



Department of Anthropology

ANTHRO 9127-001: Historical Material Culture

COURSE OUTLINE

2026

Date: January 5, 2026

Instructor and course information:

Class day/time: Tuesday 1:30-4:30 p.m.

Classroom: SSC 3102

Instructor: Dr. Trish Markert (she/her)

Office: SSC 3433

Office hours: Tuesday, 11-1 p.m.

Email: pmarkert@uwo.ca

Credit Value: 0.5

Antirequisites: None

Prerequisites: None

Course Description:

Material culture encompasses the relationships between people and their material world (e.g., objects, landscapes, written records, architecture). This course offers a hands-on approach to the theorization, identification, analysis, and presentation of a wide range of material culture, with a focus on the 19th and 20th centuries. Throughout, we will explore conceptual frameworks for thinking through artifacts, built landscapes, and archives. What are materials and how do they shape our lives, and vice versa? How do people mobilize things to create meaning, make places, negotiate identities, remember (or forget), or simply go about their daily lives? How do archaeologists, museums, and other scholars make sense of the material culture decades or centuries later? With this theoretical foundation, we will examine diagnostic and methodological approaches to historical material culture. Students will learn to identify, catalog, analyze, and curate historic materials (e.g., glass, ceramic, small finds), as well as practice methods like photogrammetry for recording objects and architecture. Students will work with objects, landscapes, and collections to complete individual term projects, as well as a contribution to a public-facing class exhibit.

Materials, of course, do not exist in a vacuum; they are intimately connected to the processes, movements, and narratives that shape our lives. Therefore, we will focus on several thematic issues throughout the term: migration, colonialism, race/ethnicity, industry, heritage, and memory. Many of our readings, exercises, and discussions will sit at the intersection of one or more of these themes, and term projects will explore them in analytical depth. Students from the Migration and Ethnic Relations Collaborative Specialization will select term projects that align specifically with issues of historic migration and ethnic identity.

A full course schedule including a week-by-week breakdown of topics and assigned readings will be available on the course's OWL Brightspace site before the first day of class.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Explain how historic materials exist within broader social, political, and cultural contexts and intersect with issues of migration, colonialism, race/ethnicity, industry, heritage, and memory, among other themes;
- Identify 19th and 20th century artifacts including glass, ceramics, metal, architectural materials, and personal items;
- Conduct individual research and analysis on a material culture collection or assemblage to produce a publication-quality paper;
- Record architecture and the built landscape using traditional and digital mapping techniques;
- Explain material culture theories and apply them to conduct a sophisticated analysis of material culture in 19th and 20th century contexts;
- Find and use primary and secondary archival sources to compile histories of sites, events, and/or objects;
- Read and critically evaluate scholarly works that deal with various aspects of material culture research;
- Synthesize material data with other forms of data (e.g., spatial, oral history, archival, genealogical, ethnographic) to generate original research at a graduate and professional level;
- Critically engage with museum curation and scholarship through exhibit review and creation;
- Write across genres (e.g., research papers, exhibit text, public-facing media) to share material culture analyses with diverse audiences.

Course Materials:

Required textbook: Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*, 1st Edition, Pluto Press, 2020. The textbook costs approximately \$24.00 (paperback version) on Amazon.ca or approximately \$8 [as an eBook through the publisher](#). Students are welcome to purchase second-hand or earlier editions of this textbook, as well as e-books.

Each week, graduate students will complete the 1-3 required readings or materials posted for the class (e.g., PDFs, websites, videos), as well as an additional 1-2 readings assigned at the graduate level. All of these will be available on our Brightspace Content page. Our in-class discussions and activities will be based directly on the readings for that week. It is your responsibility to check the schedule and complete the readings for each week prior to class.

Additional costs: We will take one trip to the Museum of Ontario Archaeology. Students are asked to bring \$8 for admission.

The class may also offer optional field trips outside of our regular class time, including weekends. These local field trips will provide the option of additional hands-on experience to students. They are unmarked and have no bearing on your final grade. Students will be expected to cover any costs related to travel and arrange their own transportation to and from sites.

Evaluation:

Grades will be based on the following:

- Weekly participation and lab portfolio 30%
- Exhibit review: Museum London 20%
- Reading discussion: *The Brutish Museums* 10%
- Original research project and paper: collection analysis 40%

Optional (and unmarked): Participation in final class exhibit

I provide a short overview of each assignment below. Detailed instructions will be posted to Brightspace.

