

**HANDBOOK**  
*for*  
**QUESTIONING  
THINGS**



# QUESTIONING THINGS: A QUARTER CENTURY OF MATERIAL CULTURE STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

The things around us have the potential to tell stories. They open up new ways of understanding the past and its relationship to the present and future. The study of the material world allows us to chart new academic and creative pathways across disciplines, and to think in new ways—but only, if we stop, look closely, and ask questions.

*Questioning Things* invites visitors to sit down, to examine, to compare, to connect, and to interrogate things that are common, wondrous, and sometimes both at the same time. All of the objects on view are from UW campus collections or Wisconsin collections that have partnered with Material Culture courses on campus. They have animated the work of Material Culture students for decades. This exhibit brings together things that make us curious, things we might covet, and things that open new worlds of intellectual possibility.

For the past twenty-five years, the University of Wisconsin-Madison has been a national leader in the study of Material Culture, the interdisciplinary study of the material traces of the past. With the support of the Chipstone Foundation, this exhibition celebrates the contributions and retirement of Ann Smart Martin, Stanley and Polly Stone (Chipstone) Professor Emerita of American Decorative Arts and Material Culture. It looks ahead to the future of Material Culture Studies on campus now rooted in and reaching out from the Center for Design and Material Culture here in the School of Human Ecology.

In your hands is a *Handbook for Questioning Things*, for your own questions and sketches. Open the drawers, experience the Chair Park, and look closely. This *Handbook* contains object reflections from more than forty Material Culture-connected alumni, faculty, and collaborators. Read the questions they ask about the things on view and then ask your own.

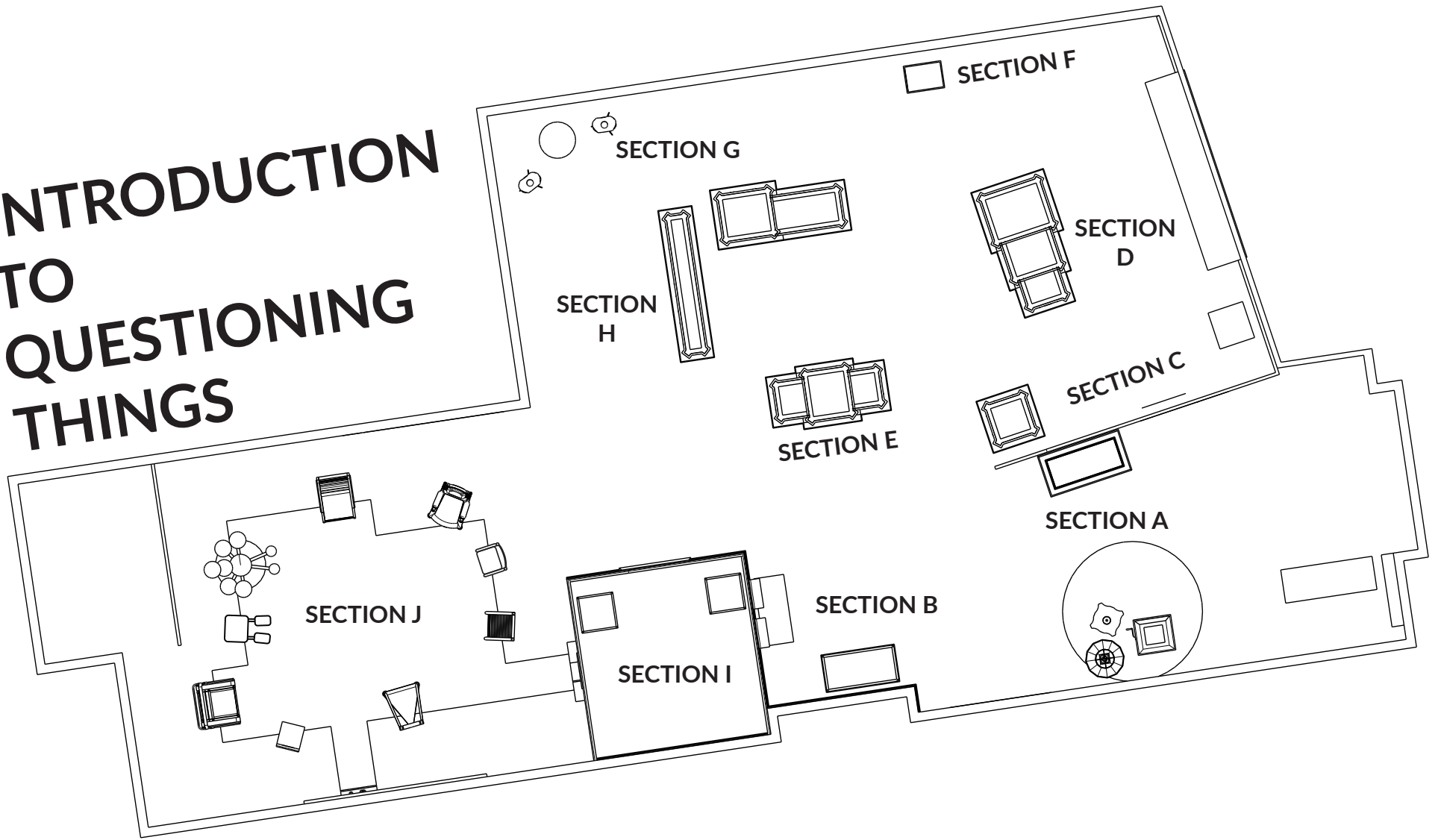
## TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF MATERIAL CULTURE AT UW: HONORING PROFESSOR ANN SMART MARTIN

Over the past twenty-five years Ann Smart Martin, Stanley and Polly Stone (Chipstone) Professor Emerita of American Decorative Arts and Material Culture, has transformed the ways students and colleagues at the University of Wisconsin-Madison engage with material things. She has invited all of us to consider how the simplest objects—a shop ledger, a ceramic shard, a candlestick, a table or even a ribbon—record vast histories of shared human behaviors. Through her widely lauded publications, innovative teaching, and impactful public humanities and collaborative exhibition projects, Martin has shaped Material Culture Studies both locally and internationally. In all of these endeavors material things and the questions they pose have been at the center of her work—including many of the things on view in this exhibition. The questions she posed of these objects were answered with unforgettable stories. We learned how material things shape and were shaped by culture and identity, preserved early industrial technologies, structured international systems of finance, and revealed how people made sense of their most intimate spaces.

While she was not the first professor at the UW to teach about the ways that the human condition could be gleaned from everyday objects, Martin codified Material Culture Studies at this university into a well-respected certificate program. Just as importantly she invited colleagues to share methodologies and approaches that connected schools and faculty across campus. She served as the Director of the Material Culture Studies Program since its inception and in recent years helped to establish the Center for Design and Material Culture. Martin truly excelled in organizing several comprehensive research exhibitions for her students on campus, online, within local cultural institutions, and nationally at the Smithsonian Museum of American History. Many of the objects on view here are marked with a ☆ indicating they were featured in one of Martin's more than ten major student-engaged projects.

Ann Smart Martin forever changed the ways the UW teaches with and asks questions about material things. Her work elevates the importance of campus, regional, and national collections. Her retirement this year challenges all of us to honor her by developing new material culture research, collaborations, and even more excellent stuff.

# INTRODUCTION TO QUESTIONING THINGS



# SECTION A

## INTRODUCTION

As you begin your *Handbook for Questioning Things*, notice that many different approaches may be taken to the same object. For example, this phonograph features two different question-driven labels written by three scholars. As you proceed, make note of the questions you have. **How might you begin to answer them?**

**1** Thomas Edison sent this state-of-the-art phonograph to UW professor Benjamin Snow for the Physics Department's new museum in 1919. The collection already included a replica of Edison's very first phonograph, an 1877 patent that recorded sound on a metal cylinder wrapped in tin-foil. By 1919 several companies were successfully producing home phonographs, and Edison held just a small slice of the market. The Edison Company's biggest selling point was superior acoustic clarity. Their dramatic "Tone Test" demonstrations challenged audiences to tell the difference between a live performer and an Edison Diamond Disc recording on a darkened stage.

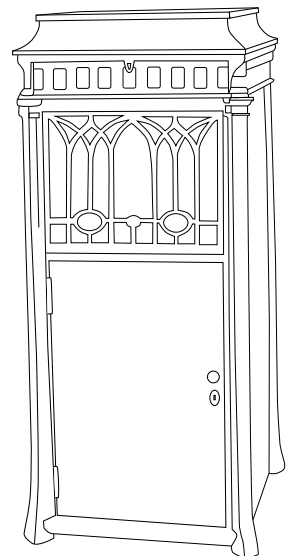
Although it represented the pinnacle of acoustic reproduction in its day, today this phonograph is a quaint reminder of how far sound technology has progressed. **Can you think of other objects whose meanings have changed as the circumstances of their use and value have changed?**

—Jody Clowes, Director, James Watrous Gallery, Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters.  
—David Driscoll, Curator of Economic History, Wisconsin Historical Society.

### WHAT IS THIS THING?

Furniture? A device for reproducing recorded sound in a living room? A physics demonstration item? An object for historical reflection? You decide.

Thomas Edison donated this phonograph to the University of Wisconsin's Physics Department in 1919. In Fall 2013, the First-Year Interest Group (FIG) "Science History Detectives," led by Ann Smart Martin and Lynn Nyhart, discovered it hiding in plain sight as they explored the physics demonstration collection. They learned it was still being used for lectures on the physics of sound. Accompanied by period music, the phonograph became part of the student-produced exhibition *Capturing Nature: Instruments, Specimens, Art*, on display at the Chazen Museum, Birge Hall, and Chamberlin Hall December 2013-April 2014. Using the interdisciplinary lens of material culture, FIG students learned how to detect unifying themes across the sciences, arts, and humanities and to curate their thematic exhibition across very different spaces.



**What hidden themes do you see joining the objects on view in this exhibition?**

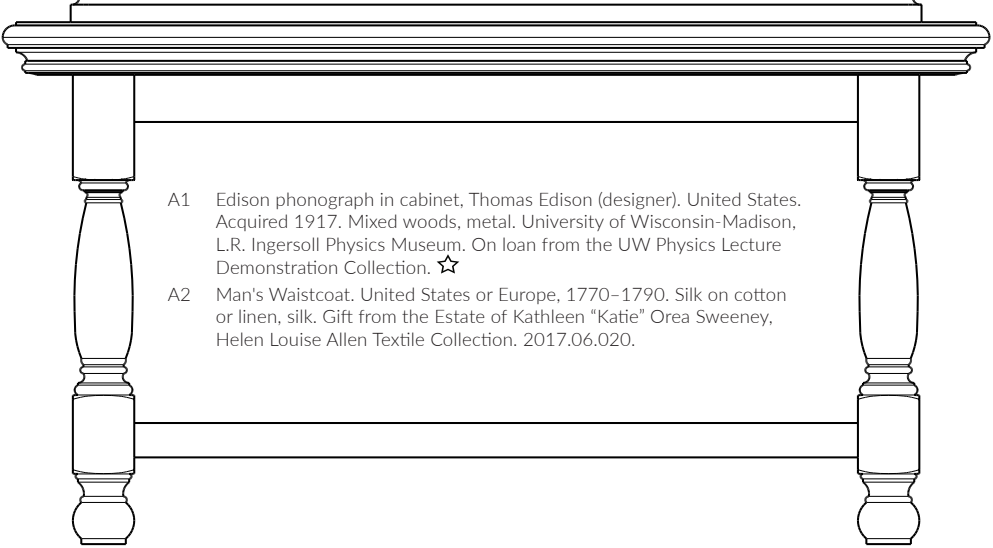
—Lynn Nyhart, Robert E. Kohler Professor of History of Science, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

## 2 THIS WAISTCOAT CAN SPEAK FOR ITSELF.

Floriography – the language of flowers – was popular in the eighteenth-century, so its embroidered rosebuds suggest hope for love, while daisy chains guard pockets from thieving hands. Notice how the embroidery does not quite reach the shoulders or side seams? This tells us that the decoration was not bespoke and the wearer's body exceeded sizes available on the ready-made market. When market standards clash with idiosyncratic bodies, objects raise surprising questions.

The wearer was probably making a statement about taste, status, and wealth through fine clothing – what might be called conspicuous consumption. But we can see that the waistcoat was altered as his body changed, making his own consumption conspicuous. How did this smooth shimmering satin waistcoat make its wearer feel, move, and behave? Impressed by the fine stitches, we might also wonder about the embroiderers' strained eyes and fingers. How do objects shape and regulate bodies? **Do you reassess your own clothed body when confronting this waistcoat in the gallery?**

—Sophie Pitman, Pleasant Rowland Textile Specialist and Research Director, Center for Design and Material Culture, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

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- A1 Edison phonograph in cabinet, Thomas Edison (designer). United States. Acquired 1917. Mixed woods, metal. University of Wisconsin-Madison, L.R. Ingersoll Physics Museum. On loan from the UW Physics Lecture Demonstration Collection. ☆
- A2 Man's Waistcoat. United States or Europe, 1770–1790. Silk on cotton or linen, silk. Gift from the Estate of Kathleen "Katie" Orea Sweeney, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. 2017.06.020.

