

ARTH290: Making Material Histories

TU/TH 2-3:15

Hanes Art Center 117

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Office Hours: Thurs. 11-1

Clay, wood, cloth, glass, steel, and plastic. We interact with these materials every day, but rarely do we think about their properties and histories. This course explores the history and technology of materials and the ways they have impacted art, culture, and science. The course will fully integrate historical scholarship and experiential making. Students will both engage with the physical and chemical properties of materials through hands-on manipulation and fabrication at BeAM, studios, and laboratories across campus and study the historical and theoretical debates surrounding material invention and use by artists, architects, scientists, and industries.

Course website: <https://makinghistory.web.unc.edu>

Password (for accessing the syllabus and readings): XXXXXXXXXX

POLICIES

Attendance may be excused only for religious observance, illness, or emergency with written notice in advance. A single unexcused recitation absence will not be penalized, but each unexcused absence beyond one or excessive tardiness will result in a reduction to your final grade.

Extensions will generally be granted only in the case of illness or emergency and NOT for time management difficulties.

Late assignments will automatically be reduced 1/3 grade per day. Plan accordingly.

Laptops, tablets, and smart phones may NOT be used during class unless required by the professor for a specific project.

Academic integrity is at the heart of Carolina and you are responsible for upholding the ideals the university's **Honor Code**. The student-led Honor System at UNC is responsible for adjudicating any suspected violations of the Honor Code and all suspected instances of academic dishonesty will be reported. Plagiarism, cheating, and other acts of academic dishonesty will also result in a failing grade in the course.

Group work is an essential component of the course and will be required of several graded assignments. Failure to be a respectful, cooperative, and fairly contributing team member will be penalized.

Grades will be assigned according to the following university guidelines:

- A Mastery of course content at the highest level of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development.
- B Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development.
- C A totally acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development.
- D A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment.
- F For whatever reason, an unacceptable performance. The student's performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content.

It is important to note that you will NEVER be graded on your skill or experience in making. Grades for fabrication projects will, however, take into consideration your creativity, effort, and dedication.

Graded Assignments

Reflections. For each unit, students are expected to write a brief reflection about their hands-on activities (typically due at the following lecture meeting). For “artifact analysis reflections,” students should describe the chosen artifact and make educated speculations about its making, connecting these ideas to lecture, readings, and class discussions whenever appropriate. For “making and knowing reflections,” students should describe the object, your experience with fabrication (challenges, problems solved, etc.), and draw connections to the lecture, reading, and discussion of its corresponding unit. For individual projects, the reflection should be 250-500 words. For team projects, each member of the group is responsible for writing approx. 250 words of the reflection. You are encouraged to use visual media to supplement your writing (an image of your core object at the very least). Reflections should be published as blog posts on the course website. Your posts will be public, so polish and attention to detail really matter.

Final project: material deception. Students will individually make an object in which one material imitates another. The lectures, demos, and reading discussions will have introduced material imitation in various forms throughout the term. Students will have the flexibility to work with any materials and any technologies with which they are familiar or trained to use. The assignment need not be completed within BeAM spaces, but this is encouraged. At least one of the materials (either the actual or the imitated) must go beyond those studied specifically in the course. Accompanying the object will be a 7-page paper on your fabricated object in the form of a museum catalogue entry. It should describe/name your creation; discuss the materials, tools, processes used; and offer historical or contextual background that incorporates research on the materials in question. Each student will also prepare an illustrated presentation on their final projects to share with their peers during finals weeks.

Grade Breakdown

Participation/Attendance	25%
Artifact analysis reflections (2 total)	10%
Making projects and corresponding reflections (5 total)	35%
Final project (fabrication and oral presentation)	20%
Final project (written paper)	10%

Blog post instructions (this is how you will “hand in” each of your reflections):

1. The class website uses WordPress. To post, go to the admin page for the class website: <https://makinghistory.web.unc.edu/wp-admin/>.
2. On the left of the page, hover your cursor over “Posts” and click “Add New.”
3. Give your post a title that is both descriptive and unique.
4. In the blank window below the title, paste your text. You can use the tools at the top of this window to format the text.
5. Your post should include visual documentation. To add media (photos, video, sound clips, etc.), place your cursor in the text at the location where you’d like your media to appear. Click the “Add Media” button. In the pop-up window, click the “Upload Files” tab. Upload your media file and click the “Insert into post” button on the bottom of the page.
6. Once you’re satisfied with the post itself, proceed to input categories, tags, and a feature image (all are required).
7. Find the categories window on the right side of the screen and check the box that corresponds with the correct unit (clay, wood, etc.). If you do not select a category, your post will not appear on the page associated with the unit.
8. Next, find the “Tags” window below categories and put your name (first and last, always written the same way each time you post). Tagging yourself with each post will allow the professor to grade your reflections.
9. Next, add a feature image to appear by clicking “Set feature image.” The media library will appear. Select one of the media files that you uploaded as part of your post and click the “Set featured image” button at the bottom of the page. This image will appear as a thumbnail on the blogroll with your post.
10. When you’re finished, click the “Publish” button.
11. Double check that your post published correctly. Go to the class website’s blog page: <https://makinghistory.web.unc.edu/blog/>. Navigate to the correct unit, find your post thumbnail and click it to make sure it reads as you intended.
12. To make changes, return to the admin page for the class website, hover over “Posts” and click “All posts.” Search for the post you wish to edit, make your changes, and click the “Update” button. Repeat Step 11 to verify that your changes published correctly.

