



BRILL

## Enduring Ornaments

*Five Enigmatic Found Objects and Assemblies by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, or the Avant-Garde Legacy of Trash*

*Irene Gammel*

Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto, ON, Canada  
*gammel@torontomu.ca*

Received 22 May 2023 | Accepted 18 October 2023 |

Published online 18 December 2023

### Abstract

This article examines five found objects and assemblies created by Dada artist Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven: *Enduring Ornament* (1913), *Cathedral* (c. 1918), *Earring Object* (1917–1919), *Limbswish* (1917–1919), and a now lost textile circle. These works, obscured for a long time, symbolize the historic silencing of Dada women. By merging feminist theories of performance, trash, and Dada, this article argues that the Baroness's use of discarded materials generates radical destabilizations, infusing her work with affect, memory, and transatlantic connections to avant-garde artists. Drawing on new archival sources, the article situates the Baroness within the queered dynamics of *The Little Review* circle, revealing her interactions with figures such as Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, and Allen C. Tanner, key figures of the queered avant-garde.

### Keywords

assemblies – found objects – Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven – trash art – Allen Tanner

•••

I thought of the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, who, ... sincere and fastidious, collected old tin cans, broken electric bulbs, milk bottles and automobile tires from the New York garbage pails.

GEORGE BIDDLE<sup>1</sup>

•••

The Baroness was a slender woman, who posed beautifully (she must have been a dancer) ... Once she was arrested for shoplifting (she had stolen a pair of silver earrings); she called me from jail asking if I could go over to her place and feed her parrot, she loved and had many animals. I had my Concierge do it. She was an artist who made many wonderful little things—the first in the world who made anything like them.

THERESA BERNSTEIN<sup>2</sup>

••

Picture headgear consisting of a rubber swim-cap adorned with a large feather (Figure 1), or a hat decorated with soda spoons, or a Victorian skirt bustle sporting a blinking battery taillight. The attire of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven was startling as it was iconic in enacting New York Dada during World War I and the postwar era.

Born Else Hildegard Ploetz in Pomerania on the Baltic Sea in 1874, having acquired her moniker “the Baroness” in New York in 1913 via marriage to a German baron, the *émigrée* artist, poet, and performer became a radical experimenter in New York’s public spaces.<sup>3</sup> Then in her forties, having previ-

1 Biddle (1937: 212–213). In his memoir, American painter George Biddle compares the Baroness’s chase after found objects with James Joyce’s chase after new words and images.

2 Theresa Bernstein was a painter who sketched and painted the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven during the war era and knew her well. Bernstein’s recollection was recorded by Francis M. Naumann in “Notes from a Conversation with Theresa Bernstein in her New York Studio Apartment,” New York, 29 April 1989.

3 Her oeuvre comprises at least 120 poems, of which at least 30 were published during her era, mostly in avant-garde journals such as *The Little Review*, *The Liberator*, *Broom*, *the transatlantic review*, and *transition*; at least 11 found objects, assemblies, and collages, along with



FIGURE 1  
Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven  
in her Greenwich Village Studio,  
7 December 1915  
CREATIVE COMMONS

ously immersed herself in the Berlin and Munich avant-garde (first married to Jugendstil architect and theorist August Endell, then to writer Felix Paul Greve), she lobbed her sexually charged Dada poems and manifestos at the public, excoriating Americans for being too bourgeois and commerce-driven. Like singer, poet, and dancer Emmy Hennings, cofounder of Dada in Zurich in 1916, the Baroness was sexually transgressive and ran afoul of the law, being arrested for the attire she wore in public and for stealing to survive. Both women's experiences fueled daring writings, from Hennings's prison memoir to the Baroness's sexual autobiography.<sup>4</sup> Like Hennings, who enacted her terse poetry and songs on the stage of the Cabaret Voltaire (Kamenish, 2015: 19–20), the Baroness was a bold performer who projected her androgynous and combative identity on the streets of New York (Harding, 2010: 35–66). Despite her great notoriety in New York, after returning to Berlin in 1923, and

---

many visually decorated manuscripts; and autobiographical writings. See listing in Gammel (2002: 490–498).

4 For more, see Freytag-Loringhoven's posthumously published autobiography *Baroness Elsa* (1992), and Gammel (2014: 171–196), for a parsing of the text as a sexual autobiography; and Hennings's prison memoir *Gefängnis* (Prison) (1919) and her diary account of her experiences as a prostitute in *Das Brandmal* (The Stigma) (1920), discussed in Kamenish (2015: 26–31).

her mysterious death in Paris in 1927 at the age of 52, she was long absent from history (Reiss, 1986: 81–124), a fate she shared with many other women artists.

Indeed, patterns of systemic cultural silencing and containment emerge when juxtaposing the Baroness with other women Dadaists such as Paris painter Suzanne Duchamp, Berlin collage artist Hannah Höch, and Swiss sculptor and textile designer Sophie Taeuber-Arp, to name but a few. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse's *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity* (1998), Ruth Hemus's *Dada's Women* (2009), and Paula Kamenish's *Mamas of Dada: Women of the European Avant-Garde* (2015) collectively document the double marginalization of female Dadaists within European and American contexts. Furthermore, they also emphasize that women Dadaists developed their own socially relevant themes (including birth control, gender and sexuality, women's oppression, and suffrage) and artistic mediums and modalities (including corporeal, performative, and sartorial means of expression). This very diversity of women's achievements focalizes the magnitude of their cultural neglect that is the result of the historical privileging—even universalizing—of masculine-centered expressions and systems of rationality, associating the quintessence of Dada with Francis Picabia's mechanomorphic drawings and Marcel Duchamp's sleek store-bought readymades. Even in women-inclusive studies, notably Francis M. Naumann's seminal *New York Dada, 1915–1923* (1994), the focus on the Arensberg salon at West 67th Street, where Duchamp temporarily resided, has a way of obscuring the Dada role of *The Little Review* (1914–1929).<sup>5</sup> Run by two women, co-editors and life partners Margaret C. Anderson and Jane Heap, their periodical and circle operated in Greenwich Village, giving the Baroness a platform for her poetry, manifestos, and collages while pushing against the representational boundaries of public taste and even legality. In her 1922 “Dada” manifesto, which appeared in an issue dedicated to Picabia, Jane Heap proclaimed the Baroness “the

---

5 Francis M. Naumann's *New York Dada, 1915–1923* (1994) must be credited with featuring women prominently including Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, Katherine Dreier, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Mina Loy, Louise Norton, the Stettheimer sisters, Clara Tice, and Beatrice Wood, showing the vibrant and productive interactions among members of the Arensberg circle. Although the Baroness is listed as a member of the Arensberg circle (Naumann, 1994: 168–175), she was much more visibly engaged with *The Little Review* circle.

In the winter of 1922, *The Little Review* showcased the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's sculpture *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, captured in a photograph by Charles Sheeler. Filled with pride, Freytag-Loringhoven requested multiple copies of the issue, intending to circulate them among her former husband in Berlin and her former lovers (Gammel, 2002: 312, 325–327).

first American dada” with a distinctly performative Dada: “when she is dada she is the only one who lives dada, laughs dada, loves dada” (Heap, 1922: 46).

Considering the Baroness’s fierce struggle against institutional and gender hierarchies, it comes as no surprise that she has become a touchstone in the critical repositioning of the entire New York Dada movement through the lens of gender. Taking a feminist and queer studies approach, Amelia Jones’s *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* (2004) argues that waste and refuse offer frameworks for identifying modernism’s patterns of inclusion and exclusion, with modernists separating their formalist, clean, and rational aesthetic from the messy, irrational aesthetics of Dada such as the Baroness’s, an argument expanded by others including Caroline Knighton in *Modernist Wastes: Recovery, Re-Use and the Autobiographic in Elsa von-Freytag-Loringhoven and Djuna Barnes* (2020).<sup>6</sup> The use of waste in the Dada movement has also been given attention across gender boundaries; for example, Hannover Dadaist Kurt Schwitters’s made architectural constructions, which included souvenirs and photos, pieces of clothing, even human excretions, what scholar Leah Dickerman calls “mnemonically significant forms and artifacts” (Dickerman, 2005: 109). Moreover, even though often store-bought, Marcel Duchamp’s readymades (such as the snow shovel elaborately titled *In Advance of the Broken Arm* [1915]) were prone to “trashification,” often being discarded as garbage by friends and family upon the artist’s relocation, surviving only in archival photographs (e.g., Naumann, 2012: 61) and replicas (Filipovic, 2016: 115–131, 49–55). Where Duchamp often selected commonplace, new, store-bought objects as readymades, the Baroness was drawn to the used object with a history and presence. Where Duchamp insisted that the inscription was devoid of meaning and had nothing to do with the object itself (Naumann, 2012: 116–117), the Baroness’s titles create resonances between the object and title.<sup>7</sup>

6 For an analysis of Freytag-Loringhoven’s incorporation of waste, scatological humor, and urinal references in her work and letters, refer to Gammel’s *Baroness Elsa* biography (Gammel, 2002: 220–231). Additionally, Gammel and Wrighton’s 2013 essay “Arabesque Grotesque: Toward a Theory of Dada Eco-Poetics” delves into Freytag-Loringhoven’s exploration of waste and recycling motifs in her poetry, highlighting her development of a Dada Eco-poetics (Gammel and Wrighton, 2013: 795–816).