# SECTION B

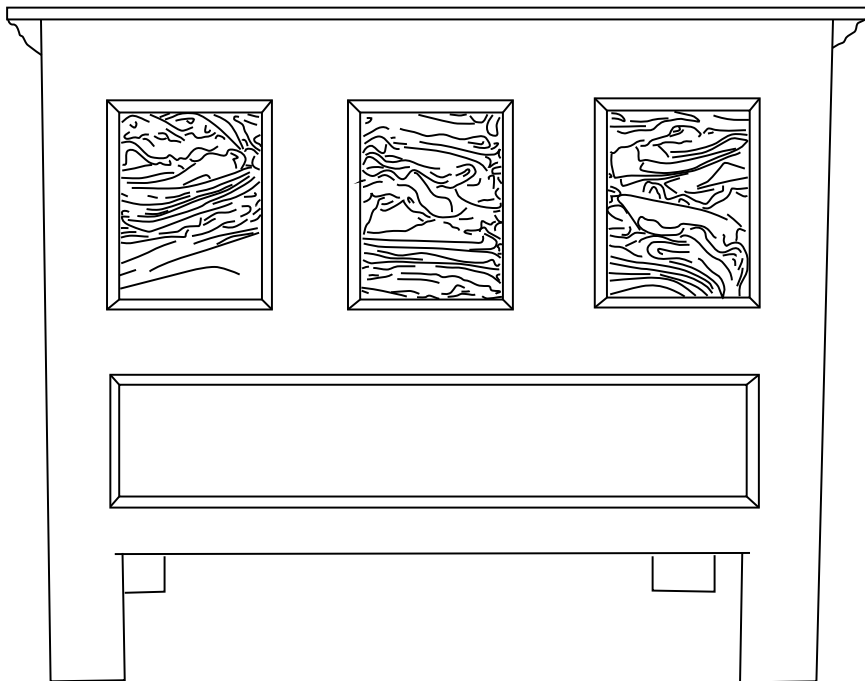
## ARTISTS AS MATERIAL CULTURE SCHOLARS

Scholarly work takes many forms. Contemporary artists benefit from Material Culture Studies when their research into historic objects, ideas, and materials translates into new, layered works of art. Here we can see how artist Martha Glowacki's engagement with historic objects shapes her own work. We can ponder how artist BA Harrington turned research on historic furniture forms and gender into a fascinating sculpture.

**1** My sculptural artwork focuses on early American furniture made specifically for women. Reclaiming it from the world of male production, where it has received most of its scholarly attention, I unpack latent meanings embedded in the furniture as I consider the domestic, feminine world of its use.

*Lineage* was the first piece in my largest body of work that references Hadley chests, an American vernacular chest form made in the Connecticut River Valley of Western Massachusetts from the late seventeenth through the mid-eighteenth centuries. As a traditionally trained furniture-maker, I had been familiar with the chests but it was not until studying early American decorative arts at UW-Madison that this iconic dowry furniture came alive for me. Reflecting, through a material culture lens, on the historical and social context within which the chests resided transformed my making practice and was pivotal in defining the conceptual foundation of my artwork.

—BA Harrington, Director, The Wood Center at IUP, Associate Professor of Woodworking, Department of Art and Design, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.



### 2&3

Both of these wreaths are fine examples of Victorian era women's "fancywork". Wreaths from this period were made from a variety of materials, including human hair, wool, and feathers. They were generally displayed in deep, glass-covered shadow boxes lined with decorative papers or fabric. By the 1880s, instructions and tools for making fancywork wreaths were widely available and were advertised in sources such as *Godey's Lady's Book*.

Unfortunately, we don't know who constructed these two wreaths or whether they served a purpose beyond the display of skilled making.

Hair wreaths have a strong emotive power, and this one is no exception. Hairwork was often made as part of mourning, using hair from people who had passed. Unlike Victorians, who incorporated rituals surrounding death into their daily lives, we find human hair from deceased people both fascinating and edgy. The wreath may instead commemorate a group of friends or family. It was certainly a difficult object to fabricate. The process

of making a complex hair wreath like this one involves gathering and preparing the hair; wrangling this slippery, fine material around wire forms; and binding all the separate components into a composite that creates the illusion of flowers, vines, and sprigs.

Unlike the more somber hair wreath, the wool wreath bursts with color and energy. To me, this wreath is a marvel of engineering: the wool strands are wrapped around and woven into tightly coiled metal wire forms. The metal armature becomes an important visual component of the wreath. It is pulled out to create springy sprigs with beads on the ends, or bent and formed to create shapes for leaves or petals. The pliable wool is artfully knotted, bundled, or sheared to create dimension and remarkably realistic renditions of flowers and stems. It is probable that wreaths like this one reflect the Victorians' passion for botanizing, as well as the study of floriography, or the symbolic "language of flowers" popular in the 1800s.

—Martha Glowacki, Independent artist and curator.

- B1 *Lineage*, BA Harrington, 2006–2009. Red oak, antique linens. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation. 2010.1.
- B2 Hair wreath. United States, 1850–1869. Human hair, wire. Transferred from the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. D.C.US.0002.
- B3 Yarn wreath. United States, 1880–1899. Glass, metal, wool. Transferred from the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. D.C.US.0009.

# SECTION B

## ARTISTS AS MATERIAL CULTURE SCHOLARS

4 Martha Glowacki is deeply curious about how people through time have made sense of the world. She explores these problems through her sculptures and installations. Like scholars of the natural world dating back to antiquity, she strives to make the process of capturing and recording natural and social— itself a false distinction—histories legible and tangible. *Summa (For My Mother)* is a diptych or two-part artwork that explores this problem in an intimate way, as a tribute to her mother. Glowacki opens up both the potential and the impossibilities of fully capturing a person, an idea, and a memory. She combines hairwork, life casting, relics of her mother, animal bones, and insects, signaling a kind of *momento mori*. Glowacki mixes modes of memory making to create a work that is both about her most excellent and specific mother, and somehow universally, mothers. **What details do you notice? Who do you remember?**

—Sarah Anne Carter, Executive Director, Center for Design and Material Culture, Associate Professor, Design Studies, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Look around the gallery. What objects or questions inspire you?  
Who or what do they remind you of? Why?

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Sketch what you see.

Pick one detail. Sketch it.

B4 *Summa (For my Mother)*, Martha Glowacki, 2007. Wood, glass, bronze, linen, bones, graphite, pigment. On loan from Martha Glowacki.



# SECTION C

## MATERIAL IDENTITIES

Material things are central to self presentation. The way you dress your child, the intimate items you share with loved ones, or ribbons and trim that bring new meaning to the everyday all underscore the role of the material in the stories we tell about ourselves.

**1** This child's coat was collected by Professor Helen Louise Allen and is part of the original bequest of textiles at the core of the collection that bears her name. For Allen, this coat likely offered a lesson in technique: it is elaborately embellished with fine, detailed embroidery, raised work with satin stitch, French knots and chainstitch. For me as a parent and historian of childhood, this cream-colored child's coat offers a different set of lessons. I see so much potential for mess and accidents. I wonder about the stories the small stains, wear, and hidden repairs hold. A toddler wearing it would be buttoned up to their neck, but the cut is more generous than it would be for an adult. At the same time, the tot would be on display, possibly presented in a pram, perhaps more like a carefully packaged object than an active little person. **Could you imagine a child in the Child Development Lab learning or playing in this coat? What lessons could a garment like this teach them—and their parents? Compare this coat to the child's kimono nearby. What futures, hopes, and dreams might these items suggest?**

—Sarah Anne Carter, Executive Director, Center for Design and Material Culture, Associate Professor, Design Studies, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

**2**

“Towards the end of the morning...Catherine, having occasion for some indispensable yard of ribbon which must be bought without a moment's delay, walked out into the town...”

—*Northanger Abbey*, written 1803, published 1817, by Jane Austen.

“In a pirate, man-of-war, or slave ship, when the captain is rowed anywhere in his boat, he always sits in the stern sheets on a comfortable, sometimes cushioned seat there, and often steers himself with a pretty little milliner's tiller decorated with gay cords and ribbons. But the whale-boat has no seat astern, no sofa of that sort whatever, and no tiller at all.”

—*Moby Dick*, 1851, by Herman Melville.

“The day of the burial [Frado] was attired in her mourning dress; but Susan, in her grief, had forgotten a bonnet. She hastily ransacked the closets, and found one of Mary's, trimmed with bright pink ribbon. It was too late to change the ribbon, and she was unwilling to leave Frado at home; she knew it would be the wish of James she should go with her.”

—*Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*, 1859, by Harriet E. Wilson.

“[Jo] read the manuscript carefully through, making dashes here and there, and putting in many exclamation points...she tied it up with a smart red ribbon, and sat a minute looking at it with a sober, wistful expression, which plainly showed how earnest her work had been.”

—*Little Women*, 1868, by Louisa May Alcott.

“What caused the ladies to stop was the prodigious spectacle presented by the grand exhibition of white goods...the greatest radiance of this nucleus of light came from the central gallery, from amidst the ribbons and the neckerchiefs, the gloves and the silks.”

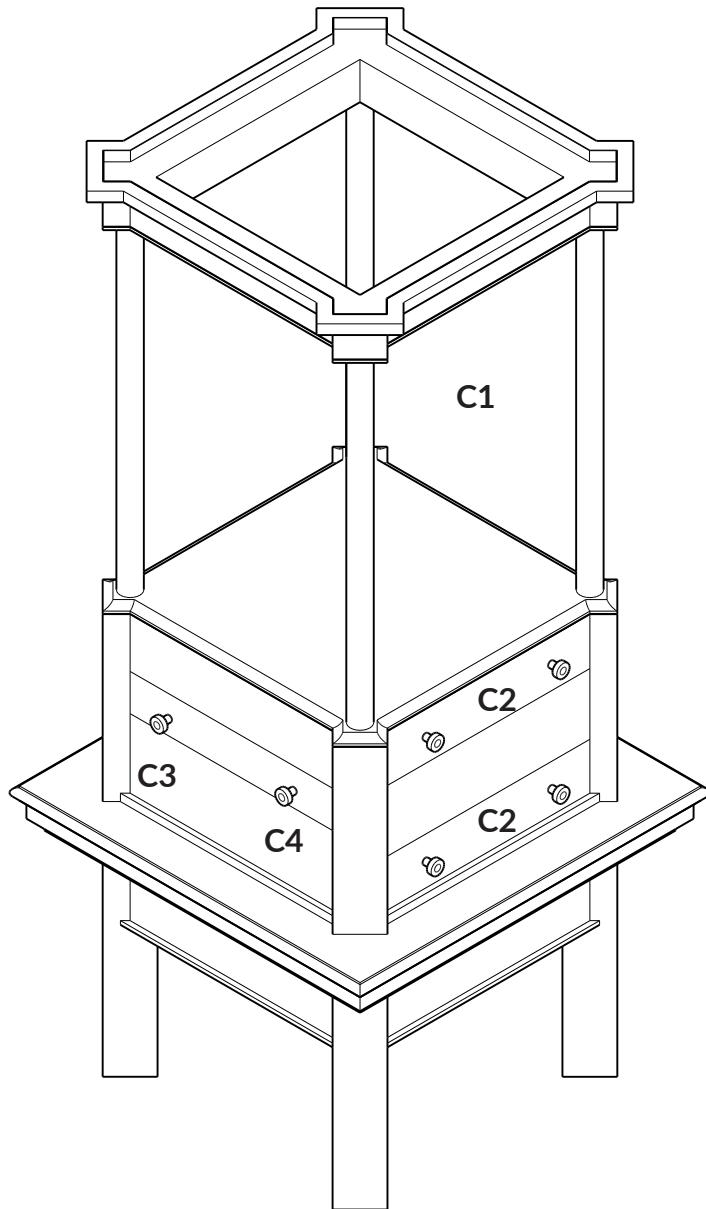
—*The Ladies' Paradise*, 1883, by Émile Zola (translated by Ernest Alfred Vizetelly)

In nineteenth-century novels, as well as in daily life, ribbons are shorthand. As these authors note, ribbons carry meaning, even when that meaning may not be appropriate in the moment. They symbolize identity and affiliation, rank and status, occasion and opportunity, and, as Ann Smart Martin reminds us, desire. Ribbons flutter and flow, while they also wrap and bind. They ornament, drawing attention to the body or object they festoon. They can also fasten,

concealing and protecting what is secured within them. These tiny textiles—with their visible, and sometimes decorative, selvages; their intricate or glossy weave structures; and their plethora of color—reveal the skill and care of their making and manufacture. And therefore, they convey value to whatever they are tied.

—Marina Moskowitz, Lynn and Gary Mecklenburg Chair in Textiles, Material Culture, and Design, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

- C1 Child's coat. France, 1870. Cotton, pearl, silk on wool. Gift from the Estate of Professor Helen Louise Allen, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. E.A.E.0731a.
- C2 Edging trim tape. Servall. United States, 1930-1949. Cotton. Gift of Gary John Gresl, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. W.L.US.3110a, W.L.US.3110b.  
Edging trim tape. The American Fabrics Company, Bridgeport, Connecticut, United States, 1920-1929. Cotton. Gift of Gary John Gresl, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. W.J.US.2169a, W.J.US.2169b, W.J.US.2169d.  
Edging trim tape. Germany, 1900-1929. Cotton. Gift of Edgar Hellum & Robert Neal, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. W.J.E.2111.  
Edging trim tape. United States, 1800-1899. Cotton. Gift from the Estate of Professor Helen Louise Allen, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. W.L.US.1368.  
Upholstery trim. United States, 1900-1929. Cotton, rayon. Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. W.J.US.2122.  
Upholstery trim. United States, 1920-1939. Linen, cotton. Gift from the Estate of Edna Kearns-Gleason, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. W.J.US.3142.  
Ribbon. France, 1900-1919. Silk. Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. P.D.E.1647.  
Upholstery trim. United States, 1920-1929. Linen, cotton. Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. W.J.US.1237.



## 3&4

Do you want to carry one of these small portraits in your pocket? Put it on a chain and hang it around your neck? Wear it over your outfit and let everyone see it, or hide it under your clothes and only show it to your closest friends?

Portrait miniatures were small, intimate portraits that were often given or exchanged around the time of marriage or to commemorate another rite of passage. Their materials made them even more precious: they were painted on ivory,

which was imported from places that were viewed as exotic and far away. Miniature cases, made of gold and other imported metals, were often custom-made for a patron. They sometimes included inscriptions, initials, or locks of hair on the reverse or were surrounded by precious stones or pearls, as was Robert Broome's portrait. Miniature portraits often cost as much as a 25 by 30-inch oil painting.

—Anne Verplanck, Associate Professor Emerita,  
American Studies, Penn State Harrisburg.

