

Connecting Threads: Blow Me Bag

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Material culture has long been interwoven with humanity itself. The subject of human evolution can be considered synonymous with craftsmanship; behaviors and actions in creating tools and protections to survive can be reflected upon in the 21st century as one of the greatest strengths possessed that have launched humans today as a dominating species on the planet. The connections humans make between the objects they create has only intensified with time and the construction of culture. Objects made and worn have developed from that of necessity to conscious displays of identity. Today, individuals can reflect and analyze the choices made regarding style and clothing in relation to much larger mechanisms and ideologies, particularly as they relate to growth and change. Industrial processes have rapidly expanded through globalization, which has both revealed the connections between individuals throughout space and time as well as the overall effect of human behavior on the environment. Furthermore, observable advancements in technological processes have coincided with changes in culture. The following paper seeks to analyze a single human-made object as a larger reflection of production and ideology evolution, specifically in regards to eco-consciousness, consumerism, and sexuality.

Artist Nicole Daddona owns Magic Society, a small-scale clothing retailer based in Los Angeles, California. One of her best selling products, entitled the “Blow Me Bag,” has garnered great attention on social media due not only to its visual appeal and shock value, but also from its advertised production methods focused on recycling deadstock blowup dolls. The Blow Me Bag is a small sized crossbody bag featuring an adjustable bright yellow strap to wear around one’s body, with the main covering of the bag itself meant to resemble the face of a woman. Daddona advertises on her social media and Magic Society website that each bag is made from the face of a genuine vintage blowup doll, recycled and repurposed as wearable fashion.

A 2020 interview in Forbes with the artist details the bag's origin, Daddona's inspiration, and production methods. Daddona discusses her own fascination with found objects from the time she was a child, often making wearable designs from items foraged from landfills (Forbes 2020). The artist cites this personal attribute as significant in the creation of the very first prototype for the Blow Me Bag. Upon discovering a vintage blowup doll in a Connecticut thrift store, Daddona details her method of cutting off the iconic face, seen to her as "a classic design that's been around for decades," to make wearable art. While the first prototypes of the Blow Me Bag had been sourced sustainably through thrifting on eBay or physical store locations, increasing consumer demand has propelled the artist to work directly with a blowup doll manufacturer. The production methods currently in use with creating each Blow Me Bag lie in opposition with its marketing, which highlights the recycled aspect of the source material. Even still, the Blow Me Bag remains one of Magic Society's highest selling items among its target audience; young adults whose creative expression aligns with the bizarre but who also claim membership to a larger in-group of ethically motivated consumers.

The Blow Me Bag functions as a symbol of change in American consciousness on multiple levels. Considering the material itself, a "repurposed" sex toy, as the principle selling feature, the Blow Me Bag represents a rapid transformation of sexuality and sexual acts from an innately private aspect of personal identity to that which can be publicly displayed and openly discussed. A TIME 2014 piece reflects on its own 1964 article examining this exact phenomenon, specifically the prevalence of sex posing an "ethical revolution ... which had left young people morally at sea" (TIME 2014). The formation of more progressive attitudes toward sexuality, the prevalence of sex, and the openness in which it began to be discussed in mainstream Western society undoubtedly made many uncomfortable. For readers in 2020, the article itself acts as a focal point in offering reflections of the past to better understand the significance of sex today and its revolution from private to public domains. For the greater part of Western culture's development, open displays of one's sexual agency had been entirely absent from mainstream conversations. Considering the rapid changes in attitudes about sex from that of condemnation to normalisation, and arguably celebration within the last decade, the Blow Me Bag functions as much more than a mere accessory, the bag itself is a

symbol of past oppressions morphed into valuable statements about an individual's power in their sexuality. The condemnation of sexuality's growing exhibition among youth culture from TIME's 1964 article demonstrates this best with the reflection "in the 1920s, to praise sexual freedom was still outrageous ... today sex is simply no longer shocking" (TIME 2014). And while other aspects of culture undoubtedly contributed to a reconstruction of sexual mores, the clothing and adornments chosen by individuals to reflect their position in society stands as a firm statement of sex being an acceptable component of identity. Shenaz Suterwalla's 2012 article for *Women's Studies Quarterly* provides critical observations in using fashion, particularly among those identifying as female, as a mechanism for obstructing antiquated ideologies; "I too see women's dress practice as active articulations of inventive ruses and refusals" (Suterwalla 2012). Analyzing the work of Suterwalla and TIME's dual authors offers insight into the evolution of attitudes toward sex from the 20th century to today.

Beyond enticing consumers through its strange eroticism, one of the main selling points advertised about the bag is its source material. The blended elements of projected sexuality, artistic structure, and recycled vegan material spotlight the values imperative in much of youth culture today. Advertising for the Blow Me Bag on its retail site and Instagram continue to highlight the sourcing of the bag itself, made from "100% real vintage blowup doll" and using deadstock product for assembly. Beneath the initial shock regarding the visual nature of the bag is the underlying value for consumers of purchasing a product without adding to waste streams. Alexandra Smith discusses in her article "The Ecofetish: Green Consumerism in Women's Magazines" the relationship between environmental marketing and female consumers. Smith calls attention to the created connection between women and nature, noting "feminism and green theory have often been intertwined" through their dually subjugated positions. The suggested environmental considerations in the production of the bag illustrate Smith's claims that "messages aimed at women are increasingly built around commodity-based solutions to environmental ills" (Smith 2010). Instagram posts for the Blow Me Bag vaguely highlight the environmental aspects of its production, specifically its "recycled" value. Further research into the actual production methods of the bag have proven any sustainable efforts in its assembly to be nonexistent. This illustrates Smith's position that "what is

being sold in green consumerism is not really the product, but the feeling of being green” (Smith 2010). As humanity increasingly faces the impact of climate disaster largely due to our own industrial processes, making individual decisions conscious of the state of the environment has had increasing importance and visibility. Yet scholarship has proven the greatest way to mitigate the impact of humans on the natural world is not through individual effort, but collective action. Smith reflects on this notion through presenting a report from the World Wildlife Fund, which laments the strategy of a “‘marketing approach’ to environmentalism: ‘Such approaches may actually serve to defer, or even undermine, prospects for the more far-reaching and systemic behavioral changes that are needed’ in order to address environmental problems” (Smith 2010). In this way, the Blow Me Bag serves as a demonstration of a newly emerging aspect of consumer culture which places ethical value on brands based on the methods of production and subsequently on individuals for either supporting or condemning those brands, but often without the research into the physical methods used. In the case for the Blow Me Bag, vague terms hinting at ecological considerations but without the actual proof of its efforts are enough to make it the most popular item sold for its retailer.

The Blow Me Bag functions as a layered symbol of significant aspects of Western culture today; upfront sexuality, collective consciousness for environmental degradation, and half-hearted commitments from industries to be more sustainable in their production. The Blow Me Bag is not just a mechanism for transporting items in a “trendy” way, it is a quiet but larger symbol of the values embedded in youth culture: sex being normal, sex being natural, and projecting the sexual component of human identity is acceptable. But it also touches on the values that have recently become quite significant in the collective consciousness of humanity: the effect of human activity on the earth. And as industries and producers push consumption among the masses, they employ tactics to show their products and their brands benefit what we hold dear, preserving the natural environment. However, their methods of doing so rarely reflect the values they project while continuing to harm and deplete resources. In this way, the Blow Me Bag bag is a physical representation of three rotating aspects of Western psyche in the culture we create today.

References

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