7 Marcel Duchamp engaged with his own body through cross-dressing for Man Ray’s lens, assuming the personas of Rose Sélavy and later Rose Sélavy in 1920–1921. In addition, he expanded the notion of the readymade to encompass clothing, evident in his later series of

While there are important cross-connections, the Baroness's art was nonetheless unique and highly innovative in using trash found on the streets or pilfered from public spaces including hotels and department stores, as well as introducing themes of portability and wearability in confronting diverse audiences. In this, the Baroness administered a double shock—loudly attacking the gender hierarchies of the avant-garde circles while also striking against America's rapidly accelerating consumerist middle class. In short, the case of the Baroness's found objects and assemblies helps expand the field of Dada with a focus on women, gender, and the body, exploring questions related to her immersive Dada and her critical engagement of social categories including gender, race, and class.

Specifically, this article focuses on a group of five found objects and assemblies—*Enduring Ornament* (1913), *Cathedral* (c. 1918), *Earring Object* (1917–1919), *Limbswish* (1917–1919), and a textile circle (now lost)—all of which the Baroness had the foresight, in Berlin in 1923, to hand over to a regular habitué of *The Little Review* circle, pianist and critic Allen C. Tanner (1898–1987), who safeguarded them and returned them to New York in the 1930s. Having been obscured in private hands for many decades, these works were first displayed at the 1996 *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York* exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art (Figure 2), curated by Francis M. Naumann with Beth Venn.<sup>8</sup> Since then, they have enjoyed exposure through exhibitions (e.g., Naumann, 2002) and scholarship (e.g., Gammel, 2002; Jones, 2004, 2005; Taylor, 2005; Groom and Ty, 2020) while raising new questions about how to read and interpret them given their fragmentary history and context. Performance theorist James Harding suggests that avant-garde women such as the Baroness and Gertrude Stein use a collage aesthetic as a counter-hierarchy, destabilizing masculinist collage aesthetics (Harding, 2010: 24).<sup>9</sup> Moreover,

---

waistcoats titled *Made to Measure* (1957–1961), as examined in Ingrid Mida's *Dressing and Undressing Duchamp* (2022: 70–79).

8 However, these objects are missing from the exhibition catalogue, which does feature her (lost) assemblage sculpture *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* (1922; photographed by Charles Sheeler) on its cover, as well as discussing *God* (c. 1917, in collaboration with Morton Schamberg) (Naumann and Venn, 1996: 222–225, 248–247, 281), nor are these objects mentioned in Mileaf (2009: 46–49), Naumann (1994), or Reiss (1986: 81–101).

9 In his book *Cutting Performances: Collage Events, Feminist Artists, and the American Avant-Garde* (2010), Harding examines the conundrum of the avant-garde margin, recognizing it as a space already confined within a broader structure and value system. Consequently, he argues that acts of opposition by the vanguard are often rendered merely nominal forms of resistance (Harding, 2010: 4). By shedding light on this issue, Harding's critique highlights the frequent appropriation of avant-garde expressions and their subsequent containment within larger frameworks, diluting their original fervor and impact.



FIGURE 2

After decades of obscurity these four objects by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven—*Limbswish*, *Enduring Ornament*, *Earring Object*, and *Cathedral*—were returned to the public light, the textile circle not being included

*MAKING MISCHIEF: DADA INVADES NEW YORK*, CURATED BY FRANCIS M. NAUMANN WITH BETH VENN, WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, 21 NOVEMBER 1996–23 FEBRUARY 1997

some of her found objects and assemblies are akin to what performance theorist Philip Auslander calls “performative documents” (2006: 1–10), that is, they function as material media not so much reproducing a live event but constituting a performative art form themselves that can be curated to create new phenomenological relationships with future audiences. By incorporating her own body in her work, the Baroness adds autobiographical elements. However, as an androgynous performer her sexual curiosity and queered style aligns with Jonathan D. Katz’s notion of queerness as a rejection of sexuality as a functional or socially obligatory system of categorization (Katz, 2013: 223).<sup>10</sup>

Through the intersection of performance, trash, and Dada theories with queering approaches, I propose to explore the Baroness’s quintet of objects as a dynamic ensemble. I argue that her purposeful use of trash created radical destabilizations, infusing her work with profound affect and memory while

10 Jonathan D. Katz (2013: 232) delves into the impact and influence of queer activist fashion, particularly through attention-grabbing “declarative tee-shirts.” In this context, the focus is not solely on identifying an individual’s authentic gay or lesbian identity but also on embracing a broader perspective that rejects sexuality as a functional or socially necessary classification system (Katz, 2013: 223). See also Valerie Steele (2013: 11), who asserts that gay culture plays a significant role in shaping modern fashion, illustrating how “dissident ways of relating to fashion as a cultural form” have given rise to a queer sensibility characterized by both idealized and transgressive styles.

fostering transatlantic connections with like-minded vanguard artists. These works, collectively embodying the material and performative dimensions of Dada, represent a remarkable case of avant-garde objects surviving outside established art institutions. Ultimately, understanding the history of these rare works and their avant-garde dynamic necessitates acknowledging the role of gay, lesbian, and queer allies who, recognizing their value, helped safeguard them as transgressive spaces of collective avant-garde memory. They invite viewers to explore the trauma of the era and shed light on the avant-garde principles that facilitated their preservation. Therefore, a brief contextual introduction is necessary before analyzing these objects.

### 1 The Dada Context: *The Little Review* Circle

Margaret Anderson's memoir *My Thirty Years War* (1930) provides a key contextual source with direct observation of the Baroness's performative use of her found objects. In March 1920, pianist Allen C. Tanner and famed soprano Marguerite D'Alvarez delivered a musical performance to raise funds for the chronically underfunded *Little Review*. The Baroness, who had been specially invited to the event, arrived after the concert, as Anderson describes the event in her memoir:

... a hush fell upon the room. It was Elsa von Freytag von Loringhoven. She wore a trailing blue-green dress and a peacock fan. One side of her face was decorated with a canceled postage stamp (two-cent American, pink). Her lips were painted black, her face powder was yellow. She wore the top of a coal scuttle for a hat, strapped on under her chin like a helmet. Two mustard spoons at the side gave the effect of feathers.

ANDERSON, 1930: 194

In the profound silence that enveloped the disquieting public emergence of the Baroness, her startled audience found themselves contemplating her remarkable attire, which radically contrasted the refined atmosphere of the classical music recital, where typically expensive couture held sway. The Baroness's coal-scuttle hat resembled a helmet, an allusion to the soldiers so recently entrenched in the overseas dugouts and pillboxes but also presenting the Baroness as a cultural combatant at the post-war home front. The presence of mustard spoons and yellow face powder evoked the haunting memories of mustard gas and the insidious consequences of chemical warfare. Symbolically representing the war tax imposed upon it, a canceled pink two-cent American



stamp alluded to the escalating censorship imposed on the postal services—an act that would impede the operations of *The Little Review* by 1920. Indeed, anarchist Emma Goldman had famously referred to the US Postmaster General as “the absolute dictator over the press” (Goldman, 1917: 1). In her memoir, Anderson juxtaposed the Baroness’s colourful performance with her account of the arrest and conviction of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman for their anti-conscription activism in 1917, followed by their deportation from the United States in 1919. In Anderson’s recollection, these events are contiguous, and her placement of the Baroness’s act alongside the anarchists highlights her understanding of the Baroness’s capacity to stage a bold Dadaist rebellion that, like Goldman’s revolutionary activism, acts as a counter-memory. Through aesthetic means, both figures defied the prevailing censorship of the war and post-war eras.<sup>11</sup> By staging her found objects upon her person, the Baroness orchestrated a collage-like aesthetic, while radically destabilizing expectations,<sup>12</sup> her trash-studded attire leaving an indelible imprint on the collective consciousness of the avant-garde of her era, prompting Heap to designate her “the first American Dada” (Heap, 1922: 46).

With most of the Baroness’s found objects and assemblies lost today, including the top of the coal scuttle “helmet” she wore that day, the handful of surviving Dada art objects gains saliency, even more so as they survived not through official institutional (art historical or archival) channels but through underground methods, asserting themselves in the face of dislocation, homelessness, fascism, war, and resistance. At the heart of these objects’ remarkable survival is a member of *The Little Review* circle, namely Tanner, the man who played the piano in Anderson’s anecdote above. Typically obscured in the historicizing of New York Dada, his own queered story and catalyst role requires a brief introduction.

Described by Anderson as a charming and pale musical genius in well-cut clothing (1930: 92), Allen Tanner was a connector, an active member who played music at gatherings as well as escorted Emma Goldman to the theatre and Anderson to the police station after the New York court convicted her and Heap of publishing “obscenity” by serializing Joyce’s *Ulysses*.<sup>13</sup> More than

11 The Baroness was friends with Eleanor Fitzgerald, secretary to anarchist Emma Goldman; see Freytag-Loringhoven’s unpublished correspondence with Eleanor Fitzgerald; Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven Papers, University of Maryland Libraries.

