Pennsylvania State University--Harrisburg
American Studies 570
American Decorative Arts and Material Culture
Spring 2014
Prof. Anne Verplanck

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Office: Olmsted W 356 (R)  Classroom: Olmsted  E309,  M 6-8:45
Office hours: M/W 4:20-5:40; also by appointment

Description: This seminar will examine American decorative arts in their historical context, focusing primarily on the period from 1750 to 1960, with an emphasis on the earlier period. We will look at the production and consumption of decorative arts in cities, non-urban environments, vernacular traditions, and varied materials. Historic interiors will be addressed. The historiography of the field, as well as theories and methods of research and analysis (particularly material culture), will be covered. Regretfully, we cannot explore every subject and media in depth. Note that this is a seminar, which primarily depends on guided (me) discussion (you). There will be some lecture-like components, but students’ active, informed participation is at the core of this seminar.

Required texts
Briann Greenfield, *Out of the Attic*
Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort*

Grade:
Precis/presentations: 20%
Class participation: 30%
Final project: 50% (5% proposal, 10% presentation, 35% paper)

Reading:
There are several required books for this course, and all are available, new or used, at the bookstore. Many of these books should be readily available through on line vendors as well.

Each week we will all read a book and/or articles related to American decorative arts. For Feb. 7, you will each choose a work to read; you will post your précis by noon on Feb. 6 to the Angel dropbox (under Lessons); and you will present and discuss the work in class.

On Feb. 10 (précis needed) and March 3 (mini-precis) and March 31 (mini-precis), you will each choose a different book or article to review, comment upon, and use as the basis for contributions to class discussion. On the Feb. 10th, please bring the book to class so we can have a less formal discussion while looking at the books.

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During the first class you will choose the books for individual reading (this will allow you to obtain books through ILL or other sources); we can amend choices schedule if necessary. These books can be obtained through the PSU libraries—it normally takes several days for them to be delivered from within the PSU system, and will take slightly longer if they are not available within PSU. You do not need to buy these. If you have trouble obtaining a book, please let me know and I will work with you to find a solution. Please do not choose a book you have read or are about to read for another class.

One can get access to the required *articles* through our class Angel site (under Resources tab); through the library website (e-reserves), and, often, directly through databases such as JSTOR.

I will send notices to the class via Angel. Please note that if you connect your Angel mail to your PSU email, as well as your PSU email to your preferred email, you do not need to check (or neglect to check) multiple sites for messages. *Read your email every day.*

For those who are new to PSU, please familiarize yourself with the outstanding library/internet resources here by checking out the library webpage and/or contacting Heidi Abbey, our liaison in the library.

**Final project:**
The final project is an approximately 12-15-page (double-spaced) paper; see below.

A. Statement of final project and preliminary bibliography due **February 24** in class.

B. Optional deadline: draft of final paper, **April 14**, in class.

C. Final paper: due **May 6, 9 a.m.** (hard copy)


**Week #1**

**January 13:** Introduction; the Colonial Revival and the Historiography of American Decorative Arts

**Reading:** Greenfield, *Out of the Attic*

- Choose readings for Feb. 10

Decorative arts/antiques(objects/material culture/stuff has a range of meanings and uses that often vary with time and place. Who are some of the key figures and what value(s) do decorative arts represent for them? How does Greenfield’s work situate decorative arts in American culture? Is there something uniquely American going on at the turn of the twentieth century?

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January 20: NO CLASS: MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY
*Begin reading for Jan. 27

Jan. 27: Approaches to Objects; Early American Furniture

  • Choose readings for Mar. 3

Readings:


Please note that articles by Fleming and Montgomery are also on reserve, though not required reading. I will make reference to them in class.

Feb. 3: Fabric/Cloth/Textiles/Clothing

Reading:


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What are some of the lenses that have been used to study and analyze textiles, their makers, and their users? Do the methods and modes of analysis differ from those in other studies? Is survival of materials an issue? What directions in textile studies can productively be followed?

Feb. 10: Consumerism, Theory, and Other Things to Know and/or Use

Prepare a 4-5 page précis (see guidelines below) on one of the following; post it to Angel dropbox by noon on Friday, Feb. 7; be prepared to spend about 10 minutes in class discussing the work.

18th c
Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*
Ellen Hartigan-O’Connor, *The Ties that Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America*
Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America*

18th c/early 19thc
Ann Smart Martin, *Makers, Buyers, and Users*

19th c

19th/20th c
Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers*

20th c
Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Color Revolution*

Theory related to behavior/behavior
Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*

Week #6

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Feb. 17: Inventory Madness and Historic Interiors

M. Michelle Morris, “‘A bed and curtains and all things thereto belonging’: context, value, and scarcity in eighteenth-century Massachusetts,” in Peter Benes, ed., Textiles in New England II: Four Centuries of Material Life.


What are some of the approaches to studying interiors? How are (or aren’t) they connected to social history, art history, object-centered research, and archival-centered research? Many use period images—how do we test the reliability or accuracy of visual and documentary evidence?

