

ANTH 299: MATERIAL CULTURE

Winter Semester 2021

Tues. 11:15-12:30pm | Fri. 12:45-2:00pm

Dr. Meghann E. Jack

mejack@stfx.ca | 902-867-2112

Office Location: JBB-335G

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30pm-4:30pm | Thursdays 11:30am-1:00pm | Fridays 2:30pm-3:30pm or by appointment (virtual meetings via Teams are encouraged)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an introduction to the transdisciplinary study of material culture, which encompasses the world of objects and the ways in which they can offer evidence to further our understanding of culture in both living and historical contexts. Studies of material culture focus on the relationship between people and things, and how objects are designed, made, used, and exchanged, and what they mean to those who make, buy, and use them. Drawing on the work of anthropologists, folklorists, ethnohistorians, cultural geographers, and archaeologists, the course will present terms, concepts, issues, and questions that are central to a cultural understanding of objects, including making and design, gift and commodity exchange, consumption and the profusion of things, collection and display. Coursework focuses on the development of critical reading and thinking skills, visual literacy, and the methodological processes of observing, interpreting, and writing about culture. Three credits.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

There are no required texts for this course. All course reading material is accessible from our Moodle site or from the StFX Library.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

You will need access to a **camera that takes quality images**.

EVALUATION:

Project	Percentage	Due date
Class Engagement	10%	Ongoing
Mid-Term Exam	15%	Feb. 19
Research paper (multiple parts)	45 %	See below
Collecting for the Museum	10 %	Apr. 6 & 9
Final Exam (take home)	20%	TBD

CLASS SCHEDULE & READINGS

After an introduction to the key theories, methods, concepts, and approaches in the study of objects, we will survey a variety of material culture topics that fall, broadly speaking, under the five main thematic arenas in which material culture scholars have largely concentrated their analyses: landscape; architecture and the home; art; consumption; and museums & heritage.

WEEK 1

Course Introduction & Syllabus Review

Jan. 15

Classes meets online via Collaborate

Glassie, Henry. 1999. Material Culture. In *Material Culture*, 41-86. Indiana University Press.

WEEK 2

Introducing Material Culture: Theories | Methods | Approaches

Jan. 19 &
Jan. 22

Classes meet online via Collaborate

Readings:

Prown, Jules David. 1982. Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method. *Winterthur Portfolio* 17 (1): 1-19.

Peers, Laura. 1999. 'Many Tender Ties': The Shifting Contexts and Meanings of the S BLACK Bag. *World Archaeology* 31 (2): 288-302. [This is a good illustration of the idea of “object biographies” and the “social lives” of things]

Recommended:

Fleming, E. McLung. 1974. Artifact Study: A Proposed Model. *Winterthur Portfolio* 9: 153-73.

Hicks, Dan. 2010. The Material-Cultural Turn: Event and Effect. In *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, 25-98. Oxford University Press.

WEEK 3

Style & Design

Jan. 26 &
Jan. 29

Classes resume on-campus

Readings:

Prown, Jules David. 1980. Style as Evidence. *Winterthur Portfolio* 15 (3): 197-210.

Hubka, Thomas C. 1979. Just Folks Designing: Vernacular Designers and the Generation of Form. *Journal of Architectural Education* 32, no. 3 (February): 27-29.

Pocius, Gerald L. 1984. Style in Newfoundland Traditional Crafts. *Newfoundland Quarterly* 80 (1): 3-8.

WEEK 4

Landscape

Feb. 2

Landscapes as Artifacts: The Old World and the New

Readings:

Hart, John Fraser. 1975. "Land Division in Britain." In *The Look of the Land*. New York: Prentice Hall, pp. 25-44.

Feb. 5

Landscape and Politics: Contested Landscapes, Contested Monuments — Medieval to Present Day

Readings:

Nelson, Louis. 2018. Object Lesson: Monuments and Memory in Charlottesville. *Buildings and Landscapes* 25: 17-35.

Upton, Dell. 2020. Monuments and Crimes. *Journal 18*.

<https://www.journal18.org/nq/monuments-and-crimes-by-dell-upton/>

Museum Anthropology Special Issue: Mobilizing Museum Anthropology. Focus on heritage, monuments, education, and racism 41 (2): selected pages TBD.