12 For more on women avant-gardists’ use of collage as an “integrationist” aesthetic, see Suzanne Zelazo (2009: 51–52), who argues, with a focus on Mina Loy, that collage creates an aesthetic that consciously challenges notions of stability, placing emphasis instead on perpetual states of transformation.

13 For details, see Allen Tanner’s short piece entitled “Joyce Obscenity Trial” (n.d.).



FIGURE 3  
Pianist Allen Tanner (left)  
and Margaret Anderson  
(right) enjoying each other's  
company, likely in New Jer-  
sey, c. 1922  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCON-  
SIN-MILWAUKEE LIBRARY

a witness, decades later in his letter to “Darling” Anderson, Tanner describes himself as her “disciple” (Tanner to Anderson, n.d. [c. 1950]: [1]). A gay man at a time when homosexuality and its representation in art was a crime, he found a home in her openly queered *Little Review* circle, and he lived with Anderson in a house in New Jersey in the summer of 1922 (Figure 3). Fondly remembering her perfume and their intimate strolls in Central Park ([1]), he reminisced to Anderson, “how luminous the values we loved” ([2]). These values underpinned their action as they supported queered art practices in defiance of legal and institutional boundaries, united by their own political, sexual, and legal outsider positions and identities. These values included supporting the iconoclastic Baroness, whom Anderson called in her memoir “perhaps the only figure of our generation who deserves the epithet extraordinary” (Anderson, 1930: 177).

The survival of the Baroness’s objects falls squarely into the vortex of these transatlantic intersections of traumatic dislocation, queered gender, and fragmented memory. In December 1922, Tanner relocated to Berlin, then the queer capital of Europe (Beachy, 2015), where he met his new lover, Russian set designer and painter Pavel (Pavlik) Tchelitchew (1898–1957), who would be his partner for ten years (Tyler, 1967: 276–277). Tanner met the Baroness shortly after her own return to Berlin in 1923<sup>14</sup>; she was destitute, and he gave her

14 Prior studies, including my own (Gammel, 2002: 323; Jones, 2004: 143), report that the Baroness gave Tanner four objects; in fact, she delivered five, the fifth (textile object) being

money, which prompted her to transfer to him a handful of her New York artworks, along with key information regarding their titles, dates, and the circumstances in which they were created. New archival findings for the first time reveal some of the details. Tanner's own notes on "The Early Tchelitchew" corroborate that the purpose of his trip to Berlin was to study music and "rejoin a [music] friend George Antheil" (Tanner, 1963: 1), referencing the experimental musician to whom the Baroness would devote a poem (Freytag-Loringhoven, [George Antheil], 2011: 269). Furthermore, Antheil's recently uncovered letter from May 15, 1923, reveals that upon the Baroness's arrival in inflation-plagued Berlin in late April 1923, she was desperate, finding refuge at his place as he informed a friend in New York about the situation: "The Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven whose poems you once read in that first *Little Review* that I showed you, dropped in here yesterday homeless, shelterless, in danger of being picked up a bum upon the streets. Berlin in despair, [...] I shelter a Baroness, have three mistresses ... Counts are editors, Baronesses are poets and streetwalkers" (Antheil, 1923: 1). From May 14 on, she resided with Antheil, who left for Paris by mid-June. A small poster drawn by Tchelitchew in October 1924 (Figure 4) depicts the male trio, Pavlik (= Tchelitchew), Alusha (= Tanner), and Antheil, in what Tanner describes as "a 'Bon Voyage Valentine' for Miss [Jane] Heap [...] show[ing] her three friends Tchelitchew[,] Antheil[,] and Tanner saluting her as 'Gay Hussars' the musical fanfare in Antheil's hand" (Tanner, 1963: 2). This flaming orange artwork painted in gouache delivers a playful double entendre, boldly proclaiming their "gay" identities; the heart and arrow symbolize homoerotic love, adding whimsy. Adopting a manifesto-like poster art style, the work asserts their transgressive identities and solidarity with *The Little Review*, proclaiming their belonging to this avant-garde circle as a protest movement: "Vive Jane!!!!" (see Figure 4).

Within this context, the New York–Berlin–Paris transfer of a significantly large and valuable collection of found objects and assemblies by the Baroness was influenced by several factors. The first factor was the Baroness's homelessness in Berlin, which prevented her from storing her artwork as she had previously done in her New York tenement room, providing her with a degree of material security. Secondly, the transfer was motivated by their shared oppo-

---

lost by Howard Hussey in 1997. This information is based on conversations with the owner of the objects (since 1997), Mark Kelman, who received the information from Hussey, who had received it directly from Tanner, and Tanner from the Baroness. In this article I draw on a number of conversations and email exchanges with Kelman, including a conversation with Kelman in 2022.



FIGURE 4

Pavel Tchelitchev, *Bon Voyage*, showing Pavlik (Pavel Tchelitchev), Alucha (Allen Tanner), and George Antheil. Gouache 58 × 42 cm, 22.8 × 16.5 inches

RUSSIAN ART SALON ON ARTNET, NEW YORK

sitional values tested in New York, where the Baroness and Tanner had fought against the government's repressive censorship of *The Little Review*. They also experienced a similar outsider status in Germany, with Tanner and particularly Russian-born Tchelitchev being subjected to xenophobic attacks. The Baroness, who was destitute, renounced her German heritage and embraced both American and Slavic identities, asserting her and her mother's spiritual origins as "passionate Slavic Poles" (Freitag-Loringhoven to Eleanor Fitzgerald, c. 1923). The third factor was the Baroness's strong desire to establish herself in Paris, where many members of the New York Dada movement had relocated, including *The Little Review* circle, Duchamp, and Man Ray. Tanner, therefore, served as an ideal companion and curator of her New York Dada artworks during their move to Paris. Tanner and Tchelitchev initially escaped to Paris around July 4, 1923, according to Tchelitchev's biographer, as living conditions in the German city became increasingly challenging; they briefly returned in August to relocate their belongings (Tyler, 1967: 287, 293). Given the hurried nature of their first departure in July, during which they carried only a suitcase of essential items, it is likely that they transported the Baroness's artworks safely to Paris during their August return.

Tanner assumed the role of custodian for the objects, bringing them back to New York in the fall of 1934, following the oppressive rise of the Nazis, who deemed such avant-garde objects as "degenerate art" and subjected them to condemnation, relegating them to the underground or disposal. The repatriation process was overshadowed by Tchelitchev's separation from Tanner. However, Tanner's recollections, as documented in "Life with Tchelitchev," continued to portray Tchelitchev in an idealized manner even decades later (Tanner, c. 1960: 45). During the 1960s, Tanner bequeathed the artworks to his caregiver, Howard Hussey, a native of New York (b. 1938). Tanner shared with Hussey the titles, dates, and stories provided by the Baroness herself (Kelman to Author, 2022). Hussey, who was also an avid collector of Dada and Surrealist works and

owned a complete set of *The Little Review* (Kelman to Author, 2022) served as a knowledgeable and appreciative conservator for the objects.

Hussey mounted and displayed *Earring Object* (previously a wearable sculpture) on a bookshelf in the entrance of his Philadelphia apartment. He also conducted minor repairs on *Limbswish*, such as baking its delicate base in the oven to eliminate termites and dry rot (a technique possibly borrowed from Surrealist artist Joseph Cornell).<sup>15</sup> Hussey's ownership continued the queered lineage of this collection of Dada objects and assemblages; Hussey had a long-term partner who was an art collector and gallery owner named Carlton A. Willers, known as Andy Warhol's first boyfriend. In 1997, Hussey sold four of the remaining five works (one having been lost by then) to a New York Dada art dealer named Mark Kelman. Kelman has since reintroduced these artworks, along with the titles, dates, stories, and provenance, back into public circulation. These objects, with their erotic, tactile, and kinesthetic qualities, establish a tangible connection to the Baroness's lived body. They also embody a queered aesthetic, manifesting the historical avant-garde of the American metropolis through their spatial and cultural origins. These objects, remnants of the Baroness's ephemeral oeuvre, encode fomenting Dada tales that demand deeper exploration: even though recuperable only in fragments, they shed light on avant-garde gestures while their survival pushes against the erasure of avant-garde histories.

## 2 Found Objects: *Enduring Ornament* and *Cathedral*

Among the Baroness's collection of five objects, the oldest one, *Enduring Ornament* (Figures 5a, b, c), bears the closest resemblance to a discarded item. It is an iron ring she discovered on the streets of Lower Manhattan while en route to City Hall for her wedding on Wednesday, November 19, 1913 (Gammel, 2002: 160, 430, n. 9). According to the accompanying oral accounts, the Baroness loosely associated this ring to her wedding, considering it a "female symbol representing Venus" (quoted in Gammel, 2002: 160), although this aspect remains unexplored. If the ring indeed signifies the Venus symbol, featuring a ring with a cross (♀), commonly recognized today as a gender symbol for femininity, it suggests that this ring should be curated with the cross pointing downward

15 From 1965–1972, Howard Hussey worked as an assistant for Surrealist artist Joseph Cornell (Hussey, 2016: [9]). The information regarding repairs was provided by Mark Kelman to the author in 2022.



