His 350R (39395): "Arts/Artifacts in the Americas"
Fall 2011, TTH 2-3:30, GAR 1.122
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Office Hours TH 3:45-4:45 in GAR 2.146
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Material culture is a term borrowed by a vast number of academic disciplines from the study of archaeology, anthropology and folklore. It refers to all categories of historical artifacts—things that range in status from artistic masterpieces to the lowly stool, from architectural monuments to hedgerows, from religious rituals to factories and industrial products. All this and much more are now studied avidly by a growing number of historians in the hope of revealing overlooked evidence of past lives that both compliment and reach beyond the historian's traditional "comfort zone" with the written text.

This course will survey the changing material culture of the western hemisphere from pre-Columbian times to the beginning of the industrial revolution, with occasional forays into later periods where appropriate. We will view artifacts from an Atlantic perspective on all levels of society while sampling a cross-section of written work from a number of disciplines and geographies in the Americas. We will keep a keen eye on our central problem of telling the connected stories of artisans, consumers and their societies within specific historical contexts that are simultaneously local, regional and global. We will also think about the history of beauty.

Requirements: We will meet for discussions twice each week. Enthusiastic participation in discussion counts for a high percentage of your final grade (30%), therefore unexcused absences will prove most detrimental in this course. Readings will not usually exceed three essays or chapters from the books below per session. This is a writing course so requirements include a weekly 2 pp paper from all students due every Thursday on what you perceive to be the main problems and questions posed by all the readings discussed that week (50%). There will be final papers and class presentations on an artifact of each student's choice (20%). Please be aware that the assignment of grades has always been up to the discretion of the instructor. Students with disabilities may request academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259. This course carries the Writing Flag. Please take a moment to review the flag criteria, available at http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/teaching/flags.

Required Readings (UT Coop; the usual online sources, and/or on reserve at PCL):

Arjun Appadurai, ed., The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective
Samuel Y. Edgerton, Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artisans in Colonial Mexico

Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman, ed., American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture
Robert Blair St. George, ed., Material Life in America, 1600-1860 (out of print but readily available used on amazon.com and reserve)
Sherry Turkle, Evocative Objects: Things We Think With (also available as an *Electronic Resource* via the UT Library Catalog)

Week one: "Evocative Objects" and Personal Histories

Organizational day
Discussion: Turkle, Evocative Objects, 3-61, 78-91, 101-17, 153-61, 184-92, and 217-43.
Paper due

Week two: Evocative objects in our lives

Oral presentations of students' personal histories
Oral presentations of students' personal histories
Paper due

Week three: Material Culture, Brief Introduction to Theory and Practice

Discussion: Foreward and Introduction, and JD Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture, History or Fiction?" in Prown and Haltman, American Artifacts, ix-27, Rhys Isaac, "Ethnographic Method in History: An Action Approach," in St. George, Material Life in America, 39-61.
Discussion: Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in The Social Life of Things, 3-63; Henry Glassie, "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifact's Place in American Studies," in Material Life in America, 63-92.
Paper due

Week four: Mesoamerican Artisans and "mixed" cultures

Discussion: Theaters of Conversion, Introduction, chapters 1-4
Discussion: Theaters of Conversion, chapters 7, 8, 9, 11.
Paper due

Week five: European Contexts and Colonial Beginnings in early North America

Discussion: Alfred Gell, "Newcomers to the World of Goods: Consumption Among the Muria Gonds," and Patrick Geary, "Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics," in The Social Life of Things, 110-40, 169-94
Discussion: James H. Merrell, "The Indians' New World: The Catawba Experience," in Material Life in America, 95-112.
Paper due

Week six: Race and Slavery

Discussion: Philip D. Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700-1880," and Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in Material Life in America, 203-32, 357-70.
Discussion: Melvin Wade, "'Shining in Borrowed Plumage': Affirmation of Community in the Black Coronation Festivals of New England, ca. 1750-1850," in Material Life in America, 171-82; Daisann McLane, "Unwrapping the bwat sekre: The Secrets of a Haitian Money Box," in American Artifacts, 109-28.
Paper due

Week seven: Women and Gender

Discussion: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Furniture as Social History: Gender, Property, and Memory in the Decorative Arts," in Luke Beckerdite and William N. Hosley, ed., American Furniture 1995 (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1995): 39-67 (reserve), Marylynn Salmon, "Women and Property in South Carolina: The Evidence from Marriage Settlements, 1730-1830," in Material Life in America, 291-309.
Discussion: Robyn Asleson, "Seduced by an Old Flame: Paradox and Illusion in a Late-Twentieth-Century Lucite Lighter," Leslie Shannon Miller, "The Many Figures of Eve: Styles of Womanhood Embodied in a Late-Nineteenth-Century Corset," and Joel Pfister, "A garden in the Machine: Reading a Mid-Nineteenth-Century, Two-Cylinder Parlor Stove as Cultural Text," in American Artifacts, 29-46, 129-66.
Paper due

Week eight: Space and Landscape

Discussion: A.G. Roeber, "Authority, Law, and Custom: The Rituals of Court Day in Tidewater Virginia, 1720-50," Rodris Roth, Tea-Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," in Material Life in America, 419-62.
Discussion: Betsy Blackmar, "Rewalking the 'Walking City': Housing and Property Relations in New York City, 1780-1840," in Material Life in America, 371-84, "*In Vino Vanitas?* Death and the Cellarette in Empire New York," in American Artifacts, 47-70
Paper due

Week nine: Cloth

Discussion: Brian Spooner, "Weavers and Dealers: The Authenticity of An Oriental Carpet," in The Social Life of Things, 195-235.
Discussion: William M. Reddy, "The Structure of a Cultural Crisis: Thinking about Cloth in France Before and After the Revolution," in The Social Life of Things, 195-236.

Week ten: Clay

Discussion: Neil Kamil, Fortress of the Soul (on reserve), "A Risky Gift: The Entrance of Charles IX into La Rochelle in 1565," 15-51
Discussion: Neil Kamil, Fortress of the Soul (on reserve), "The Art of the Earth," 316-88
Paper due

Week eleven: Wood

Discussion: Kevin M. Sweeney, "Furniture and the Domestic Environment in Wethersfield, Connecticut, 1639-1800," Robert Blair St. George, "Artifacts of Regional Consciousness in the Connecticut River Valley, 1700-1780," in Material Life in America, 261-90, 335-56
Discussion: Cary Carson, et al, "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies," in Material Life in America, 113-58, Paper due

Week twelve: Stone

Discussion: John L. Brooke, "'For Honour and Civil Worship to Any Worthy Person': Burial, Baptism, and Community on the Massachusetts Near Frontier, 1730-1790," in Material Life in America, 463-86.
Paper due
Discussion: No discussion

Week 13 to last class day

Presentation of students' final projects
Final papers due last class day