

Sadie Meade makes thrifting an artform

By Sean Eifert

For JOUR2311



Sadie Meade poses in the Maker Space at UpCycle Ohio thrift store.

Photo by Sean Eifert for JOUR2311

Thrift stores exist to alleviate members of a community's waste. When people have a need to free themselves from the clutter in their homes, they can always turn to a thrift store to manage that clutter. People bring in items that have since lost purpose. For Sadie Meade, manager at UpCycle Ohio thrift store, these objects hold endless possibilities.

Meade has been UpCycle's manager since 2020. Formerly ReUse Industries, UpCycle is owned by Rural Action, a company centered around sustainability in southeast Ohio. At the start of the pandemic, UpCycle was opened in place of ReUse Industries in the same location.

Meade started out as a volunteer at ReUse Industries, also working at West End Cider House to make ends meet. When Rural Action reopened ReUse Industries under a new name, Paul Patton, the chief innovation officer at Rural Action, offered Meade a job managing UpCycle full time. Meade has been with UpCycle ever since.

Meade attributes her passion for managing the thrift store to her childhood. "I grew up in a hoarding household, which is poignant when you think about what I do now, manage the excess and chaos of people's homes," Meade said. "It can be something that's triggering and also really cathartic, because I don't have personal attachment to other people's things, so I get to work through that every day at work."

Meade's childhood allowed her to shape how she thinks about "things." "I love being outside, but I also love things," Meade said. "Rewriting my relationship to things and thinking about sustainability as living within my means in a way that's not a sacrifice, but as an art practice."



UpCycle Ohio thrift store in Athens, OH, the thrift store Sadie Meade manages.

Photo by Sean Eifert for JOUR2311

“There’s an old-timey saying my mom used to say ... it’s basically, ‘If you can’t meet your needs, you have to get creative about it, or you don’t get that thing,’” Meade said. “That’s an attitude that I grew up with, so now it’s about non-judgmentally taking stock of what my needs are and being creative about how those needs get met.”

Meade received a master’s degree in printmaking from Ohio University. “Early on I knew I wasn’t going to get discovered. In that transitional moment I was like, ‘I don’t know what I’m doing’.”

Her passion for art was refounded through her work in thrifting. “Thrifting in Athens is a big part of my connection to this town. I think you can tell a lot about a place based on what’s in its thrift stores,” Meade said. “I’m interested in that, as a printmaker, as an artist, as a person, about what’s going on in my community.



The “Paradoxes and Realities” exhibit that Sadie Meade curated in partnership with Ohio University Art Galleries.
Photo by Ohio University Art Galleries

Meade recently partnered with Ohio University Art Galleries to curate “Paradoxes and Realities,” an art show centered around thrifted objects. “(The art gallery) felt like a really beautiful connection between my art career and my thrifting career in the idea that all objects have value, they just need to have the proper context for that thing,” Meade said. “It’s fun to play around with objects in different contexts and consider them in other ways than in their functional positions.”

The art show takes thrifted materials and puts them in a grander space. “I was like, ‘Let’s take something that has canonically been people who don’t have the resources to buy new and celebrate it, frame it as something that’s sophisticated and thoughtful,’” Meade

said.

For Meade, curating the art show has a large connection to thrifting. “The idea of curation is about editing, and the idea of living is also about editing,” Meade said. “Making a home and making decisions about what you want to take home with you is about editing.” Meade said, “Your life practice is an artistic practice and your decisions that you make, you can consider that way. The things that surround me in my home, I have curated. The things that surround me in that gallery, also curated.”

“Paradoxes and Realities” is about the plasticity of a material world through utilizing thrifted materials to describe philosophical thought. Meade said, “A t-shirt can also just be fabric. I can wear it, or it can just be in a pile. It can exist or I can burn it. That plasticity is really interesting to me, because I work in an abundance of materials all the time.”

“There’s art all around us, whether or not we consider it that way. The things that we accompany in our home, if we treat them with love and respect, and see those things as art, then they are, simply because we chose them to be. That’s the show for me,” Meade said.