- C3 *Portrait of a Gentleman*, Nathaniel Rogers (1787–1844). American, ca. 1825. Watercolor on ivory. Chazen Museum of Art, Gift of D. Frederick Baker from the Baker/Pisano Collection. 2017.27.43.
- C4 *Portrait of a Gentleman*, Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827). American, ca. 1780. Watercolor on ivory. Chazen Museum of Art, Gift of D. Frederick Baker from the Baker/Pisano Collection. 2017.27.47.



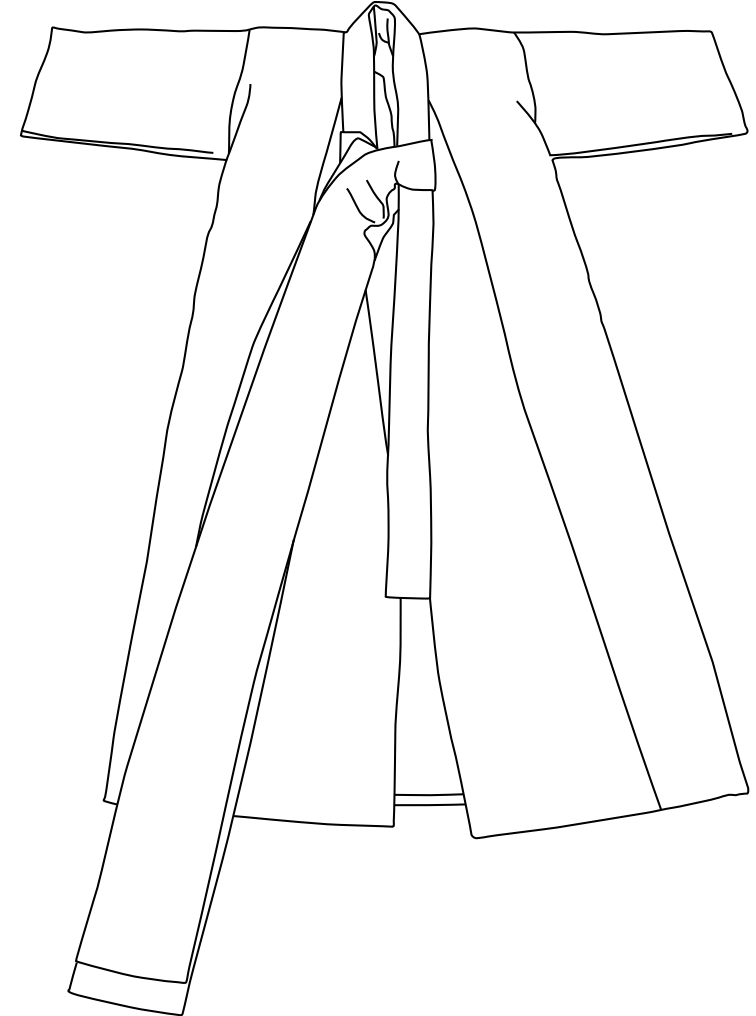
- 5 There is a lot of action in the vivid pattern of the fabric of this small kimono. The geometric shapes, mountain scenes, seascapes, interiors with folded screens and large flying cranes reflect many aspects of Japanese aesthetics. The fabric buzzes with activity and the eye does not rest on any one motif for long. Perhaps the most potential energy and action in this garment was in the child who wore it. What did it feel like for a child in Hawaii in the first half of the twentieth century to carefully put on this kimono? Did their parents hope this garment would connect back to their lives in Japan and Japanese culture? Would it help create new pathways for that connection as they grew up? Did the child move more carefully or listen more attentively when wearing it? Or not? **Look closely at the artist book *Kimono/Kosode* displayed nearby. How might the lessons and feelings of this child's garment be folded into the history and layers of its pages?**

—Sarah Anne Carter, Executive Director, Center for Design and Material Culture, Associate Professor, Design Studies, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

- 6 Carol Schwartzott's *Kimono/Kosode* is a demanding object. Even while the protective box it is housed in warns you to be careful with its contents, *Kimono/Kosode* asks to be handled. Before even opening it, the book's piano-hinge binding urges you to think about how you will physically engage with this object; cautioning that this is not a book that you can leaf through with one hand, while the other hand casually supports the spine. Opening *Kimono/Kosode*

demands a flat surface on which to explore pages that expand beyond their closed footprint. For a maximalist material culturalist like me, this book also demands that a table surface be cleared of clutter—piles of other books, boxes, and trinkets must be relocated to accommodate *Kimono/Kosode's* spatial request. Before you realize it, this book has asked you to construct an altar space in which to ritually unfold and refold its sections like delicate silk garments.

—Joanna Wilson, PhD Candidate, Art History, University of Wisconsin–Madison.



- C5 Child's kimono. Japan, Early 20th century. Silk, cotton. Gift of Anonymous, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. 2022.04.003.
- C6 *Kimono/Kosode: A Decorative Study of the Kimono*, Carol Schwartzott (b. 1945). American, published by National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2001. Cotton rag board, Japanese papers, bamboo. On loan from the Kohler Art Library, University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries. N7433.4 S387 K55 2001.

# SECTION D

## THINGS HOLDING STORIES

The objects on view in this case offer a wide range of stories, if you are able to ask the right questions. Think about how issues of race, class, gender, and power—central categories of cultural history as well as Material Culture Studies—shape the ways these items may be made meaningful.

### 1&2

The fantasmagorical shapes on these teapots represent the shells of ancient marine invertebrates, cut through at different angles. Why would a late eighteenth-century English potter decorate a teapot with images of fossil shells?

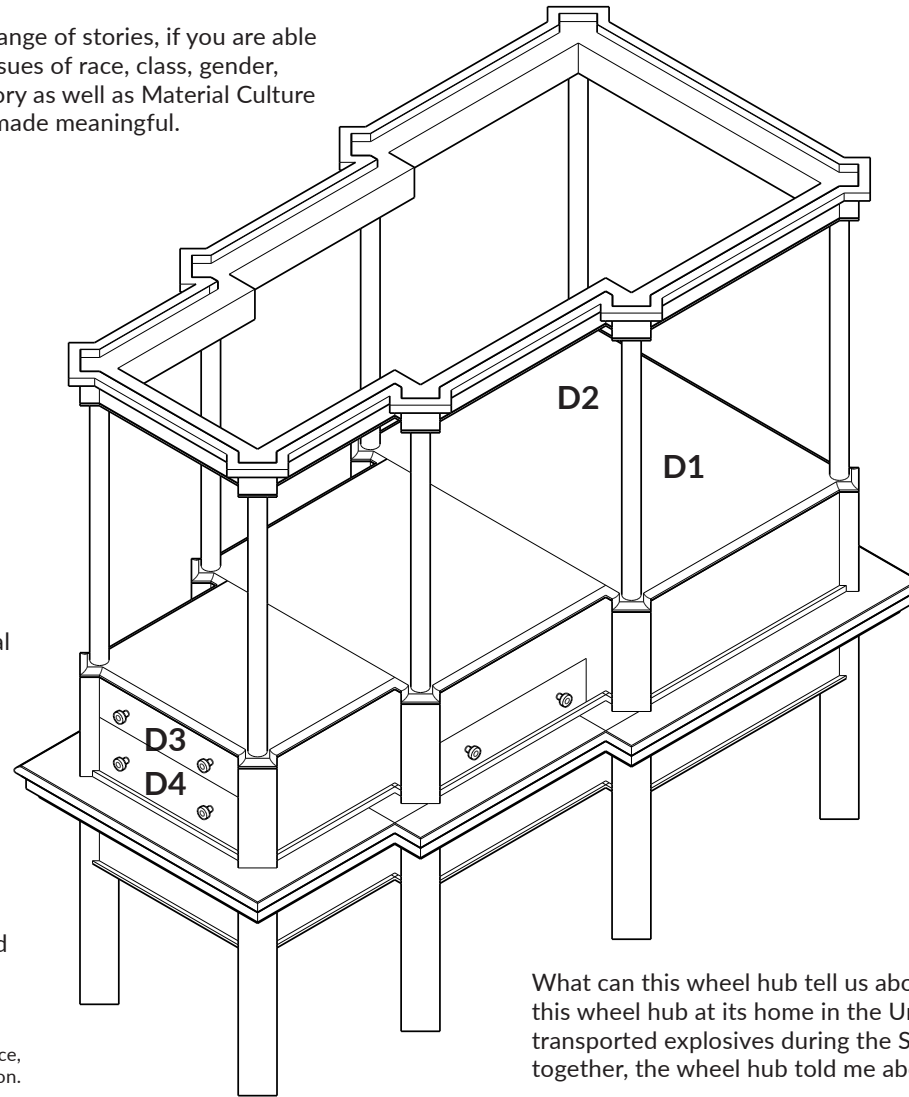
Were they signs of ongoing natural-philosophical debates? Although naturalists committed to an unchanging Creation still argued that they were geological illusions, most by then believed such forms were the relics of once-living things. (How they got underground in the middle of land remained disputed.)

Such teapots are rare. Were they a fleeting personal experiment? The famously innovative Staffordshire potter Josiah Wedgwood was a fossil enthusiast and radical experimenter. Sadly, no evidence indicates that Wedgwood's firm produced such a pot.

Were these decorations, like tea-drinking and teapots themselves, a sign of middle-class emulation of wealthy elites? The noble "great houses" of the region were sometimes decorated with local, fossil-studded "encrinite limestone" containing exactly the same sorts of ancient shells represented in these teapots.

#### What do you think?

—Lynn Nyhart, Robert E. Kohler Professor of History of Science, University of Wisconsin–Madison.



- D1 Teapot and Cover (fossil pot). Staffordshire, England, ca. 1785. Creamware. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation. 1995.1.a-b. ☆
- D2 Teapot and Cover (fossil pot). Staffordshire, England, ca. 1760. Salt-glazed stoneware, enamel. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation. 1997.19.a-b. ☆
- D3 Sugar Tongs, Hester Bateman (1708–1794). London, England, 1789–90. Sterling silver. Chazen Museum of Art, Gift of the Shirley Jane Kaub Trust. 2018.29.3. ☆
- D4 Wheel hub from Sterling Hall van. Madison, Wisconsin, United States. Retrieved August 24, 1970. Metal. On loan from UW–Madison Archives. Memorabilia\_00667 7/050/01.

### 3

Upon close inspection of this diminutive sugar tong, you can find two sets of initials: HB on the interior, MH on the exterior. HB is the maker's mark for Hester Bateman, a preeminent female silversmith. The elegantly interwoven monogram MH represents this piece's long-ago owner, likely a woman, who would have owned a larger silver tea and coffee service, each piece engraved with the same monogram. These sets served a performative function for the owner, both as a display of her taste and refinement and as a social requisite for entertaining and serving guests.

Imagine how this piece might be activated in a formal setting, complete with the visual pleasures and tastes, sounds and aromas that were once a part of this object's life. Envision how you might use it to delicately place a sugar cube in your cup, in the ritual of having a cup of tea or coffee.

—Laura Sevelis, Associate Specialist, British & European Furniture & Decorative Arts, Freeman's.

### 4

What can this wheel hub tell us about its biography? Throughout spring 2019, I visited this wheel hub at its home in the University Archives. Initially, I wanted to learn how it transported explosives during the Sterling Hall bombing. Yet, after sharing quality time together, the wheel hub told me about its multifaceted life.

What evidence does the wheel hub carry of its commercial purpose? The serial numbers and identification marks tattooed on its body symbolize its service in a Ford Econoline's braking system.

On August 24, 1970, this wheel hub endured the Sterling Hall bombing. Can you describe how this event scarred the hub? How has its participation altered the wheel hub's function and its public perception?

**Consider the hub in relation to you and this gallery. In what stage of its life is it meeting you now? How does this wheel hub compare to those in everyday vehicles?**

—Noah Mapes, PhD Student, History of Art & Visual Studies, Cornell University.

# SECTION D

## THINGS HOLDING STORIES

### 5&6

*End Products; or, Down in the Dumps*

"Oh dear me, what do I see?" Material culture is all about reading things. It's rare, though, that they actually talk back to us, much less with a wicked sense of humor. In the days before indoor plumbing (and electric lighting, which would help you find your way to a privy), chamber pots like these were one of life's most basic essentials. The first one features a spread-eagled figure, gazing upwards in horror, pledging a social contract between user and object: "Keep me clean and use me well, and what I see I will not tell." The second chamber-pot, a big heavy piece of pearlware, is more savagely satirical. A figure of Napoleon lurks in the bottom, accompanied by the single Latin word *PEREAT* ("let him perish"). Political polarization, evidently, is nothing new. But few objects nowadays find the fun in function quite so effectively as these. Call it sit-down comedy.

—Glenn Adamson, Curator and writer.

