

HPSS S732 The Witness Tree Project [in conjunction with FURN 2451]

Instructor: Daniel Cavicchi

Office: 212 Carr House

Phone: 454-6799

E-mail: dcavicch@risd.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays, 1-4 p.m. or by appointment

Class: W 01:10pm - 04:10pm at 20 Wash. Place, Room 237A

Course Philosophy

The Role of the Department of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences at RISD

This course is offered by the Department of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences (HPSS) at RISD. HPSS is a multidisciplinary department whose faculty members teach and conduct research in a range of fields across the humanities and social sciences, including American studies, anthropology, history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology. The coming together of such disparate fields in one department represents the cutting-edge of scholarship and provides a unique and rich learning experience in which you may readily learn and compare traditional disciplinary approaches to understanding the world (anthropology, history, philosophy), as well as explore newer, interdisciplinary fields of knowledge (e.g. gender and sexuality, media studies, race and ethnicity). Studying in HPSS will enable you to develop your imagination and independence of thought, your ability to approach issues and problems from different viewpoints, and your communication skills --qualities integral to the creative work of any artist.

The Role of Liberal Arts at RISD

HPSS is one of three departments (alongside English and History of Art and Visual Culture) in RISD's Division of Liberal Arts. At RISD, the liberal arts are integral to the process of becoming an accomplished artist or designer. Creativity depends on curiosity, empathy, and communication—a desire to explore and share an understanding about the world in which we live. In fact, the word "liberal" in liberal arts comes from the Latin *liber*, meaning "free," and it is meant to convey that learning about culture, history, and philosophy can liberate the mind and thus provide the foundation for truly imaginative and innovative work. Liberal Arts classes are intended to shape fundamental aspects of your vocation by instilling in you a lifelong curiosity about the world, enhancing your capacity to analyze situations and act on ideas with independence and confidence, and enabling you to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts.

Seminar Description

Witness trees, as designated by the National Park Service, are long-standing trees that have "witnessed" key events, trends, and people in history. In this joint studio/liberal arts course, students have the unique opportunity to study and work with a fallen pecan tree, shipped to RISD from the Hampton National Historic Site. The Hampton plantation, located outside of Baltimore, Maryland, was a farm, an ironworks, and a port before the Civil War; it served for over half a century as a center of industry and slave labor in the upper South. The course will involve three components: 1) a field trip to the tree's site in Maryland at the beginning of the semester; 2) classroom-based reading and discussion about American material culture and history; and 3) studio-based building of a series of objects, in response to the tree, the site, and students' classroom study. Overall, the course will explore both how material artifacts shape historical understanding and how historical knowledge can create meaningful design.

Course Requirements and Expectations

Books

The following books will be available at Symposium Books, 240 Westminster Street, or you may purchase them online. Copies have been ordered, too, for the RISD Library Reserve Desk.

Gayle Brandow Samuels, *Enduring Roots: Encounters With Trees, History, And The American Landscape*. ISBN: 978-0813535395

Richard Lyman Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*
ISBN 978-0679744146

Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*.
ISBN 978-0801890079

Todd D. Smith, Angela D. Mack, and Stephen G. Hoffius, *Landscape of Slavery: The Plantation in American Art*. ISBN 978-1570037207

NOTE: The readings are listed in the schedule below according to when we will discuss them as a class. Please read them by such dates and come to class with questions, analyses, and applications. Having said that, please treat the readings as rich sources to which you can return repeatedly throughout a section of the course and through the course as a whole. In the ideal, we would never be "finished" with any of the readings in a course.

Digication Course Web Site

This course has a required online component that will supplement our face-to-face meetings and facilitate communication. You have on-line access to handouts and other links specific to course, as well as the ability to engage in discussion about specific topics and submit papers online. In the first week of the semester, everyone will be given instructions for obtaining access to the course site.

Evaluation

The following four factors will determine your final grade:

1. Attendance and Participation 10%

You are required to attend all classes, no excuses. The course meets only once a week, which makes missing a class a This means you may miss a class if you have to (due to illness, etc.) but that it will count against you.

2-4. Three Section Projects 30% each

Descriptions below, in Meeting Schedule.

Grading Policies

Grades will be based on a traditional A-F scale, where "C" equals "meeting the basic requirements of the course." Everyone starts with an assumed C and goes up or down from there as they complete the coursework.

All assignments, exams, etc. not completed by the last day of class will receive an F and be factored into the final grade, unless you have made other arrangements with me.

Plagiarism is a serious offence and will result in an automatic F for the assignment and may warrant further judicial action. Be sure that you understand what constitutes plagiarism before you begin an assignment.

