

Artmaking as Research: Rose Piper's *Blues and Negro Folk Songs*

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This paper engages with the work of Rose Piper, a Black woman artist best known for *Blues and Negro Folk Songs*, a single series of paintings completed in 1946-47. Piper had applied to the prestigious Rosenwald Fellowship in 1945 with a detailed project proposal outlining her desire to conduct research for the series. Using these application materials, along with the little-known works from the *Blues* series, this paper examines Piper's unique approach to artmaking as research—a process neither of documentation nor expression, but of wider inquiry, in which the artwork stands as one part of a larger ensemble of investigative media. I examine how Piper positioned her project in conversation to emerging disciplines like sociology or anthropology, as well as the conflicted position that she occupied while conducting “fieldwork” in her familial home in Georgia—the way she acted in an intermediate space between neutral observer and informed participant, artist and scientific researcher. And I ask in what way the series that resulted—which respond not to her family or specific surroundings in Georgia, but to the songs of female Southern blues singers—can be considered “research material.”

This paper, in short, engages with the generative potential of considering artmaking as research—the way it blurs disciplinary boundaries and opens up art historical analysis to the agency of many actors, including but also beyond that of the artist.

Claire Ittner is a PhD candidate in the History of Art at the University of California, Berkeley. She studies the art and visual culture of the Americas in the 20th century, with a particular focus on questions of race, travel and diaspora, and patronage. Her dissertation project, *Fellow Travelers: The Artist-Researchers of the Rosenwald Fellowship, 1940-1950*, examines the role of funded research travel in the work of Black artists at midcentury, focusing in particular on the Rosenwald fellowship program. She is currently the Chester Dale Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.