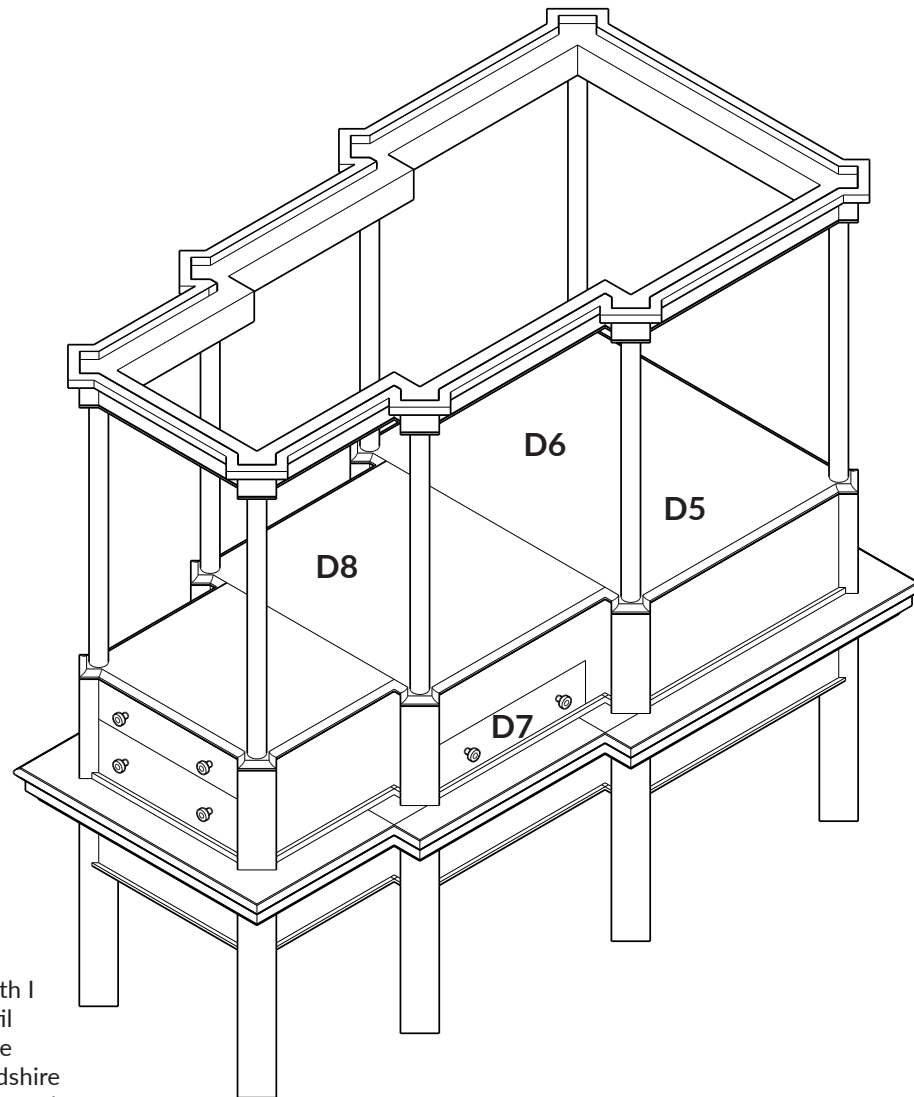


Follow the links to take a peek inside.

### 7

At first glance, this aesthetically wonderful object makes absolutely no sense. Why is Queen Elizabeth I who reigned on the English throne from 1558 until 1603 portrayed on a creamware serving dish made nearly 170 years after her death? In 1765, Staffordshire potter, Josiah Wedgwood, in a stroke of marketing genius made a creamware tea service for Queen Charlotte, the consort of George III and subsequently claimed the title "Queen's Ware" for the entire brand. In 1773, Wedgwood also produced an elaborate creamware dinner service for Catherine II, Empress of Russia. Several lines of historical and political evidence might explain this dish but perhaps it is best considered a visual pun made by a competing creamware manufacturer in Leeds, unhappy with the current monarchy, and even more concerned about ceramic relationships with foreign rulers, who decided to choose the popular and revered Elizabeth I as the rightful monarch to represent Queen's Ware.

—Rob Hunter, Editor, *Ceramics in America*, Chipstone Foundation.



### 8

This Chinese export porcelain bowl depicts the busy Canton port (Guangzhou) of the late eighteenth century. We see a long line of "hongs"—warehouses, factories, and residences for traders. The Canton port was one of the world's greatest sites for exporting tea and porcelain and a meeting place for merchants from all over the world, represented on the bowl with the national flags of Prussia, France, Sweden, England, Holland, and Denmark. Hence, the waterfront hongs were a popular symbol for Chinese trade and western exploration. Regarding the depiction of the buildings, the Chinese traditional isometric perspective and the contemporary panoramic perspective were applied. On the inside, an apple green band with a festoon of flowers encircles an iron-red vase of flowers in the famille rose colors—a family of pink shades developed by the Jesuits and subsequently introduced to the Chinese artisans in the Kangxi period. The inside rim, decorated with fret patterns, flower baskets, and golden cartouches, is inspired by Meissen borders popular in the late eighteenth century.

—Sooyun Sohn, Assistant Professor, Early Modern Europe Art History, Hong Ik University.

- D5 Chamber pot. Possibly Dixon, Austin & Co., Garrison Pottery. Durham County, England, ca. 1840. Lead-glazed creamware, polychrome decoration. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation. 2003.22.
- D6 Chamber pot with Napoleon figure. Staffordshire, England, 1805–1810. Pearlware. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation. 2017.18.
- D7 Charger. Leeds Pottery (1758–1820). Leeds, England, ca. 1775. Creamware. Chazen Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John C. Cleaver. 1978.1126. ☆
- D8 "Hong" Punch bowl. Unidentified Chinese Manufacturer, ca. 1785. Porcelain, overglaze enamel. Chazen Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John C. Cleaver. 1974.92. ☆

# SECTION D

9

By the mid-nineteenth century, Americans annually consumed, on average, seven gallons of alcohol—three times today’s consumption. As such, women had a vested interest in moderating the drinking habits of their husbands. With few public avenues to express their moral or political values, women often expressed themselves through their domestic spaces. Carefully curated household motifs imparted important moral guidelines to the user.

Portrayed here, the poem “Tam O’ Shanter” highlights the alcohol-fueled marital discourse between its troubled protagonist, Tam, and his wife Kate. What begins as a rowdy drunken night for Tam, concludes with near ruin at the hands of a beguiling witch, a fate akin to that prophesied by Kate. This tale, depicted across the vessel—likely once containing ale—communicates an important message regarding the dangers of gross intoxication.

Material statements of morality are not unfamiliar to today’s consumers. In a time of perpetual consumption and infinite choice, **what is your jug? What messages does it impart?**

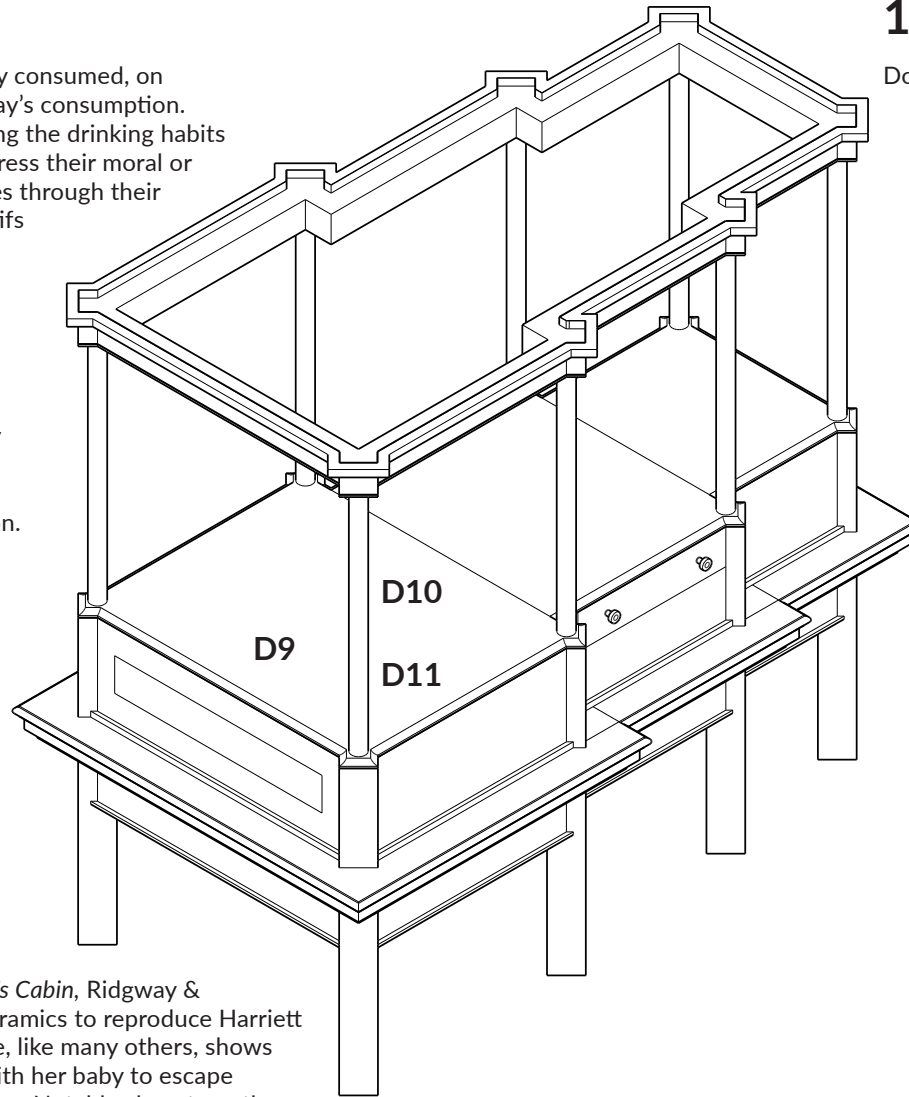
—Sophie Plzak,  
Operations and Compliance, Democratic Party of Wisconsin.

—Panagioti Tsiamis, Student, Art History,  
University of Wisconsin–Madison.

10

Made two years after the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Ridgway & Abington’s Slavery jug was among thousands of ceramics to reproduce Harriett Beecher Stowe’s abolitionist imagery. This example, like many others, shows the moment Eliza crossed the frozen Ohio River with her baby to escape re-enslavement. The reverse pictures a slave auction. Notably absent are the more popular sentimental illustrations of Eva and Uncle Tom’s friendship. The enslaved figure on the handle, with clasped hands reminiscent of Wedgwood’s 1787 abolitionist medallion, hypocritically forces the user to push their thumb onto the man’s head for leverage. This jug is also unusual in its color. Though many abolitionist ceramics featured painted figures to denote race, this piece is entirely white. **What does that choice do to your understanding of race in relation to the molded figures? Ridgway & Abington also created this same jug in an all-brown stoneware. Would that change your conclusion?**

—Natalie Wright, PhD Candidate, Design History, University of Wisconsin–Madison.



# THINGS HOLDING STORIES

11

Do objects speak? For a moment, suspend disbelief. Listen.

## THIS TUREEN IS TALKING TO YOU.

It has that porcelain swagger.

Part of a commissioned service for the Herbert family, its transfer-printed design bears heraldic elements. Its Welsh motto translates to “A good conscience is the best shield” and surrounds the profile of a Black figure. Histories suggest the family sought these dishes in celebration of the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act which emancipated some enslaved persons in some parts of the British empire. Others remained enslaved for years.

A gilded finial beckons us to remove the lid, to see the sauce inside, to confront its aromatics. Perhaps these would be mace, nutmeg, or cinnamon, made accessible by empire and by the labor of those free and others still enslaved.

**How might a dinner guest shield themselves from this jarring dissonance? What meanings lurked in the tureen? Who wondered about taking the lid off?**

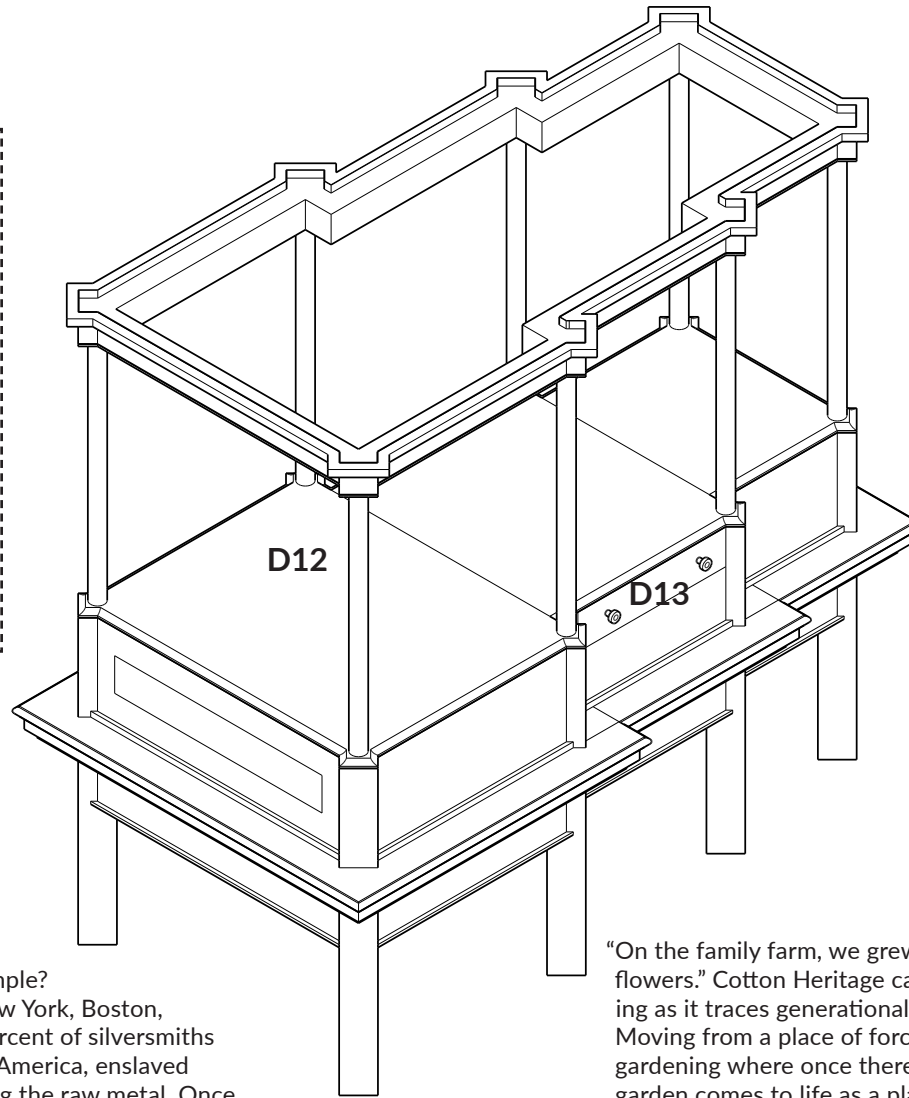
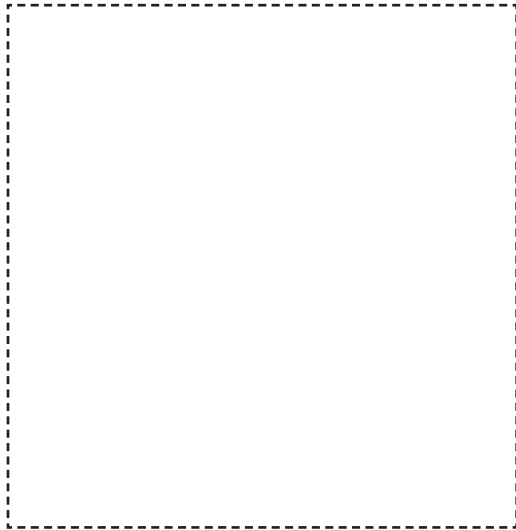
—Karen Parsons, Archivist and History Teacher,  
The Loomis Chaffee School.

