**USW 30: Tangible Things: Harvard Collections in World History**

# MW at 11, and a weekly section to be arranged

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**What this course is about:**

Over four centuries, Harvard has amassed an astonishing array of tangible things—not just rare books and manuscripts, but Babylonian roof tiles, Roman glass, and the molars of giant pandas. This course explains how and why such things arrived in Cambridge and what happened to them when they got here. It demonstrates the many ways people make history through the things they collect, exchange, reflect upon, or ignore. The course transcends divisions between the arts, the humanities, and the sciences, offers close-up encounters with objects of many sorts, and features behind-the-scenes visits to Harvard’s varied museums. It may also alter the way you interact with common-place objects around you.

**Required Books:**

1. Ulrich, Gaskell, Schechner, and Carter, *Tangible Things: Making History Through Objects.* Oxford University Press, 2015

2. Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1870-1920*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.

3. Ulrich, ed. *Yards and Gates: Gender in Harvard and Radcliffe History.* Palgrave, 2004. (limited copies of the print edition of this book are available through Amazon and other on-line sources, but the full text is free on-line through Dash.)

**Additional short readings have been linked to the course website.**

**Videos**

We have also included a variety of brief videos on the syllabus, some from the HarvardX version of the course. Viewing them ahead of time will allow for more active participation both in lecture and in section.

**Course Requirements:**

Our main requirement is that you **actively engage with the course**, attending lectures, completing section assignments, and designing a final project that allows you to extend your own capacities in some way. Please understand that each element of the course is related to the others. The best way to prepare for section is to be fully present (mind and body) in lecture. The best assurance of success on a final project is to do your best in section assignments.

Weekly assignments may include both reading and visits to selected exhibits. Since museum hours vary, be sure to plan ahead. In addition, during the weeks of October 9 and November 6, we will cancel regular lectures and sections to allow you to participate in two or more group visits to storage collections or less accessible sites. Here is how we will value each component of the course:

**1. Overall Participation (including lecture)** (20% of final grade)

2. **Weekly Section Assignments** (20% of final grade**)**

**3. Two Short (5-6 page) Papers**. (30% of final grade)

First Paper—due to your TF by 5 p.m. Sept. 29.

Second Paper—due to your TF by 5 p.m. Oct. 27.

**3. A Final Project** (30% of final grad)

This assignment asks you to *interpret* an object or group of objects in Harvard’s collections. The format will depend on the type of object you have chosen and the questions you want to explore. You can produce an interpretive paper of 10-12 pages or an art-work or reproduction of your chosen object. With permission, you can also join Sara Schechner and a few others to create an exhibit. We will post several examples of successful projects submitted in the past and will devote class time to instruction in methods and techniques. Regardless of format, your project *must* include close-up examination (usually with curatorial assistance) of the object or objects you have chosen.

Applications for exhibition with Sara Schechner—due Oct. 16

Preliminary topics for final—due the week of Oct. 30

Project proposal—due to your TF the week of Nov. 15.

Final project—due to your TF by 5 p.m. Dec. 6.

**Schedule**

*Note: Assignments are due on or before your section meeting for the week under which they are listed.*

**Aug. 30, Sept. 6** **Thinking with Things**

1. View“This is Not a Chair”

2. Read “Introduction: Thinking with Things” in *Tangible Things,* pp. 1-20.

3. Read, Rachel Poliquin, “Introduction,” in *The Breathless Zoo,* pp. 1-10

4. Read “Rewriting Harvard’s History,” in *Yards and Gates* pp. 1-13 [pp. 8-28, online]

5. Explore *Harvard Crimson* coverage of Harvard Law School shield controversy: <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2016/3/15/corporation-hls-seal-change/>

No Section.

**September 11-13 Looking Closely**

1. View: “Look at the Fish”.

2. Read Conn, Ch. 1, “Museums and the Late Victorian World,” pp. 3-31.

3. Read *Tangible Things,* Ch. 1, “Things in Place,” pp. 21-38 and the accompanying case studies, “A Glass Jar,” and “A Collection of Powders“ pp. 46-50 and 59-64.