Week #7

Feb. 24:

African-American Material Culture

All read:

AND choose at least 1 of these 3:


What are some of the lenses that have been used to analyze African-American material culture? What are the questions that scholars ask of African-American makers and users of decorative arts? Do the methods and modes of analysis differ from those in other studies? Is any of this literature inflected by the work of (Jules) Prown, Fleming, Montgomery, or Martin?

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**Paper Proposal due:** be prepared to provide your classmates with a 5-minute summary of your project.

**Week #8**

**Mar. 3: Furniture 1750-1850**

**Reading** for all: Krill, *EADA*, 89-126 AND

Choose **one** to discuss in class (mini précis) (*asterisks denote some of the more recent and/or significant works that I hope some people will choose*)

* Cooper and Minardi, *Paint, Pattern, and People: Southeastern Pennsylvania Furniture*
* Peter Kenny, *Honore Lannuier*
* Ronald L. Hurst and Jonathan Prown, *Southern Furniture, 1680–1830*
* Patricia Phillips Marshall and Jo Ramsay Leimenstoll, *Thomas Day: Master Craftsman and Free Man of Color*
* Jennifer Anderson, *Mahogany*

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-American Furniture—4 essays of your choice, including [http://www.chipstone.org/framesetAFintro.html](http://www.chipstone.org/framesetAFintro.html) (note, 2005 and before are available online; more recent issues can be borrowed through the PSU system).
- Gerald Ward, ed., *Perspectives on American Furniture*
- Brock Jobe, *Portsmouth Furniture*
- Brock Jobe, *New England Furniture*
- Brock Jobe, *Harbor and Home*
- David Barquist, *American Tables and Looking Glasses*
- Morrison Hecksher, *John Townsend, Newport Cabinetmaker*
- Peter Kenny, *Duncan Phyfe*
- Benno Forman, *American Seating Furniture*
- Nancy Goyne Evans, *American Windsor Chairs* (any volume)

**Or** focus on discussions about furniture in:

* Jonathan Fairbanks et al, *New England Begins*
* Edward S. Cooke Jr., *The Great River*
* Jack Lindsey, *Worldly Goods*
* Hecksher and Bowman, *American Rococo*

Prepare a mini-precis: a 1-page summary of the work that summarizes the key points and offers a brief analysis that answers relevant questions below. Post to Angel by 9 a.m. on March 3. (The main point of this is to provide your classmates with a summary.)

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Who is the author? Who the audience for the book/journal? What does it contribute to the study of furniture specifically and to decorative arts, material culture, and cultural history more broadly? Does your work sustain an argument? If so, is it successful? What are the important themes in the construction of furniture? What kind of furniture did people own? How did furniture makers succeed?

March 10: SPRING BREAK

Week #9

March 17: Antebellum Material Culture

Reading:

Margaret Mulrooney, “All the Goods and Chattels,” Black Powder White Lace, 141-161; 249-258.


Compare these essays to your earlier reading. Do production methods change over time? Consumption patterns? Materials? Aesthetics? Do these change over space as well, or could you argue that taste, production, consumption, and/or technology are becoming more national. How does transportation affect these changes? Immigration? Jaffee and Mulrooney identify themselves as historians—how do their perspectives differ from Kenny’s?

Week #10

March 24: Furniture and REQUIRED field trip

Meet at the shop of Kelly Kinzle, New Oxford, PA. Class will run from 6:30-8:30. We will discuss carpools in the previous class, but you are responsible for making alternative arrangements should your plans change.

Reading:


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March 31: Ceramics

Reading:

• Optional background reading, Krill, 127-143.
• Choose 1 of the following:

An article in *Historical Archeology* or *Winterthur Portfolio* on Ceramics.

• AND Choose 1 of the following:

An article in *Ceramics in America* (2006 and before are available on line at Chipstone.org)

Be prepared to discuss in class, based on your readings in *Historical Archeology* or *Winterthur Portfolio* AND *Ceramics in America*: What is the state of the scholarship? Do archeologists, collectors, and museum- and university-based scholars ask different questions, and what are they? Think about how the authors read the same forms of evidence. Compare and contrast their views on ceramics. How do they approach their subjects differently? What kinds of questions does each ask of the artifact? Which is more convincing and/or interesting to you and why?

Prepare a mini-precis of each: a 1-page summary of each article that summarizes the key points and offers a brief analysis that answers relevant questions above. Post to Angel by 9 a.m. on March 31. (The main point of this is to provide your classmates with summaries.)

April 7: Decorative Arts 1850-1900

All read:

Video: “Grand Rapids Made”

**REQUIRED** Field trip: Dauphin County Historical Society (curator, Steve Bachmann). Meet at DCHS, Harrisburg. We will discuss carpools in the previous class.

April 14: The Turn of the Twentieth Century

Wendy Kaplan, *“The Art that is Life”: The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920*, pp. 52-60 (Kaplan/Clark), 208-221 (Boris).