- D9 Tam O’Shanter (jug). William Ridgway & Co. (active 1830–1854). Staffordshire, England, 1835. Salt-glazed stoneware. Chazen Museum of Art, Bequest of Frank R. Horlbeck. ☆
- D10 Slavery (jug). Ridgway & Abington (active 1835–1860). Staffordshire, England, 1853. Salt-glazed stoneware, metal. Chazen Museum of Art, Bequest of Frank R. Horlbeck. ☆
- D11 Covered Sauce Tureen. Worcester Porcelain Company and Chamberlain & Co. Factory, (ca. 1786–1852). Worcester, England, ca. 1833. Porcelain. Chazen Museum of Art, Bequest of Mr. and Mrs. John C. Cleaver. 1991.361a-b. ☆

# SECTION D

## THINGS HOLDING STORIES

What is your favorite thing in the exhibit?  
Why? Sketch it.



What questions do you have?

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12

How might enslaved workers have contributed to the manufacture of coffee pots like this example? In some parts of colonial America—including New York, Boston, Delaware and Philadelphia—as many as forty percent of silversmiths were enslavers. Even before the silver reached America, enslaved miners and sailors were digging and transporting the raw metal. Once in the silversmithing workshop, enslaved hands could have cast, hammered, soldered, polished, and engraved this form into existence. In addition, enslaved merchants also could have sold this form to consumers, managed its delivery, and recorded their payments in ledgers. Skilled enslaved workers could have been hired out to other silversmiths nearby, or even hundreds of miles away, to apply their talents for wages that benefited their enslavers. In some cases, this practice of hiring-out could have provided funds and the opportunity to buy their own freedom.

—Ryan Grover, Director, Rockwood Park & Museum.

13

“On the family farm, we grew only our food and cotton. Now I only grow flowers.” Cotton Heritage captures many of the tensions inherent in farming as it traces generational shifts in one family’s relationship with plants. Moving from a place of forced labor to one of choice, Banks finds joy in gardening where once there was pain. Through her words and images, the garden comes to life as a place of wonder and of work; a place of beauty and of sustenance; a place to enjoy the moment and to connect with the past. The materiality of the book mirrors these tensions as well. What begins as a cold gray box opens into a world of soft color and veiled leaves.

—Meghan C. Doherty, Director, Museum of the White Mountains, Plymouth State University.

- D12 Coffee Pot. North America, Second half of the 18th century. Silver. Chazen Museum of Art, Gift of Eugene and Jean Roark. 2018.23. ☆
- D13 Cotton Heritage, Alisa Banks, American, 2016. Cotton plant, bronze, silk thread, cloth, watercolors. On Loan from the Kohler Art Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries, N7433.4 .B354 C68 2016



# SECTION E

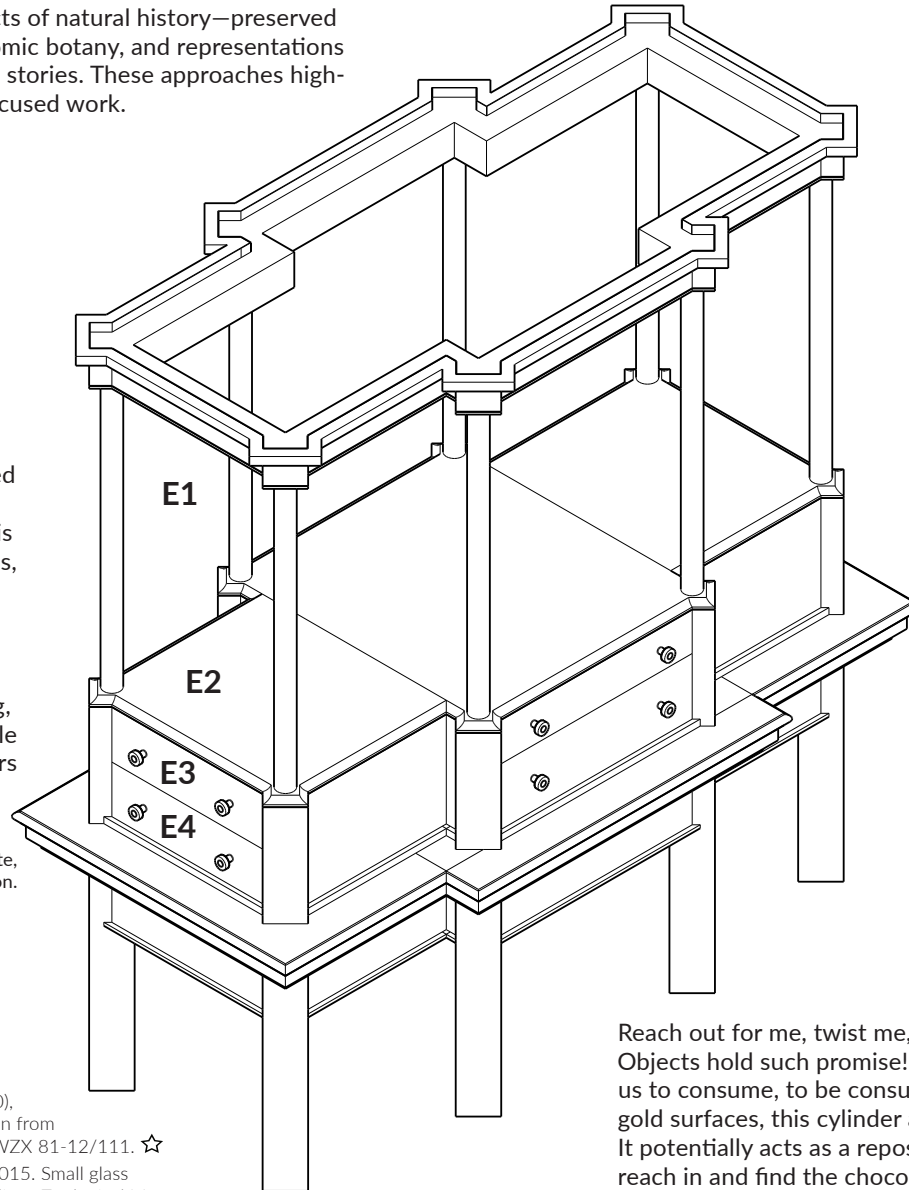
## NATURAL AND CULTURAL HISTORIES

Through the lenses of Material Culture Studies, objects of natural history—preserved specimens, the tools of collecting, examples of economic botany, and representations of animals—inevitably tell cultural as well as scientific stories. These approaches highlight the potential of truly transdisciplinary, object-focused work.

### 1&2

What does it mean to filter, to strain, to separate, and to capture? The fine silk mesh that makes up this mysterious item gives us a clue. Artists have long used this material as “silk screens” through which paint or ink passes layer upon layer, and out of which reveals an image. Edward Asahel Birge used this silk mesh to create a different kind of picture: that of life teeming in freshwater lakes. Plunging this net deep into the water, he would then pull upwards, capturing minute plankton (much like that present in the wet specimen displayed here) and organic matter at different strata. With this net and others like it, he created the field of “limnology,” the study of inland aquatic ecosystems. The filtering, straining, separating, and capturing that this net made possible showed that water is not simply water. And as others build upon his work, the picture becomes increasingly layered—increasingly detailed.

—Natalie Wright, PhD Candidate,  
Design History, University of Wisconsin–Madison.



- E1 Plankton Net. Possibly designed by Edward Birge (1851-1950), American. Early 20th century. Silk, cotton, wire, metal. On loan from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Zoological Museum. UWZX 81-12/111. ☆
- E2 Monona Zooplankton, 9/4/2015. 0-20mm. Wisconsin Net, 2015. Small glass jar with liquid. On loan from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Zoological Museum.
- E3 *L'Elephant Savant: Grande Questionnaire (The Learned Elephant: Quiz Game)*, Probably Saussine Editions (founded 1860). France, Late 1800s. Lithograph on pressed board. On loan from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Special Collections. CA 19780.
- E4 *La Calculateur Suchard Milka*, Chocolat Suchard (founded 1826), Swiss. Germany, Early 20th century. Lithograph on pressed board. On loan from the Department of Special Collections, University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries CA 19781.

### 3

Elephants have been objects of artistic fascination for thousands of years, since artists first made drawings on cave walls. Elephants have been popularized as a topic for children from Bewick's *General History of Quadrupeds* to the Babar books. Wild elephants are slaughtered for their tusks—carved ivory has been revered as a luxurious art material, its iconography probed by historians for what it discloses about aesthetics, commodities, and cultural beliefs. Captive elephants have served humans as laborers and objects of entertainment. Knowing of elephants relegated to circus performance or confined to the generally limiting spaces of zoos might well provoke discomfort as we look at this educational game board imagery of 1900. The wise(r), anthropomorphized elephant has the readymade answers--but what if we might step away and really learn from the elephant?

—Jane Bianco, Curator, Farnsworth Art Museum.

### 4

## I AM A MARVEL.

Reach out for me, twist me, turn me. I will answer your questions. Objects hold such promise! These promises can entice us in, encourage us to consume, to be consumers. With its contrasting purple, black and gold surfaces, this cylinder appears magical. It offers a host of revelations. It potentially acts as a repository for delicious sweetness. We want to reach in and find the chocolate it might contain inside. Perhaps that revelation will come later though. For now, the surface of the cylinder has its own surprises. It can multiply! Each movement, each twist will produce a new calculation. We can think with this thing. The cylinder can answer questions, but it also prompts them. **Who is this for? Who will it entice with all its promises and revelations? Who will treasure and keep it?**

—Kate Smith, Associate Professor of Eighteenth-Century History, University of Birmingham.



## 5

Specimens of decorative taxidermy can remind viewers of the seemingly limitless bounty promised in the expanding American Territories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, at what cost was the natural wealth of the New World collected? Early recorders of unique American animals such as naturalists Thomas Catesby and John J. Audubon created intense consumer demand for the plumage, pelts, furs, meat and eggs of their subjects. Making these natural resources available to international manufacturers of decorative clothing, interior décor and handcrafts decimated animal populations and even caused extinctions of many native species. What would it mean to display these preserved birds in your parlor?

—Ryan Grover, Director, Rockwood Park & Museum.

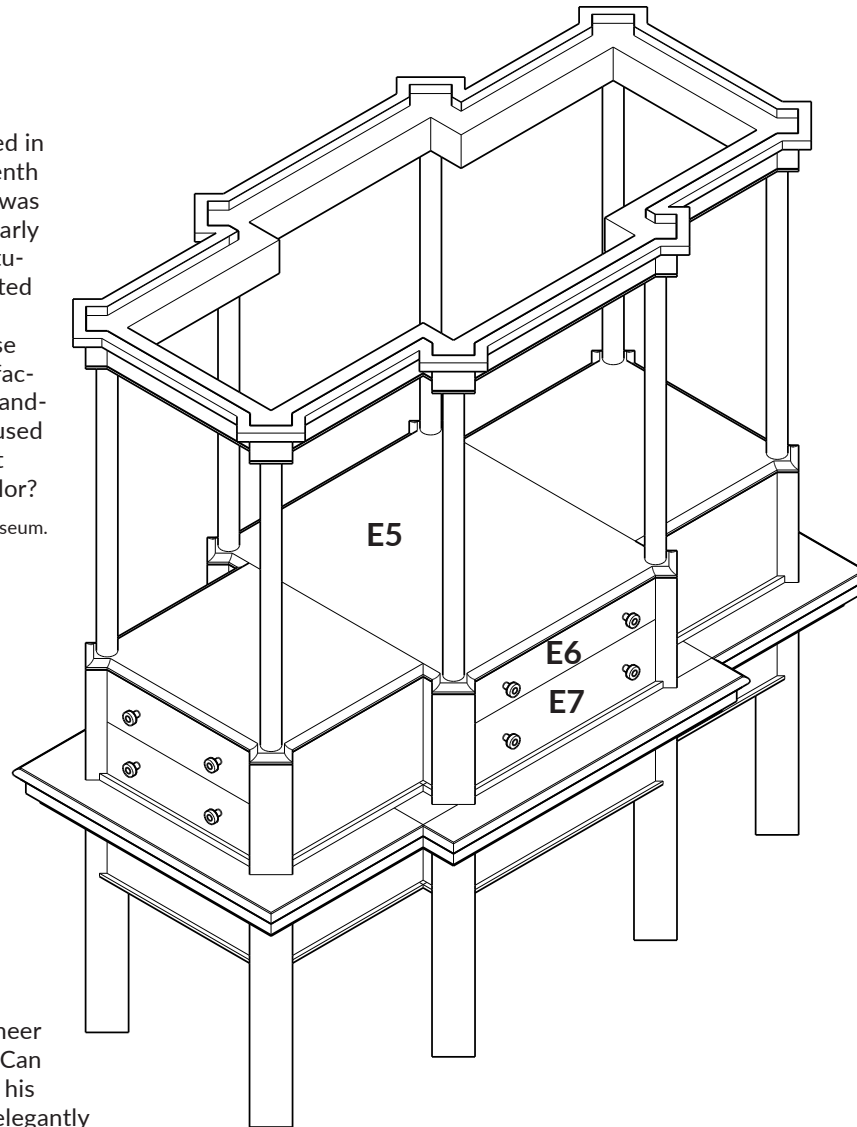
## 6

The closed drawer with its hefty knobs beckons. What awaits you? Slide it open. Peer inside.

