

FURN 2451
Fall 2011:Olmsted:The Politics of Urban Public Space
[In conjunction with HPSS S732]

Instructor: Dale Broholm

Office: Dept of Furniture Design Faculty Office 2nd Fl, Prov-Wash

Phone: 781-440-9830

E-mail: dbroholm@risd.edu

Office Hours: By Appointment

**Class: Monday 1:10-6:10 at Dept. of Furniture Design Woodshop, 1st Fl
Met-Calf Building**

The Witness Tree Project is a curricular initiative involving Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and the National Park Service (NPS). Witness trees, as designated by the National Park Service, are long-standing trees that have “witnessed” key events, trends, and people in American history. The Project arranges for fallen witness trees to be shipped from a national historic site to RISD, where, in a joint history seminar and furniture studio, students interpret the history the tree witnessed and make relevant objects from the trees wood. In addition to classroom study, the Project variously involves field trips, guest lectures, exhibitions of students’ objects, and other events that highlight the significance of material culture, landscape, and design in learning about American history.

Due to the nature of this collaborative class the work load is similar to a major studio. Be prepared! Mondays will be very demanding; with both classes meeting all day and work outside the studio is not to be underestimated.

This is the third year of the Witness Tree Project. In our first year we worked with Pecan wood from a former slave plantation outside of Baltimore, MD. The second year Oak, Cherry, Maple and Boxwood from the Home sites of Theodore Roosevelt and George Washington. For more information on the past classes visit www.witnesstreeproject.org

Class Description

As designer/makers we understand that research provides the maker with a deeper understanding of where ideas come from, and how to utilize them in our design process. This research-based studio class, in conjunction with its Liberal Arts component [HPSS S732], will use the readings, discussions, and research from the seminar to build a fully informed design vocabulary from which you will create objects. We will be working with material from the “Olmsted Elm”. An American Elm that was present and witness to Olmsted’s time at “Fairsted”, the family home in Brookline, MA. This residence is now the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.

RISD took possession of the tree upon its removal, processed the wood into lumber and dried it. With all projects in this course, the wood is free to the students for usage. Instructor’s approval is required for the release of the wood for student use. Upon completion of the Project, all student work will be professionally photographed and through a jurying process work will be selected for public exhibition. In past years selected works have returned to the Sites for exhibition. This year due to construction at the Site, the exhibition will mostly be held off Site. Also planned is an exhibition at the Brattleboro Museum of Art, Brattleboro, Vermont. This exhibition will be a retrospective of the first 3 years of the Witness Tree Project. Please note that any student work selected for exhibition must be available for the duration of the exhibition.

Course Requirements and Grading

As in all studio courses you are expected to attend all classes. If you miss a studio class you are expected to make up the work and have it ready for the following week. Missing 3 classes (unexcused) means an automatic F. Studio hours are limited and there will be demand for machines and tools, which means effective use of your time in the studio will serve you well. You are not to use any Department machinery until you are check out by the instructor. You are bound by the Departmental Studio Rules and Guidelines and must follow them. Not doing so may result in your time in the studio being restricted.

Students are required to keep a sketch book/design journal and bring it to class weekly. This book should contain all handouts, careful notes from demos and be a register of your thoughts/ideas from both the seminar and studio components of the collaborative class. This sketch book will be referred to frequently and is considered part of your body of work. Always bring it to class!

Your grade will depend on your attendance, class participation, demonstration of technical knowledge and the completion of the 3 Studio assignments. Please understand that a “C” grade is given for average work, you got the work done on time. “B” is for above average, and an “A” is for excelling in all areas of demand in the studio class. Since this is a collaborative class Dan and I will do the grading together.

Class Meeting Schedule

- 9/19** Intro to Studio, Dept. Rules & Reg's. Safety Talk, Wood Technology, View Wood in Storage. Demo of Basic hand tools. Sketch book and Design Development talk.
- 9/26** Field Trip to Frederick Law Olmsted NHS Brookline, MA. All day
- 10/3** Hand & Power tool demonstrations. Means and methodologies of attachment, gluing and shaping demos. 1st assignment given.
- 10/10** Review 1st assignment. Carving/shaping/sanding demo. Give 2nd assignment.
- 10/17** Design development review, group and individual. Finishing Demo.
- 10/24** Work on 2nd assignment (in class time).
- 10/31** Critique of 2nd assignment. 3rd assignment given.
- 11/7** 2nd Field trip. Design development review. Class pin-up and critique.
- 11/14** Final design review, in class working time.
- 11/21** In class working time.
- 11/28** In class working time.
- 12/5** Final Critique, Location TBA.

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1st Assignment

Frederick Law Olmsted was a man of many interests and occupations. Some more successful than others. Choose one of these occupations and make an object that you think Olmsted would have wanted had with him during the practice of the chosen occupation. Along with the object a written statement explaining your intent is required. A paragraph will be sufficient but it can be longer. Both a hard copy and e copy is expected at critique. This requirement is standard for all of the assignments.

Class Review: 10/10

2nd Assignment

Leisure activities, play, relaxation in public spaces have changed in many ways during the past century. Identify a period of time in America's past, starting with the 1850s, and create an object that reflects a form of leisure, play, recreation, etc... that would have been popular and recognizable during the selected period.

Class Critique: 10/31

3rd Assignment

Public Spaces, Private Uses. The demands of public spaces in a democratic society have been fraught with turmoil since our countries founding. Public usage of public spaces does not always conform to the expectations of society nor necessarily adhere to the laws of a given time. Pick a period and explore this issue through an object. As your final assignment and your major studio object, it is very important to draw upon the work, writing and research that you are doing in seminar.

Final Critique: 12/5