Optional paper draft due

Week #15

April 21: An All Too Quick Look at the Rest of the Twentieth Century

Reading:


Week #16

April 28:

Student Reports: 10-15-minute, illustrated oral reports

Final Project due: Tues., May 6 at noon

Class Participation: You are expected to attend all classes and active and informed participation in discussions are central elements of the course. Our meetings will consist almost entirely of discussion of the assigned readings, so it is essential that you do the reading and come prepared to discuss it. Discussion serves as a way of exploring and thinking about historical works and questions that gives us a more complete and complex understanding than any single point of view can provide. Classes are more intellectually rewarding for everyone when as many people as possible contribute. Participating in scholarly discussions of this type is a skill in and of itself,

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and working on this skill is part of the purpose of the course. Your ability to participate meaningfully in this class will play a large role in determining the participation part of your final grade. Thus, regular, positive contributions to discussion are a baseline expectation for the class; your participation and presentations will be graded on content as well as relevance, organization, and delivery.

Information for oral and written reports and some questions to consider when reading:

- What is the book’s/article’s overall argument and historiographical orientation?
- Who is the author and how do his/her preparation, agenda, job, and/or mindset influence the work?
- What more specific arguments and evidence make up this larger whole?
- How do these points relate to other works we have read and to the field as a whole?
- In what way do they build on precedents and ideas in other works?
- In what ways do they challenge or reject other interpretations or approaches?
- Is the argument persuasive and/or interesting?
- Is it particularly creative, important, or insightful, and in what ways?
- What sorts of evidence and primary source material does the author use?
- Are these sources new or underutilized? If not, does the author use old material in new ways?
- Does the evidence support the argument?
- How does the author account for the inherent biases and limitations of the evidence?
- Does the author ignore or minimize important issues that might undermine or change the argument?

I encourage everyone to read reviews of the books, when available. Journals that tend to review decorative arts and material culture books include Winterthur Portfolio, West 86th (Bard’s decorative arts journal), MESDA Journal, Ceramics in America, and American Furniture; not all of these will appear in JSTOR and Project MUSE.

For the Feb. 10 precis:
Prepare a 4-5 page double-spaced paper. Please post a copy on the class Angel site on the Friday before, and provide me with a hard copy at the beginning of class. These papers will provide you and your classmates with summaries and interpretations that will be particularly useful during preparation for comprehensive and other exams. Please do not choose books that you have read or are about to read for another class.

See bullet points above. Summarize the main points, critique the work (your paper should analyze rather than simply describe the work), and comment on methodology and theoretical perspectives of the authors.

The paper should have one paragraph summarizing the book’s argument and project as succinctly as possible without sacrificing accuracy and important nuances, and another

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paragraph on your critical response to this argument/project and its execution in the book (in this case “critical” does not necessarily mean negative, but rather engaged and analytical). Your response should focus on substantive intellectual and interpretive issues rather than matters that are primarily aesthetic or formal (e.g., there were too many big words, it was boring, you felt maps would have been useful, or you would have preferred footnotes to endnotes). Note the author’s argument and how he or she substantiates it. Is the argument effective? What biases does he or she bring to it? What is omitted that perhaps should not be? Centrally, how does this work relate to the other assigned reading for the week?

Reading reviews is expected. That said, I want your analysis, not a listing of others’ responses to the work.

Research paper proposal
Students will submit a two- to three-page research proposal by Feb. 24. This prospectus should include (1) the question that you hope to ask, (2) a description of the primary sources you plan to use, (3) a list of at least five secondary sources related to your project, at least four of which need to be ones that are not part of the class reading, and (4) the significance of your proposed topic. Please be sure to explain what your research contributes to the field. If you significantly change or revise your project (or are asked to), I need to see the information listed above ASAP (and definitely by March 17).

Research paper
Each student will write an original research paper about 12-15 pages in length on a topic of the student’s choice. Whenever possible, I encourage you to consider using this paper as part of your thesis or dissertation research. In considering your research project, you might think about a grouping of material culture or one single artifact and the questions or issues that these objects help you explore. Or you might come up with a question that you think you could answer using some type of material culture. Your topic must be different from one we have discussed in class. Remember that the field of material culture is very inclusive and you are encouraged to be as creative as you can in framing your project. Students are encouraged to submit an abstract of this paper to an actual conference.

The research paper must be based on primary research. This research could include the artifacts themselves, it could involve documents (i.e. wills or probate inventories, tax records, census data, account books, popular magazines, Sears Catalogs, or other relevant types of records that tell us about material culture of the past), or both. You may utilize oral histories as a source for interpreting and analyzing the material culture in question.

Although you will place your objects in a social, economic, religious, ethnic, and/or racial context, material culture must be at the core of your project. If you use artifacts in your analysis, please include photographs or other types of illustrations to illustrate what you are studying. If you use written documents, you might consider ways in which you could organize your data for the reader or perhaps relate what you are finding in the written records to the artifacts.

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The paper must also incorporate **secondary sources** to place your research into a broader context of material culture and history scholarship, both in methodology and in the topic under discussion. Students should consult at least eight secondary sources. You may utilize up to three secondary sources from the readings, but you must also locate five additional secondary sources relating to your topic. Always consider what contribution your work makes to the field and be sure to highlight that contribution in the introduction and conclusion of your paper.

Please note that the paper that you turn in must be written specifically for this class. You may not “double-dip” by writing a paper for this class that you also plan to use for another class this semester, or have prepared in the past.

*Models:*