WEEK 5

Vernacular Architecture

Feb. 9 &
Feb. 12

Open and Closed Houses: The Evolution of Anglo-American Vernacular Domestic Architecture

Readings:

Johnson, Matthew. 2010. Chp. 8. The Georgian Order. In *English Houses, 1300-1800: Vernacular Architecture, Social Life*, 160-186.

Recommended:

Carter, Thomas and Elizabeth Collins Cromley. 2005. Chp. 1: Definitions. In *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes*, 1-18.

WEEK 6

Feb. 16

No class – StFX study day

Feb. 19

MID-TERM EXAM

WEEK 7

Home Cultures: Domestic Spaces and Objects

Feb. 23

Culture & Comfort: Interior Making

Readings:

MacKinnon, Richard. 1998. Making a House a Home: Company Housing in Cape Breton Island. *Material History Review* 47: 46-56.

Feb. 26

Furniture as Gossip

Guest lecture by Dr. Gerald L. Pocius

Class will be either in-person or virtual via Collaborate

WEEK 8

Material Life on the Family Farm: Home Spaces, Work Spaces

Mar. 2

Domestic Architecture and the Farm Family: Reproducing Kinship

Mar. 5

Barns

Readings:

St. George, Robert Blair. 1982. The Stanley-Lake Barn in Topsfield Massachusetts: Some Comments on Agricultural Buildings in Early New England. *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, vol. 1, 7-23.

WEEK 9

Art & Making

Mar. 9

Film Viewing & Discussion: *Good Work* (2018)

Mar. 12

African American Art: Gee's Bend Quilts

Readings:

TBA

WEEK 10

Collecting Cultures: Collectors, Museums, and the Profusion of Things

Mar. 16 &
Mar. 19

Readings:

Macdonald, Sharon. 2015. On 'Old Things': The Fetishization of Past Everyday Life. In *British Subjects: An Anthropology of Britain*, ed. Nigel Rapport, 89-106.

Morgan, Jennie and Sharon Macdonald. 2019. What not to Collect? Post-connoisseurial Dystopia and the Profusion of Things. In *Curatopia: Museums and the Future of Curatorship*, ed. Phillip Schorch and Conal McCarthy.

Recommended:

Cashman, Ray. 2006. Critical Nostalgia and Material Culture in Northern Ireland. *Journal of American Folklore* 119 (427): 137-160.

Philips, Ruth B. 1998. Representation in the Miniature: Effigy, Toy, Model, Souvenir. In *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900*, 72-102.

WEEK 11

Consumption & Consumers: Identities in Goods

Mar. 23 &
Mar. 26

Readings:

Miller, Daniel, and Sophie Woodward. 2010. Chp. 5, Ordinary & Chp. 6, The Struggle for Ordinary. In *Blue Jeans: The Art of the Ordinary*, 84-103; 102-120. University of California Press.

Clarke, Alison. 2007. Consuming Children and Making Mothers: Birthday Parties, Gifts, and the Pursuit of Sameness. *Horizontes Antropológicos* 13 (28): 263-287.

Recommended:

Woodward, Ian. 2007. Material Culture and Identity: Objects and the Self. In *Understanding Material Culture*, 133-150.

WEEK 12

The Material Culture of Death: The Art of Cemeteries and Gravestones

Mar. 30
Apr. 2

No Class – Good Friday

Readings:

Dethlefsen, Edwin and James Deetz. 1966. Death's Heads, Cherubs, and Willow Trees: Experimental Archaeology in Colonial Cemeteries. *American Antiquity* 31: 502-510.

Thomas, Jeannie Banks. 2003. Cemetery Statues. In *Naked Barbies, Warrior Joes, and Other Forms of Visible Gender*, 15-55. University of Illinois Press.

WEEK 13

In-Class Group Presentations

Apr. 6 &
Apr. 9

Sign-up sheet will be distributed

ASSIGNMENTS & EXAMS

Class Engagement

10%

I expect you to attend class regularly, keep up with assigned readings, take notes, and generally be engaged and ready to contribute to class activities and discussions. There will be a few small, in-class activities throughout the semester that will also form part of your overall engagement grade. I will notify you closer to their scheduled date on how to prepare for these.

