

**FURN 2451-01 [In conjunction with HPSS S732]  
Fall 2010: Presidents, Place and Public History**

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**Office Hours:** By Appointment

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

The Witness Tree Project is a curricular initiative Department 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.

Last year, a Pecan Witness Tree, from Hampton National Historic Site in Towson, Maryland was the material we used in our course of studies. This year we will be working with memorial-era trees from both the George Washington Birthplace National Monument and the Sagamore Hill National Historic Site (Teddy Roosevelt home site) in Oyster Bay, NY. A Site visit and an opportunity to "witness" the landscape is critical to our understanding of the subject we are investigating. Due to the distance from RISD of the GW Birthplace we will be only visiting Sagamore Hill.

### **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 two National Park Service Historic Sites; George Washington Birthplace National Monument and Sagamore Hill National Historic Site (the homestead of Theodore Roosevelt). These trees were not witness to the lives of these two iconic Presidents, but were present during one or more of the memorialization periods. These materials were removed by the NPS during the course of restoration projects at the respective Sites. RISD took possession of the trees, 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.

### **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 checked 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**

9/20 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.

9/27 Hand and Power Tool Demos. Methods and means of attachment, gluing and shaping lecture. Give 1st assignment.

10/4 Field trip to Sagamore Hill.

10/11 Review 1st assignment. Carving/shaping/sanding demo. Give 2nd assignment.

10/18 Design development review, group and individual. Finishing Demo.

10/25 Work on 2nd assignment (in class time).

11/1 Critique of 2nd assignment. 3rd assignment given.

11/8 Design development review. Class pin-up and critique.

11/15 Final design review, in class working time.

11/22 In class working time.

11/29 In class working time.

12/6 Final Critique, Location TBA.

### **1st Assignment**

The memorialization of our Presidents by the public has been happening since Washington's time. Before the advent of electronic media and even wide spread print media this memorializing was very much a "home spun" craft. Create a simple object that memorializes either Washington or Roosevelt. This object is to be created primarily with the hand skills that have been demonstrated in the studio. Develop a story line about the person who would have wanted the created object and why they were memorializing said President.

Class Review: 10/11

### **2nd Assignment**

Washington and Roosevelt, besides being soldiers, statesmen, scholars and politicians were men of the land. Their close connection to nature, and their desire to understand it, work it and (some would say) control it helped shape who they were and national attitudes towards it. Design an object that reflects their interest in the environment of their time. Think carefully about what each of these Presidents interests were, how they overlapped and were also different.

Class Critique: 11/1

### **3rd Assignment**

This assignment is about Roosevelt and Sagamore Hill. Design an object that you would place at Sagamore Hill. Pick the location carefully. The object's intent is to engage the public in the process of reflection and memorialization of Roosevelt. Who he was and what he stood for.

In addition to your object, you are required to write a statement about the object: How you came to design it, what issues, ideas or events helped shape and form your design.

Final Critique: 12/6