

Temperance and Vice
TikTok's Resurgence of Classical Values
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The beginning of a new year prompts a passion for a healthier lifestyle. After a holiday season dedicated to relaxation and time with loved ones, new years celebrations act as a last hurrah. Reflecting on the past year's growth and struggles spurs a newfound energy for change.

This urge to rejuvenate ourselves is echoed by the 'Dry January' trend floating around social media. Mostly popular on TikTok and Instagram, the trend encourages people to stay sober (from alcohol specifically) for the month of January. Sobriety is known to improve both physical and mental health, and community-based accountability is useful in sticking out the whole month.

Drinking alcohol has been a part of popular culture for centuries, if not millennia. First reserved for intellectual men, it has grown increasingly accessible and acceptable. During the turn of the 20th century, outdoor leisure and casual drinking became more widespread amongst the middle and upper classes, for both men and women.

This change in attitude is reflected in Renoir's 1883 oil painting titled *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. In this piece, there is a wide variety of people with gazes pointed everywhere, bringing the sense of a calm chaos. Food and drinks are spread out on the table, glasses are empty, and faces are red. The quick brushstrokes and bright colors bring the essence of spring, freshness, and rebirth. This work exemplifies how drinking came to be associated with leisure. Alcohol is used to unwind, socialize, and revel in the day.

Alcohol is certainly still associated with these same purposes; a couple glasses of wine can easily turn a regular girls night into a party. At what point, though, has binge drinking behaviors seeped into popular culture?

We use alcohol to subdue our reflexes, instincts, and defense mechanisms, perhaps because there is a certain freedom to slow processing, allowing us to stop worrying about everything in our environment. In a safe space, this feeling is comforting, but unsafe conditions can sometimes sour the experience of being out of control.

Drinking keeps the mind and body unguarded. So at what point does this indulgence turn to vice? At what point does the feeling of lightness turn from self care into self harm? There is no one answer to these questions, though substance abuse counselors would certainly be able to give a comprehensive one.

Instead, I will turn to a contemporary painting: Aurélie Quentin's *Happy Hour*. This oil painting from 2023 depicts two women draped over a lounge, tropical plants and vibrant color throughout. Full and empty martini glasses are scattered, and both women wear sunglasses, blocking their eyeline. The women are relaxed and blasé; only the fullness and comfort of the moment matters, no worries about the spectator or the future.

In this way, there is a lack of temporality - it feels like a moment frozen in time. This is often the feeling achieved when drinking, where the only thing that matters is the current moment. When drinking and going out, there is a promise (or a hope, rather) of a night filled with fun and adventure with no worries about what tomorrow will bring.

Drinking alcohol allows you not to care about what everyone else is thinking, or how they are perceiving you. This is a freeing feeling, and one that these women seem to embody. There is an irreverence about them, that they are aware of being watched, but don't care.

This work is discussing the art of doing nothing, which is often correlated with laziness or boredom. Quentin is encouraging indulgence and doing things because you want to. She is concerned with our right to lightness, laziness, and lost time; our right to do what we wish.

The ability to balance alcohol consumption with mental and physical health is not easy. Most have felt the struggle of the learning curve we must go through when first discovering our limits.

Although vices do not define us, they can certainly change us. Whether you are just finding your limits, drinking in moderation, or participating in Dry January, thinking about your personal and individual relationship to alcohol is a worthwhile reflection to bring into the new year.