FIGURES 5A–C Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Enduring Ornament*, 1913. Found object, metal ring. Height 10.5 cm. Mark Kelman Collection, New York. Clockwise: a) Typical positioning of object in photographs; b) Digital rotation of Figure 3a by 180 degrees to show the Venus symbol with cross at the bottom; c) *The Baroness Elsa Project*, exhibition photograph 2021 by Justin Wonnacott

A) PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY MARK KELMAN; C) COURTESY OF CARLETON UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY, OTTAWA.

(Figure 5b). However, most photographs of *Enduring Ornament* obscure this gender reference, depicting it in an upright position with the cross pointing upward (Figure 5a), giving it a more masculine appearance (resembling the symbol for Mars ♂). The iron cross, particularly its broken arm, is visibly covered in rust, emphasizing the nonfunctionality of the piece and heightening its ever-changing ambiguity.

*Enduring Ornament* has its origin in an industrial, mass-produced endpiece that the Baroness stumbled upon as discarded litter on the street. Its original

purpose could have been as part of a ceiling loop, a door knocker, or even a dock mooring ring for a small boat before it became detached and obsolete. Regardless of its initial function, it had been affixed to another structure until it became disconnected and relegated to trash. By attaching the ring to her own wedding ceremony, the Baroness infuses the object with a unique affective and erotic charge, particularly when arranged with its hole pointing upward and the cross pointing downward, disrupting conventional perspectives. Stripped of its original functionalist context and utilitarian role, the ring becomes imbued with a new energy reminiscent of a symbolic sex toy, conjuring associations with ancient cock rings and creating space for fresh interpretations.

The spatial origin of *Enduring Ornament*, discovered in City Hall Park and nearby Broadway, historically known as Manhattan's earliest cruising grounds for gay men (Katz, 2001: 45–59), performs a queering of the found object. These areas were notorious for nonconforming gender activities and were frequented by sailors while being subject to frequent police raids, with the infamous Tombs prison where the Baroness herself was detained standing between City Hall and Broadway, all within walkable distance. The spatial context in this neighborhood radically collapses the meaning of the object's origin, shifting the viewer's perception of space from utility and production functionality to a space where new transgressive value emerges in relation to gender identity, endowing the found object with avant-garde potential by charging it with a radically new presence and meaning, with the location becoming a ground zero of sorts. Cultural geographer George Henderson suggests that "trash infects the circulation of value as such—it becomes a form of value" (Henderson, 2011: 144). Following Bill Brown's "thing theory," whereby "things" are different from "objects" in that they exert their agency in creating new types of relationship with humans, Henderson argues that even when an object loses its functionality, its materiality endures. Viewing trash as "matter 'out of place'" (Henderson, 2011: 143), we begin to understand trash as intricately linked to spatiality. This notion directly aligns with the Baroness, who not only identified the spaces where she found her objects—streets, subways, hotels—but also extended those spaces back into the urban environment through her wearable sculptures.

Furthermore, as refuse constantly metamorphoses into something new, taking flight in scraps and fragments, garbage exists within a framework of indeterminacy. These shifting meanings contradict *Enduring Ornament's* faint undertone of Precisionism, an art movement characterized by sleek machine representations and geometric order, often associated with American painters Charles Sheeler and Morton L. Schamberg (Naumann, 1994: 220). In contrast to Schamberg's treatment of a brass and lead bathroom plumbing trap and pipes titled *God* (1917) that the Baroness is said to have removed from a leaky sink

in Schamberg's Philadelphia studio and which Schamberg elevated by applying silver paint to the metal (Taylor, 2005: 289), *Enduring Ornament* disrupts traditional notions of both aesthetic and utility. Positioned on the periphery, its unmitigated rust cover conveys a message of being discarded and rendered nonfunctional, contradicting the principles of functionality and precision.

While rust can evoke sublime beauty, as seen in the work of Pennsylvania artist-photographer Alyssa Eve Csük, who has been photographing the shuttered steel works of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, since the early 21st century to reveal a nostalgic aesthetics with exquisite colors and shapes (Waldman, 2015: 120–124), not all rusted structures lend themselves to this purpose. Contrary to the perspectives of Amelia Groom and Michelle Ty, who view rust art as nostalgically decorative (Groom and Ty, 2020: 128), my interpretation of *Enduring Ornament* presents a challenge to their viewpoint. I assert that the work, with its mottled reddish-brown hue and rust-brittle surface, makes a disruptive statement by embodying its progressive state of disintegration and nonfunctionality. Ornamentation, derived from the Latin word *ornamentum* meaning equipment, adornment, or jewel, assumes a subversive role in the hands of the Baroness as she embraces the ring as a kind of avant-garde regalia. This raw jewel visualizes corrosion, a destabilizing concept within the context of industrial modernity. Rust emerges as a formidable adversary to the modern industrial landscape, a persistent threat that gradually erodes and obliterates, as eloquently described by Jonathan Waldman in his book *Rust: The Longest War* (2015: 1–2). Consequently, within the Baroness's anti-commercial Dada aesthetic, her visual claiming of actual rust assumes a critical significance, challenging the dominance of American industrialism and commercialism, which often overshadow human concerns and civic structures.

Indeed, as a rusted object, *Enduring Ornament* declares its origins as trash, transcending the uniformity typically characterizing mass-produced objects. In contrast, through its descriptive title, *Enduring Ornament* explicitly calls out its new temporal presence (*duration*), soliciting an immersive, durational experience in its viewers. The Baroness's act of collecting, naming, and preserving the object in her Greenwich Village studio bestows upon it a new identity filled with new affective colors and values, exemplifying Jean Baudrillard's concept of objects transcending technical structures, assuming secondary meanings, and transitioning from a technological system to a cultural system (Baudrillard, 1996: 6), thereby generating renewed affective impact.

*Enduring Ornament's* trash metal aesthetic finds resonance in *Cathedral* (c. 1918; Figure 6), a pointedly organic wooden splinter. Measuring 26.5 cm (10 7/16 inches) in height, *Cathedral* connotes anti-modern and anti-capitalist modes of production, distinguishing it from Duchamp's readymade approach





FIGURE 6  
Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Cathedral*,  
c. 1918. 26.5 cm  
MARK KELMAN COLLECTION

that relies on store-bought items, as discussed by Jones (2005: 161–162). Scholars were quick to note the mounted *Cathedral*'s association with the “commercial cathedral,” referring to the skyscrapers of New York City (Jones, 2005: 161). While *Cathedral* strikingly evokes these towering structures through its vertical mounting, it is important to note that the Baroness did not mount *Cathedral* herself; Pavel Tchelitchev used nails, wire, and a small wooden platform for its assembly (Kelman to Author, 2022), highlighting the work's insistent phallic shape, emphasizing its bold sinewy nakedness and physicality, which invites the male homosexual gaze.

When one handles the unmounted wooden splinter of *Cathedral*, the jagged notches and rough edges evoke a palpable sense of fragility, reminiscent of the tactile experience of touching the brittle, rusted surface of *Enduring Ornament*. This trash aesthetic serves as a reminder of decay and embodied vulnerability, directing our focus to the backdrop of World War I, a period characterized by immense human loss, coinciding with its retrieval as a “found” object. The inherently phallic shape of this delicate fragment, derived from a once-standing tree now reduced to a horizontal or propped up position, draws associations with the representational dichotomy of the European battlefield—vertical for living soldiers and horizontal for the fallen bodies. This accentuates the exploration of human vulnerability, particularly masculine vulnerability. Furthermore, the medical technique known as the Thomas splint, used for frac-

tures during the war, revolutionized treatment on the frontlines (Bell, 2016).<sup>16</sup> *Cathedral*, with its evocation of war-torn European cathedrals supported by scaffolding to preserve their remnants amid bombardment and shelling, stands as a relic—a literal fragment and memorial—its title alluding to the place where the deceased are often enshrined.

The relic-like body of *Cathedral*, along with its title, resonates with Kurt Schwitters's *Cathedral of Erotic Misery* (*Kathedrale des Erotischen Elends*), which was destroyed in 1943. Schwitters began this complex work in 1923 in his Hanover studio, featuring various grottoes and caves dedicated to friends, incorporating personal references such as a vial containing his own urine. Both *Cathedrals*, one a surviving fragment and the other a complex assemblage of fragments (no longer extant), convey a sense of traumatic disturbance rather than peaceful harmony (Dickerman, 2005: 115). Indeed, like Schwitters's constructions infused with refuse, the Baroness's act of collecting objects to use them in her art had a compulsive accumulation effect. Her unheated loft on 14th Street, described by American painter George Biddle in the first epigraph to this article, was filled with celluloid paintings and a wild mix of relics she had gathered from New York gutters over the years—old ironware, tires, gilded vegetables, broken light bulbs, and old tin cans. In the eyes of the Baroness, these objects acquired formal beauty (Biddle, 1939: 140). Biddle describes her art-filled studio as having as much validity as Constantin Brancusi's experiential studio. Disconnected from their original context, these objects formed an archive, a collection of fragments that reflected the brokenness of modern memory. Unlike Schwitters's *Merzbau*, the Baroness's assemblies were not confined to a corner of her room but were portable and often incorporated into her body as performative tools. These found objects memorialize the Baroness's roaming through New York City, shaping the 21st-century viewer's perspective and forging an emotional connection to a historical era they didn't witness themselves. By constructing a counter-history from the margins of society, they act as "prosthetic memories," to apply a concept coined by cultural historian Alison Landsberg, who explored the role of documentary cinema in creating powerful memories of the experiences of World War I even for those who never participated overseas or visited the war front (Landsberg, 2004: 25).

