

Public Abstract

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My dissertation offers a culturally-based examination of the aid-driven western marketplace for Central Asian crafts based on detailed textual and visual analysis of websites, film, online and print catalogues, and comics as well as ethnographic research in Kyrgyzstan and at the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market. I begin with the question: what happens to traditions and to the people who practice them when they are actively mediated and placed for sale outside of their culture? It is my argument that marketers utilize and shoppers literally "buy into" narratives of tourism, philanthropy, connoisseurship, and authenticity that position shoppers in certain kinds of relationships with both the objects they purchase and the people who made them. These relationships are based out of cultural assumptions about Central Asia and its gender roles, race, and modernity that proliferate in the western cultural landscape from National Geographic to the film Borat. Such advertising narratives can both challenge and replicate biases handed down from nineteenth-century travel and missionary writing. Specifically, how do humanitarian aid organizations, arts agencies, catalogue companies, anthropologists and folklorists engage in and influence the circulation and exchange between the needs of one group and the desires of another?