Weekly Participation/Lab Portfolio (30%)

This course is a combination of hands-on learning through labs/exercises and class discussion of readings, topics, and projects, with some short lectures throughout. Weekly in-person attendance and active engagement in labs and discussion are critical to your success in the course. Discussions will focus on weekly readings or prompts. Labs may include historic bottle and ceramic identification, conducting photogrammetry, using 3D modeling software, artifact or architectural drawing, artifact cataloging, or working independently or in teams on term projects.

This part of your mark is based on 1) attendance and participation, 2) participation in class discussions, and 3) completion of weekly lab exercises. Graduate students are expected to thoughtfully and substantively engage in discussion each week, sharing their own insights but also posing questions and prompts for others to respond to in discussion.

During class periods that include labs or exercises, graduate students are expected to generate a short, 1-2 page lab report that outlines the activity, methods, and findings/insights. You will then compile these into a portfolio for submission twice during the term – once before Reading Week, and once at the end of the term. You may only receive credit classes that you attended; if you miss class, please see the Missed Class policy.

Exhibit Review: Museum London (20%)

An exhibit review asks you to engage critically with processes of material culture curation and display, with attention to curatorial choices, space, audience, content, and narrative. You will be expected to draw on scholarly literature from class readings or your own independent research to inform your review.

For this assignment, you will visit Museum London (or another museum, with instructor approval) outside of class time and evaluate an exhibition that explicitly features some aspect of historical material culture. [All Around Me, All Around You](#), [Black Lives Lived Here](#), [Tools of the Trade](#), [London: A History](#), and [History Goes Digital!](#) are all good options currently on offer at the museum.

Reading discussion: The Brutish Museums (10%)

We will be reading one book-length work this term: Dan Hick's *The Brutish Museums*. Our book discussion will happen in-class on March 10 (Week 10). In addition to completing the book, graduate students will prepare a structured book discussion on book themes and lead discussion groups with the undergraduates in the class. This will include a 1-2 page discussion guide and a

short write-up of the outcomes of the conversation, due on Brightspace the Friday following our class period. Detailed instructions will be posted to Brightspace.

Original research project and paper: collection analysis (40%)

Early in the term, you will begin thinking about a semester project that applies a theoretical lens to analyze a material culture collection or assemblage. This could be an archaeological assemblage, a museum collection (physical or digital), a cultural landscape with cohesive elements (e.g., a style of building, a shared history), an archival collection, or a personal collection or archive. As a collection, there should be some externally imposed order or criteria that you can engage with critically in your analysis.

You will be responsible for choosing the collection, developing an analytical framework, conducting background research, and doing any groundwork necessary to access and analyze it during the term. Your independent research and analysis will culminate in an 15-20 page (double-spaced) publication-quality research paper at the end of the term. (Images and appendices are encouraged but not included in the page count!)

Final class exhibit: object biographies (optional!)

Undergraduates in the class will be contributing to a collective class exhibit at the end of the term on object biographies, or history through things. You are also welcome to develop a contribution to the exhibit, based on objects from the collection you are analyzing for the final project, or to help with the in-class curation as co-curators (e.g., deciding what order to put the objects in, contributing to introductory text). This is entirely optional and not part of your final mark, but you are welcome to put it on your CV as experience. Instructions for the undergraduate assignment will be posted to Brightspace.

Academic Statements and Policies

Missed Class Policy:

Attendance and participation in class activities are a large part of succeeding in the course. That said, things happen and life is unpredictable! Do your best to be in class, but familiarize yourself with the following attendance policy so that you know your options and do not fall behind in the course.

For graduate students, I build in one absence that you can use during the term for any reason (no questions asked!). You must contact me by email within 24 hours of the missed class for this policy to apply and arrange to make up any missed work. After that, you can apply for academic considerations through the Student Absence Portal with documentation to make up missed work. If you use this option, you will still need to let me know of the absence within 24 hours of the missed class and email me once considerations are approved to coordinate plans.

Please note that I will be unable to schedule labs and hands-on exercises outside of class time, so make-up work will generally consist of an out-of-class assignment that engages with the themes of the week.

If you miss three classes for any reason, I will request an office hours appointment to check in about your progress in the course and determine whether you need any additional support.