Reading and listening must be completed by the date specified on the syllabus. Plan your schedules accordingly so that you can complete the work on time. The weak retention and superficial understanding caused by waiting until the last minute, especially with the listening requirements, will become painfully obvious on exams.

Class Meeting Schedule

NOTE: All class meetings will be in a seminar discussion format. It is understood, however, that all seminar content will function as an integral part of students' work in the studio and vice versa. Crossover discussion, mutual insight, and collaborative activity will enhance the topic outline presented here.

Sept 16 – Course Topic, Goals, and Methods

Online research about the Hampton National Historic Site, at: <http://www.nps.gov/hamp/index.htm>

I. Landmark : The Hampton tree as a marker of historical significance

Sept 23 – Trees, Place, History

Gayle Brandow Samuels, *Enduring Roots: Encounters With Trees, History, and the American Landscape*

Sept 30 –Material Culture of the Plantation

John Solomon Otto and Augustus Marion Burns III, "Black Folks and Poor Buckras: Archeological Evidence of Slave and Overseer Living Conditions on an Antebellum Plantation." *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Dec., 1983), pp. 185-200. [JSTOR]

Jim Deetz, "Parting Ways" from *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (1977). Available at <http://www.histarch.uiuc.edu/plymouth/parting.html>

Online Exhibit: "The Cultural Landscape of the Plantation." At <http://www.gwu.edu/~folklife/big-house/intro.html>

Oct 2 – *FIELD TRIP*

Oct 7 – Recap of Field Trip

***DUE: Personal Mapping Assignment**

Maps are selective, purposeful representations of a place. They quickly communicate multiple levels of detail and scale and can address diverse factors such culture, behavior, and physical environment. In this assignment, you must map the Hampton Plantation, based on your interpretations from the class field trip. Maps may be visual, textual, 3-D or 2-D; all maps must include at least three "layers" of information. The idea is to convey what you learned about the site, using your careful attention to both its environment and your experience of it. This exercise should help you as you prepare for your first assignment in studio.

II. Culture: The Hampton tree as an axis of historical experience

Oct 14 – Gentility

Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America*

Oct 21 – Industry

Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*
Visit by Professor Rockman.

Oct 28 – Slavery, War, and Aftermath

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845)*. At: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/menu.html>

Nov 4 – Histories of the Middle Ground

***DUE: Historical Research Assignment**

Learning how to make an historical argument requires not only a thorough understanding of the possible variables influencing past events but the ability to convincingly persuade a reader that your understanding is the “most true.” This requires painstaking primary source research, a consideration of secondary source interpretations, and the crafting of a compelling narrative, complete with supporting evidence and logical assumptions. For this assignment, you must choose an historical issue related to our study of American history and culture (it need not be about Hampton), investigate it, and write about it in an 7-8 page paper.

Witness: The Hampton tree as a means of historical understanding

Nov. 11 – Testimony and Perspective

Marvin Lunenfeld, “What Shall We Tell the Children? The Press Encounters Columbus.” *The History Teacher*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1992): 137-144 [JSTOR]

Paul A. Shackel, “Public Memory and the Search for Power in American Historical Archaeology.” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 103, No. 3 (Sept. 2001): 655-670. [JSTOR]

Nov 18 – Interpreting the Plantation

Todd D. Smith, Angela D. Mack, and Stephen G. Hoffius, *Landscape of Slavery: The Plantation in American Art*

November 25 – Thanksgiving Break

Dec 2 – Politics of Preservation

Dolores Hayden, “Placemaking, Preservation and Urban History.” *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol. 41, No. 3, *Urban History in the 1980s* (Spring, 1988), pp. 45-51 [JSTOR]

Steven Hoelscher, "Making Place, Making Race: Performances of Whiteness in the Jim Crow South." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (Sep., 2003), pp. 657-686. [JSTOR]

Visit by Louis Hutchins, Senior Curator, National Park Service

December 9 – Exhibiting Hampton

Final critique of exhibits and objects.

Open to RISD community; Provost, deans and department heads attending.

***DUE: Exhibit Concept Narrative**

Any museum exhibit uses various artifacts and interactive techniques to spark exploration and learning about a topic. The combination of the material and the theoretical is a powerful means to both summarize a topic and make it engaging for those unfamiliar with its importance. In this assignment, you need to write a proposal (5-6 pages) for a public exhibit, geared to both children and adults, that might be devoted to the history and legacy of Hampton National Historic Site. It should include the exhibit's learning goals as well as its specific content, which may include artifacts, photographs, sound, sculptural and architectural elements, room layout, and other desired features. Be sure to address, in particular, how you would place your own object, from the 3rd assignment in studio class, into the exhibit.