship on nineteenth-century collecting, the japonisme movement in Second Empire Paris, as well as participating in extant discourse concerning the application of fetishism as tool of visual analysis for the art historian. Through an investigation of modes of self-fashioning and Tissot’s own social aspirations, as suggested by this painting, this thesis not only addresses the social posturing of a Parisian Second Empire bourgeois artist, but also speculates about Tissot’s public affiliations and personal desires. Such speculations nuance our understanding of the painting and the artist-subject.

Chapter One:
A Social History of Collecting in Second Empire Paris and Tissot’s Prelude to Japonisme

Investigating the social history of collecting in Paris, and in particular, understanding how collecting in Second Empire Paris served as a powerful indicator of the collector’s social standing, learnedness, and financial prestige, persuasively nuances and enlightens current views of both the character and function of James Tissot’s *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais* (1869). Specifically, such historical inquiry redefines *Jeunes femmes* as a culturally charged, personally opportune, and historically relevant painting. Rather than assume *Jeunes femmes* to be a trite cavort with *japonisme*, “exploiting a fashionable fad with considerable success, as his [Tissot’s] grand house and studio amply demonstrated,” 28 I want to position the painting as a powerful attestation to the perceived virility of the collectible and to Tissot’s own self-fashioning strategies as a Parisian bourgeois collector. 29

Before further considering the impact of collecting on the nineteenth-century Parisian bourgeoisie, I would like to clarify the use of the term *bibelot* as I will be using it in this paper. Often used interchangeably with *curiosités, objets d’art*, or with the

---

28 Wood, 38.
29 Not all celebrated collections were owned by men. The Empress Eugénie, for example, maintained a collection of Chinese articles appropriated from Yuanming Yan, which was displayed in the Tuileries. Later, she kept a more personal, though also publicly displayed collection in her *Musée Chinois* in Fontainebleau. The Empress, however, is a notable exception. For more information on the looting of Yuanming Yan and the Empress’ collection, see Greg Thomas “The Looting of Yuanming Yan and the Translation of Chinese Art in Europe,” *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 1-37, http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn_08/articles/thom_print.html, 7 October 2008.
frequently dismissive or pejorative sense of *bric-à-brac*, the connotation of the word *bibelot*, and what it signifies changes dependant on the decade in which one is writing, and often, the tone of the writer. Although the term *bibelot* can be traced to the Middle Ages, French literature scholar, Ronda Janell Watson attests that the term’s connotation evolved rapidly, and somewhat confusedly between 1840 and 1900.  

In 1883, when Ernest Bosc published his *Dictionnaire de l’art, de la curiosité et du bibelot* he defined the *bibelot* as a “term which originally designated tools, utensils and a diverse array of objects of little value is now used by collectors and antiquarians to principally designate *objets d’art* and curiosities.” In the body of this paper, it is to this definition that I will be referring—a definition that replaces the original understanding of the word *bibelot* as referring to an everyday object and its use value with the implication of an *objet d’art*. *Bibelot* is used interchangeably in this paper with collectible, curiosity, or art object; however, specifically in relation to Tissot’s personal collection, *bibelot* implies a luxurious, or exotic item, whether or not such modifiers are explicitly utilized. *Bibelot* does, however, suggest a smaller item and not all of the objects depicted in *Jeunes femmes* are small. Some, such as the altar, are quite immense. To this end, I will be reserving *bibelot* for the smaller items in the collection, such as the Japanese model boat, the vases, and the Japanese dolls.

In 1850’s, with the introduction of the World’s Fair, collecting arguably became less concerned with the remnants of France’s royal past and more invested in the rarities

---

and exotic items of non-European cultures. It was also during this time that collecting became increasingly considered as a distinct, formative activity of the French bourgeois male. In her article, “The Gendering of Consumer Practices in Nineteenth-Century France,” Leora Auslander describes the frenzied hunt for the next great treasure, and the attempts to outwit both the other bidders and the auctioneer at the auction house, as transforming over the decades from being associated with hoarding, impulse, and buyer’s mania (though collecting as a practice never completely lost its monomaniac affiliations) to signifying a masculine habitude regulated by rules of the hunt. As they searched out specific pieces to fulfill their collections, collectors were careful hunters who cunningly demanded the best prices. Moreover, they arranged their coveted objects in a manner that spoke not of an historically, or an ethnographically unified past, but of the collectors themselves. Collecting, by the fall of the Second Empire and the early days of the Third Empire could be classified as “a challenge, a proving ground, a hurdle separating the boys from the men and the men from the women.” For the gentlemen, collecting became a smart self-fashioning tool for creating an individual place among (and often, above) one’s peers, as well as a means for staking one’s claim as an authentic, and rightful member of the bourgeoisie.

That is not to say that one form of collecting eradicated the other. There were still the marketplaces, the magasins, the curio shops, and the chance vendors who sold trifles


34 Leora Auslander, “Gendering,” 85.
for fortunes to unwitting and purportedly undereducated buyers.\textsuperscript{35} With the introduction of the grand magasin (e.g. the Bon Marché in 1850) consumers could easily purchase domestically manufactured, mechanically produced curios. They could also purchase exotic imports created specifically for international trade, which often mimicked the vases, furniture, or knick-knacks of periods past. In this manner, the petit-bourgeoisie were able to furnish their houses and start their own collections. In short, they were able to mimic the practices of the bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{36} As external signifiers of one’s social class became harder to determine and authenticate, collecting as an activity of the legitimate bourgeoisie placed greater emphasis on authenticity, erudition and aesthetics. It is important that in his Dictionnaire de l’art, de la curiosité et du bibelot Ernest Bosc includes a synopsis of two very different types of collectors. According to his description, there are the ostensible gentlemen for whom money and leisure are no issue. For this group of men, collecting was merely a game of the senses; it was a pleasurable social endeavor, a carefree trip. It did not matter whether one ignorantly purchased a new trinket or stumbled upon a valuable object. But “to work diligently, with fierce tenacity, that’s another thing. His [the “true” collector’s] work in the house of curios, that is his [the “true” collector’s] minor defect.”\textsuperscript{37} This passage suggests that by the 1880’s the dividing

\textsuperscript{35} References to such undereducated, or voracious buyers are made in contemporaneous works of fiction, such as Emile Zola’s character Madame Marty in The Ladies’ Paradise, trans. not listed, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 72-79. See also Honoré de Balzac, Cousin Pons, trans. Herbert J. Hunt (London: The Penguin Group, 1968), 43-53.

\textsuperscript{36} For more information on the practice of the petit-bourgeoisie mimicking the bourgeoisie, see T.J. Clark, The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 147-204.

\textsuperscript{37} For the sake of brevity, I summarized the first half of Bosc’s description. However, the full passage reads: “Or le curieux est nécessairement un homme riche et de loisir, c’est-à-dire un “gentleman” qui aime beaucoup à voir, à flâner, à toucher, à palper, à voyager sans soucis d’aucune sorte; la causerie entre amis, entre confrères, voilà son fait; raconter les bonnes aubaines, les belles occasions, rire à demi et même sourire des achats d’un jeune étourneau ou d’un curieux aussi riche qu’ignorant, voilà son affaire:
line between the *nouveau riche*, whom Bosc classifies as the ignorant collector, and for whom he satirically utilizes the English term “gentlemen,” and the learned, astute collector, who is associated with the legitimate or proper bourgeoisie, was an already apparent cultural classification. Through terms such as “minor defect” Bosc also alludes to the obsessive nature manifest in the bourgeois practice of collecting. I believe that the cultural significance of collecting as an efficacious indicator of social class and personal distinction, as demonstrated through Bosc’s description of the two types of collectors, is a motivating factor in the creation and display of Tissot’s *Jeunes femmes*. Both the manner in which he attained his collectibles and the mode in which he visually appropriates and represents his personal collection aim to position Tissot socially, as a legitimate member of the Parisian bourgeoisie and, personally, as a learned, premier *japoniste*.

Although Tissot enjoyed a considerable income from the sale of his paintings, garnering jealousy from his peers and affording him the ability to live on the affluent Avenue de l’Imperatrice, a new road carved out by Haussman, he was not born into the haute-bourgeoisie into which he later tried to assimilate. By the mid-to-late 1860’s, Tissot’s lucrative and new found financial success, paired with the derisive comments made of him by Paris’ social elite, such as Champfleury and Edmond de Goncourt, may well have been enough impetus for Tissot to produce a painting contemporaneous with the mores and desires of his audience, while simultaneously validating both his claim to the haute-bourgeoisie and his reputation as an artist. Given Tissot’s burgeoning financial status, his sensitive social standing, and the context of collecting as a class-conscious, formative act in Second Empire Paris, one wonders why *Jeunes femmes* is so often

*mais travailler assidûment, avec acharnement, c’est autre chose; le travail chez le curieux . . . c’est la moindre défaut.”* *Dictionnaire de l’art*, 15.
dismissed by recent art historians as a superficial attempt at japonisme; or, as a painting of pretty women, a less successful predecessor to his more popular London paintings.\textsuperscript{38} I believe that if Jeunes femmes is perceived as trite, such labeling is due, in large part, to the tepid reception of two of Tissot’s earlier compositions depicting women and Japanese objects, Japonaise au bain (1864) (Fig. 9) and Jeune femme tenant des objets japonais (1865) (Fig.10).

\textit{Japonaise au bain} and \textit{Jeune femme tenant des objets japonais} were among the first publicly displayed paintings inspired by Europe’s newfound fascination with objects and art from Japan. In 1861, when Japan participated in the London World’s Fair, Europeans were introduced to Japanese art and \textit{objets d’art} on a grand scale. This is not to say that Japan’s participation in the World’s Fair provided the West with its first exposure to Japanese art or Japanese ceramics. However, before Commodore Perry’s U.S. naval expedition to Japan in 1853, and the subsequent opening of the Japanese ports, trade exports were under the sole control of the Dutch.\textsuperscript{39} Therefore, Japanese vases and Japanese collectible objects that reached the European market were filtered through Dutch merchants. Ultimately, prior to Japan’s introduction in the World’s Fair, much of


\textsuperscript{39} Commodore Matthew Perry was a Naval Officer in the United States Navy responsible for opening several ports of Japan to the United States. His treaty between Japan and the U.S. was reached during the Convention of Kanagawa, and was later replicated by France and England, ending Japan’s long history of isolation.
Figure 9. James Tissot, *Japonaise au Bain* (1864).  
Oil on Canvas, 208 x 124 cm.  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, France.
Figure 10. James Tissot, *Jeunes femme tenant des objets japonais* (c. 1865). Oil on Panel. 18 x 14 in. Private Collection.
the Japanese collectibles available to European consumers were mistaken for Chinese or Indian imports.\textsuperscript{40} The opening of the ports allowed for more Japanese objects to be available to French collectors, while the presence of Japan in the World’s Fair both invigorated the market for Japanese \textit{bibelots} and exposed European artists, on a broad scale, to a new form of Asian aesthetics.

