



[The Falconer](#), James W. Glass [Object 1966.0289]



[Painting on Charcuterie Window](#), Todd Webb [Object 1981.1864]

Artist: James W. Glass
Date: 1846
Medium: Oil
Classification: Painting
Gift of Mr. Jack Ostuw
Object: 1966.0289
Copyright: Public domain

Artist: Todd Webb
Date: 1951
Medium: Gelatin silver print
Classification: Photograph
Gift of Steven and Bernice Sohacki
Object: 1981.1864
Copyright: © Todd Webb Archive

Teaching guide by Jeanelle Cho '24 and Abigail Greenfield '25

James W. Glass's painting *The Falconer* (1846) and Todd Webb's photograph *Painting on Charcuterie Window* (1951) both align their depictions of hunting with European art historical tradition, but they do so in different cultural contexts, in different media, and with different ecological messages.

Context

James W. Glass's oil painting *The Falconer* (1846) depicts a man, dressed in bright red, on horseback; his falcon is perched on his right index finger. In the background, two other figures, one male and one female, ride their horses across an open field set against a rocky hill; at the top of the hill, overlooking the valley below, is a fortification. The scene is part of an European visual tradition in which hunting ennobles the subject by drawing comparisons with other forms of human (and usually male) "conquest." Hunting scenes also emphasize human connections to the natural world, which is often presented as a counterpoint to the corruption of human-built environments. Unlike other European hunting images from the eighteenth and nineteenth century that show birds actively engaged in the chase or dealing fatal blows to their prey, Glass depicts a moment of relative calm, with the falcon just having landed on his master's hand—or, perhaps, about to take off. The titular figure's dress indicates that this scene takes place in the past, likely in the Renaissance period. The use of a falcon for hunting corroborates this, as falconry was supplanted in later periods by hunting with firearms.

Falconry, a practice of keeping and training birds of prey to hunt, dates to the 3rd millennium BCE. Believed to have originated in Central Asia and the Iranian Plateau, falconry spread to east Asia and Europe through trade routes and is well documented in many regions of the world from the early medieval period. Falconry continues to be practiced worldwide today, and in 2021, it was listed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In Europe, the two main classifications of birds used in falconry are falcons (long winged hawks) and goshawks (short winged hawks), which are each used for hunting different types of prey. Falcons tend to be more skilled at killing prey in the air, mostly other smaller birds, as they strike their fatal blow by diving from above the prey, while goshawks hunt closer to the ground.



Context cont.

Before the mid to late twentieth century, all birds used in falconry were taken from the wild, either before they had left the nest, right after they had fledged, or sometimes as adult birds in migration. In recent years, however, falconers have developed captive breeding techniques, both for purebred hawks, and, in some cases, the creation of crossbreeds.

Due to falconry's reliance on the continued well-being of wild birds of prey, falconers have long been involved in conservation efforts. For example, in the medieval period, many European countries had laws designed to protect falcons, including those known as *falcation*, which protected nests of falcons and the trees they were built in by placing the responsibility for their wellbeing on local communities. According to the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey, one of the first ornithological treatises was published as a part of a falconry manuscript. More recently, in the late twentieth century, falconers were involved in the successful recovery of the Peregrine falcon from its status as endangered in North America. In the same period, however, American falconers faced opposition to the sport with the passage of the Migratory Bird Act, which initially did not include birds of prey, but was amended in 1972 to include raptors. This was mainly due to the concern, raised by falconers and others, over the threat posed by DDT to ospreys and bald eagles in particular.

In nineteenth-century Britain, where Glass spent much of his career, hunting and depictions of hunting were highly stratified by class, and used as symbols of one's status and gentlemanly character. British law strictly regulated all aspects of hunting, including falconry, along class lines. For falconers, social rank determined what type of bird a person could fly, so a yeoman, duke, and prince would all be easily identifiable in a painting by bird type. More broadly, hunting was so restricted as to make it an upper-class sport. In the late eighteenth century, deer were legally the private property of the owner of the estate on which

they were found, and stringent penalties were instituted for poaching them, even if the hunter in question was a tenant on that estate. Until 1831, Britain also had property qualifications for shooting rights, meaning that a person had to hold a certain amount of property in order to be allowed to shoot game legally, even if that game was on land the person owned.

These restrictions helped to build a mythology around hunting that emphasized its "manliness." Hunting, including falconry, was often justified by its supposed public benefits, such as inducing upper-class youth to leave the busy city for their country estates. Depictions of hunting in art, therefore, aligned both the subject and the owner of the work with this upper-class tradition. They also often alluded to the other major form of "conquest" a man was expected to undertake: sexual conquest. Images of pursuit and defeat often mirrored those depicting male sexual conquest, and it has been argued that this was an intentional form of allegory. This is especially true in depictions of stag hunting, as the stag was frequently used in European medieval and Renaissance allegories as a symbol of love (Tseng).