Mid-Term Exam

15%

The midterm exam will draw on material covered up to the class before the date of the exam including both in-class material (lectures, activities, discussions, and audio/visuals) and assigned readings. The goal will be to test your knowledge and application of key concepts in the course to date. The format will consist of short essay questions. I will expect you to reflect a solid understanding of the course material covered, and I am looking for your ability to comprehend, synthesize, and apply the material. **This will be invigilated if we are in-person, or time-limited or take home style if we are online.**

Final Exam

20%

The final exam will draw on material covered from the midterm up to and including the final week of classes from both in-class material (lectures and guest lectures, activities, discussions, and audio/visuals) and assigned readings. The format will consist of short essay questions. **The exam will be take home style, and will be assigned no earlier than the last day of classes.**

Research Paper

45%

This assignment is meant to help you think critically about objects in-context and to build your visual literacy and research skills. It will give you the opportunity to experience primary source, field-based research, which is central to anthropological methods of cultural analysis.

A **major** research paper of between **8-10 pages** is required on a relevant topic related to the field of material culture studies. The paper must be based on **both** primary source materials—either archival/museum (including online options) or field data—and secondary research. The topic can be either historical or contemporary. Primary source archival materials utilized might include newspapers, maps, popular magazines and trade catalogues, government documents, plans, historic photographs, online museum catalogues. Primary source field data might involve your own investigation of historic artifacts or contemporary objects through interviewing, observation, measured drawings, photography. Historic research could involve an analysis of a collection of artifacts at a museum, or a study of artifacts found in a specific home, landscape, or community. Analysis of contemporary objects might involve the study of makers, technologies and processes involved in creating certain objects, and/or design choices made by the maker. Other contemporary studies might focus on the role of objects in the daily life of the user or consumer.

Whatever the nature of your chosen topic, the paper should reflect a semester's work of thought and research, and a thorough grasp of relevant scholarly literature and research methods in material culture studies. This means actually visiting the library and conducting a search for related scholarly, peer-reviewed books and articles, reading these materials, and then drawing on them to write your final paper (which you will cite thoroughly in-text and in a reference list). **The assignment requires time and project-planning. Do not wait until the last few weeks of class to start this paper.**

Ideally, the topic you choose should involve an object(s) that you have direct access to—in other words, they must be directly observable to you. You should not choose a topic that can *only* be researched online or in the library.

****In conducting your primary research you must respect COVID-19 protocols. Preferably, if you choose to interview someone, they would be within your own social bubble. Teams or Zoom interviews are also a safe option. If you conduct a face-to-face interview, informed consent is required. See the course Moodle site for invitation to participate in research and informed consent sheets. We will also review research safety and ethics in class.****

The major research project has three separate components. Detailed instructions for each component will be posted on Moodle as the class progresses.

Component	Due Date	Value
Paper Proposal	Feb. 5	5%
Annotated Bibliography (6 sources)	Mar. 5	10%
Essay	Apr. 9	30%

Feeling stuck on what to research?? Below are some potential research topics:

- Visit a cemetery in the Antigonish area or your home community and examine material and/or spatial patterns. Consider grave markers as art, and explore their form and stylistic expression. You might consider how gravestone art has changed over time, or you might analyze contemporary stones for what they might tell us about local cultural values and belief systems in the present. You might examine spatial patterns of burial, or you could document and analyze the markers of one particular family plot, or compare/contrast the markers of a particular ethnic or religious group (e.g. Protestants/Catholics; Scots/French).
- Explore the emergent world of pandemic materiality — hand sanitizer, masks, face shields, material and spatial forms of social distancing and barriers in buildings and landscapes, the proliferation of single-use coffee cups and other containers, toilet paper, Lysol wipes, sweatpants, latex gloves, thermometers, the Amazon box etc. etc. What new meanings and purposes have these objects taken on? How have consumption practices changed? How are people making / customizing / wearing masks during the pandemic? What kinds of crafting/making practices are happening during lockdown? Why? What are the practices surrounding certain objects and how do they intersect with beliefs of contagion/purity/danger? How do home spaces look as we “quarantine” or “shelter in place”? Consider the implications of “rapid response collecting” practices in museums by interviewing a curator. Check out the V&A’s “Pandemic Objects” blog: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/pandemic-objects> and the National Post’s “Object Lessons of a Pandemic” series: <https://nationalpost.com/tag/object-lessons-of-a-pandemic/> for further ideas.
- Examine commemorative monuments in the local landscape (e.g. WWI cenotaphs, public art and murals, cairns, labour landmarks). How do they relate to issues of heritage, memory, and power? Sense of place? Local or regional identity?