Japan’s participation in the World’s Fair of 1861 also preempted the opening of trendy teashops and Asian boutiques in both London and Paris. In Paris, Tissot, along with British-based artists Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and James McNeill Whistler, as well as notable writers such as Champfleury and the Goncourt brothers, frequented the well-reputed \textit{la Porte Chinoise}, located on the affluent \textit{Rue de Rivoli}. Although Edmond de Goncourt would describe this store as “a school” for expanding the “grand japanese movement,”\textsuperscript{41} it seems that even in this early stage of \textit{japonisme} the acquisition of Japanese \textit{bibelots} was already evolving into a competitive tool for showmanship. In contrast to Goncourt’s gentlemanly description of \textit{la Porte Chinoise} as a seat for cross-cultural knowledge, letters from artists paint the store as a hotbed of contentious consumption, where the appetite to obtain costumes, prints and vases could border on ferocious. The proclivity to buy as much as one could, when one could, is evident in Whistler’s directive to artist Henri Fatin-Latour to go to \textit{la Porte Chinoise} and set aside

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
“all the costumes” for him.\textsuperscript{42} This enthusiastic consumption is further exemplified by Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s letter to his mother, written after a discouraging visit to a shockingly understocked \textit{la Porte Chinoise}:

I have bought very little—only four Japanese books, . . . but found all the costumes were being snapped up by a French artist, Tissot, who it seems is doing three Japanese pictures which the mistress of the shop described to me as the three wonders of the world, evidently in her opinion quite throwing Whistler in the shade. \textsuperscript{43}

The “wonders of the world” of which Rossetti writes are commonly attributed to both Tissot’s \textit{Japonaise au bain} and \textit{Jeune femme tenant des objets japonais}. Both paintings are concurrent with the description offered in Rossetti’s letter, as well as being contemporary to Whistler’s own first attempts at Japanese-inspired paintings. They are also emblematic of a growing societal phenomenon, one whose mainstream interaction with Japanese and Chinese culture was mainly fashionable, based on the consumption and appropriation of goods removed from their cultural context. In \textit{Japonaise au bain}, contrary to the painting’s title, the model, despite her long black hair and shading around the eyes, is clearly European. Her coy tilted head and direct gaze is highly sexual. Art historian Christopher Wood labels this painting as “an uneasy, vaguely pornographic image, which cannot be accounted one of Tissot’s most successful works, although it is his only large female nude.”\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, if this painting is to be seen as overtly sexual, its sexuality is only augmented by the larger than life size of the composition (208 x 124

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Wood, 37.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
cm.) and by the artfully painted kimono, whose contours draw the eye across the breasts of the model and down to the pubic area, which the robe barely conceals. If, in French paintings of the Orient, “plants like palm trees become archetypal markers of the exotic, even when abstracted from their desert oasis habitat” so, too, in japonisme inspired paintings did the kimono signify the exotic, even when worn by a clearly European model.

A year later, when he completed Jeune femme tenant des objets japonais, he seemed to correct some of the crude features of his earlier composition. The blatant sexuality of the female figure is replaced with a model whose kimono is tightly wrapped and the European facial features are exchanged for decidedly Asian ones. Scholars generally attribute these Asian features to the use of a Japanese doll, similar to the ones displayed in Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais, rather than a Japanese model. Aside from these provisional transformations, Tissot’s portrayal of Japanese culture is equally synthetic in the latter painting. The Japanese prints and vases portrayed have no relation to the models other than the fact that they are all purportedly Japanese. And, in both compositions, the models are placed in nonspecific spaces. The lush garden of Jeune femme tenant des objets is meant to refer to the exotic, but the “where” cannot be precisely determined. Likewise, we know by the painting’s title that Japonaise au bain is situated at a bathhouse, a setting depicted in many Japanese prints available to European collectors at the time. But, there is nothing about this composition that

46 This fact is generally agreed upon by all Tissot scholars. However, Alan Scott Pate gives a particularly detailed identification of the doll that may have been used in his book Japanese Dolls: The Fascinating World of Ningyo (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2008) 32.
positions the model in a precise geographic location. The marginality of locale may add to the nineteenth-century artist’s exotic, or even eroticized, notions of the “other,” but it ultimately functions to propel, rather than diminish, the claims of shallowness or contrivance that continue to be associated with Tissot’s early encounters with japonisme.

While noted Tissot scholar Michael Wentworth calls Japonaise au bain “superficial yet attractively eccentric japonaiserie,” and Christopher Wood describes both Japonaise au bain and Jeune femme tenant des objet japonaise as “basically trivial, and deliberately so, making no serious demands on the viewer’s intellect [. . .] superficial as they are,” it is important to consider Japonaise au bain and Jeune femme tenant des objets japonais as part of the continuum of Europeans’ artistic appropriation of Japanese art in the nineteenth century. And if the paintings seem a shallow engagement with the fashionable, one should bear in mind that even into the late 1870’s and 80’s, celebrated artists like Claude Monet and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec were still painting European women in kimonos, contrived as costume or leisure wear. (Figs. 11, 12). Historian Toshio Watanabe argues against dismissing Tissot’s Japonaise au bain as simple frivolity. While Watanabe may have been unaware of the art historical discourse surrounding these early compositions, he personally describes Japonais au bain as “striking, almost shocking” and points to the “small opening in the background where the composition with the big lantern and the temple has been borrowed from Asakusa

47 Although written mainly about the Middle East, Edward Said’s Orientalism provides a base for understanding notions of the “other” and the hegemony of France over the Orient. See Edward W. Said, Orientalism, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1-28.
48 Wentworth, “Japonisme,” 129.
49 Wood, 38.
Kinryūzan by Hiroshige, a print from the series *Edo meisho hyakkei*” (Fig. 13). Tissot changed the season of the print, from winter to spring, to better compliment his composition. Watanabe attributes this variance as proof of the artist’s engagement with the print. In a painting deemed “superficial,” Watanabe’s defense of *Japonaise au bain* is unique. And while it would be presumptuous to claim that these two primary examples of *japonisme* by Tissot are products of a mature, profound engagement with Japanese culture, it would also be imprudent to dismiss them as careless trifles. Still these two paintings do not depict an ethnographically informed version of Japanese culture. In his first attempts with *japonisme*, Tissot paints a construct that is not based in a mature interaction with a new culture, but instead, is the result of a fashionably aesthetic response to the new commodities that this culture afforded. Or perhaps, as Wentworth humorously surmised:

> There is a real attempt at accuracy in this assembly of Japanese goods, and if it fails, it fails only from a lack of information which alone could have guaranteed its success. As Ingres has been called “a Chinese artist lost in Greece,” Tissot might be considered a Northern primitive set loose, if not in Japan itself, at least at Mme Desoye’s [*la Porte Chinoise*] in the rue de Rivoli.

The question therefore becomes, what occurred during the years 1865 and 1869 that would change both Tissot’s perception and portrayal of Japanese collectibles? What factors might encourage the art historian to consider the version of *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais* displayed at the Salon of 1869 as a painting distinct and

---

50 Watanabe, 675.
51 Ibid., 675.
52 Michael Wentworth, “Tissot and Japonisme,” 129. The term “accuracy” is referring to the visual acuity of Tissot. As a painter of high verisimilitude, Wentworth assumes that a certain amount of visual accuracy is to be expected.
Figure 12. Henri Toulouse-Lautrec. 
*Lily Grenier in a Kimono*, 1888. 
New York, Private Collection.
Figure 13. James Tissot. Detail of Lantern. *Japonaise au bain* (1864). Musée des Beaux- Arts, Dijon, France
removed from Tissot’s earlier Japanese influenced compositions? And how might the historical and visual evidence lead one to a more nuanced understanding of Tissot’s encounter with the culture and art objects of Japan?

Tissot’s *Japonaise au bain* and *Jeunes femme tenant des objets japonais* may be ill received by art historians; however, in the late 1860’s, these paintings, as well as Tissot’s paintings of modern life, must have impressed the Japanese royalty. In 1867, when Japan participated in the World’s Fair in Paris, Prince Akitake spent ten months there in order to obtain an impressive Western education. This instruction included a variety of subjects, from the pastimes of the bourgeoisie, such as fencing and equestrian sports, to a liberal arts education suitable for a young man of royal lineage. Ikegami Chūji, the first scholar to discover and study an unpublished diary of Tokugawa Akitake, maintains that during the Prince’s sojourn in Paris, his private drawing instructor was none other than James Tissot. This connection was convincingly solidified in 1980 when Chūji discovered a lost watercolor portrait of Prince Akitake (Fig. 14). The painting contains the inscription “Paris/ 27 Septembre/ 1868/ au prince Mimboutaiou/ souvenir/ affectuex/ J.J. Tissot” (Fig.15).\(^{53}\) Such an august teaching appointment to Japanese royalty would have, no doubt, boosted Tissot’s position among fellow *Japonists*, and perhaps, other artists. It also would have offered him an authoritative interaction with Japanese culture—a cross-cultural experience that could not be replicated through the consumption of kimonos, prints or other Asian *bibelots*. It is also during this time that Tissot’s mode of collection becomes more selective. Larger, luxurious, more exceptional *objets* augment and even overshadow the kimonos, vases and prints. The acquisition of

\(^{53}\) Chūji, 147-153.
these collectibles was attributed to the sale of Japanese articles after the close of World’s Fair in 1867. And certainly, Tissot was financially successful enough to afford such impressive objects. One could also argue that due to his position as drawing instructor to Prince Akitake, Tissot would now have the propensity to make more erudite decisions when selecting additions to his collection.\(^{54}\) However, Chūji proposes that Tissot’s collection was largely indebted to parting gifts presented to him upon Akitake’s return to Japan.\(^{55}\) Unfortunately, Prince Akitake’s diary entries are sparse and there is no further narrative concerning his relationship with Tissot. Nonetheless, Chūji’s well-supported suggestion that Tissot’s reputable Asian collection was bolstered, if not fostered, by his interaction with Japanese aristocracy, explains both the notoriety of his collection and Tissot’s transformation from an affected painter of frivolous japonaiseries to a learned, esteemed collector—a collector whose interactions with Japanese royalty served to authenticate his collection, and to secure his position as a rightful member of the bourgeoisie.