When collectively transferred to Allen Tanner in 1923, these two found objects merged with three other assembled pieces, forming a collection that

---

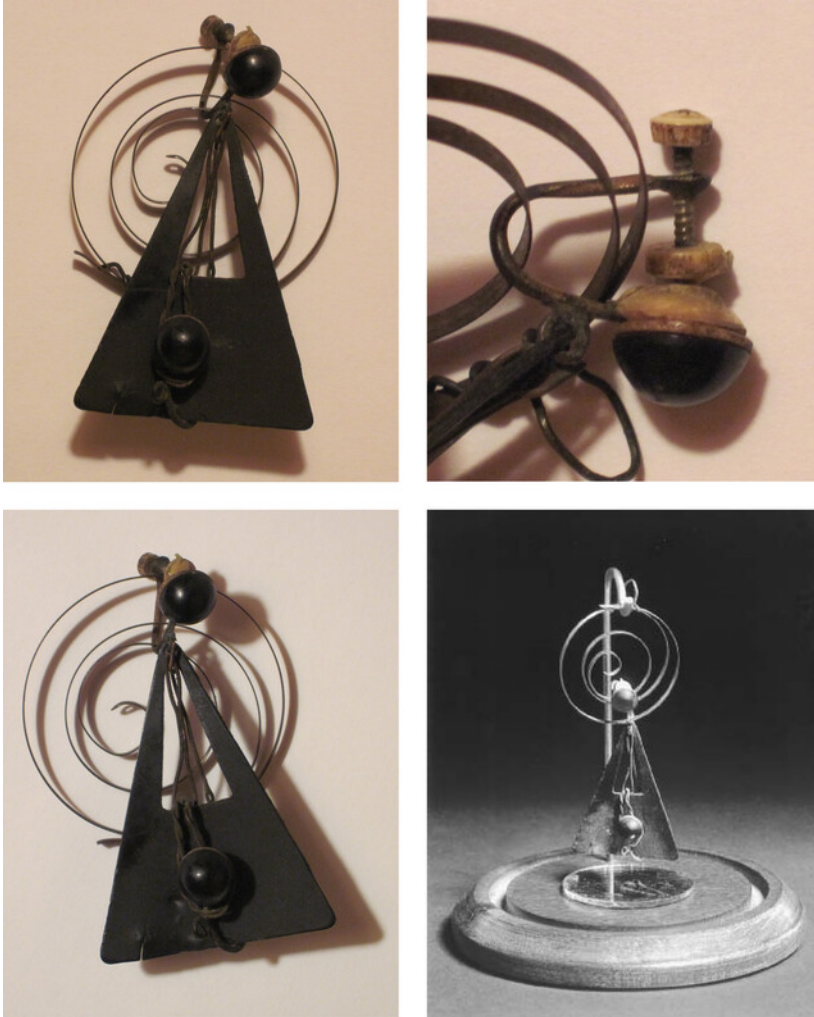
16 Soldiers in the trenches repurposed bullets or shell casings to create trench art, objectifying themselves and imbuing these remarkable artifacts with memories and affects that resonate even after a century has passed, as these objects tell stories about their creators (Saunders, 2003: 2–3).

reveals their thematic coherence across diverse mediums, forms, and even materials (including metal, wood, and textile). Firstly, they share a common interest in the thematic of trash, reflecting the Baroness's two-pronged practice of both rescuing nonfunctional items as found objects and/or dismantling functional objects to repurpose them in their brokenness in her constructed (often wearable) assemblages. Secondly, there is a shared concern with immersive temporality (duration) that defies clock time, the latter prominently signaled by her focus on broken clocks within her assemblies. Thirdly, each piece possesses self-referential and autobiographical qualities, being connected to the Baroness's body as wearable or portable art, extending her transgressive body. Collectively, they tell queered and feminist stories of avant-garde practice in New York, recuperating narratives from the periphery—ultimately asserting alternative genealogies of avant-garde expression.

### 3 Memory and Body Doubles: *Earring Object* and *Limbswish*

Consider her *Earring Object* (c. 1917–1919; Figures 7a, b, c, d), a delicate wearable ornament measuring 10 cm in mounted sculpture form. Comprising a steel watch spring, two ebony beads, brass ear screws, faux ivory screw guards, a metal triangle, and wire, this layered work incorporates discarded and scavenged items. Exhibited hanging, the flat spring steel band alludes to its watch or timepiece origins, with its prominent loose curvature proclaiming it broken and nonfunctional for telling time (just as *Enduring Ornament* asserted brokenness). When removed from its bell-jar display, the *Earring Object* easily folds into a wearable piece with distinct layers—an unfolding watch spiral in the background, a metal triangle in the middle ground, and earring bases in the foreground. The dominant metal triangle, featuring precisionist lines and a small cut-out, draws attention to the scavenged industrial element within this wearable sculpture. Painted black, it evokes mourning jewelry—a poignant and subversive theme during a time of global war.<sup>17</sup> The morphologically intriguing triangle serves as the canvas for the artist's handmade interven-

17 During the war, expressions of grief had to be carefully channeled so as not to interfere with war operations. In the United States women mourners wore black armbands on their left arm with a gold star for every family member who had died in the war (Evans, 2012: 227), a death in war, as the *New York Times* wrote, being “a matter of glory rather than of prostrating grief and depression” (quoted in Evans, 2012: 227). The Baroness was known for her artistic use of mourning objects, in 1921 stealing “the crepe from a house of mourning” for her performative self-display, as witnessed by Margaret Anderson (1930: 211).



FIGURES 7A–D Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Earring Object*, c. 1917–1919. Mark Kelman Collection, New York. Top L–R: a) *Earring Object* in its wearable state; b) Close-up of screw-back closing device; Bottom L–R: c) *Earring Object* in its wearable state; d) *Earring Object* on the bell-jar base as typically shown at exhibitions

tions, emphasizing the *Earring Object* as an artist-engineered creation, showcasing collaged objects.

As the performative narrative within the *Earring Object* unfolds, viewers are asked to contemplate the transformation from manufactured (utilitarian) object into non-utilitarian (artistic) one. In the foreground, two earring bases with prominent black ebony beads take center stage, their screw-back mod-

els suggesting a post-1909 manufacture (see Figure 7b). Speculation surrounds whether the Baroness received the pair of ebony earrings as a gift or acquired them through pilfering from a department store before dismantling them. Theresa Bernstein's account in the second epigraph suggests the possibility of the latter. Originally, the earrings served as bases for attaching substantial dropper-style or chandelier pendants, as evidenced by the visible loops that allude to their former purpose. In the foreground, only one bead loop remains functional, supporting a large black triangular pendant. The second ebony bead, however, has transitioned from a supportive role to an artistic and performative one. Suspended from a wire, it added an element of auditory rhythm to the piece as the Baroness walked, accentuating bodily mobility.

The resulting assemblage forms a humanoid figure, with a black triangle representing its body and black ebony beads symbolizing heads. The significance of this artwork lies in the Baroness's performance, which derives meaning through contextual interpretation. Created during the war and the immediate postwar era, it carries added significance as a reflection of that time. The prevalent association of black with mourning during this period memorializes the loss of loved ones in a costly war. Additionally, the singular *Earring Object* alludes to the biblical tradition of a singular earring branding a slave (Exodus 21; Deuteronomy 15), touching on themes of racial tensions that were prominent during World War I. The war led to African American migration to munition factories in cities, resulting in racist violence, including lynchings, as well as anti-racist protests in New York in 1917. The Baroness highlights this dark reality in a later poem, accusing Americans of a lack of empathy and clear vision, "vulgar blood-fogged brain—run amuck! ... violent action—noise—clamour: / American lynchings" (Freytag-Loringhoven, [1921] 2011: 293). Drawing from Margaret Anderson's accounts of the Baroness's performances utilizing reclaimed objects, her subversiveness lies in the transformation of trash into art, serving as a critical reflection of America itself. This anticipates cultural scholar John Scanlan's concept that "spectres of garbage serve as a harsh reminder of our true nature" (Scanlan, 2005: 12). When trash is repurposed and recycled in art, it gains subjectivity, infiltrating our collective imagination like a haunting ghost that materializes before us (Scanlan, 2005: 14). This ghost is embodied in the Baroness's displacements, directing viewers' attention back to the traumatized, gendered, and racially divided social spaces in America.