4. Read “Unexpected Discoveries: The Joy of Object Photography,” in *Tangible Things,* 192-207.

# 5. Visit “Glass Flowers: The Ware Collection of Blaschka Glass Models of Plants,” Museum of Natural History, Oxford St., and “Recreating the Throne of Egyptian Queen Hetepheres,” Semitic Museum, Divinity Ave.

# 6. For the story of Agassiz and the fish, see Samuel H. Scudder [writing as "A Former Pupil”], "In the Laboratory With Agassiz", *Every Saturday*, Vol. 1, Issue 118 (April 4, 1874), 369-370; reprinted in Jules Marcou, *Life, letters, and works of Louis Agassiz.* New York : Macmillan and Co., 1896, pp. 94-97.

Section 1

**Sept. 18-20 History and Memory**

1. View the video “Mineral”

2. Read *Tangible Things,* Ch. 2, “Things Unplaced,” pp. 71-80, and the accompanying case studies, “A Galapagos Tortoise Shell” and “A Carved Spoon,” pp. 85-97.

3. Read Sven Beckert and Catherine Stevens, *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking a Forgotten History,* 1-27*.*

4*.* Read, *A Forensic Dispute on the Legality of Enslaving the Africans, Held at the Public Commencement in Cambridge, New-England*. Boston, 1773

5. Read “The President’s Chair,” in Josiah Quincy, *The History of Harvard University*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1840) pp. 288, 544, and Marvin Hightower: “The President’s Chair,” *Harvard Gazette*, Sept. 24, 2007

6 Visit the displays for USW30: Tangible Things in the University Study Gallery, Room 3620, Harvard Art Museums.

Section 2

**Sept. 25-27 Exhibiting Collections**

1. View video “Time and Time Again”

2. Read *Tangible Things*, Ch. 3, “Things Out of Place” (pp. 115-35) and the accompanying case studies, “An Artist’s Palette” (pp. 135-40) and “A Hand Plow” (pp. 148-52).

3. Optional: explore the catalog for the Time & Time Again exhibit.

Section 3

FIRST PAPER DUE by 5 p.m. September 29

**Oct. 2-4 Wonder and Order**

1. View video “John Harvard’s Toe”

2. Read Tangible Things, Ch. 4, “Things in Stories,” pp. 159-164, and the accompanying case study, “Transits of Venus,” pp. 179-186.

3. Read “Wonder” and “Order” from *The Breathless Zoo,* pp. 11-22 and 111-140.

4. Compare three short accounts of Harvard’s earliest collections:

a. Entry for October 25, 1750 from *The voyages and travels of Frances Goelet.*

b. “An Account of the Fire at Harvard College,” *Massachusetts Gazette*, Feb. 2, 1764

c. “A Visit to Harvard College, 1798,” *New England Quarterly*, 34 (1961): 510-514

5. Read Wright, “Creating a Fellowship of Educated Men”; Lord, “Harvard Once Removed”; Minardi, “The Poet and the Petitioner,” in *Yards and Gates*, pp. 17-64 [30-107]

# 6. Explore “The Philosophy Cabinet,” Third Floor, Harvard Art Museums, Quincy St.

Section 4

**Oct. 9 Harvard holiday. No lecture** **or section.**

**Oct. 11-13 Harvard collection visits**

1. Read Conn, 2, “Naked Eye Science,” pp. 32-74, and review time-line of Harvard museums.

2. Participate in scheduled visits to museums and libraries. (See sign-up instructions on course website).

**3. Attend 18thcentury Electrical Demonstration, Friday, October 13, 2 p.m. in the Science Center Hall D.**

**Oct. 16-18 Racial Science**

1. View “Hidden in Plain Sight” and “A Tool Out of Place”

2. Read Conn, Chap. 3, “Between Science and Art,” pp. 75-113.

3. Read Brian Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerreotypes,” *American Art*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 38-61.