A note on sickness: if you are feeling ill or believe you might be contagious, it is important to take care of yourself and others by staying home! Please do not come to class sick. Do not hesitate to email me if you are concerned about missing class due to an illness and want to talk about your options. I will also have masks available in my office for anyone who would like to use them during

the term. In the event of my own illness, I will be in touch about changes to the course schedule, which might include a virtual class option or activities.

Attendance and Class Preparation:

We will meet in person throughout the semester unless I let you know otherwise. I may shift class to Zoom in the event of my own illness or other extenuating circumstances. If so, I will notify you by Brightspace or email with instructions.

Coming to class and being prepared are essential to doing well in this course. Completing assignments, readings, and class preparation *before* we meet will be necessary to participate in activities and discussion. Please make sure to carefully review what is expected each week and prepare accordingly.

Guidelines for Assignments:

I will upload specific PDF instructions for each major assignment to our OWL Brightspace site. For in-class assignments and class preparation activities, I will provide instructions in class and/or using Brightspace (e.g., Announcements, Content, Discussion Board, etc.).

Late Assignments and Flexibility:

For all written assignments, I offer a two-day flexible submission window (e.g., an assignment due Tuesday, I will accept without penalty until Thursday; for Friday, Sunday). After the flexible submission window, I will deduct a blanket 10% of the mark but accept late assignments for one week from the original due date. At 11:59pm on that date, the submission will close on Brightspace. Because the submission deadline is flexible, academic considerations do not apply and I will not be able to accept late assignments past that date.

All in-class labs, discussions, activities, and presentations must be completed during class time; if you need to miss a class, see the Missed Class Policy.

Communication Policy:

The best way to get in touch with me is by email. I will respond to emails as promptly as possible, which will generally be within 24 hours on weekdays or Monday if you email on Friday or the weekend. Though you may occasionally receive emails or announcements from me outside those hours, I generally reserve evenings and weekends for my family.

Please start the subject line for every course-related email with **"ANTH9127: [Subject]"** so that it is sorted properly in my inbox, and I can respond promptly – without this, there is a chance I will miss your email and you will need to resend it. Indicate why you are contacting me in the subject line and include any details I might need to address your questions or problem in the body of the email.

Academic Consideration:

You can find the [university policy on academic considerations here](#), with [additional details on the consideration policy here](#). This policy requires that all requests for academic considerations must be accompanied by a self-attestation. Further information about academic considerations, and information about submitting this self-attestation with your academic consideration request may be found here. Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline.

It is important to communicate with me as soon as you know you will need additional considerations (beyond course policies) to complete coursework or assignments, including exams. Please see your academic counsellor immediately if you will be seeking academic consideration based on medical or compassionate grounds ("[What is Academic Consideration](#)"). It is your responsibility to keep me

informed about considerations and provide the appropriate documentation so that I can work with you on ways to stay caught up in class. All missed work must be made up by the end of the exam period in the applicable term.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI):

Based on the current state of generative AI in the world and the academy, I ask that all students actively and intentionally opt out of all generative AI use for this course. This means that I do not condone any use of generative AI to complete, edit, or aid assignments, at any phase of research (e.g., asking ChatGPT for sources or definitions). In other courses and your daily life, you can make the ethical, professional, and personal decision that makes most sense for you.

There are several reasons for this policy. Some are ethical (i.e., dependence on genAI is destroying the environment and reversing climate initiatives; day-to-day AI use trains/funds models that are being used in warfare, policing, surveillance, ethnic cleansing, and genocide; and so on). Some are practical (i.e., you are here to build skills and I need to make sure you are building them rather than outsourcing them; AI remains bad at critical tasks, despite messaging to the contrary). Some are cognitive (e.g., researching, reading, and writing are *ways of thinking* that are important to develop, and emerging research links AI reliance with cognitive decline at an individual and societal level). Some are personal (i.e., AI-produced work is boring; the writing is poor, particularly at a graduate level; providing feedback on AI work wastes my time).

I know that AI is increasingly impossible to avoid in today's world. We will go over strategies for intentional decision-making around AI use in class. This policy is primarily honour-based, but evidence of using AI to complete your work may result in lost marks or a 0 (see Academic Integrity - Statement on Plagiarism).

Statement on Academic Offences:

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, in the [Scholastic Offenses policy](#).

All required written work may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between Western University and [Turnitin.com](#).

Statement on Plagiarism:

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing. It is also a scholastic offence to submit the same work for credit in more than one course. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence. All students are expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources of information and avoiding plagiarism. Writing assignments should reflect the student's own thoughts and independent written work.