In *Limbswish* (c. 1917–1919), the Baroness's most imposing sculpture (Figures 8a and b), the themes of trash and social value take on a distinctly queer interpretation. Standing tall at 57.6 cm (22 11/16 inches) including its base, *Limbswish* represents her largest extant artwork, surpassing the smaller pieces



FIGURE 8A  
Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Limbswish*, c. 1917–1919. Metal spring, curtain tassel, and wire mounted on wood block. Height with base 55.1 cm  
MARK KELMAN COLLECTION.  
VENICE BIENNALE EXHIBITION  
PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNIFER ASHBY,  
VIA TWITTER, 29 APRIL 2022



FIGURE 8B Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Limbswish*, c. 1917–1919.  
Detail of tassel head  
MARK KELMAN COLLECTION. VENICE BIENNALE  
EXHIBITION PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNIFER ASHBY, VIA  
TWITTER, 29 APRIL 2022

displayed alongside it at exhibitions (see Figure 2). Like *Earring Object*, it functions as a wearable sculpture, as Michael Taylor (2005: 291) suggests, “thought to have swung from her hip ... swishing back and forth as she moved.”<sup>18</sup> Prior studies have recognized the work’s radical hybridity, with *Limbswish* blurring boundaries between human and machine technology, embodying a prescient posthuman prosthesis sculpture (Goody, 2016: 2). It also operates as “poem object,” embodying daring intermedial hybridity (Bozhkova, 2020: 178–179, 188), whereby the playfully punning title of the work, “limb swish / limbs wish,” invites a range of interpretations. Scholars have observed its swaying gender-fluid movement and eroticism (Gammel, 2002: 188), its sexual power and “swirl of urban meanings” (Jones, 2004: 198), as well as its embodiment of the androgynous Baroness herself within the modern industrial cityscape (Knighton, 2020: 118). How, then, do the constituent parts dynamically interact with each other and how do they contribute to the entire assembly’s shared meanings?

Not previously mentioned in existing scholarship, the six-inch curtain tassel featured in *Limbswish* was repurposed from drapes sourced from a hotel lobby, while the large metal spring originated from a clock within a railway station (Kelman to Author, 2022). The presence of the clock spring strengthens the thematic connection with the loosened watch spiral in the *Earring Object*. In the *Earring Object*, the unraveling spiral of a broken watch symbolizes the Baroness’s Dadaist challenge to conventional clock time and her rejection of mechanical temporality. In contrast, the unfurling spiral in *Limbswish* culminates mysteriously with the star-shaped base of a Christmas tree candle holder (see Figure 2), representing both a celebratory ending and a new beginning. Through the deconstruction of mechanical clock time via the dismantled railway clock, the assemblage amplifies the Bergsonian concept of time as *durée* (duration) (Bergson, 1913), redirecting viewers to the temporal notion of embodied and performative experience in the present moment—an idea reflected also in the title *Enduring Ornament*. *Limbswish* suggests an immersive, embodied promenade through the city, where the Baroness’s body serves as the primary guide. The sartorial references in this wearable piece, with its armature likely fashioned from a repurposed metal clothes hanger (Figure 9),<sup>19</sup> further enhance its embodied and humanoid qualities. Most intriguingly, the Baroness herself mounted *Limbswish*, utilizing a cheap hollow wooden storage box, securing the wire armature through two small handmade holes, each

18 Michael R. Taylor builds on both Gammel (2002: *passim*) and Jones (2004: *passim*).

19 By the 1930s, there are advertisements showing how clothing hangers could be refashioned into other functional items, such as wire flowerpot holders; see <https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/508766089124866549/>.

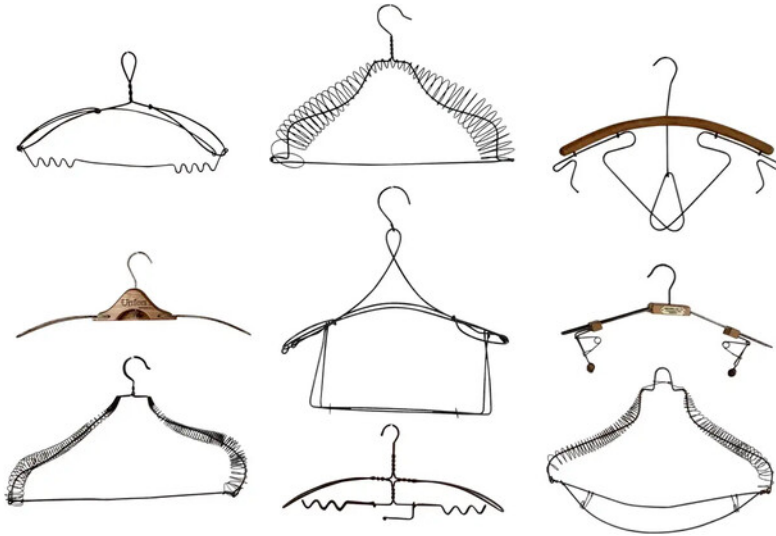


FIGURE 9 Antique novelty wire clothing hanger collection “9”; c. 1890s–1940s.  
[HTTPS://WWW.ISTDIBS.COM/FURNITURE/DECORATIVE-OBJECTS/  
 SCULPTURES/ABSTRACT-SCULPTURES/ANTIQUENOVELTY-WIRE  
 -CLOTHING-HANGER-COLLECTION-9/ID-F\\_18786572/](https://www.istdibs.com/furniture/decorative-objects/sculptures/abstract-sculptures/antique-novelty-wire-clothing-hanger-collection-9/id-f_18786572/)

approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch in diameter. The collapsible nature of the box facilitated convenient portability of the artwork—emphasizing its mobility.<sup>20</sup>

Enveloped by the expanding spiral turns, *Limbswish* offers a glimpse into its central interior (see Figure 8a). Here, the large, six-inch curtain tassel repurposed from the drapes in a hotel lobby is powerfully decontextualized from its functional context. Made of intricate knotting, using molds, and loops, and chords, this tassel is a complex artistic structure that embodies a long history of functions—tassels not only serving interior decorating as ornaments for curtains, pillows, and beds, but also encoding ranks on military uniforms or religious and academic gowns, often worn on epaulettes or hats. As Annabel Westman explains in her study *Fringe, Frog, and Tassel* (2019: x), molds and tas-

20 Where Duchamp had experimented with the mobile sculpture in his 1913 (lost) *Bicycle Wheel* mounted on a stool (Naumann, 2012: 61), *Limbswish* was an innovation, a suspended sculpture applying the principle of the clothes hanger, anticipating the 1930s mobiles of Alexander Calder (1898–1976) and likely predating Man Ray’s *Lampshade* (c. 1919–1920), itself made of a paper lampshade wrapper (replaced with metal in 1921) that unwraps and forms a spiral when suspended on a metal rod. *Lampshade* was an early suspended spiral made of paper, which he changed to metal in 1921, after Katherine Dreier wrote to him: “I was wondering whether it would not be better to make the lampshade scroll out of metal, which would keep its form”; quoted in Halwes (1990: 101).



sels create complex sculptural effects with meticulous detail that give the tassel individuality. Since *Limbswish* was a product of c. 1917–1919, that is, the American war and immediate postwar years, when war dress fashion included stripes and tassels (as seen in a Harvey Nichols wartime dress in London in 1916, with tassels attached to both the collar and the pockets [Nichols, c. 1916]), and when the German tassel (*Troddel*) was used by soldiers to attach the bayonet—the war provided yet another way for the Baroness to decontextualize and destabilize the tassel from its “useful” functionality.<sup>21</sup>

With its “head,” “neck,” and “skirt,” the tassel in *Limbswish* constructs an eerily embodied shape. As an objectification of self, *Limbswish* serves as an extension of her body when worn, endowed with erotically charged limbs, wishes, and swishes. Like the *Earring Object*, which she wore, but also like *Enduring Ornament* and *Cathedral*, which she handled, *Limbswish* creates a somatic contact zone, where the Baroness’s skin has touched the object, with the skin, body, and clothing acting as a porous contact zone. *Limbswish* continues to exist as a desiring, haunting, and uncanny humanoid presence even a century later—a corporeal mnemonic tool, reviving the Baroness’s presence in her sensory experiences. In Jennifer Ashby’s close-up photograph captured at the 2002 Venice Biennale (see Figure 8b), the tassel’s “eyes” directly engage with the camera, evoking a mobile body view that suggests the ghostly presence of the Baroness’s human body double. Historically, body doubles, also known as *modèle*, are nonhuman mannequins found in tailor shops that assume human functions in the evolving practice of tailoring (Matthews David, 2018: 7, 14).<sup>22</sup> Deeply embodied, *Limbswish* is subject to the passage of time, showing signs of aging and fragility at more than a century old, requiring professional restoration to stabilize its posture and maintain an upright position (Kelman to Author, 2022).

21 Within the German imperial army, the color of the tassel’s stalk (*Stengel*) represented the battalion, while the colors of the wreath (*Kranz*) and slider (*Schieber*) represented the company, the color codes indicating which battalion and company each soldier belonged to. See “M. 1873 Troddel (Bayonet Knot),” <https://www.ir63.org/troddel.html>.