- Research a particular building or type/pattern/style of architecture. Document the building carefully through drawings/photographs/archival research and write a “cultural biography” or “life history” of the building-as-object, paying particular attention to use.
- Consider the collecting practices of an individual or group. What objects do they collect? How? Why? How do they display what they collect?

Collecting for the Museum (Small-Group Assignment)

10%

This assignment asks you to experience the important curatorial activity of discovering, collecting, and persuasively presenting an object for museum acquisition, as well as building team-working skills.

Working together in groups of no more than three, you must find an object and propose its acquisition by one of a pre-determined list of museums. You will follow your selected institution’s collection policy in order to justify the museum’s acquisition of the object. Assume that your museum can properly store, preserve, and use the potential artifact. You may choose an object that already belongs to you, a friend, or family member, or you can purchase an object for under \$25. Look on buy and sell sites, antique and second hand shops, as well as modern stores for your potential museum artifact. There are no required textbooks for this course, so consider any related expenses for this assignment as what you would normally allocate for a textbook. If you are experiencing financial difficulty, consider finding an item that is free or come speak to me about options.

Once you have determined what you think is a museum-worthy object, bring the object to class (if we happen to move online, take a picture to share). **In a no more than 10 minute presentation (5 min. for presentation, 5 min. for class discussion), you must justify why the object should be added to the museum’s collection.** Both myself and your classmates will serve as the museum’s acquisition committee members, and we will weigh your proposal and either accept or reject the object into the museum’s collection. The presentation must include well-researched statements about: (1) What the object is and its provenance (i.e. where it came from, where/how you got it); How the object is made, used, and/or functions in society; (2) Your justification for the object’s accession into your museum’s permanent collection. How does the object fit the museum’s collection mandate? What cultural group or historical person(s) does the object belong to? What cultural values, beliefs, and ideas is the object representative of? Does the object retain its physical/material identity, integrity, and authenticity?

You must also prepare a **no more than 2-page report on your object**, answering the above questions and justifying your rationale, which should be distributed to the class for review before your group presentation begins.

Museum collection policies will be distributed at a later date. A sign-up sheet for presentation days will also be circulated.

I will evaluate the assignment for your creativity and your ability to follow instructions, to provide adequate and well-researched background or context to the object, and to persuasively justify your object for museum acquisition. I also will judge your presentation for logical flow, organization, and clarity, whether you stay within your budgeted time, and your ability to engage with the topic and audience.

ASSIGNMENT FORMATTING & SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Formatting:

- 12 point Times New Roman font.
- 1” (2.54 cm) margins on all sides.
- **Chicago Author-Date** style for referencing. Please visit:
https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html
- Double-spaced.
- Insert page numbers.
- Assignment title, your name and student #, submission date, course name, and instructor name on a separate cover page OR the top left margin of your assignment.
- Paper meets required page length (don't worry if you are over the guidelines for length, but if you are significantly under you are probably not providing the detail of analysis required to successfully complete the assignment)
- Any quotation longer than three lines should be a block quotation (indented on both sides and single-spaced *without* quotation marks) as per Chicago Author-Date style guidelines.
- Reference List/Bibliography numbered as last page of assignment for all secondary sources, including class notes and assigned readings. The Reference List page should not be counted towards your final page count.
- Any images are clear, each image is numbered and captioned, and all images are **placed on a separate, numbered page(s) within your document (rather than embedded in the text)**.

Assignment Submissions and Extensions:

- **Submit all assignments via the designated dropbox on the Moodle course shell.**
- **Do not directly email assignments to me** unless I have given you permission to do so.
- All assignments are due on the specified date at the beginning of class. Late assignment submissions will incur a loss of **1/2 point per day**. Extensions will be considered on a case-by-case basis. I'm very reasonable about extensions, as I prefer quality work submitted a day or two late than inferior work submitted on time.

OTHER COURSE DETAILS

Assigned Readings: Weekly readings are meant to complement, further illustrate, and/or expand upon lectures and course topics, as well as help facilitate further thought and discussion about material culture. They will also help your write a better paper. While I understand that you may not be able to

read *everything* listed in the syllabus, your comprehension of course material and ability to engage in class discussion will improve if you read *something*. **Note that you will be tested on both assigned readings and lectures.**

Attendance: You are expected to attend class regularly as it is a key to academic success. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain any course materials given during your absence and to reach out to a friend or classmate for lecture notes. Typically, any handouts will be posted on the course Moodle site. I will do my best to accommodate your learning needs if you must miss class for legitimate medical/personal reasons. Meet with me face-to-face to discuss options. I will provide exam study guides and allocate class time for review and questions as the exam date approaches.