Penalties may range from a failing grade for the assignment or the course to suspension or even expulsion from the University. I will provide you with the tools to properly reference and acknowledge other's work in class. Never hesitate to ask if you have a question about academic honesty.

Academic Rights and Responsibilities:

All students should familiarize themselves with Western's current [Academic Policies in the Academic Calendar](#) which include, but is not limited to, academic consideration for medical illness,

accommodation for religious holidays, academic appeals, academic accommodation for students with disabilities, as well as scholastic discipline.

Support Services

For student support services please see the [Office of the Registrar](#) and [Academic Support and Engagement](#).

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence:

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Accommodation for Religious Holidays:

Students should review the policy for Accommodation for Religious Holidays. Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but not later than two weeks prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Accessible Education:

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mentalhealth conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education (AE), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AE and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations may include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction. Please see [Western's Accessible Education](#) page for more information.

Mental Health Support:

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health Support at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Weekly Schedule of Topics and Assignments

The following schedule may be subject to some change (e.g., rescheduling due to class cancellation, reading changes, deadline extensions). I will announce any changes using the Announcements page on Brightspace.

Readings for the first half of the term will be announced the first week of class. Readings for the second half of the term will be announced during Reading Week.

Week 1, Jan. 6: History through Things

Introduction to the course

Class Preparation: Bring an object to class, any object. Consider how it reflects or represents an aspect of personal, local, or global history. Be prepared to share – very informal, no more than a minute or two!

Readings:

Cochran, Matthew D., and Mary C. Beaudry. 2006. Material Culture Studies and Historical Archaeology. In *The Cambridge Companion to Historical Archaeology*, edited by Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry, pp. 191–204. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Week 2, Jan. 13: Thinking through Material Culture

Theories for understanding materials, objects, and our relationships with things

Readings:

Riello, Giorgio. 2017. Things that shape history: Material culture and historical narratives. In *History and Material Culture*, edited by Karen Harvey and Giorgio Reillo, pp. 27-50. Routledge, New York.

Harris, Oliver J. and Craig N. Cipolla. 2017. Secret Lives of Things: Object agency and biography. In *Archaeological Theory in the New Millennium*, pp. 71-86. Taylor & Francis, New York.

Mullins, Paul. 2014. The Rhetoric of Things: Historical Archaeology and Oral History. *Historical Archaeology* 48(1):105-109.

Grad students also read:

Mulready, Cyrus. 2023. In the Middle: Subjects, Objects, and Theories of Things. In *Object Studies: Introductions to Material Culture*, pp. 63-80. Palgrave MacMillan/Springer Nature Switzerland AG, Cham.

Based on the theoretical frameworks discussed in the readings or your own interest in materiality theories, choose one additional work (e.g., Miller, Gell, Appadurai, Kopytoff, Latour, Deleuze, Ingold, Bennett, Marx, etc.) to read for class. This does not have to be long; choose something that is a reasonable length, like an article or a chapter.

Week 3, Jan. 20: Historic Artifacts

Identifying and dating 19th and 20th century materials

Class Preparation: Familiarize yourself with the following resources. Take notes to create a personal guide that will help you in the identification of historic glass, ceramics, and personal items in class. Remember, we *all* use reference material – it's more important to learn where to find information than to memorize the information itself!

Readings:

Explore the following online historic artifact resources:

- Society for Historical Archaeology [Historic Glass Bottle Identification & Information](#) website, particularly the pages on Dating, Finishes/Shapes, Body & Seams, and Bases.
- Pages under the [Florida Museum's "Ceramic Type Collection"](#).
- The [Historic Artifact Identification Sheets](#) created by the California Department of Transportation (you can also print these for easy reference).

Grad students also read: Carolyn White's Introduction (pp. 1-15) to *A Cultural History of Objects in the Age of Industry* (2022, Bloomsbury Press).

Week 4, Jan 27: Archaeological Analysis and Interpretation

Making sense of artifacts and assemblages; or from objects to histories

Readings: I will post a list of published archaeological analyses to Brightspace that illustrate how archaeologists interpret artifacts or assemblages. You should choose two to read for class and come ready to discuss.

Grad students also read: In addition to two of the listed articles, locate and read one additional artifact-based analysis that has been published as a scholarly article or chapter. This can be in archaeology or a related field (e.g., museums, history, etc.). Be prepared to share in class.