22 The concept of *Limbswish* serving as a surrogate body for the Baroness gains further saliency when considering the Baroness’s lifelong struggle to survive by modeling for artists. In 1894, she engaged in simulating nudity for Henri de Vries’s *tableaux vivants*, recounting in her autobiography: “Then I was clad in tights and ‘Henry de Vris’ [*sic*], boss of ‘living pictures,’ looked me over, though I did not then quite know what for. Being safe inside my meshell—I liked that scrutiny” (Freytag-Loringhoven, [c. 1924] 1992: 46). Additionally, she posed nude for the men’s class at the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts in 1915, and in 1917 she posed for American painter George Biddle in the nude except for her striking bra made of tin tomato cans (Biddle, 1939: 137).

The gender-focused title *Limbswish* holds paramount significance. Craig Loftin, who discusses *swishing* in the context of homosexual activism, notes that during the war and the interwar years, the concept of swish identity emerged as a subversive gesture within both working-class and elite cultures, with homosexual men exhibiting swishing behavior often referred to as “fairies” and “pansies” (Loftin, 2007: 579). Swish, as depicted in gay-friendly publications, was associated with men who typically assumed passive (“bottom”) roles in their sexual behavior, while masculine-identified men who practiced the active (“top”) role were often not considered homosexual (Loftin, 2007: 579). Sartorial markers, such as clothing and meticulous grooming of nails and eyebrows, were integral to swish identities, enabling men to play a crucial role in promoting gay culture and visibility (Loftin, 2007: 581). However, this heightened visibility also posed risks, as it made gay social spaces vulnerable to police raids and arrests (Loftin, 2007: 582). Consequently, swishing men, like the bold and conspicuous Baroness herself, often became targets of attacks. With its visually striking and multisensory qualities, *Limbswish* embodies the Baroness’s own queered aesthetic, as the creative expression of an audaciously androgynous woman who occupied male spheres and openly adopted masculine roles as an avant-garde artist. Furthermore, its limb-swishing reference positioned the Baroness as an ally to gay men, alluding to connections and shared experiences.

As a queered art form, *Limbswish* shares a kinship with the Baroness’s collected objects and assemblages, collectively embracing their outsider status and delivering a social and political critique that aligns with the spirit of Dada. In doing so, the Baroness defies the “erasure” described by James Harding, who highlights the ongoing repression faced by women artists performing within oppressive conditions (Harding, 2010: 3). While marginalized spaces provide opportunities for resistance against normative compromises, Harding warns that this resistance remains symbolic and easily controlled (Harding, 2010: 4). In contrast, the Baroness’s works present a provocative challenge to norms, with their tangible impact on the audience demonstrated by the survival of the ephemeral objects she left behind. These objects disrupt conventional historicizing narratives of Dada, demanding an alternative genealogy that encompasses the periphery of the avant-garde, visually represented by the expanding spirals of *Limbswish* and *Earring Object*. By reimagining dysfunctional objects as subversive forms of underground street art, the Baroness challenges the hierarchies of conventional histories.

#### 4 “Circle” and Concluding Reflections

In her bohemian Greenwich Village studio during the war and the postwar era, Freytag-Loringhoven employed objects as catalysts for cross-connections to construct innovative visual and verbal compositions. A remarkable instance of this artistic process is the *Enduring Ornament*, which served as inspiration for her prose poem titled “‘Thee I Call Hamlet of Wedding Ring,’” prominently published in *The Little Review* in 1921. By harnessing the symbolic power of her decaying iron ring and its association with marriage, she launched a scathing Dada critique of poet William Carlos Williams and his conventional middle-class life, publicly charging him, “You: brittle—breaking—*decaying iron*—eaten by *rustworm*” (Freytag-Loringhoven, [1921] 2011: 296; italics added). Her merging of the motifs of wedding ring and rust ring gained provocative, manifesto-like power. Similarly, the *Earring Object* exhibits striking morphological similarities to *Oggetto* (Object), a textile later gifted by Freytag-Loringhoven to American art collector Peggy Guggenheim in Paris. Guggenheim featured it in her 1943 exhibition celebrating modern women artists. A surviving photograph of *Oggetto* reveals the Baroness’s incorporation of the identical industrial triangles with machine cut-outs found in *Earring Object*. In addition, the textile incorporates circular objects reminiscent of *Enduring Ornament*, such as buttons, small metal medallions, a tiny bottle brush, and a key, with cross-connections becoming like a thread for her evolving art.

These cross-connections not only reveal the intricate network of associations within the collection but also shed light on the significance of the fifth object in the series: a tie-dyed (batik) textile ring, which unfortunately went missing in 1997.<sup>23</sup> After having safeguarded the object for decades, the owner Howard Hussey unintentionally left it behind during a train ride from New York to Philadelphia, immediately after collecting it from the Whitney Museum of American Art. The museum had deemed it too delicate for public display (Kelman to Author, 2022). With only an old and deteriorating paper sack and a plastic bag for protection, this aged and fragile cloth ring might have seemed inconsequential to fellow passengers or the transit cleaning staff, making it likely to have been discarded in the transit trash bin.<sup>24</sup>

23 Howard Hussey to Mark Kelman, 1997; Kelman to author, August 2022.

24 Today, we can only speculate on whether this unfortunate loss compelled Hussey to sell the objects shortly after, considering both the burden of caring for delicate artworks and the responsibility they entailed. Furthermore, Hussey took offense when his proposal to give a lecture on the Baroness’s objects at the Whitney Museum of American Art was rejected. Despite my attempts to engage in conversation with Hussey, he refused to answer any questions.

A thematic cross-connection to the lost textile ring can be found in Freytag-Loringhoven's poem "——Circle," which was published in the avant-garde journal *Broom* in their December 1922–January 1923 issue, just before she entrusted her circle object to Tanner. The poem's visually arranged circular calligram explores inquiries about the identity of the modern woman artist, highlighting three distinct stages: youth, self-realization, and society's perception of the middle-aged female artist as a monstrous figure (Goodspeed-Chadwick, 2016: 51–72). Concluding with the image of the serpent biting its own tail, symbolizing the ouroboros circle, the self-referential poem signifies the cyclical nature of birth and death, connecting back to Freytag-Loringhoven's recurring motifs in works such as *Enduring Ornament*, *Limbswish*, and the *Circle* textile. This circle demonstrates her profound understanding of the tendency towards entropy in trash art, where entropy itself signifies transformation, reminiscent of the early German concept of *Verwandlungsinhalt* (transformation content).

The survival and significance of this collection of objects and assemblies resides in their recognition and circulation as highly prized artifacts that embody queerness and transgression within the avant-garde circle. These artifacts provide a connection to the story of Tanner and Tchelitchew, reflecting their own search for a sense of queered belonging during the early stages of their partnership. Through the Baroness's *enduring* stories, we can infer that her 1913 wedding narrative associated with the *Enduring Ornament* ring, along with her account of its queered spatial origins, deeply resonated with Tanner and Tchelitchew as they embarked on their own gay "marriage" and began living together as a committed couple. These objects found their place within intimate personal spaces, constructing a queered avant-garde and subversive art history that highlights the resilient power of the marginalized periphery. Importantly, these objects represented deeply cherished values shared by Tanner, Margaret Anderson, and *The Little Review* circle. Moreover, they nostalgically recalled Tanner's youthful days as a rising musical star, observing and exploring dissident pleasures including camp and drag. In "Notes on Gay Life in Chicago during the 1910s," Tanner's perspective on camp as a deliberate violation or caricature of taste (Tanner, [c. 1960]) aligns with the queered performative aesthetics of the Baroness, who embodied *The Little Review's* avant-garde battle cry of "Making No Compromise with the Public Taste." The transfer of these objects to Tanner occurred just four years before the Baroness's tragic death in 1927, imbuing them with an added layer of significance. As embodiments of self and phantom limbs passed on, these objects symbolize the uncertain survival of both the artifacts and the Baroness herself. They also symbolize their space of origin—New York. Despite enduring years of privacy, obscurity,

and being deemed illegitimate, the Baroness's found objects and assemblages gained public recognition in the late 1990s, propelled into the spotlight by exhibitions and the growing push for inclusiveness of women artists. Rooted in a queered and feminist aesthetic, they resonate with the countercurrents of their time and directly address marginalized viewers. They serve as illuminating windows into the marginalized vanguard artists of history, exposing the inequitable structures they rebelled against and urging viewers to confront contemporary injustices while drawing inspiration from the transgressive art of the past. Their resurgence is emblematic of the recuperation of the voices of Dada women more broadly.

Today, these found objects and assemblages solidify a queered genealogy within avant-garde history, forging a connection with subversive practitioners of the past who faced persecution and were forced into underground movements due to their LGBTQ+ identities. The rawness and distinct destabilizing aesthetics embodied by pieces such as *Enduring Ornament*, *Cathedral*, *Earring Object*, and *Limbswish* boldly assert their separation from normative institutional aesthetics, evoking the spirit of street art. Moreover, these works establish a significant relationality, functioning as self-referential portraits not only of the Baroness herself but also of key participants within the avant-garde movement.