Prince Akitake and his companions departed Paris in October of 1868.\(^{56}\) Shortly afterward, Tissot opened his studio containing his impressive collection of Asian bibelots and objets to artists and bourgeois members of Parisian society. His collection, as well as

\(^{54}\) It should be noted that Tissot combined both Japanese and Chinese articles in his “Japanese” collection. This practice was both common during this period and unproblematic. But, it does show that at least some of Tissot’s well-reputed collection was personally purchased. For more information on the practice of combining, or even misidentifying, Japanese and Chinese collectibles see Geneviève Lacambre, “Les milieux japonisants à Paris, 1860-1880,” in Japonisme in Art: An International Symposium, ed., Yamada Chisaburō (Committee for the Year 2000: Tokyo), 43-56. For specific collectibles depicted in the London version of Tissot’s Jeunes femmes that have been identified as Chinese, rather than Japanese, see Wentworth’s “Tissot and Japonisme,” 145, endnote 14.


\(^{56}\) Chūji,152.
Figure 14. James Tissot, *Portrait of Prince Akitake Tokugawa*, 1868
Tokyo, Japan.
Private Collection.
Figure 15. James Tissot. Detail of signature. 
*Portrait of Prince Akitake Tokugawa*, 1868 Tokyo, Japan. 
Private Collection.
his unabashed display of it, garnered rapid attention. Within a month of Tissot opening
his studio doors, Champfleury published an article in *La Vie parisienne* titled “La Mode
des japonaiseries.” Champfleury was a noted opponent of the *japonisme* inspired
society paintings considered *en vogue* at the time of his article’s publication. However,
like Tissot, Champfleury was an early collector of Japanese *bibelots*. Ikegami Chūji
suggests that the vituperative and satirical tone of this article commences with the title.
He argues that the word “*japonaiseries,*” as it is spelled and used in the title, is a “newly-
coined word combining *japon* and *niaiserie* (nonsense).” It is clear from the article that
Champfleury does not take Tissot, his collection, or the public affection to it, seriously.
Rather than celebrate the exoticism and opulence of Tissot’s acquired collection, or the
eruditeness of their selection and display as evidence of the collector’s distinction,
Champfleury’s carefully constructed rhetoric characterizes Tissot as a “young painter,
rich enough to display his wealth through a small home on the *Champs-Elysées.*” He
scoffingly describes the ladies and gentlemen who visit the home as playing dress-up
with Japanese costumes and declares his fatigue with the class of presumed “painters of
elegant society.” He continues, “we [Champfleury and his sympathizers] are weary of
their Japanese cabinets, of their Japanese flowers and of their laquerware and their
bronzes which take the principle place on their canvases and play just as a considerable

---

57 Champfleury “La Mode des japonaiseries,” *La Vie Parisienne*, 21 November 1868, 862-863; rpt. in
58 Chūji, 152.
59 Rpt in Lacambre, op. cit, p. 143. Much of the satirical tone of the statement is lost in translation. French:
“un jeune peintre assez richement doté par la fortune s’offrir un petit hotel dans les Champs-Elysées.”
60 Ibid., 145. French: Déjà meme de prétendus peintres de la via élégante nous fatiguent de leurs cabinets
japonais, de leurs fleurs japonais, de leurs laques et de leurs bronzes japonais qui prennent la place
principale sur la toile et jouent in rôle bien autrement considerable que les personages.
role as the figures, themselves. His caustic tone, his own status as a collector of Japanese objects, and his standing as a legitimate member of the bourgeoisie, all recommend another reading of Champfleury’s article. I suggest that Champfleury’s social satire is less a protestation of the current state of society paintings and is, rather, a public mockery motivated by personal envy, and perhaps, more specifically, a collector’s envy.

Champfleury’s article also sets the stage and tone for the reception of *Jeunes femmes* when it was first publicly displayed at the Salon in 1869. Rather than compliment Tissot’s detailed representation of his collection and the two model bourgeois women whom admire it, art critics largely discarded the painting as trite, and like Champfleury, complained that the representation of the collectibles overshadow the figures in the composition. I argue below that art historical inquiry into *Jeunes femmes* has been limited by narrow interpretations of such contemporary art reviews. Furthermore, I suggest that the current trend of viewing the composition as a genre painting of bourgeois women in a luxurious setting is too narrow. I theorize, rather, that the extant visual reading of *Jeunes femmes*, in which the women are considered in terms of Freudian fetishism, is better augmented when it is the collectible objects, and not the women, that are the subject of said analysis.

---

61 Ibid., see footnote 60 for French.
Chapter Two:
The Function of Fruedian Fetish in *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais*

“Je sais bien, mais quand même” (“I know, but nonetheless”) – Octave Mannoni

At the Paris Salon of 1869, James Tissot displayed a small painting of two young women carefully observing Japanese objects titled *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais* (Fig. 3). As a previous Salon medal winner, Tissot could freely choose which paintings he wanted to show at the exhibition. His deliberate decision to exhibit a painting so intrinsically concerned with the portrayal of his own luxe domestic interior and notable collection of Asian valuables generally generated derisive commentary amongst critics. The verisimilitude with which Tissot painted the bourgeois interior, the women, and the Asian *bibelots* prompted critic Elie Roy to state that “our industrial and artistic creations can perish, our morals and our fashions can fall into obscurity, but a picture by M. Tissot will be enough for archeologists of the future to reconstitute our epoch.” However, it was comments, such as Frédéric Borgella’s quip “Young women looking at Japanese objects, or objects looking at young women, it’s all the same: *chinoiserie*” that pervaded the painting’s reviews. Borgella’s review of *Jeunes femmes*...
is indeed rich with insight, connotation, and historical significance; it has had long term effects well beyond the offhanded tone of its dismissal. Art historians have used Borgella’s statement to support a reading of the painting that primarily focuses on the two young women, their narrative, and their aesthetic function in this composition.

Furthermore, Borgella’s commentary reflects the contemptuous tone of Champfleury’s article in *La Vie Parisienne* in which Champfleury satirizes both Tissot’s collection and the artist’s supposed ennoblement of it. Specifically, Borgella echoes Champfleury’s complaint that the Japanese objects play as much of a narrative role as the figures portrayed. And his flippant tone and vocabulary also seem to indicate a similar uneasiness with Tissot’s flagrant public display of his lavish domestic space and personal belongings.

Borgella’s summation of Tissot’s painting in *Le Globe* as “objects looking at young women” is markedly provocative. Not only because he terms the composition a “chinoiserie,” an historical attestation to the period’s ease in combining, or even confusing, Japanese and Chinese collectibles, but also because he defines the representation of the collection as “chinoiserie.” Here, Borgella (whether inadvertently or not) disregards the collection’s connection with Japanese royalty. Such an oversight derides the collectibles, and Tissot’s affiliation with them, as unremarkable. Finally, the fecund connotations of Borgella’s characterization commodify the young women in the painting, designating them not as observers, but as mere objects to be viewed. Recent scholars have elucidated this last argument and suggest that the women in Tissot’s

---

Chisaburō (Tokyo, Kodansha International, Ltd., 1980), 133. French: “*Jeunes Femmes regardant des objets japonais, ou des objets regardant des jeunes femmes, c’est tout un: matière de chinoiserie!*”

66 See footnote 57.

67 See footnote 54 for more information about combining Japanese and Chinese collectibles.
compositions operate as feminine commodities offered to the male gaze. This reading of both *Jeunes femmes* and of Tissot’s subsequent paintings utilizes Freudian fetishism as a fundamental analytical tool.\(^{68}\) Certainly, Tissot’s fascination with fashionable women, and the detailed nature with which he depicted feminine accoutrements, connotes Freudian notions of fetish.\(^{69}\)

While Freud continued to develop his theory of fetishism throughout his career, his essay “Fetishism,” published in 1927, provides a solid base from which to consider fetish in Tissot’s painting. In the article, Freud defines fetish as:

> not a substitute for any chance penis, but for a particular and quite special penis that had been extremely important in early childhood but had later been lost. That is to say, it [the penis] should normally be given up, but the fetish is precisely designed to preserve it [the penis] from extinction.”\(^{70}\)

Freud asserted that fetishistic behavior results from a young boy’s realization that his mother does not have a penis. The recognition of this lack creates castration anxiety in the young male: the subconscious fear that the stability of his own genitalia (or innate authority) is no longer guaranteed. Ultimately, the experience leads the male to search out proxy phalluses to substitute for the non-existent maternal penis and to assuage his castration anxiety. Such replacement phalluses can be found in a variety of items that

\(^{68}\) I am referring to Tissot’s subsequent paintings of women and modern life—not to the religious works that he produced in his later years.

\(^{69}\) Modern art historian Elizabeth Prelinger also claims that Tissot’s fascination with textiles and textures is a Freudian evocation of fetish. See “Tissot as Symbolist and Fetishist? A Surmise,” in *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of James Tissot*, ed., Katharine Lochman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 185-212.