Week 5, Feb. 3: Collections, Catalogs, Curation

Field trip to the Museum of Ontario Archaeology

Class preparation: Arrange transportation to the Museum of Ontario Archaeology and bring \$8 for admission.

Readings:

Knowles, Chantal. 2011. 'Objects as Ambassadors': Representing Nation through Museum Exhibitions. In *Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum*, edited by Sarah Byrne, Anne Clark, Rodney Harrison, and Robin Torrence, pp. 231-247. Springer Nature, New York.

Bezerra, Marcia and Luzia Gomes Ferreira. 2022. Affective Museums: The practice of collecting archaeological artefacts in the Brazilian Amazon. In *The Oxford Handbook of Museum Archaeology*, edited by Alice Stevenson, pp. 98-114. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Turner, Hannah, Nancy Bruegeman, and Peyton Jennifer Moriarty. 2024. Provenance and historical warrants: histories of cataloguing at the Museum of Anthropology. *Journal of Documentation* 80(6):1419-1441.

Grad students, optional reading: Convolute H, "The Collector," in Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (1999, Harvard University Press)

Week 6, Feb. 10: Material Culture Show-and-Tell [Virtual, Asynchronous Class]

Object biographies and material stories

Readings: I will post a short list of object biographies to Brightspace. Choose one to read for this week's asynchronous class.

Class preparation:

1. Undergraduate students will record short, informal "flash" presentations (3 minutes) about the object they've chosen for the final project and post to Brightspace by the start of class time on Tuesday, Feb. 10 (see OWL page for instructions). Every student should watch the videos and post a short comment or question for each by Friday, Feb. 13.
2. Post a short reflection about the object biography you read to the discussion board.

Assignment due: Portfolios for first half of the term due on Brightspace by Friday, Feb. 13.

Week 7, Feb. 17: Reading Week

Week 8, Feb. 24: Maps as Material Culture

Approaching archival materials as objects, cultural traces, and materialized histories

Class preparation: We will be meeting at the Map and Data Centre, Weldon Library.

Readings: TBA during Reading Week

Week 9, March 3: Photographs as Objects, Photographs of Objects

Class Preparation: Outside of class, pay a visit to Museum London to see the [All Around Me, All Around You](#) and [Black Lives Lived Here: London Family Photos, 1910s–1960s](#) exhibits. Admission is free.

Readings: TBA during Reading Week

Week 10, March 10: Colonialism and Museums

Class Preparation: Finish the course book, *The Brutish Museums*, and come to class ready to discuss. Undergraduate students should bring a draft of their visual book review to share in class. Graduate students will prepare their book discussion and come prepared to lead discussion groups.

Readings:

Dan Hicks. 2020. *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*. Pluto Press, London.

Assignments Due:

Visual Book Reviews by Friday, March 13 on Brightspace [undergraduate]
Book Discussion and Reflection by Friday, March 13 on Brightspace [graduate]

Week 11, March 17: Architecture and the Built Landscape

How we shape our material surroundings, and how they shape us

Class preparation: Take photos of an architectural or landscape feature for close-range photogrammetry. Instructions will be provided in class and on Brightspace.

Readings: TBA during Reading Week

Week 12, March 24: Material Memory

Material culture, oral testimony, and processes of memory (and forgetting)

Class preparation: We will meet at 1:30 p.m. for a class discussion and then attend the Darnell Distinguished Lecture on Theory, Ethnography, and Activism at 2:30 p.m., featuring speaker [Dr. Pilar Riaño-Alcala](#). Some details may be subject to change; please check Brightspace for updates closer to the date!

Readings: TBA during Reading Week

Assignment due: Exhibit Review due by Friday, March 24 on Brightspace [graduate]

Week 13, March 31: Digital Material Culture

Considering the challenges and possibilities of digital approaches to material culture

Class preparation: Bring your exhibit materials to class for an in-class workshop prior to mounting the exhibit on April 7.

Readings: TBA during Reading Week

Week 14, April 7: Exhibit Mounting and Opening

Mounting of class exhibit in Weldon Library and exhibit opening in the Weldon Community Room

Assignment due: Please submit your portfolio for the second half of the term by Thursday, April 9 at 11:59pm on Brightspace [graduate]

Graduate final papers due **Tuesday, April 21 at 11:59pm** on Brightspace.

~ End ~