4. Read Elliott West, “Reconstructing Race,” *Western Historical Quarterly,* 34 (2003): 6-16.

5. Visit “All the World is Here,” Peabody Museum.

Section 5 PROJECT TOPICS AND APPLICATIONS FOR EXHIBIT TEAM DUE

**Oct. 23-25 Harvard Men, Radcliffe Women**

1. Read essays from *Yards and Gates*, pp. 79-156 [140-257]: Sullivan, “Taming Undergraduate Passions”; Schwager, “Taking Up the Challenge”; Hoganson, “Harvard Men”; Horowitz, “The Great Debate”; Gloria Bruce, “Radcliffe Women at Play”; Karen Lepri, “Clothes Make the Man”

2. Read E.C. [Elizabeth Agassiz], “A Cruise Through the Galapagos,”

*The Atlantic Monthly*. 31 (May 1873): 579-585

3. Read “A Field Hockey Dress” and a “Tin Bluebird,” from *Tangible Things*, 64-70, 141-148.

4. Read David Wallace Adams, “More than a Game: The Carlisle Indians Take to the

Gridiron, 1893-1917,” *Western Historical* Quarterly. 32 (2001): 25-53

Section 6

SECOND PAPER DUE

**Oct. 30-Nov. 1 Imperialism and Commerce**

1. View: “A Museum in a Box”

2. Read Conn, Chap. 4, pp. 115-150.

3. Read Rachel Poliquin, “Spectacle” in *The Breathless Zoo*, pp. 77-110

4. Read “An Orchid,” “A Mexican Tortilla, and “A Beetle Ornament,” in *Tangible Things*, pp. 38-45, 103-108.

Section 7

**Nov. 6-8 Trouble at Home (no lecture on Wednesday; no section)**

1. Read “Fair Harvard?” in *Yards and Gates,* pp. 159-170.

2. Read Amit Paley, “The Secret Court of 1920,” *Harvard Crimson*, November 21, 2002

3. Read, “The Harvard Dormitory Crisis,” in *Blacks at Harvard*, pp. 189-227.

4. Read W.E.B. Dubois, “A Negro Student at Harvard at the End of the Nineteenth Century,“ *Massachusetts Review* 1 (Spring 1960): 439-458

5. Read “A Gift from the Ladies of Llangollen,” in *Tangible Things*, pp. 80-85.

**6. Sign up for collections visits on Wednesday-Friday.**

**Nov. 13-15 Art and War**

1. Read Conn: Chapter 6, “Art Museums and the Creation of Fine Art,” 192-232.

2. Read, Jane Dini, “The Art of Selling War: Sargent’s World War I Murals for Harvard University,” *Harvard Art Museums Bulletin*, 7 (2000): 67-84.

3. Read “The Bauhaus Manifesto,”

4. Visit the Sargent Murals and the Harry Elkins Widener Memorial Room in Widener Library

5. Revisit our exhibit in the University Study Gallery, 3d Floor, Art Museum

Section 8

FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE

**Nov. 20 Manifestoes (no lecture on Weds. 11/22; no section)**

1. Read Synnott, “Changing Harvard Student”; Mandel, “Feminism and Femininity in Almost Equal Balance”; Karnovsky, Hubbard, and Mosely, “Midcentury Memories”; Stetzer, “From Sympathizers to Organizers,” and “Memories of Change,” in *Yards and* Gates, pp. 195-207, 215-244, 271-302. [346-446];

2. View David Letterman interview with Grace Hopper and read Fred R. Shapiro, “Etymology of the Computer Bug: History and Folklore, *American Speech,* 62.4 (Winter, 1987): 376-378.

**Thanksgiving Break**

**Nov. 27-29 Reclaiming the Past**

1. View “Whose Collections? Whose Heritage?”

2. Read Conn, Chap. 5, Objects and American History, “ pp. 151-191

3. Read “Objects as Portals,” “A Nostalgic Painting,” and “Changing Stories About American Indians,” in *Tangible Things,* 164-179, and 186-192

Section 9

Final Projects Due by 5 p.m. Dec. 6