\(^{70}\) Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. XXI: The Future of an Illusion Civilization and its Discontents and Other Works (1927-1931)*, trans. and ed., James Strachey with Anna Freud, Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1961, 152. There are many psychoanalysts, including Freud himself, who have debated the nature of the phallus in reference to the anatomical penis. These debates are large and diverse and, for the most part, are outside the range of this paper. While my account references the “origin” of the fetish, the phallus as substitute penis, that is not to say that the phallus is the penis. Freud concludes, in other treatises that the phallus could be “found” in any body part. The ultimate distinction between the phallus and male genitalia still remains debatable. My summation of Freudian fetishism pertains to a more conservative view of Freud’s writings and also assumes a hetero-normative interpretation and application.
mirror the shape or character of genitalia. According to Freud, feet, noses, and sumptuous fabrics, such as velvet and fur, were among the most common.\textsuperscript{71} Certainly, Tissot’s engagement with the fabric in women’s clothing evokes Freudian fetishism. James Laver, Tissot’s first biographer, describes Tissot’s engrossment in near obsessive terms, “He excelled in depicting the minutiae of her toilet, the set of a hat, the fall of a flounce, even the material of which her clothes were made. No painter ever took more pains in the dressmaking of his figures than Tissot.”\textsuperscript{72}

In light of Tissot’s focus on women in both the public and private arenas, particularly during the prolific output of his London years and in his \textit{La Femme à Paris} series (ca. 1883-1885), it is understandable why one would want to assimilate the female figures in this earlier painting into the same visual vocabulary of Tissot’s later paintings of fashionable women in modern society. There are stylistic similarities, such as the high finish and explicit rendering of the fabrics and textures in the women’s outfits. The accretion of detail in \textit{Jeunes femmes}, such as the delineated nature of the buttons on the white peignoir or the meticulous representation of the seam work, does encourage careful prolonged viewing. Furthermore, the fastidious representations of the luxury satin, the soft wool, the highly finished kid leather, and the sensuous fur of the women’s outfits all conjure Freudian interpretations of fetish. In \textit{Jeunes femmes}, the fetishistic portrayal of the women’s dresses is heightened by Tissot’s depiction of a fur muff placed directly in front of the genital area of the woman in the center of the composition. In addition, the two women’s outfits were both part of Tissot’s personal collection and appear in other

\textsuperscript{71} Freud, 155.
contemporary compositions.\textsuperscript{73} Tissot’s ownership of these costumes, and his repeated use and portrayal of them in various paintings, not only suggests fetishistic behavior on the part of the artist, but visually, such repetition depersonalizes the female figures and codifies their appearance. It is also important to consider that the white outfit is a peignoir, a domestic gown typically worn in the morning, whereas the maroon outfit is a dress meant for the public sphere. Understood in this manner, the two women in this painting become not just sexual commodities, but the embodiment of Second Empire idealized feminine types—the championed, chaste, obedient domestic housewife and the celebrated bourgeois beauty of the social arena.

To ignore the commodification of the women in \textit{Jeunes femmes} would be to dismiss a large quantity of existing scholarship on Tissot’s portrayal of women, society and fashion. Such ignorance would also fail to acknowledge fashion as a veritable part of the spectacle that was the Second Empire. Writing contemporaneously to the Salon of 1869, Nestor Roqueplan defines women as the “sparkling” counterparts to man’s “drab” appearance.\textsuperscript{74} The finery of the women’s dresses and the excess of the fabrics, the textures, and even the sounds made by the petticoats as the women walked through the domestic and public spheres, all created a performance of femininity starkly contrasting the countenance of the Second Empire bourgeois male dressed in his somber black costume.\textsuperscript{75} Woman was rendered as spectacle, as the native exotic. Thus, it is understandable why art historians would focus on the women in this composition as

\textsuperscript{73} Such as \textit{L’Escalier}, 1869, Oil on canvas, 20x14 in. (Sutton Place Foundation)
\textsuperscript{75} Garb, 81-113.
fetishized commodities. It is equally understandable why critics from the Salon of 1869 should focus on the presence and depiction of the women in *Jeunes femmes*. Seeking to define the female figures’ relationships to the striking interior space and the exotic collectibles that frame their surrounding prompted one critic to conclude that the women exist as “beautiful birds in their golden cage”76 More than an aesthetic characterization, the reference to birds and birdcages carries strong sexual overtones.77 The women, their sexuality, and their role as fetish are clearly an effective analytical tool in this painting. However, I posit that the function of Freudian fetishism is not limited to the costumed women in the painting, but is also at play in the rich bibelots and objets so meticulously portrayed in *Jeunes femmes*.78 Addressing the transference of the imaginary phallus in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* Judith Butler employs the rules of logic to deconstruct Freud’s theory of the phallus, concluding that if the phallus can belong to any body part then it therefore can belong to no body part. Butler notes, “to be a property of all organs is to be a property necessary to no organ, a property defined by its very plasticity, transferability and expropriability,” and argues for a phallus that is

76 Roy, 81.
78 There is no written proof that Tissot is fetishizing the objects, and I am certainly not implying that all paintings of precious bibelots and objets are pictures of fetishized objects. However, while these objects are not an attempt to define Tissot’s conscious fetishes, I am attempting to understand the objects as tools of a social exchange and social practice. In this light, the objects are Tissots unconscious, motivated fetishes, which are ‘read’ by Tissot’s ideal audience—his fellow artists and japonistes—as coveted, fetishized, symbolic objects. As it is my belief that this painting is involved with coveting and desire, I am making a conscious decision to focus attention on fetish in this chapter and in the next.
both imaginary and transferable.\(^{79}\) If the phallus can indeed be located anywhere, then conceptions of the licentious, covetous gaze, and the role of fetish, are not relegated to the women in *Jeunes femmes*, but should also be considered in relation to the collectible items that Tissot portrays with intimate hyperrealism and with which he was (arguably) more enamored.

The transferability of the phallus is not an unfamiliar idea, but is a concept that continues to engage art historians, especially when considering paintings with an abundance of decadent *objets de luxe*. While he is writing about seventeenth-century Dutch still lifes, art historian Hal Foster’s article “The Art of Fetishism: Notes on Dutch Still Life”\(^{80}\) elucidates upon Freudian fetish, objecthood, and the conflict between representation and reception, all relevant themes in Tissot’s *Jeunes femmes*. As Foster admits “at first glance it is problematic to relate the discourse of fetishism to Dutch still life: the discourse hardly appears coherent, and given its modern provenance, it seems anachronistic to apply it to a distant practice.”\(^{81}\) Likewise, it may seem ahistorical, or even disjunctive, to discuss Tissot’s nineteenth-century painting, *Jeunes femmes*, in terms of seventeenth-century Dutch still life.\(^{82}\) However, from an art historical standpoint, it is agreed that Tissot had strong ties with northern artists, both historically and stylistically.

---


\(^{80}\) Foster, 251-265. I would like to acknowledge that this article has come under scrutiny by some early modern art historians. Even Foster, in his article, concedes that his theory may cause friction among scholars. This article represents just one way to look at early modern Dutch still life painting.

\(^{81}\) Ibid., 253.

\(^{82}\) Not all scholars would consider such comparisons problematic. Peter Demetz, for example, writes a thorough article on the relationship between seventeenth-century Dutch painting and the nineteenth-century French realist writers, such as Gustav Flaubert. Demetz investigates the defenses of seventeenth-century Dutch art based on three main arguments: ontological, aesthetic, and sociological. Ultimately he argues that a defense of Dutch painting “indicates that old traditions crumble and new provocative ones triumphantly emerge.” See Peter Demetz, “Defenses of Dutch Painting and the Theory of Realism,” *Comparative Literature*, 15, no. 2 (Spring, 1963), 97-115.
He demonstrated a personal affinity for northern painterly techniques, particularly during his early career when Tissot appropriated the style Hendrick Leys (Fig. 16).\textsuperscript{83} He also maintained connections with several contemporary Belgian painters throughout his life.\textsuperscript{84} Furthermore, recent comparisons were made between the subject matter of Alfred Steven’s genre paintings and Tissot’s (Fig. 17). Stylistically, the small size of the canvas, the inclusion of the curtain peeking out of the left hand of the composition, the domestic interior, the emphatic use of detail, and the high finish of the painting all hold strong visual parallels with seventeenth-century Dutch cabinet paintings (Fig 18). I suggest that despite the presence of the two figures in the painting, the composition has more in

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image16.jpg}
\caption{James Tissot. \textit{The Meeting of Faust and Marguerite}, 1860. Oil on wood, 78 x117 cm Paris, Musée d'Orsay}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{83} Hendrik Leys was an artist from Antwerp who moved to Paris in the 1830’s and with whom Tissot shared affection both in subject matter and in style. Tissot officially studied under Louis Lamothe and Hippolyte Flandrin at L'École des Beaux-arts.

\textsuperscript{84} Prelinger, 190-191.
Figure 17. Alfred Stevens. *Lady with a Japanese Doll*, 1894. Oil on Canvas, 81.3 x 65.4 cm. Private Collection
Figure 18. Jan Vermeer. *Woman Reading by a Window*. 1657. Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.
common with Dutch genre interiors than with other genres en vogue at the time. The rigidity of the two figures, the compressed nature of the composition, and the female figures’ inability to furnish the viewer with allegorical, didactic, or humorous narrative cues, so often found in Tissot’s other genre paintings (Fig. 19) recommend an alternative reading. In particular, the consideration of Jeunes femmes in relation to Foster’s investigation into Dutch still life paintings is expressly resonant if one regards the collectible items and the space in which they are displayed as being the primary motivators for Tissot’s composition, and as those features with which the artist was most concerned. The intense verisimilitude of Tissot’s painting is concurrent with Foster’s assertion that “too many viewers have remarked upon the strange energy that emanates from the objects of Dutch still life for us not to admit a connection, [between Dutch still life and fetish].”

Foster postulates that the link between Dutch still life and fetish is particularly resonant in pronkstilleven, such as Willem Kalf’s Chinese Bowl and Nautilus Cup (Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid) (Fig. 20). The hyperrealism with which the different surfaces are depicted: the wool of the oriental rug against the cool, sleek, hard surface of the marble table, the reflectivity of the silver tray, the nautilus cup, the goblet, and the pulpy, juiciness of the just peeled lemon, all are formal characteristics of pronkstilleven—paintings which display luxurious abundance with abundant detail.

---

85 I am referring to popular visual tropes and subject matter that pertain to this painting, such as birdcages, burgeoning sexuality or scenes of domesticity. See footnote below.
86 At this point in his career, Tissot’s paintings either tended to reference literary themes or common visual tropes. This tendency is demonstrated in the other painting he chose to exhibit in the Salon of 1869, Une Veuve in which a young widow, surrounded by icons of lust and love, stares demurely out at the viewer. This painting references popular literary and visual motifs of young, lusting widows.
87 Foster, 253.
Figure 19. James Tissot, *Une Veuve*, 1868. Oil on Canvas, 69 x 75cm. Exhibited: Salon of 1869 Private Collection
Figure 20. Willem Kalf. *Chinese Bowl and Nautilus Cup*, 1662. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid
Significantly, the word *pronk* comes from the Dutch word *pronken*, which means “to show off.” The opulent *bibelots* portrayed in *Jeunes femmes* correspond well with the sensuous characteristics of *pronk* paintings. However, it is not just the sumptuous rendering of fine objects or the licked finish of the canvas that engenders empathy between *Jeunes femmes* and Dutch still life paintings. It is also the concerns that these paintings have with mortality, which Foster interprets as a further indication of Freudian fetish and the uncanny.