### SUCH TREASURE!

A collection, carefully accumulated, collated, labeled, and preserved. Who saw value in these objects? What drove them to spend the time and effort? The collector, Dr. Edward Birge, was a pioneer of the study of inland rivers and lakes, limnology. Can this collection, which dates to 1888, tell us about his connections to our own Lake Mendota? Can the elegantly executed labels tell us about the personality of the man? There is a curious opposition between the rough, irregularity of the natural objects, and their deliberate paired organization. It suggests an impetus to systemize, classify, archive. The act of collecting itself implies one has the means and opportunities to acquire unusual items. **What can we learn about the people who made “objects” such as this from looking closely at what they valued?**

—Elizabeth Hooper-Lane,  
Senior Lecturer, Design Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison.



## 7

The text of this book, which tells of the materials used to record ideas throughout human history, is perhaps less important than the material upon which it is printed. The title page announces that this book was “Printed on Paper Made Entirely From Straw.” Believe it or not we haven’t been making tree based paper for very long. Matthias Koops, this book’s author, was granted the first patents for removing ink from paper pulp—thus allowing new paper to be made of recycled paper material for the first time—and making paper from straw, thistle, hemp and flax waste, wood and tree bark. This was a solution to the cost and difficulty of obtaining the volume of linen and cotton rags to produce the amount of paper an increasingly literate population required. A thought provoking achievement in a moment when we are looking to new materials and processes to reduce waste and protect natural resources.

—Maeve M. Hogan, PhD Student, Design History,  
University of Wisconsin-Madison.

- E5 Bird box. Late 19th century, Glass, wood, organic feathers, arsenic, wool. On loan from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Zoological Museum. UWZX 92-54/1. ☆
- E6 Shells with labels. Collected by Edward Birge, (1851-1950). American, Late 19th early 20th century. Shell, paper. On loan from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Zoological Museum.
- E7 *Historical account of the substances which have been used to describe events and to convey ideas from the earliest date to the invention of paper*, Matthias Koops (active 1789-1805). London, England, 1800. Straw, wood, unknown paper substrate. On loan from the Department of Special Collections, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries. TS1090 K82.

# SECTION E

## NATURAL AND CULTURAL HISTORIES

### 8

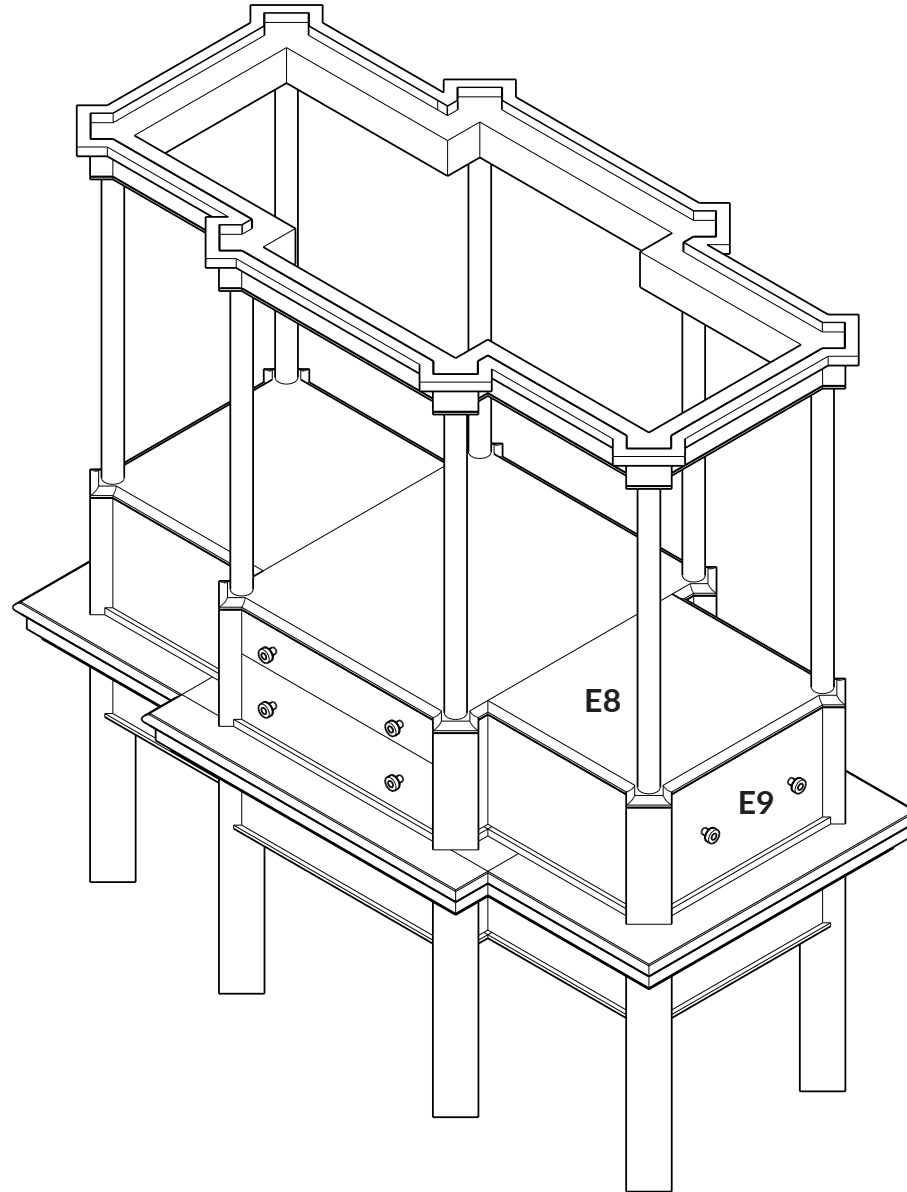
This grotesquely large beetle might seem to be the stuff of nightmares. But closer inspection reveals a metal hook and latch, inviting us to speculate on what might lie beneath the shiny, lacquered surface. This sturdy, manipulable model opens to reveal complex anatomical structures, each neatly labeled in French for the edification of students.

Yet, as studies of material culture teach us, actual users tend to engage with objects in ways that diverge from what those objects' makers might have originally intended. An archival photograph shows students who have liberated their scientific models from the classroom, staging a playful encounter with the oversized creatures in the natural world. A young man holds an insect-collecting net at the ready, advancing upon the now-comically-large beetle perched on the trunk of a tree. This surreal scene might spoof prior notions of a scientific expedition—or it might encourage us to question and to dream.

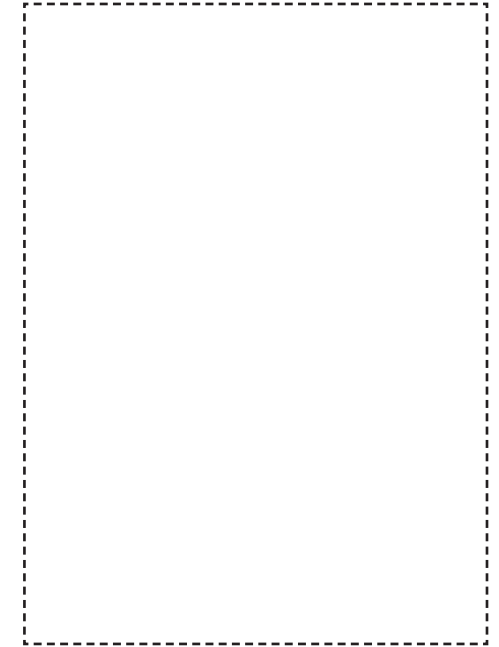
—Ellery Foutch, Associate Professor,  
American Studies, Middlebury College.



Follow the link to see a beetle in the wild.



Sketch what you see.



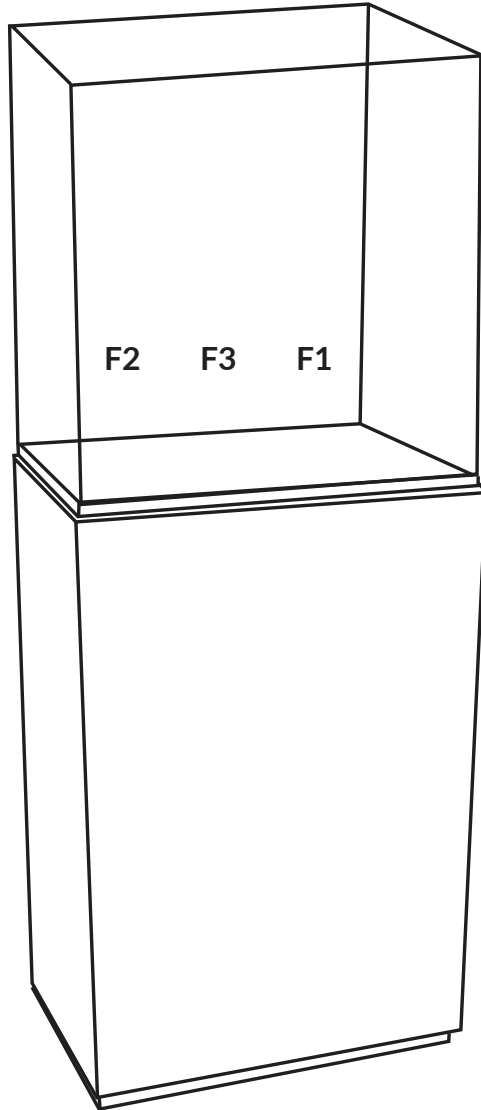
E8 Beetle, Louis Thomas Jérôme Auzoux (1797-1880). Saint-Aubin-d'Écrosville, Normandy, France, Late 19th or early 20th century. Paper mache, metal. On loan from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Zoological Museum. ☆

E9 Zoological Block Toy, Illustrated by Heinrich Leutemann (1824-1905), German; possibly published by F. E. Wachsmuth, late 1800s. University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Special Collections. CA 19779.

# SECTION F

## VISIONARY ART FROM THE JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ART CENTER

Material Culture Studies embraces many kinds of arts, including the work of self-taught, contemporary and visionary artists documented by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center (JMKAC). For two decades the JMKAC and the Kohler Foundation have worked on collecting and conserving important art environments, such as at Mary Nohl's home in Fox Point, Wisconsin.



### 1, 2, & 3

#### DEAR LIVELY CREATURES:

We have never met, but I feel I know you. I wonder if you feel that too. Since moving to Minnesota in 2016 I have taken my kids (ten and fifteen years old) to see your cousins throughout Wisconsin on an adventurous annual roadtrip. They have explored Prairie Moon, Grandview, and Fred Smith's park. They have been pilgrims at Grottos of Redemption, of Dickeyville, and of Wegner. They have been to the Cold War-era Marian Shrine at Necedah (against their mother's better judgment) and to Dr. Evermore's sculpture grove (twice). There's plenty more, but you get the idea. By the time folks greet you in this space, we'll have been to your childhood home where Mary Nohl made you and took care of you.

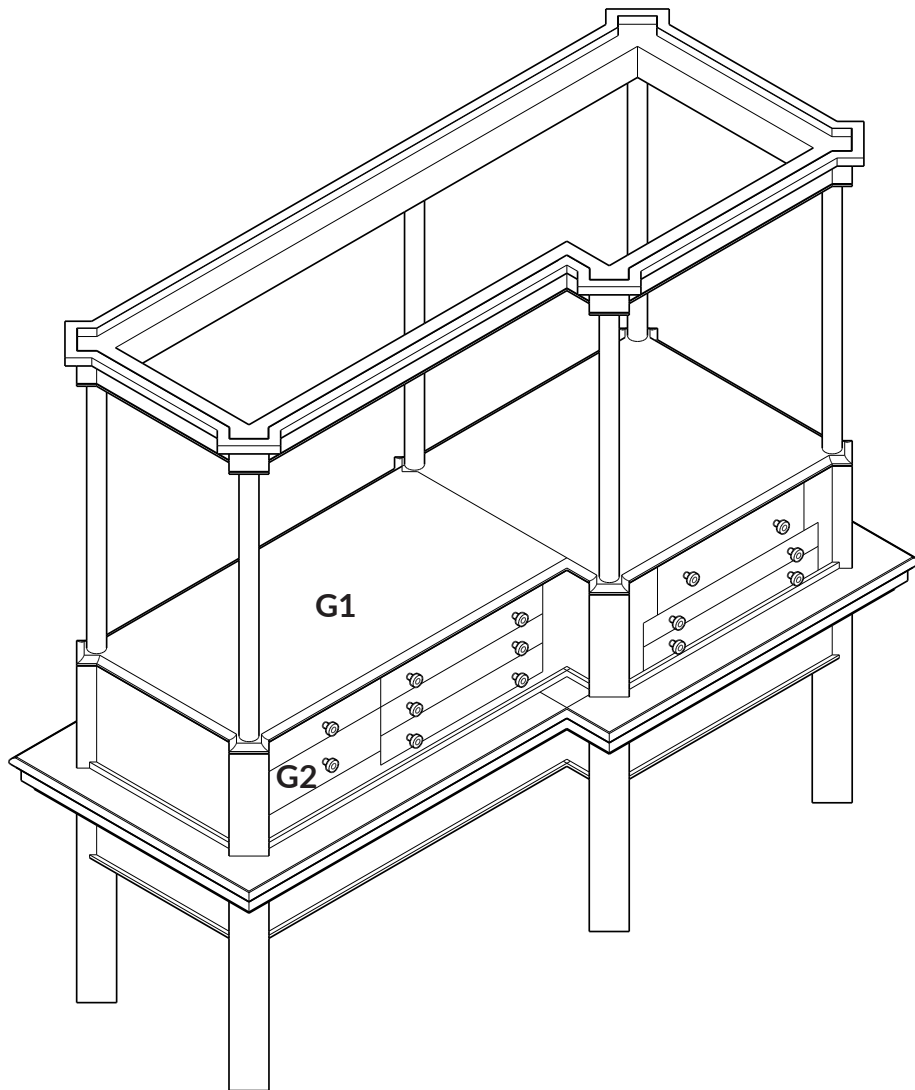
I want to know—do you miss her? She seemed to be an extraordinary person, who made worlds inside of worlds. You were the inhabitants with her, in her microcosm. Do you feel out of place here, longing for the sound of Lake Michigan's waves or the laughter and voices of kids running by Mary's yard? Can you still feel her presence? Do you still see out the window to the horizon?