Note about the schedule:

After an introductory week, the semester will be broken up into 7 two-week units, each focusing on the history and technology of a specific material that impacted art, culture, and science: clay, wood, cloth, glass, steel, and plastic. Unit will generally consist of four 75-minute meetings: an intro lecture dealing with the history of the focus material, a demonstration at BeAM or other studio/lab setting in which you get hands-on experience with the material, a reading discussion centered on a historical case study related to the material and its theorization or implementation, and a student-directed session in which you share and discuss the making projects you completed outside of class.

Week 1: Introduction

Thursday, January 11

Introduction to the course

Week 2: Orientation to BeAM

Tuesday, January 16

Onsite: BeAM orientation in Murray Hall

Assignment: Start figuring out when you'll complete your required BeAM trainings: woodshop (must be completed by 2/6), sewing (by 2/20), and 3D printing (by 4/10)

Thursday, January 18

Discussion: Why make?

Reading: Smith, P. H. "Historians in the Laboratory: Reconstruction of Renaissance Art and Technology in the Making and Knowing Project," *Art History* 39 (April 2016): 210–233.

Steven Hooper, "On Looking at a Tahitian God-House," in *Museum Objects: Experiencing the Properties of Things*, ed. Sandra H. Dudley (2012), 36-46.

Week 3: Clay

Tuesday, January 23

Lecture: Local clay

Assignment: A low-stakes blog post to familiarize yourself with using WordPress. Follow the Blog post instructions on the syllabus, but instead of posting a reflection paper, you'll write a 100-word bio about yourself (feel free to share whatever you would like to your classmates as long as it's appropriate). Your post must include an image embedded in the text. It must also include a "feature image" (which can be the same). For step 7, categorize your post as "Introduction." For step 11, navigate to <https://makinghistory.web.unc.edu/introductions/> to double check your post (this page is not publically searchable and cannot be accessed without the URL above).

Thursday, January 25

Onsite: Making pots, location TBD

Week 4: Clay

Tuesday, January 30

Ackland Study Session: ceramic artifacts (meet in Ackland lobby, bring pencils for notetaking and a camera for visual documentation)

Reading: Short pieces on contemporary artists using clay

Sarah Gatter on Pheobe Cummings: <https://outlinejournal.wordpress.com/2011/06/10/down-there-among-the-roots-phoebe-cummings-art/>

Jordan Eddy on Jami Porter Lara: <https://themagsantafe.com/jami-porter-lara-a-map-with-no-border/>

D.H. Rosen on Kosho Ito: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2009/08/14/arts/breaking-all-the-rules-in-ceramics/#.WlbZCXeZNSM>

Thursday, February 1

Case study: The quest for “white gold”

Reading: Robert Finley, “The Secrets of Porcelain” in *The Pilgrim Art: Cultures of Porcelain in World History* (2010).

Edmund de Waal, “Figurines in Dachau,” *The Guardian*, September 18, 2015, online at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/18/figurines-dachau-nazis-love-porcelain--porzellan-manufaktur-allach-himmler-hitler>

Week 5: Wood

Tuesday, February 6

Lecture: Wood work

Assignment due (individual): Artifact analysis reflection on a ceramic object of your choice from the Ackland collection.

Thursday, February 8

Onsite: Demonstration of woodworking tools at BeAM in Murray Hall

Assignment due: You now have the opportunity to work with wood. Sketch ideas for what you would like to make using a 6x4x2in block of wood.

Week 6: Wood

Tuesday, February 13

Case Study: Wood as relic

Reading: Laura Turner Igoe, “‘The Limb in my Father’s Arms’: The Environmental and Material Creation of a Treaty Elm Relic,” *Common-Place* 17 (Fall 2016), online at <http://common-place.org/book/the-limb-in-my-fathers-arms-the-environmental-and-material-creation-of-a-treaty-elm-relic/>

Christina Neilson, “Carving Life: The Meaning of Wood in Renaissance Sculpture” in *The Matter of Art. Materials, Practices, Cultural Logics, c. 1250-1750*, eds. Christy Anderson, Anne Dunlop, and Pamela H. Smith (2014), 223-239.