If the collection and portrayal of luxury items typically found in Dutch still life painting (Fig. 20) seem to be “caught between two worlds—not alive—not dead” as Foster proposes; then, the visual effect of presenting such objects, whose inherent temporality is preserved for (supposed) posterity in paint, not only creates an ever present tension between the animate and the inanimate; but, also creates an effect of “deathly suspension, or as remarked before, of eerie animation, with the objects at once chilled and charged by the speculative glaze fixed upon them.” Though his prose describes his reading of seventeenth-century Dutch still life paintings, Foster’s insights and conclusions are oddly correspondent to the rhetoric surrounding both collectors and the collecting culture of the nineteenth-century French bourgeoisie.

Descriptions of the modern bourgeois collector often position the subject’s practice as a precarious balancing act. Some collectors might have counterbalanced their fears of mortality with the belief that the properly acquired, well-reputed collection could

---

88 Ibid. Not all art historians believe that seventeenth-century Dutch still-lifes are invested in vanitas or mortality. This is the stance that Foster takes to further his inquiry into Freudian fetish.
89 Ibid., 254.
90 Ibid., 257.
91 Ibid.
replace the need for, or at least supplement the purpose of, procreation. According to historian Leora Auslander, the collection could provide the collector with the chance of immortality through its continued existence after his physical death.\(^{92}\) Novelist Elisabeth de Gramont, writing in the 1930’s when collecting was still a thriving practice and indicator of secure bourgeois status, characterizes the “true collector [as] he who seeks to satisfy a complicated need, both cerebral and sensual. He experiences physical joys which are among the most noble which we may ask of our organism. Furthermore, the beautiful objects which surround us distract us from the idea of death, and give spirit to the idea of eternity, through the past.”\(^{93}\) Auslander interprets de Gramont’s description of the collector as one whom experiences a “mysterious physical joy (orgasm?) through the acquisition of objects rather than the production of children.”\(^{94}\) Just as the production of male heirs was to carry on one’s name (and, via primogeniture, one’s wealth), the accumulation of the collection was considered a generative, creative act, which for the erudite male bourgeois collector acquired “a clear biological function”\(^{95}\) and “represented the fantasy of immortality.”\(^{96}\)

A collection capable of immortalizing the collector must be a collection worthy of being memorialized. It follows suit, in order to possess a collection that accurately reflects the collector’s spirit, and thereby affords immortality, the collection must be attained judiciously. Susan Pearce, a scholar on collecting, writes that “‘instant’

\(^{92}\) Auslander, “Gendering,” 87.
\(^{94}\) Auslander, “Gendering,” 89.
\(^{95}\) Benjamin, 210.
\(^{96}\) Auslander, “Gendering,” 87.
collections, our instincts tell us, are not true collections at all; in order to be honourable and genuine, collections must have been acquired gradually over the years, and piece or group at a time.”

This authentication of the collection may account for the copiousness of articles displayed in *pronkstilleven*s. The various natural and man-made objects belie a collection purchased in bulk. Each piece, be it the hand-tooled nautilus glass, the Asian rug, or even the fresh peeled lemon, suggest an effort in acquisition, an individual story. Such an inclination may also account for Champfleury’s and others’ dismissal of Tissot’s collection. His collection was not amassed piece by piece over time. It was simply procured too quickly and shown too prominently.

Immortality, and therefore, the preservation of the collector’s soul through the possession of the objects that will succeed him, is an intrinsic concern in collecting. Arguably, as Pearce maintains, “the collection becomes the reified self, the tangible and enlivening aspect of an individuality which is otherwise fragile, vulnerable to the decaying processes of time.” This process of thought engages a personality that through the collection resists the constraints of time. In her broad study on collecting, Susan Pearce investigates the notion that a personality can withstand, and exist outside of time, as a wholly European perspective. She regards this phenomenon as a “humanist fallacy,” as it assumes the existence of individuals as “an essential personality.” Such a personality is wholly unique, consistent throughout one’s lifetime and can live on, unchanging, in the memories of those whom survive the collector. These memories are

---

97 Ibid., 235.
99 Pearce, 254.
locatable, and continue to exist, in the collectible objects that endure after the collector
dies.

Consequently, *Jeunes femmes*, though a product of Second Empire France, shares
striking similarities to seventeenth-century *pronk* still lifes, not only in the intricate mode
of the pictorial presentation of opulent *bibelots*, but also through the proposed anxieties
that the images make manifest. This angst over the temporal and the immortal, the
inanimate and the animate, is not limited to the canvases of seventeenth-century Dutch
still lifes. It is a markedly active agent in the shaping of the nineteenth-century bourgeois
collecting culture in which Tissot participated, and from which his collection, and this
painting, arose. Moreover, Foster’s claim that “the luminous shine of these [seventeenth-
century] still lifes is more faultily fetishistic: it recalls our lack even as it distracts us from
it. It is as if we are seen as we see—only it is objects that “see” us,”¹⁰⁰ is strangely
reminiscent of Borgella’s Salon review in which he could not discern whether it was
“Young women looking at Japanese objects, or objects looking at young women.”¹⁰¹

While Foster’s descant does supply an interesting avenue by which to explore
Freudian fetish and the object, he fails to consider the Freudian application of container
and containment. This analytical tool is particularly useful when analyzing *Jeunes
femmes*. Indeed, Eli Roy’s telling suggestion that the two women were akin to birds in a
cage, transcends the women’s decorous appearance, the foliage situated like plumage
over the woman in maroon’s head, or even the elaborate grillwork that frames the
walls.¹⁰² And if the women are entrapped, their enclosure signifies more than the popular

¹⁰⁰ Foster, 264.
¹⁰¹ See footnote 55.
¹⁰² See footnote 68.
satire of burgeoning female sexuality and availability. Instead, one must consider containment in terms of the structure of the composition, the *bibelots* and *objets* that Tissot collected and portrayed in this painting, and the representation of a real, identifiable domestic space. Walter Benjamin, and later, Susan Stewart, both expound upon the nineteenth-century’s collectors’ propensity for amassing objects that are themselves containers, or objects that can be contained. Although they both treat theories of containment and they are both twentieth century scholars, the two admittedly treat two different types of collectors with two different modes of approach. When Stewart, in her book, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, analyzes collecting habits, she is mainly analyzing those habits of the twentieth-century collector, for whom small knick-knacks and souvenirs are the items rendered collectible. Walter Benjamin, on the other hand, is investigating the nineteenth-century collector. Unlike Stewart’s book, which is a complete, congruous work, written in 1993, Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* is an immense collection of notes, short essays, and impressions about consumerism and nineteenth-century France, which began in 1927 and continued on until 1940. Thus, Walter Benjamin’s accumulation of notes and insights presents the reader with a diverse concept of the nineteenth-century collector and the world in which he interacted.

In her treatment of objects that are containers, Stewart links the favoring of such *bibelots* to Freudian fetish, positing that the “collection thus appears as a mode of control

---

103 See footnote 76.
and containment insofar as it is a mode of generation and series.”

The dichotomous relationship suggested by Stewart of “control and containment” on one hand and “generation and series” on the other, is complicit with the constant struggle between disavowal and affirmation in Freud’s conception of fetish, and the intrinsic impulse to constrain the itinerant, covetous gaze. While the materiality of the canvas and the limits of its physical dimensions inherently provide tangible, concrete borders to focus the viewer’s gaze, it is Tissot’s depiction of the items, and how he locates them within the composition, that actively reinforces such boundaries.

The white brocade curtain, for example, is pulled back to invite the viewer into the space; however, the women’s positions simultaneously block such an entry. The punctilious portrayal of the tile work on the floor and the placement of the Oriental rug further indicate this continual struggle between invitation and refusal, opening and enclosure. Both the tile and the rug run at a horizontal angle, directing the eye across the composition, but not inside of it. The decorative floor operates as a visual tool to entice the gaze, but it functions to compress the space rather than to expand it. The rug and the tile-work also lead the eye to the object of the two women’s gaze, the model Japanese commerce ship. This model ship, a veritable simulacrum of containment, with its various

---

105 Stewart, 159.
106 Freud, 156-157.
Figure 21. James Tissot, Detail of Shipping Crate, Tapestry and Curtain, *Jeunes femmes regardant les objets japonais*, 1869. Cincinnati Museum of Art
nooks and crannies, and the suggestively phallic nature of its masts, its staffs, and its oars, is a substantial invocation of Freudian fetish. The decorative floor also guides the eye to the shipping box (Fig. 21). Originally used to transport and store the model boat, this box has been repurposed as display table. The dual use of the shipping crate as both a table and as a visual reminder of the container in which the bibelot was originally housed is indicative of Walter Benjamin’s claim that the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie were preoccupied with the production of containers for both multifarious mass produced commodities and collectibles: “What didn’t the nineteenth century invent some sort of casing for! [. . .] and, in lieu of cases, there were jackets, carpets, wrappers, and covers.”\textsuperscript{107} Furthermore, Tissot’s generous use of sumptuous fabrics in this composition, including the highly detailed tapestry draped over the shipping crate, supports Benjamin’s supposition that “indefatigably [the collector] takes the impression of a host of objects; for his slippers and his watches, his blankets and his umbrellas, he devised coverlets and cases. He has a marked preference for velour and plush, which preserve the imprint of all contact.”\textsuperscript{108}

While the collectible objects in \textit{Jeunes femmes} exceed the daily drudgery of “umbrellas” and “slippers,” the statement’s connotation still resonates. Benjamin’s insight that the collector’s enthusiasm for containers, a latent concern with concealing, revealing, and preserving, is exemplified through Tissot’s compositional arrangement and his use of fabrics to both cloak and expose. The tassels on the curtains, the textured detail of the rug, the various patterns of the Asian silk, are all portrayed with such specificity

\textsuperscript{107} Benjamin, 220.  
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 20.
that if not for the composition’s overall controlled palette,\textsuperscript{109} they might seem chaotic or visually vertiginous. These details operate to focus the gaze while concurrently distracting it. Such duplicity of function is a constitutional component of Freudian fetishism.