—Robert Cozzolino, Patrick and Aimee Butler Curator of Paintings, Minneapolis Institute of Art.

- F1 *Untitled*, Mary Nohl (1914–2001), American. Fox Point, Wisconsin, United States, 20th century. Wood, varnish, paint, glass. On loan from John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection. 2001.006.0010.
- F2 *Untitled*, Mary Nohl (1914–2001), American. Fox Point, Wisconsin, United States, ca. 1951. Glazed ceramic. On loan from John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection. 2001.006.0790.
- F3 *Untitled*, Mary Nohl (1914–2001), American. Fox Point, Wisconsin, United States, ca. 1940–1950. Glazed ceramic. On loan from John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection. 2008.026.0028.

# SECTION G

Material things are vital to asking and answering questions about local and regional history. Professor Ann Smart Martin and her students dove into the collections of The Driftless Historium in Mount Horeb to help create their inaugural exhibition. These kinds of projects help students embody the Wisconsin idea and apply the lessons of Material Culture Studies beyond the University.



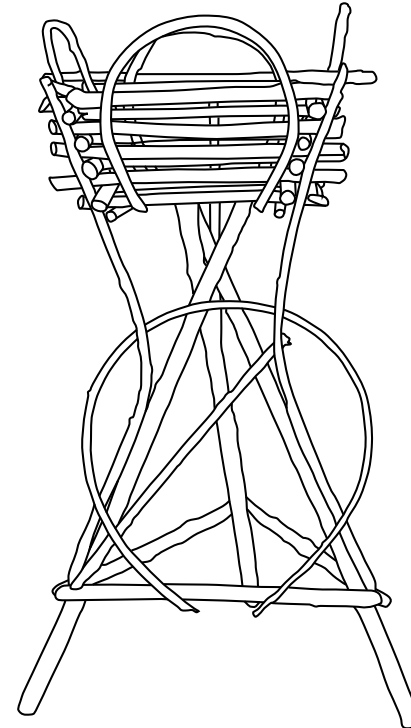
## REGIONAL HISTORIES AT THE DRIFTLESS HISTORIUM

### 1, 2, & 3

In 1899, a woman living in rural Dane County, Wisconsin made a plant stand from willow twigs as a wedding gift for her neighbors. Around the same place and time, another woman decorated a picture frame with walnut shells gathered from the forests near her home. Nearly a century earlier in Norway, a male woodworker produced the detailed carvings on this mangle board. Ostensibly a tool for ironing linens, most mangles were entirely decorative; this one was among the array of artifacts displayed at Little Norway, an outdoor museum that operated in Dane County from the 1930s until 2012.

All three objects, now in the collections of the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society, were included in an exhibition curated by the Society in collaboration with Martin and her students in 2017. Together, they exemplify Martin's philosophy of looking beyond the university to embrace your own backyard—studying local objects, local makers, and local collections to gain a deeper understanding of the place where you live and work—and her ethos of fostering community partnerships that elevate local institutions and regional expertise.

—Emily Pfotenhauer, Digital Strategist and Grants Manager, WILS.



- G1 Mangle board (mangle), 1806. Wood, paint. On loan from the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society. 2014.073.0025. ☆
- G2 Framed photographs. Attributed to the Donald/Sweet Family, 1890. Wood, walnut shells. On loan from the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society. 2002.001.0073. ☆
- G3 Plant stand. Neighbor of Stugard family, 1899. Wood (willow sapling). On loan from the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society. 2001.101.0121. ☆

# SECTION G

## REGIONAL HISTORIES AT THE DRIFTLESS HISTORIUM

4

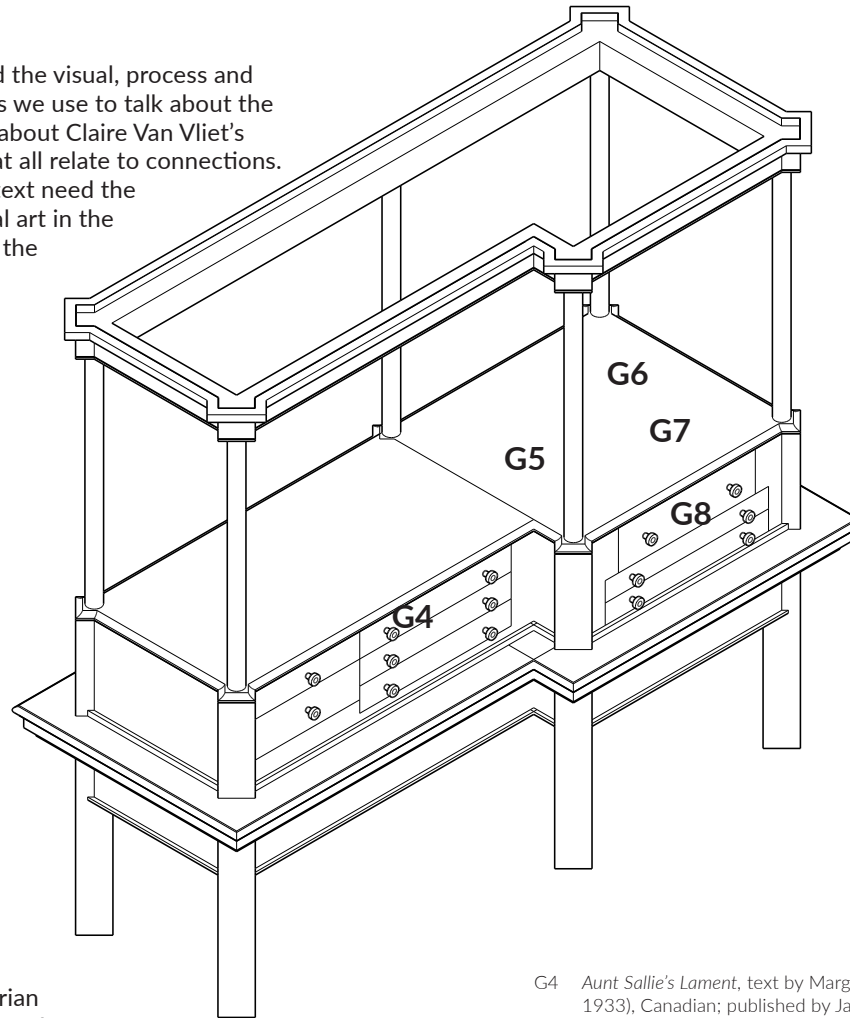
Ideas about the connection between content and the visual, process and making, and 2-, 3-, and 4-dimensionality are tools we use to talk about the visual experience. When looking at and thinking about Claire Van Vliet's book design, a couple of things come to mind that all relate to connections. How cool is it that the binding and cover of this text need the reader/viewer to become complete? Just as visual art in the post-modern world has relied more and more on the viewer as participant, so does this book require the reader to complete the thread of story by building the quilt. The quilt in the poem is made material as the reader turns the pages, thus completing the connection between the two-dimensional (words), three dimensional (book), and four dimensional (action of participation). Across time, space, and experience the connection is made when a reader picks up the text and participates in the experience of *Aunt Sallie's Lament*.

—Amy Ortiz, Instructor, Art History and Art Appreciation, McHenry County College.

7

"The first pair of shoes I ever rosemaled," Olga Edseth wrote on the bottom of these pink kitten heels. Purchased at a garage sale and embellished by Olga, the painted shoes illustrate the Scandinavian tradition of transforming utilitarian objects into works of art. As an objects conservator, I cannot help but wonder what type of paint did Olga use? Did she purchase specific colors for this project or use paints she had on hand? I am curious about the personal and cultural significance of these shoes. Though they represent the first shoes Olga rosemaled, was this her first foray into rosemaling? Was she following a particular pattern or creating her own? Did she wear these shoes? Did she make them for someone—perhaps a granddaughter? Did she create them as a display piece for the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society? All these questions and more inform how I assess and conserve objects.

—Madeline (Maddie) Hagerman, Director, Undergraduate Art Conservation Program, Assistant Professor, University of Delaware.



5, 6, & 8

These painted pieces of art provide opportunities to explore the perpetuation of cultural traditions over generations, adaptations of techniques, and identities artists may hope to convey.

Rosemaling, the Norwegian folk tradition of painting functional objects with colorful floral designs, began in Norway around 1750. Immigrants to southern Wisconsin brought rosemaled pieces as reminders of their homeland, which inspired subsequent generations to continue the tradition.

Compared in chronological order, what do you notice about the objects' rosemaling? Does the amount of embellishment or the degree of refinement make a piece 'better?' They are all perfectly functional household objects in form, but would you feel comfortable using any of these? Given the effort, what may have been the artists' intentions?

Does one feel more 'authentic?' Can similar objects be differently authentic? As traditional artists become further removed from their ethnic origins, can their works serve to retain that part of their identity?

—Joe Kapler, Lead Curator, Wisconsin Historical Society.

- G4 *Aunt Sallie's Lament*, text by Margaret Kaufman (b. 1941), American; designed by Claire Van Vliet (b. 1933), Canadian; published by Janus Press (est. 1955), West Burke, Vermont, United States, 1988. Hand and commercially made papers. On loan from the Kohler Art Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries. N7433.4 V275.
- G5 Bowl. Decoration by Patricia Edmundson (1929–1993), 1991. Wood (maple), paint. On loan from the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society. 1991.047.0001. ☆
- G6 Chair (kubbestol). Unknown maker; decoration attributed to Per Lynse (1880–1947), Norwegian-American. Mid-1800s, decoration ca. 1927. Wood, paint. On loan from the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society 2014.073.0009. ☆
- G7 Shoes, Decoration by Olga Edseth (1914–2012), Norwegian-American. Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, United States, 1998. Leather, acrylic paint. On loan from the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society. 2003.056.0001. ☆
- G8 Decorative plate. Earl Edseth, decoration by Olga Edseth (1914–2012). Norwegian-American. Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, United States, ca. 1946. Wood (recycled fruit crate), paint. On loan from the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society. 1983.048.0001. ☆

# SECTION G

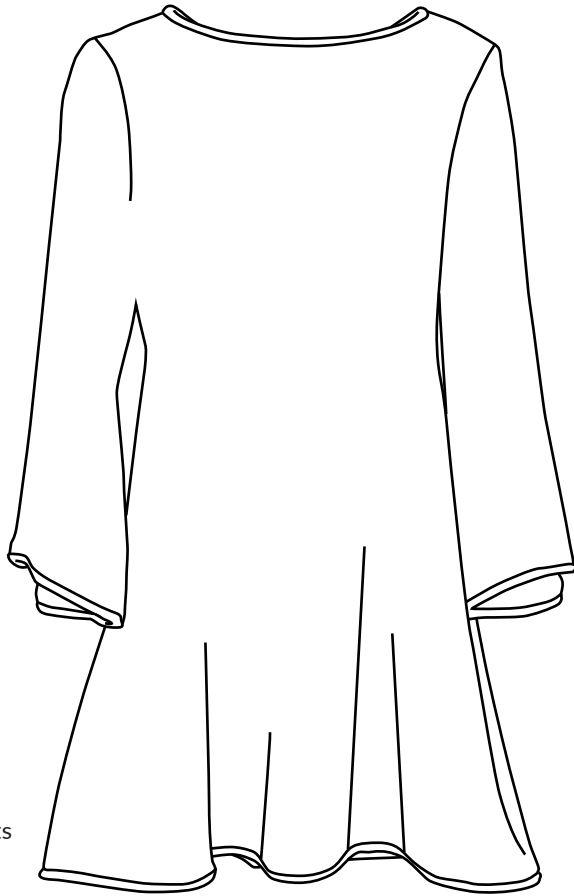
## REGIONAL HISTORIES AT THE DRIFTLESS HISTORIUM

9

Fashion-forward yet heritage-driven, Nancy Vogel's red, woolen A-line mini dress reflects a nexus point of individual and community identity negotiation within American culture. Made in 1970,

this dress represents the era's rising feminist ideals, uniting practicality with a sense of sexual liberation. At Vogel's request, Mount Horeb's Norwegian-American icon, Oljanna Cunneen, applied motifs from rosemaling, a two-dimensional Norwegian folk art painting style featuring floral and geometric designs. This outfit embodies the twin laws of tradition, simultaneously conservative by harkening to the past, yet innovative by adapting to the contemporary world. This dress expresses one woman's appreciation for an ethnicity she herself did not belong to, and another's mastery of a tradition dominated by men in the Old Country. Over fifty years later, this chic dress raises questions regarding material culture's role in assisting individuals fit-in to a community where they may feel at the periphery, as well as its limits.

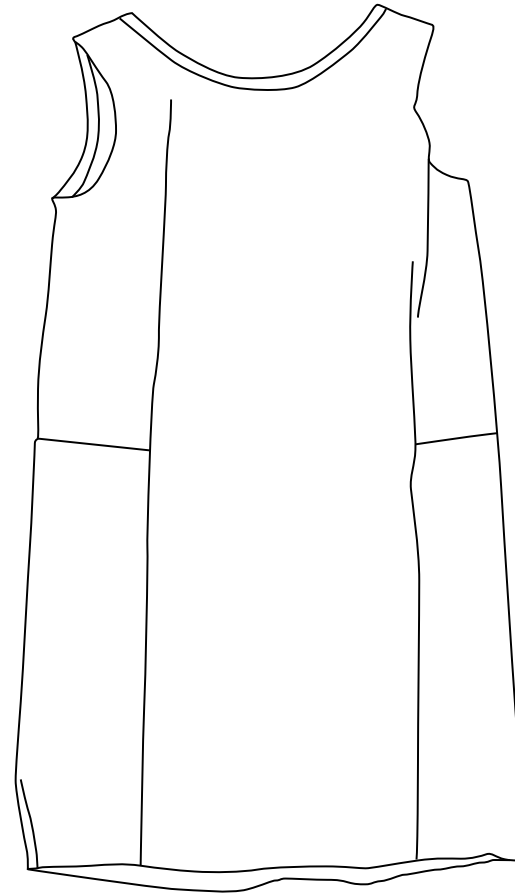
—Jared L. Schmidt, Adjunct Faculty, Tillamook Bay Community College, Tillamook, Oregon, & Southwestern Oregon Community College, Coos Bay, Oregon.