Thursday, February 15

Making assignment due (individual): modified wood design project: You are allowed to use only four tools to complete your project: woodburner, chisel, sandpaper, saw (may use power version of these tools or hand version)

Your making and knowing reflection should discuss the ways in which you modified your initial design to accommodate tool limitations.

Week 7: Cloth

Tuesday, February 20

Lecture: Textiles and globalization

Assignment due (individual): Reflection on making and knowing wood.

Explore: Watch videos and read short essays on the making of the *Planet Money* t-Shirt online at <https://apps.npr.org/tshirt> (for background on the project, listen to the NPR report on the project at <https://www.npr.org/2013/12/02/248151300/planet-money-explores-the-economics-of-t-shirts>)

Thursday, February 22

Onsite: Loom making and weaving at BeAM in Hanes Art Center

Assignment: sewing training at BeAM on your own by this date

Week 8: Cloth

Tuesday, February 27

Case Study: Gender and textiles

Laure Thatcher Ulrich, "A Linen Tablecloth," in *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (2001), 277-305.

Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Textile Politics" in *Fray: Art + Textile Politics* (2017), 1-19.

Thursday, March 1

Making assignment due (team): Chose a textile or make your own textile and construct a garment that allows your material to behave uncharacteristically and unexpectedly

For materials, you may use conventional or nonconventional ones, found items or purchased (for affordable cloth, yarn, and unconventional materials, try Scrap Exchange in Durham)

Week 9: Glass

Tuesday, March 6

Onsite: visit to UNC glass fabrication shop (Room A005, Kenan Laboratories, ground floor)

Assignment due (team): Reflection on making and knowing cloth.

Thursday, March 8

Lecture: The history of the window

SPRING BREAK

Week 10: Glass

Tuesday, March 20

Case Study: Glass models

Ackland study session: glass in functional and fine art (meet in museum lobby, bring pencils for notetaking and a camera for visual documentation)

Reading: Alan MacFarlane, "Glass and the Origins of Early Science" in *Glass: A World History* (2002), 27-50.

Corning Museum of Glass essays on the Blaschkas' scientific models: "Fragile Legacy"

(<https://www.cmog.org/article/fragile-legacy>) and "The Glass Flowers"

(<https://www.cmog.org/article/glass-flowers>)

Thursday, March 22

No Class Meeting (Prof. Cao out of town for a conference). Use your time off to take the 3D printing training in preparation for the weeks ahead.

Week 11: Steel

Tuesday, March 27

Lecture: Machine age metal

Assignment due (individual): Artifact analysis reflection on a glass object of your choice from the Ackland collection.

Thursday, March 29

Onsite: wire cutting, bending, and soldering demo at BeAM in Murray

Week 12: Steel

Tuesday, April 3

Case Study: Art and industrial materials

Reading: Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" (1967)

"Lost Art: Richard Serra" <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/gallery-lost-art-richard-serra>

Richard Serra's reflection on *Tilted Arc* in *Public Art, Public Controversy: Tilted Arc on Trial*, ed. Sherrill Jordan (1987), 148-152.

Press accounts of the *Tilted Arc* debate in *Public Art, Public Controversy: Tilted Arc on Trial*, ed. Sherrill Jordan (1987), 160-164.

Thursday, April 5

Making assignment (team): make a structure using metal wire with weight bearing capability details TBA.

Week 13: Plastic

Required evening lecture on Monday, April 9 at 5:30pm (location TBA)

Art historian Amy Ogata (University of Southern California) will speak about the history of metals in France

Tuesday, April 10

Lecture: Plastic pasts and futures

Assignment due (team): Reflection on making and knowing metal.

By this date, you should have taken 3d printing training at BeAM.

Thursday, April 12

Case Study: Disposability

Guest lecture/workshop with artist and UNC Destil fellow Robyn Frohart

Assignment due (individual): print a 3D object that is small enough to fit into a Dixie cut. We will be using this object for mold making and casting. Note that it is best to do this well in advance as the 3d printers can be very busy!!

Reading: Heather Rogers, excerpts from *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage* (2005).

Week 14: Plastic

Tuesday, April 17

Onsite: mold-making workshop at BeAM

Making assignment due (individual): your 3D printed object for mold making

Reading: Roland Barthes, "Plastic" (1972)

Thursday, April 19

Onsite: Casting workshop at BeAM

Reading: Tom Fisher, "The Death and Life of Plastic Surfaces: Mobile Phones." In *Accumulation: The Material Politics of Plastic*, eds. Jennifer Gabrys, Gay Hawkins, and Mike Michael (Routledge, 2013), 229-257.

Week 15: Final Projects

Tuesday, April 24

Tentative research workshop at the Art Library

Thursday, April 26

Bring in designs (drawings and early prototyping experiments) for peer critique

April 26, 3-5pm

QEP Undergraduate Research and Making Exposition, Student Union

Final Presentations: Monday, May 7 at noon

Bring your final project and prepare a 5 minute Powerpoint presentation discussing your inspiration, goals, and process.