Context cont.

Todd Webb created *Painting on Charcuterie Window* while on assignment in Paris in 1951. The image captures a painting on the window of a charcuterie shop, a store which specializes in cured meats, cooked meats, and cheeses. The painting shows a group of men and dogs in active pursuit of a stag. The painting is a form of visual advertisement for the goods sold within, making reference to one process (hunting) whereby meat can be obtained. It also references the French visual tradition of depictions of the hunt. The hunters in the image are dressed in the kind of traditional hunting costumes used for more than two centuries by wealthy landowners, making the setting being depicted difficult to date, but the combination of the hunting costumes and the style of the painting lend the scene an air of pastness. In France, as in other European countries, deer hunting was long the exclusive purview of the aristocracy, and this restriction elevated the deer itself to noble status. By placing the exclusive, refined tradition of the stag hunt in conversation with the commercial sale of meat, the painting creates a noble mythology around the charcuterie shop while also speaking to the more modern French tradition of visual advertising, including the poster art of Paris.

The meats in this 1950s charcuterie shop, however, likely came primarily from commercial slaughterhouses, such that Webb's photograph of the painting creates ironic distance from it. Notably, Webb's photograph itself is a gelatin silver print, which also gives it a connection to slaughterhouses. The paper on which a gelatin silver print is developed is made photosensitive by coating it with silver nitrite suspended in gelatin. Bovine gelatin was typically used for this purpose, which is made by boiling waste parts of the cow left over from the process of commercial slaughter. Butchers and charcuterie shops in 1950s Paris would have sold bovine gelatin for use in home cooking, which means that there is a direct material connection between the medium used to capture this hunting scene painted on the side of a shop and the animal products that the shop sold.



Artist Backgrounds

James W. Glass

James W. Glass (c. 1825-1857) was an American painter and draftsman. At the age of 20, Glass studied under Daniel Huntington, a prominent American portrait painter, in New York. After two years of education, he went to London where he began his professional practice. Glass produced many works that demonstrate his interest in equestrian subjects and battle scenes. His career took off after exhibiting an artwork at the British Institution in London, where it was immediately sold. Glass soon became known for his horse paintings and historical images of war. He was noted as a leading painter of his time; the simplicity and effective storytelling of his work appealed to a large audience. Some of Glass's most renowned works, including *Royal Standard*, *Free Companions*, and *Puritan and Cavalier*, have been reproduced as engravings. Glass returned to New York in 1856, where he hoped to play an influential role in American art. Today, Glass's work can be found in a variety of museum and private collections.

Todd Webb

Todd Webb (1905-2000), born Charles Clayton Web III in Detroit, Michigan, was an American photographer. Webb started his early career as a stockbroker; however, when the Great Depression hit, Webb lost all his earnings, and he took up work as a forest ranger while also writing (unpublished) short stories. During this time, he began to take photos to accompany his writing, and he soon found a passion for photography. His interest in straight photography, documenting a scene or subject as it is, unmanipulated, grew after joining and studying with the Chrysler Camera Club in Detroit. Webb moved to New York after serving as a naval photographer in World War II. During the war, he befriended Walker Evans, Georgia O'Keefe, Gordon Parks, Beaumont Newhall (who would later curate Webb's first major exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York), as well as other artists. Webb spent his career as a photographer traveling across America and France documenting everyday life, cityscapes, and architecture.

Discussion Questions

- In Webb's work, how does the fact that we're seeing this painting mediated through photography affect your experience as a viewer? What is Webb trying to show or tell us by photographing the painted window?
- If the title of the work did not tell you that you were looking at the window of a meat shop, what would you imagine you were looking at? What other kinds of imagery used to advertise food and food production can you think of? How do such images (e.g., pastoral farmscapes on milk cartons, packages of rice, or cereal boxes) compare ideologically to the painting that Webb's photograph reframes? What elements of food systems do not tend to get depicted in food shops and on food packaging? Why?
- What are some of the complex ecological relationships depicted in these two artworks?
- What are some of the visual and conceptual parallels you can draw between these two images?
- As noted above, Glass's painting and the painting that Webb captures both depict historical scenes. Are these nostalgic images? If so, what are they nostalgic for, and are they nostalgic in the same way? Is Webb's photograph itself nostalgic? Why or why not?



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