Technology Policy: Please put your phone on silent throughout class. Smartphone use during class time is disrespectful. Why bother coming to class and shelling out lots of money if you aren't ready to commit your full attention and actively learn? Unless you need to use a laptop to take notes because of a documented disability, multiple studies show that laptops do not facilitate better note-taking abilities and course material comprehension. I encourage you to instead take pen and paper notes—a useful skill to develop! If you do use a laptop, please sit at the back of the class so as not to distract other students. Audio recording lectures is only permitted for students who are registered with the Tramble Centre and request this as part of their accommodations.

Accommodations: I would appreciate if students with disabilities—whether visible or non-visible—let me know of their situation as early as possible in the semester. I will do my best to accommodate students with unique learning needs, as well as those studying under other special circumstances (e.g. single parents, mature learners returning to school, students with English as an additional language etc.)

The Tramble Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) provides assistance in determining and facilitating appropriate accommodations for students with verified disabilities. The Tramble Centre welcomes students with documented permanent disabilities and offers them a student-centred program of support. Located in Room 108 of the Angus L MacDonald Library, new and returning students meet with program staff to discuss options for support. The deadline for registering with the Centre is two weeks prior to the end of classes each semester and three business days' notice is required for booking all accommodated tests and exams. To book an appointment please use the following link: stfxcal.mywconline.com Phone 902-867-5349; Email: tramble@stfx.ca

Classroom Respect, Diversity and Inclusion: Everyone learns more effectively in a respectful, safe, and equitable learning environment, free from discrimination and harassment. I invite you to join with me to create a classroom space—both real and virtual—that fosters and promotes values of human dignity, equity, non-discrimination, and respect for diversity. Disagreeing with readings or points raised in lectures or discussions by myself or fellow students is an expected part of university learning. I welcome you all to freely share your diverse opinions and perspectives, but please do so in a respectful way. Please feel free to contact the Human Rights and Equity Advisor Megan Fogarty if you have questions or concerns about equity in the classroom or in the StFX Community in general. Megan can be contacted by email at mfogarty@stfx.ca or by telephone at 902-867-5306.

Territorial Acknowledgement: Let us respectfully acknowledge that StFX University sits on traditional unceded Mi'kmaq territory. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which were first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations. We are all Treaty people.

Academic Integrity: Cheating and plagiarism are serious offences that are not tolerated by StFX. Such actions can result in an **automatic zero**, and thus **possible course failure**. Please refer to section 3.8 of the StFX Academic Calendar for a more detailed description of academic dishonesty and its implications. Please do not plagiarize (this includes work from other students as well as scholarly and Internet sources), but be honest in your work. Summarize and paraphrase material and appropriately cite the source of your information, including those summarized/paraphrased passages as well as direct quotations. If you are struggling with this, both myself and the Student Success Centre can guide you in citing sources and suggest strategies you can utilize to avoid plagiarism.

Reading, Writing, and Study Assistance: Please do not hesitate to contact me for assistance in these areas. I encourage you to also visit the **Student Success Centre**, a valuable free service for all students that provides professional one-on-one reading, writing, and study instruction. The Student Success Centre can also assist you with how to avoid plagiarism and how to properly cite your sources using various style guides. Visit <https://www2.mystfx.ca/student-success/> to learn more and book an appointment.

Cancellations: If class must be cancelled due to illness or other unforeseen reasons, I will notify you via Moodle announcements. Check StFX's website for campus closures regarding weather or other events. If class is cancelled or the university is closed, assigned readings will remain the same. However, due dates for assignments will be bumped ahead to the next class.

How to Reach Me: I encourage you to visit with me face-to-face (virtually via Teams is encouraged) during my scheduled office hours or make an appointment if you have questions about course materials, readings, or assignments. While you can reach out to me on Moodle, the *best* way to contact me is directly by email: **mejack@stfx.ca**. Please note that it is hard to answer complex course questions via email. It is best to speak with me face-to-face.

Important Course Change & Drop Dates: **January 21** – Last day to change second-term courses. Last day to receive full tuition refund for second-term courses, when applicable; **March 04** – Last day for partial tuition refund for second-term courses, when applicable; **March 19** – Last day to drop second-term three-credit courses.