Perhaps the most overt suggestion of entrapment and containment is the presence of the grillwork on the windows. While supposedly Japanese in design, the solid dimensions with which Tissot painted the framework, in contrast to the other objects in the room, as well as the narrow corner in which the walls adjoin, seem more reminiscent of a cell than of an airy, open-plan Japanese interior space. Moreover, the exterior view that the narrow window panes might promise is obstructed by the angular view of the room, the copious foliage that occupies much of the composition’s mid and background, and the rolled up paper curtains. While the windows do offer limited views to the outside, their main function is to sharply constrict the terms of the interior space. The frame motif of the windows is also mirrored in the golden metalwork of the altar doors located behind the women. And finally, the tension between emptiness and fullness, container and contained, is implicated through the empty celadon offering bowl and the various drawers in the altar. The interior of these drawers is disappointingly empty. Ultimately, the promise of repository is aborted.

Tissot’s precise arrangement and depiction of his collection in \textit{Jeunes femmes} does more than to entice the covetous gaze of the bourgeois male collector. The women portrayed in \textit{Jeunes femmes}, whose representation is so readily subsumed under the

\textsuperscript{109}Nancy Rose Marshall points out the basic colors of red, yellow, white and black as being a key unifying element in the composition. See \textit{James Tissot: Victorian Life/ Modern Love}, eds., Nancy Rose Marshall and Malcolm Warner (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999) 44.
paradigm of Freudian fetish, are actually minor players in a larger scene of the collector’s “box in the theatre of the world.”\textsuperscript{110} The greater players in this veritable “stage of acting out one’s most intimate feelings with great authenticity”\textsuperscript{111} are the objects collected and displayed in the painting, which demonstrate the precarious balance between the potential for fulfillment and for insatiability; or, in Freudian terms, it is the acknowledgement that the maternal phallus does not exist, but the still continual search for its substitution in spite of the awareness of its inherent irretrievability. It is this struggle between the real and the potential, the desired and the attained, which makes Freudian fetish a particularly compelling tool with which to investigate the collectible objects in Tissot’s \textit{Jeunes femmes}. The composition’s high finish, verisimilitude, and the intimate concern for the authenticity of both his domestic space and his elegant \textit{bibelots} are implicitly met with the knowledge that these objects, despite the hyperrealism with which they are rendered, are merely simulated substitutions.

\textsuperscript{110} Benjamin, 19.
Chapter Three:  
“The Religion of Sensuous Desire”:112  
The Social Life of the Collectible and the Bourgeois Self-fashioning in Tissot’s  
*Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais*  

“A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.”  
-Karl Marx113  

In 1860, during the Second Opium War, British and French troops raided, looted, and eventually razed the royal palace of Yuanming Yuan (Old Summer Palace). Carefully selected booty from the conquest, ranging from military attire to fine art objects, was sent to Napoleon III and the Empress Eugénie, who publicly displayed the articles at the Tuileries Palace between February 1861 and April of the same year.114 Historian Greg Thomas argues that the objects sent to France were based on European aesthetic values and were used to “appropriate Chinese imperial culture as a way of reinforcing France’s own imperial ambitions during the reign of Emperor Napoleon III (r.1851-1870).”115 He furthers this argument by comparing Yuanming Yuan and Versailles. Like Versailles, Yuanming Yuan was an “official seat of government” and was “a vast and sumptuous repository of the greatest productions of the country’s royal

---

113 Marx, “Capital,” 81.  
114 Thomas, 20.  
115 Ibid., 1.
culture, including architecture, gardens, paintings, sculpture, and especially decorative arts.”

Moreover, he alludes to the power and wealth of the Qing Dynasty, which built Yuanming Yuan (1709-1772), as being comparable to the reign of Louis XIV. As such, the public display of the salvaged items not only implied victory and conquest on the part of the Emperor, but because Yuanming Yuan was equated with Louis XIV’s Versailles, the collectibles, through their rarity, value, and acquisition also substantiated the wealth and prestige of Napoleon III’s Empire.

When the exhibition closed in April 1861, the Empress selected her favorite objects from the collection and started her own personal musée Chinois. Like Tissot’s Japanese collection, she housed and displayed her musée Chinois in her atelier in the Tuileries. The Empress’ personal affection for Asian collectibles must have gained attention from foreign diplomats because in 1861, when the King of Siam sent ambassadors to commemorate their renewed diplomacy, he presented “48 cases of gifts” to the Empress. Many of these collectibles replicated royal Siamese objects “including a crown, palanquin, parasols, weapons and jewelry,” which were absorbed into a collection of Asian exotics at Fontainebleau. This diplomatic occasion was memorialized through an officially commissioned painting entitled Reception of Siamese Ambassadors at Fontainebleau (Fig. 22) by Jean Léon Gérôme. This painting, completed in 1864 and hung at Versailles, depicts an enthroned Empress accepting small treasures from a line of

---

116 Thomas, 1.
117 Ibid, 18.
Figure 22. Jean Léon Gérôme. *The Reception of Siamese Ambassadors at Fountainebleau*. ca.1864. 102.36 in. x 50.39 in. Chateau de Versailles, France.
humbly genuflecting ambassadors dressed in their native, exotic, attire.\textsuperscript{118} The King of Siam may have been renewing diplomatic ties, but there is a clear hierarchy among the principalities. In Gérôme’s version of the encounter, Napoleon III’s Empire, France, is politically, culturally, and, as suggested by the lavishly decorated reception hall, financially dominant. Eugénie kept her \textit{musée Chinois} open to the public until 1863. After such, it was accessible by personal permission only. While there is no direct evidence that Tissot visited her studio, or viewed the Gérôme painting, the fact that she chose to preserve both her interaction with Asian royalty and her Asian collection via a royal painting sets an evocative, imperial precedent for Tissot’s own actions.

Clearly, how a collection was appropriated and publicly displayed, and the desired public perception of that display, were significant factors during the reign of Napoleon III. The concept of a collection referring back to the collector extends beyond royal collections and their nationalistic aims. Astute collectors during Second Empire France were aware of how their collections could be self-referential and, furthermore, how a proper collection could bolster one’s esteem, or conversely, how a poorly or misappropriated collection could serve as a social pit-fall. In modern bourgeois society, the Second Empire collector was obligated to consider “the utility of these things \textit{[monopolized objects of pride]} to the possessor” as “commonly due less to their intrinsic beauty than to the honour which their possession and consumption confers, or to the obloquy which it wards off.”\textsuperscript{119} The desire to preserve one’s collection, and thereby, protect one’s fashioned persona was a common proclivity and a constant point of contention. Tissot was not exempt from such endeavors. While making no claims to

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 36, endnote 109.
\textsuperscript{119} Veblen,129.
analyze the psychology of the artist, elements of the artist’s biography do suggest that Tissot was a person who sought social notoriety and personal esteem through commodities and financial gain.

Tissot’s need to financially and socially legitimate himself is not without familial precedent. His father Marcel Théodore was a member of the emerging petit bourgeois while his mother, Marie Durand, was the daughter of an impoverished royalist family. Together they moved to Nantes, where they both worked in the textile industry; his father as a linen draper, his mother as a milliner. Tissot may have acquired his appetite for business and financial gain from his father, who thrived in his industry, eventually saving enough money to buy a respectable chateau near Marcel Théodore’s hometown. In 1856, when Tissot was twenty, he left Nantes and arrived in Paris, where he studied under Hippolyte Flandrin and Louis Lamothe; however, his passion, characterized as a “wildly offbeat enthusiasm for a student in Paris” was for Hendrick Leys. The archaic architecture and the costumes, the smooth finishes and romanticized subject matter of Leys’ medievalized Flemish paintings appealed to Tissot, and are all evident in his earlier paintings. Nothing about Tissot was typical: he arrived in Paris in 1856, a petit bourgeois with an odd penchant for medieval style paintings; in a little over ten years time, he went from being an eccentric artist living amongst the other young artists in the Latin quarter to being one of the most financially secure painters in Paris, with a home near the Bois de Boulogne to attest to his financial success.

His own social and financial gains did not go unnoticed, or uncriticized. While Champfleury’s satire and the reviews from the Salon may be the only documented

---

pejorative commentary dating from the period of *Jeunes femmes*, they certainly do not lack company. In 1871, the Commune tore through Paris. Shortly afterward, Tissot fled to London. While it has never been proven whether or not Tissot participated in the Commune, socialite J.E. Blanche reported that Tissot only “engaged in the Commune to save his beautiful house.” Furthermore, Paris’ socialites continued to gossip about Tissot even after he left London. Just four years after Tissot left France, the oft-quoted Edmond de Goncourt wrote:

> Yesterday, Duplessis told me that Tissot, that plagiarist painter, was having great success in England. Could he [Duplessis] have invented it? That this ingenious exploiter of British idiocies, has a studio preceded by a salon where one can find, at any time, iced champagne for the visitors, and around the studio there is a garden, where, during the day, one can see a butler, in full costume, polishing the leaves of the shrubbery? 

By using such terms as “plagiarist” and “exploiter” and by describing the manner in which guests are welcomed into Tissot’s home and studio, Goncourt characterizes Tissot’s social manners and his home as vulgar in their excessiveness, and perhaps illegitimate. The fact that members of the Parisian artistic elite continued to write about Tissot’s financial success in tall tales about his consumption and obvious excess implies the pervasiveness and prevalence of monetary gain and accumulated commodities over

---

123 For an interesting investigation into the word “vulgar,” in particular for its application of the word “as betrayal on the part of those who by rights ought to be in the vanguard of good taste” see T.J Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1999) 377-378.
both Tissot’s real and imagined life and, for that matter, among the artistic bourgeoisie. And even if Goncourt’s tone is mocking, his synopsis of Tissot and Tissot’s material success is still suggestive of the modern bourgeois propensity to “think we are boasting about men, while we are boasting of their estates, their dress and their palaces.”

In some cases, the collection and display of well-chosen commodities was not just seen as a social tool, it was understood as a gentlemen’s duty. In an English domestic manual from 1876, *A Plea for Art in the House: With Special Reference to the Economy of Collecting Works of Art, and the Importance of Taste in Education and Morals*, author W.J. Loftie exhorts:

> It may of course be objected that collecting is not in itself the practice of art. But, except for people who are actually artists, much that goes to make a home beautiful must of necessity be obtained by judicious collecting. It might be easily proved that the articles which are really beautiful owe their chief attraction to the suitability and permanent value which is required to make them satisfactory. But further than this, it may be fairly argued, and indeed, has several times been pointed out already, that it is the duty if everyone who is so fortunate as to possess a home and be the head of the family, to endeavor as far as he can, to make his family happy by making the home beautiful.