## References

- Anderson, Margaret C. *My Thirty Years' War: The Autobiography, Beginnings and Battles to 1930* (New York: Covici, Friede Publishers, 1930).
- Antheil, George. Letter to Stanley Hart, May 15, 1923, unpublished typed letter, George Antheil Correspondence with Stanley Hart, George Antheil Collection, Library of Congress.
- Auslander, Philip. "The Performativity of Performance Documentation." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28 (3) (2006), 1–10.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996).
- Beachy, Robert. *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (New York: Vintage, 2015).
- Bell, Louise. "A Revolution in Treatment: The Thomas's Splint." The National Archives, December 1, 2016. <https://bit.ly/3CW1bML>.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935). In *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217–251.
- Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will*, trans. F.L. Plogson (London: George Allen, 1913).
- Biddle, George. *An American Artist's Story* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939).

- Bozhkova, Yasna. "Limbswish: Baroness Elsa's 'Ready to Wear' Poem-Objects." In *Modernist Objects*, eds. Noëlle Cuny and Xavier Kalck (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2020), 167–188.
- Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry* 28 (1) (2001), 1–22.
- Csük, Alyssa Eve. "Photo Gallery: Alyssa Eve Csük Finds Beauty in Decay." *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 15, 2017, <https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2017/06/rust/>.
- Dickerman, Leah. "Merz and Memory: On Kurt Schwitters." In *The Dada Seminars*, eds. Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art/DPA, 2005), 102–125.
- Evans, Suzanne. "Marks of Grief: Black Attire, Medals, and Service Flags." In *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the First World War*, eds. Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012), 219–243.
- Filipovic, Elena. *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).
- Freytag Loringhoven, Elsa von. "'Thee I Call Hamlet of Wedding Ring': Criticism of William Carlos Williams's 'Kora in Hell' and Why ..." *The Little Review* 7 (January–March 1921); reprinted in Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*, eds. Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 291–313.
- Freytag-Loringhoven, Elsa von. "——Circle." *Broom* (Berlin) 4 (2) (January 1923), 128; reprinted in Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*, eds. Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 246.
- Freytag-Loringhoven, Elsa von. Letter to Eleanor Fitzgerald, c. December 1923. Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven Papers, University of Maryland Libraries.
- Freytag-Loringhoven, Elsa von. *Baroness Elsa*, eds. Paul Hjartarson and Douglas Spetigue (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1992).
- Freytag-Loringhoven, Elsa von. [George Antheil], n.d. Reprinted in Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*, eds. Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 269.
- Gammel, Irene. *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity—A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
- Gammel, Irene. "'Aus den Angeln gehoben': Performances von Wahnsinn, Kunst und Geschlecht im Berlin der 1920er Jahre" [Unhinged I Swirl: Performances of Madness, Art, and Gender in Berlin during the 1920s]. In *Metropolenzauber: Sexuelle Moderne und Urbaner Wahn*, eds. Gabriele Dietze and Dorothea Dornhof (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 171–196.

- Gammel, Irene, and John Wrighton. "‘Arabesque Grotesque’: Toward a Theory of Dada Ecopoetics." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 20 (4) (Fall 2013), 795–816.
- Goldman, Emma. "Freedom of Criticism and Opinion." *Mother Earth Bulletin* 1 (1) (1917). <https://libcom.org/article/october-1917-vol-1-no-1>. Accessed October 17, 2022.
- Goodspeed-Chadwick, Julie. "Reconsidering the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Kay Boyle: Feminist Aesthetics and Modernism." *Feminist Formations* 28 (2) (2016), 51–72. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/ff.2016.0025.
- Goody, Alex. *Modernist Poetry, Gender and Leisure Technologies: Machine Amusements* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
- Greenberger, Alex. "The 100 Greatest New York City Artworks Ranked." *ARTnews*, August 29, 2023.
- Groom, Amelia, and M. Ty. "Enduring Ornament." In *Weathering: Ecologies of Exposure*, eds. Christoph F.E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer, *Cultural Inquiry* 17 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020), 121–141.
- Halwes, Shannon. *Man Ray: Objects 1916–1921: The Role of Aesthetics in the Art of Idea*, Doctoral Dissertation (Houston, TX: Rice University, 1990), <https://bit.ly/3QZ6kWK>.
- Harding, James M. *Cutting Performances: Collage Events, Feminist Artists, and the American Avant-Garde* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).
- Heap, Jane. "Dada." *The Little Review* 8 (2) (Spring, 1922), 46.
- Hemus, Ruth. *Dada's Women* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).
- Henderson, George L. "What Was 'Fight Club'? Theses on the Value Worlds of Trash Capitalism." *Cultural Geographies* 18 (2) (2011), 143–170.
- Hussey, Howard. "Oral History Interview with Howard Hussey [Interviewed by Matthew Affron], 2016 June 11–July 30." Smithsonian, Archives of American Art, Transcript, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-howard-hussey-17370>. Accessed September 1, 2022.
- Jones, Amelia. *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
- Jones, Amelia. "New York Dada: Beyond the Readymade." In *The Dada Seminars*, eds. Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art/DPA, 2005), 151–171.
- Kamenish, Paula K. *Mamas of Dada: Women of the European Avant-Garde* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2015).
- Katz, Jonathan D. "Queer Activist Fashion." In *A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk*, ed. Valerie Steele (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 218–232.
- Katz, Jonathan Ned. *Love Stories: Sex Between Men Before Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- Kelman, Mark. Zoom interview with the author, August 2022, 70 minutes.

- Knighon, Caroline. *Modernist Wastes: Recovery, Re-Use and the Autobiographic in Elsa von-Freytag-Loringhoven and Djuna Barnes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).
- Landsberg, Alison. *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
- Loftin, Craig M. "Unacceptable Mannerisms: Gender Anxieties, Homosexual Activism, and Swish in the United States, 1945–1965." *Journal of Social History* 40 (3) (2007), 577–596.
- Malzeke-McDonald, Karen. "5 Easy Clues for Dating Antique and Vintage Jewelry." *HobbyLark*, June 30, 2022, <https://hobbylark.com/collecting/antique-jewelry3>.
- Matthews David, Alison. "Body Doubles: The Origins of the Fashion Mannequin." *Fashion Studies* 1 (1) (2018), 1–46.
- Mida, Ingrid. *Dressing and Undressing Duchamp* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).
- Mileaf, Janine A. "Bachelorettes." In *Inventing Marcel Duchamp: The Dynamics of Portraiture*, eds. Anne Collins Goodyear and James W. McManus (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 46–49.
- Naumann, Francis M. "Notes from a Conversation with Theresa Bernstein in Her New York Studio Apartment." New York, 29 April 1989. <http://bitly.ws/IB82>.
- Naumann, Francis M. *New York Dada, 1915–1923* (New York: Abrams, 1994).
- Naumann, Francis M. *The Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*. Exhibition catalogue (New York: Francis M. Naumann Fine Art L.L.C., 2002).
- Naumann, Francis M. *The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost: Essays on the Art, Life and Legacy of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: readymade press, 2012).
- Naumann, Francis M., and Beth Venn. *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*. Exhibition catalogue (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art/Harry N. Abrams, 1996).
- Nichols, Harvey. *Day Dress with Tassels*, London, c. 1916. Photograph Helen Larson Historic Fashion Collection via the FIDM Museum Blog, January 18, 2016, <https://bit.ly/3PH6zUY>. Accessed September 2, 2022.
- Reiss, Robert. "My Baroness': Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven." In *New York Dada*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1986), 81–124.
- Saunders, Nicholas J. *Trench Art: Materialities and Memories of War* (London: Routledge, 2003).
- Sawelson-Gorse, Naomi. *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).
- Scanlan, John. *On Garbage* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).
- Simpson, Niki. "Botanical Symbols: A New Symbol Set for New Images." *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society* 162 (2) (February 2010), 117–129. <https://academic.oup.com/botlinnean/article/162/2/117/2418432>. Accessed September 3, 2022.
- Steele, Valerie. "A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk." In *A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk*, ed. Valerie Steele (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 7–75.



- Tanner, Allen C. "Life with Tchelitchew." [c. 1960], handwritten notes. Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College.
- Tanner, Allen C. "Notes on Gay Life in Chicago during the 1910s by Allen Tanner." [c. 1960], typed notes with handwritten annotations. Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College.
- Tanner, Allen C. "The Early Tchelitchew." 1963, typed notes, Archives and Special Collection, Dickinson College.
- Tanner, Allen C. Letter to Margaret Anderson, n.d. [c. 1950], handwritten letter, n.p., MC 2013.3, B1, F5, Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College.
- Tanner, Allen C. "Joyce Obscenity Trial." N.d., Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College.
- Taylor, Michael R. "New York." In *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 274–345.
- Tyler, Parker. *The Divine Comedy of Pavel Tchelitchew* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967).
- Waldman, Jonathan. *Rust: The Longest War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015).
- Westman, Annabel. *Fringe, Frog and Tassel: The Art of the Trimmings Maker in Interior Decoration in Britain and Ireland* (London: Bloomsbury/Philip Wilson, 2019).
- Zelazo, Suzanne. "'Altered Observation of Modern Eyes': Mina Loy's Collages, and Multisensual Aesthetics." *The Senses and Society* 4 (1) (2009), 47–73.