Loftie implies that artists already have an innate ability to separate the aesthetic and the valuable from that which is worthless. He also links a collection of artwork to a happy home and believes that it is a man’s duty to provide the household with beautiful objects as a necessary part of keeping a pleasant home. Transforming abstract notions such as “beautiful” and “happy” into concrete absolutes through object acquisition embodies Marxist commodity fetish. Moreover, Loftie’s description implies that “judicious

---

collecting” is the sight of abstracted labor, which allows for the socialization of the objects. His synopsis also indicates the capacity for self-fashioning within collecting.\textsuperscript{126}

Marx’s version of fetish is privy to ongoing theoretical discussion, exploration, and expansion; but, at its foundation, it involves an object’s displacement from its use value.\textsuperscript{127} As an object enters the market and becomes commodity, its exchange value trumps its use value. This exchange value imbues the commodity with connotations exceeding the object’s original functional purpose. In his treatise \textit{Capital: A Critique of Political Economy}, Marx uses a wooden table to elucidate the process by which an object becomes a commodity, and the metaphysical nature implicit in its transformation:

\begin{quote}
It is clear as noon-day, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by nature, in such a way to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered, by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that the table continues to be that common every-day thing, wood. But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than “table-turning” ever was.\textsuperscript{128}
\end{quote}

Marx’s description of “wooden brain grotesque ideas” imparts human characteristics to the table. This narrative, a touch cheeky in tone, intertwines both the “mystical” nature of the commodity, and the unquenchable desire of the consumer to purchase the commodity; not so much for what the commodity is physically, but for what it represents both as

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{126} This is not to suggest that self-fashioning is a Second Empire phenomena. Indeed, scholars such as Stephen Greenblatt, have persuasively argued that self-fashioning occurred during the Early Modern era. For more information see Stephen Greenblatt’s \textit{Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
\textsuperscript{128} Marx, \textit{Capital}, 81-82.
\end{flushright}
commodity and in relation to all the other commodities.\textsuperscript{129} As proposed by Marx’s famous quote, “There is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things,” it is the relationship of the commodities, via abstract labor, that is the social life of the commodity.\textsuperscript{130} That is to say, the amount of human labor that goes into the producing of each object affects the exchange value of the commodity. It is this exchange value that results in a perceived sociableness among inanimate objects. Notably, Borgella animates the inanimate in his critique of \textit{Jeunes femmes}, “Young ladies looking at objects, or objects looking at young ladies, it’s all the same.”\textsuperscript{131} While Borgella’s synopsis accounts for the sociability of the objects portrayed in \textit{Jeunes femmes}, it is not just the social nature of the \textit{bibelots} and their displacement of use-value that are active agents in the painting, it is also the objects’ concern with authenticity.

As mentioned in previous chapters, authenticity is paramount to the success of the collector and the collection. In the Second Empire, as manufactured and mass-produced goods were made readily available, the genuineness of a collectible, and the verification of its authenticity, dominated the collector’s practice. For the erudite collector, if their coveted collectibles were to carry the desired elitist connotations, then they must be verifiable, luxury items. Following a model of Marxist commodity fetish, scholar Arjun Appadurai argues, “luxury goods” are “goods whose principle use is \textit{rhetorical} and

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 82. “The mystical character of commodities does not originate, therefore, in their use-value.”
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid. 83.
\textsuperscript{131} See footnote 65.
social, goods that are simply *incarnated signs.*" He also proposes categories by which one could determine the authority of a luxury good:

(1) restriction, either by price or by law, to elites; (2) complexity of acquisition, which may or may not be a function of real "scarcity"; (3) semiotic virtuosity, that is, the capacity to signal fairly complex social messages (as do pepper in cuisine, silk in dress, jewels in adornment, and relics in worship); (4) specialized knowledge as a prerequisite for their “appropriate” consumption, that is, regulation by fashion; and (5) a high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person and personality.

Although written in the late-twentieth century, this descriptive list of qualities is concomitant with the highbrow competitiveness of collectors in Second Empire Paris. And furthermore, Appadurai’s categorizations are applicable to the modern bourgeois collector’s sense of authenticity. They certainly could apply to Tissot’s (and the Empress Eugénie’s) own aspirations for his collection and to his desire to be publicly considered a connoisseur and an esteemed *japoniste.*

Whether purchased with his lucrative earnings at the close of the World’s Fair of 1868, or received as parting gifts by Japanese royalty, the collectible items depicted in *Jeunes femmes* would have been difficult for the average collector to acquire. They seem to typify Appadurai’s classifications of elitism and of difficulty (real, or perceived) of possession. If purchased after the World’s Fair, the objects were not mass-produced and would be of limited availability and presumably costly. If received as gifts from the Japanese royal family, they have a symbolic value that cannot be attained merely through financial transactions. The act of gift exchange would impart a sense of uniqueness on the objects, regardless of whether or not they were actually unavailable in the marketplace.

---

132 Appadurai, 38; emphasis author’s. I read “incarnated signs” as signs of one’s social and economic class.
133 Ibid.
Moreover, like the Empress receiving gifts from Siam, the history of acquisition, as well as the representation of the collectibles in a painting, nuance the objects. These two factors allow the represented commodities to emit deeper social messages and hold more complex implications than the average collection would probably possess. Lastly, the belief that the Second Empire collector was the ultimate referent of his collection fulfills Appadurai’s emphasis on the “high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person and personality.” Indeed, certain aspects of Tissot’s bibliography suggest that his home and his possessions were a testament to who he was as a man and as an artist. All of Appadurai’s well-articulated determinates of authoritative luxury are based in Marxist fetish. Moreover, their emphasis on the metaphysical nature of the commodity and the socially received relationship of the commodity to the possessor are inherent components of bourgeois self-fashioning. In Tissot’s *Jeunes femmes*, the displacement of use value, the numinous constitution of the commodity and the self-referentiality of the collectibles are highly legible as exertive producing agents. In the interest of specificity, time, and clarity, I will examine the active role of the Japanese altar, the packaging crate, and the miniature commerce ship.

The largest collectible item portrayed in *Jeunes femmes*, and the one that dominates the composition, is the Japanese altar located to the right hand side of the

---

134 Ibid.
135 By stating the collectibles are self-referential, I am referring to their ability to refer back to Tissot; the collector as the ultimate referent of the collection.
136 I am choosing these particular items because they are the objects which are treated in Chapter II. The miniature ship is identified as “a model vermillion trading ship, used for entertainment and trade” by Mimi Yiengspuksawan for Nancy Rose Marshall in *James Tissot: Victorian Life/Modern Love*, eds. Nancy Rose Marshall and Malcolm Warner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 44, endnote 19.
painting, behind the two young ladies. This object is a *Butsudan* household altar. As a part of a Japanese household, these altars would serve as a family memorial shrine and a place to offer prayers to Buddha. As there is no evidence that Tissot acquired this altar for religious purposes, the religious value of the altar is displaced. Rather than holding the “flower vase, candle stand, incense holder, and bell flanking a central venerated image or ancestral tablets,” which would typically be found on the altar, Tissot utilizes it as a display cabinet for a collection of fashionable, less expensive Japanese dolls (Fig. 23, Fig. 24). His mode of representation attests to the altar’s size, craftsmanship and, perhaps, its monetary value. Indeed, through his placement and depiction of the altar, Tissot strives to assure the viewer that this piece is an authentic *Butsudan* altar and not a European crafted “japanned” piece of furniture, furnishings which were immensely popular. He laboriously signals the dimensions of the altar; it is placed in the background, behind the two women, and yet, it seems to tower over them. The altar is unable to be constrained within the noticeably compact confines of the composition, spilling out of the right side of the painting. Also, Tissot tediously reproduces the altar’s engravings and its gold leaf surfaces. There is no mistaking this item for an object of mass production. The metal rod doors, the expanse of golden surfaces, the freeform carving and high luster of the crimson and black finished veneer all indicate a handcrafted *objet de luxe*. The altar’s origin as a religious object nuances the history of the collectible and denotes important symbolic value. However, Tissot, in his painting, and within this chosen collection,

---

138 Pate, 34.
139 Ibid.
140 These same types of dolls can be found in collector’s homes at the turn-of-the-century. See Eugène Atget, *Intérieurs parisiens*, eds. Molly Nesbit and François Reynaud (Paris: editions Carré, 1992) Planche 48: “Intérieur de Mr B Collectionneur Rue de Vaugirard.”
portrays the altar in terms of market value; that is, its excellent condition, its exoticness, its rarity, and its authenticity.

Perhaps a less overt and more curious inclusion in the composition is the shipping crate (Fig. 21). As discussed earlier, the crate operates as a fetishized object itself, a metaphor of the container and the contained, to which the tapestry adds another element of envelopment. However, investigated through the paradigm of Marxist fetish, the crate becomes a powerful marker of authenticity and a testament to Tissot’s erudition. Tissot could have suppressed the shipping crate from the composition and let the occasional table located to the right of the crate support the model ship. Likewise, the tapestry that covers the crate could have skimmed the floor, covering the crate’s bare boards. The entryway curtain, the occasional table, the tapestry over the crate, all of these interior items could have easily masked the crate’s crudeness. Why, in a room so packed with sumptuous luxuries, would Tissot have included a mundane item as packing crate in his composition? One must conclude that Tissot wanted the attentive and learned viewer to see and identify the shipping box. As such, the crate is distanced from its use value. It is not a commonplace wooden box used to house a model ship. No, it transforms into something much more than that: a marker of authenticity of the model ship. The mundane and pedestrian object testifies to the exotic origin of the authentic miniature. Moreover, if Chūgi’s assessment of Tissot’s collection is correct, then the shipping crate attests to the royal provenance of the collectible and not just the journey that it took to arrive to Europe. The crate, therefore, collapses the geographical social space and represents instead a symbolic space—the space where Tissot, through the act of gift exchange, is symbolically tied, both within physical proximity and within the hierarchal social sphere,
Endowed with intangible properties beyond its use as a shipping crate, or even as a makeshift table, the crate comes to represent Tissot’s wealth and his connoisseurship, and acts as a visual indicator of his association with Japanese royalty.


---

Figure 24. Eugène Atget. ca. 1910. Planche 48. *Intérieur de Mr B Collectionneur Rue de Vaugirard*. Musée Carnavalet.
If a seemingly simple shipping crate can bear so many connotations, then the model ship, the collectible that the crate held and the object that holds the two young ladies’ attention, is ripe with implication. Within the constraints of the collection presented in the composition, it is peculiar because it is a miniature, and unlike the other objects examined in this chapter, it serves no other purpose than to be observed and admired. Unlike the crate, it cannot serve as a table; it is not a kimono or bolt of silk that can act as a tablecloth, an exotic rug to pad the surface of one’s feet, or an altar acting as a display case for one’s dolls. And while one could argue that the dolls, situated on the altar, are also miniatures, they ostensibly could have had a use value in play. This model ship seems to lack any other purpose than to be a collectible. Likewise, the diminutive size of this collectible places a considerable focus on craft and detail (Fig. 25). Tissot has carefully described the nature of this ship, from its feathered staffs, and fine carved wooden rudder, to the ochre, black and rust painted finish. The two women affirm the singularity of the boat through their engagement with it. The bent posture of the woman in maroon suggests to the viewer that there is more to see than the composition allows. Tissot offers the viewer a distinct view of the ship, but perhaps, not the most privileged position from which to see it. Indeed, for all of his extravagant detail, Tissot has left bits of his collection out of the realm of the viewer: the angle of the miniature ship, the full size of the crate, the space beyond the curtain, and the entire expanse of the altar. He reveals, with intense detail, enough to whet the viewer’s appetite and to validate
Figure 25. James Tissot. Detail of Model Ship
*Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais*, 1869.
Cincinnati Museum of Art.
the collection, but conceals enough to maintain the collection’s need for mystery and to suggest further abundance.

In her impressive study on the souvenir and collecting, English literature scholar Susan Stewart states that the souvenir “will not function without the supplementary narrative discourse that both attaches it to its origins and creates a myth with regards to those origins.” She then asks, “what is the narrative of those origins? It is the narrative of interiority and authenticity. It is not the narrative of the object; it is the narrative of the possessor.” Although she is writing about the twentieth-century travel souvenir, this statement could very well apply to the miniature boat, as well as to the collection as a whole. The appropriation of the article’s presumed (or assumed) history gives the collectible its significance. It is this significance that is then projected unto the collector. In the case of the miniature boat, a display model of a Japanese commerce and entertainment ship, this bibelot functions to generate myth concerning Tissot’s abundant financial reserves and his engagement with Prince Akitake. It solidifies his affiliation, both culturally and financially, with the bourgeoisie.

The manner in which Tissot chose to arrange his collection and portray it in _Jeunes femmes_ is paramount; the collectible objects gain meaning from their relationship to each other. Walter Benjamin wrote that objects became integrated “into a new,

---

143 Stewart postulates that the twentieth-century “collectible” is devoid of a past, even refutes a past and instead finds meaning in the person who acquires it and among the other objects in the collection. Her definition of the “collectible” and the erasure of origin is counterbalanced by her conception of the souvenir, which continues to be invested in the past. I would argue that, in reference to nineteenth-century collecting, specifically collecting in Paris during the waning Second Empire, Stewart’s definitions of the souvenir and the collectible can, and should, be considered jointly. The luxe collectible does refer to its owner and, moreover, it finds meaning in the classification and categorization of the collector. But, such qualities do not negate the importance of the origin of the collectible. The nineteenth-century collectible is not devoid of its mode of acquisition, or sense of inheritance. *Longing*, 151-153
expressly devised historical system: the collection. And for the true collector, every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia of knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the owner from which it comes.”  

Loftie, in his domestic manual from 1876, also admonished the collector to order and master his collection. He believed that the duty of the collector “has another incentive. By forming a collection he does good work for the knowledge of art, and he increases the value of each individual specimen in his collection” [. . . ] “The collector must endeavor to ascertain the comparative excellence and rarity of the objects that he collects.” Both of these examples, one from a twentieth-century philosopher, and the other from a contemporary commentator, interpret the collector as a knowledgeable gatherer who judiciously arranges his collections in a system devoid of use value but endowed with connoisseur value. Both of these descriptions also refer to male, bourgeois collectors. Thus, the ability to master and arrange the collection is a practice of the masculine subject—a practice that produces and secures one’s understanding of history. The masculine endeavor of the collector is important to consider when analyzing Jeunes femmes. As much as the painting depicts collecting, it is itself a collectible object. Viewed from this angle, Tissot’s masculinity is aggrandized. Not only did he acquire and arrange these rare and authentic collectible objects, but he was also able to arrange, synthesize and portray them, with hyperrealism on canvas, ‘devising a historical system’ and ‘doing good work for the knowledge of art’ in the interest of producing and preserving history. There is a

144 Benjamin, 205.
145 Loftie, 7.
146 Benjamin, 19.
dual self-reference implicit in the painting: one, in the interior and collection that is represented and two, in the painting as a rare and historical collectible.

If Tissot’s Jeunes femmes with its “hyperattention to detail and interiors, combined with Tissot’s own unerring sense of what was fashionable, serve as a colorful portal through which to enter the world of the Second Empire” then considering the painting in terms of how the particular commodities reference the collector nuances that vision. Comprehending the masculine, competitive nature of collecting in Second Empire Paris, understanding the intangible power and draw of collectible objects, and acknowledging that their possessor is the ultimate historical referent, constitutes Tissot’s Jeunes femmes as a highly self-referential, almost self-laudatory painting. A painting wherein the maniacal desires of Second Empire collecting are made manifest in the history of the objects portrayed and in their sophisticated, methodical mode of representation on canvas.

147 Pate, 34.
Conclusion

In this thesis I proffered that Tissot’s ultimate concern in *Jeunes femmes regardant des objets japonais* (1869) is his collection of Asian *bibelots* and *objets*, and his desire to secure and legitimate his status with the Parisian bourgeoisie. I demonstrated how current modes of theoretical inquiry, such as Freudian fetishism and Marx’s version of fetish, can be used to examine and interrogate the objects in the painting, rather than just the two figures. I also located Tissot’s motivations and the painting itself in a specific socio-historic context, the latter half of the Second Empire in Paris, in order to better demonstrate the painting’s latent investment in conspicuous consumption and collecting.

From a socio-historical perspective, I investigated the practice of collecting as adopted by the Second Empire bourgeois male. I identified the difference between the casual collector and the revered erudite collector. I also established the importance of object authenticity and how each collectible object, and the collection as a whole, referred back to the collector. By accumulating a strong collection of authenticated, expensive rarities, the individual may succeed in legitimating him- or herself as an erudite collector, and, therefore, a respected member of the bourgeoisie. I suggest that it is through Tissot’s collection, and its arrangement, representation, and public display in *Jeunes femmes* that Tissot sought to authenticate himself as a veritable *japoniste* and bourgeois.
How Tissot intended *Jeunes femmes* to be viewed may never be completely known. However, my thesis offers another manner in which to construe the painting’s implications. We do know that Tissot created three compositions of his collectibles and interior, which carry the same title. We also know that it is the painting with the most sumptuous articles that he chose to publicly display. This thesis produces an opening by which to contemplate the collectible items and their significance to the painting, to Tissot, and to the construction of a very distinct Parisian Second Empire bourgeois habitude—one whose interaction with collecting was based on heated competition and an intellectual and financial snobbery. By the bourgeois standards of the time, Tissot’s collecting activities—the acquisition of his collectibles, and his very public display of them—could be perceived as flagrant and vulgar due to their excessiveness and their conspicuousness. This reading better accounts for the scoffing reviews of both Tissot’s public *atelier* and his painting, *Jeunes femmes*.

In addition to considering the social and cultural aspects of Second Empire collecting, this thesis also explored scholar Ikegami Chūgi’s research. The previously undiscovered diaries of Prince Akitake and the watercolor painting support Chūgi’s assertion that Tissot was the drawing master to the prince. Furthermore, his supposition that Tissot’s collectibles were largely parting gifts bestowed by Japanese royalty gives precedence to the collectibles as being a primary motivator of *Jeunes femmes*. Finally, considering the masculine competition cognate with collecting, it is understandable how such an affiliation with the aristocracy of Japan, via Tissot’s teaching position and

---

148 I have been unable to travel to see if documents regarding *Jeunes femmes*’ placement at the Salon of 1869 and its purchase exist. To my knowledge, no such documents have been cited by existing Tissot scholars.
through his ownership of the collectibles, would position him alongside, or above, his bourgeois male counterparts. How such a position may have fostered envy amongst his peers and critics is equally comprehensible, though not empirically evidenced.

While further research is needed to conclusively validate many of the claims of this thesis (in particular, those areas concerning modes of reception and Prince Akitake’s relationship to Tissot) such research would require travel to Paris and to Tokyo. Such travel is unattainable at this time. This thesis does provide, however, valuable, fertile ground on which to continue investigation and on which to consider this painting more extensively. Discovering where the painting was hung in the Salon of 1869 and which paintings surrounded it, and finding letters from Tissot regarding *Jeunes femmes* or the acquisition of his collectibles would also benefit this project. Personal letters, if they exist, conveying information about his relationship with the Parisian bourgeois society into which he assimilated would also nuance this thesis. How long did it take for him to sell the three compositions; at what cost and to whom? How long after the Salon of 1869 did his atelier remain open to public? Did he have knowledge of the Empress’ Asian collection, and her public display of it? How, amid such negative critiques, did this painting, and the two others, remain saleable?

Through expanding the current discourse on *Jeunes femmes* to examine the socio-historical background that was Paris in the waning Second Empire, the implications of collecting for the Second Empire Parisian bourgeoisie, Tissot’s interaction with Prince Akitake, and the significance of the public display of one’s private interior and collection, this painting becomes a testament to a very specific time in Tissot’s evolving career as a painter. It remains a provocative commentary on conspicuous consumption and collecting
analogous to the decadent display of Second Empire Paris. Lastly, as other artists, such as Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and Claude Monet were judicious collectors of *objet d’art*, I hope that my work here initiates further introspection and investigation of how these artists sought to construct their subjectivity in the face of the ever shifting boundaries of masculinity, class, taste, and achievement.
Bibliography


_____.


_____.


_____.


_____ *L’art dans la parure et dans le vêtement*. Paris: Renouard, 1875.


Garb, Tamar. Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France. London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd. 1998.


Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers, and Commerce, eds. *Reports of Artisans Selected by a Committee Appointed by the Council of the Society of Arts to Visit the Paris Universal Exhibition, 1867*. London: Bell and Daddy, York Street, Covent-Garden, 1867.


_____ . Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999