10

The “Scott®” brand likely conjures images of toilet paper and paper towels, not paper dresses. However, in 1966, Scott Paper Co. invented this disposable fashion with their “Paper-Caper” dresses. Buyers around the country flocked to order them along with their bathroom necessities. Women could choose from this paisley style or an Op Art black and white pattern. Both were made of three-ply paper and rayon that wearers cut to suit their height. The dresses ushered in a whole new “disposable culture,” leading the *Madison Capital Times* to suggest that women host “Paper Caper parties” with paper plates and plastic cups that could all be thrown away at the end of the meal—including the dress. **In our contemporary world where climate change has altered the meaning of disposable fashion, do we deride this object for what it represents? Or, does this novelty, ease, and non-committal ownership style have an enduring appeal?**

—Natalie Wright, PhD Candidate,  
Design History,  
University of Wisconsin–Madison.



- G9 Dress, Oljanna Cunneen (1923–1988). Norwegian-American, late 1960s. Wool. On loan from the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society. 1990.014.0003. ☆
- G10 Paper dress. Scott Paper Company (founded 1879). United States, 1966. Bonded cellulose fiber. Gift of Doris Peterson Swinehart, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. 2006.03.001.





# SECTION H

3

Look closely at the silver-gray pages of this illustrated book. The marks are neither written nor printed; made not in ink or paint, but woven in silk thread with pixel-like precision. The “prayer book in cloth” is modeled after medieval Books of Hours, reproductions of which were popular gifts in the late nineteenth century. It contains prayers for various times of day, and moments of life.

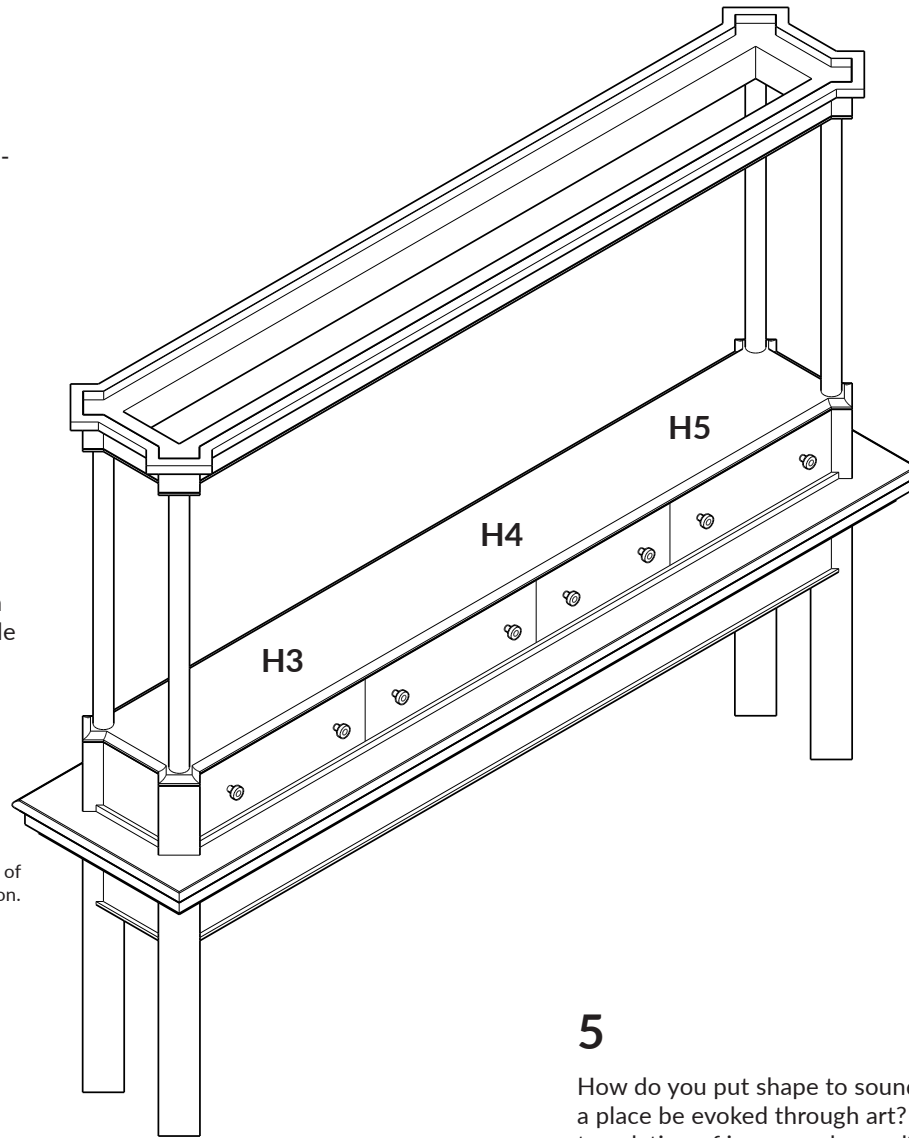
Designed as a marvel of industry for the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle, the materials and techniques employed in its making celebrate the achievements of the city of Lyon; a historic center of silk weaving and the birthplace of the Jacquard loom, a device which first automated part of the weaving process. The Jacquard loom is programmable with a series of interchangeable encoded punch cards, one for each row of the pattern. Copies of this book are thought to be both among the most complicated and unusual objects produced on a Jacquard loom, and are a touchpoint in the centuries-long development of both the programmable computer and the digital image.

—Maeve M. Hogan, PhD Student, Design History, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

H3 *Livre de prières: tissé d'après les enluminures des manuscrits du XIV au XVI siècle*. Designed by R. J. P. Hervier (active 1880s), French; published by J. A. Henry, French. Lyon, France. Designed 1886. Silk, leather, gold leaf. On loan from the Department of Special Collections, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries. CA 15767.

H4 *About Pearl*, Robbin Ami Silverberg (b. 1958), American; published by Dobbin Books (est. 1991). Brooklyn, New York, United States, 2009. Handmade papers with inclusions of hair, eggshells and mica; cloth binding. On loan from the Kohler Art Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries. N7433.4.S537 A26.

H5 *Marimba Motion*, Atta Kwami (1965–2021), Ghanaian; Rebecca Goodale (b. 1953), American. Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine, United States, 2011. Paper, cloth binding. On loan from the Kohler Art Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries. N7433.4 K895 M37.



# BINDING CONCEPTS

4

What would it take to not just accept but to desire the aging of our bodies and our artworks? In Robbin Silverberg's *About Pearl* the answer comes to us as an open invitation to meditate on the exquisite textures and depths of her grandmother's skin. Wrinkled, sewn, weathered, and collaged paper that sometimes holds short written statements or locks of hair are offered to us as a sacred book, a delicate treasure to eschew the tyranny of the impossible standards of smooth, taught, elastic, and unblemished skin. As we touch and turn these pages, they become lovingly imbued with the slough of our skin cells (and the small creatures that live there) while the oils from our fingertips commingle. Our touching adds to and precipitates the history and age of the book itself. Thus, together, as body and book, we become part of, as Silverberg writes, a “wrinkled complexity,” enmeshed, and intrinsically bound up together.

—Jessica Cooley, ACLS Postdoctoral Associate, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

5

How do you put shape to sound, or how do shapes emanate sound? How might a place be evoked through art? And how does the book become a site for the translation of image and sound? Make no mistake: it is not an attempt to record a sound wave—it's a portable, touchable, interpretation of sound—not sound made material, but a means by which to interpret color and shape. The book is portable. The marimba is portable. Both lay flat, text and sound engaged by touch: an ear on the page reminds us that only the viewer can activate the object. Touch of hand to print, touch of hand to strike a chord. Color bars, emanating zigzags—lay it flat and hear the colors and shapes inspired by life in Ghana, nothing divorced from place for Kwami and Goodale.

—Andrea Truitt, Director of Community Relations, Summer of the Arts.

# SECTION H

6

Bervin is an interdisciplinary artist and poet “interested in forms of doing and undoing” and the “entangled relationships between text and textiles.” The pages of this book feature rectangles containing graphic patterns made with repeated combinations of typewriter keys. They recall and allude to weaving drafts, the written patterns that guide the thread interlace. **What is the intention of this artwork? What might it mean to represent one medium in another in this way, particularly to use one mechanical device to refer to another device, both of which (typewriters and weaving looms) have been identified with women’s work? What issues related to handmade and mechanical skills and production/reproduction are implied, particularly because both the typewriter and handloom are largely archaic in the 21st century? What is the significance of the khadi paper and printing the book in India—what does it imply about cross-cultural interaction and global trade?**

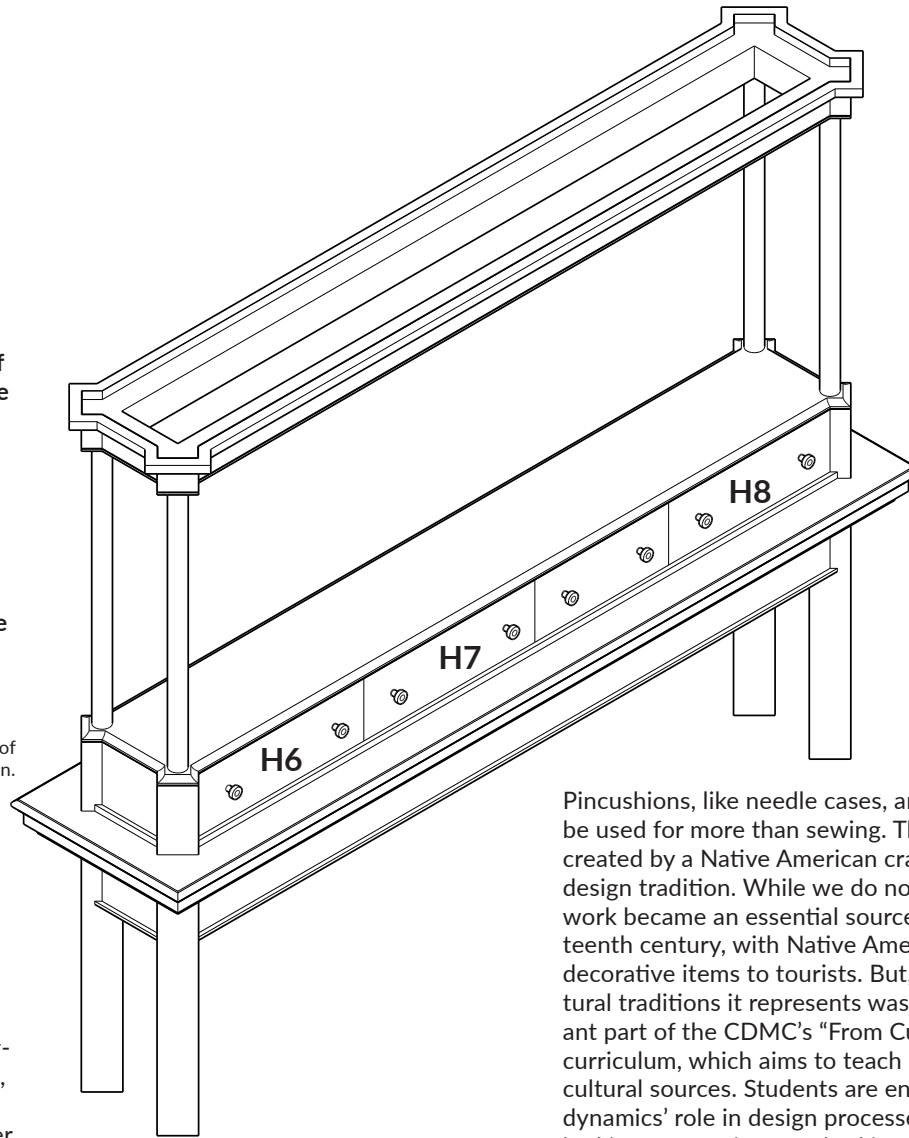
—Beverly Gordon, Professor Emerita, Design Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

7

## DOES YOUR DECKLE TICKLE?

Ruth ran her hands through cotton pulp, did she squirm? Paper so pure, so innocent, so open to anything, but see how Ruth writes of mashing, beating, sweating to couch each sheet. All those reams, do you wonder how they were wrought? Does it quiver your quires? Rags wrung, pulp mashed, wrote hard and put away wet. Chain lines, was this paper laid? Shake that sheet! Slush that stuff! The pressing, the forming, the finishing; I see your felt side, paper. Birch chased and chaste; the deckle strip stops my pulp a-creeping, fibrillation keeps my heart a-beating. O, Ruth, I’ll chase that paper you push!

—Cate Cooney, Consultant, Teaching with Primary Sources, The University of the Arts and Metropolitan State University.



# BINDING CONCEPTS

8

This small folding purse was likely a thread case, huswif, or housewife. As the name implies, its use was intrinsically linked to women’s domestic tasks. It would have been used to store small daily-use items inside the detached pockets worn under a woman’s skirt in previous centuries. The long flap would be wrapped around the body of the bag securing the contents within. Such purses were often made of scraps of fabric, which accounts for the three 18th-century cotton madder style prints in use here. **What intimate parts of a woman’s day can this small folding purse help us imagine?**

—Morgan Lemmer-Webber, Director, FOSS & Crafts Studios, LLC.

9

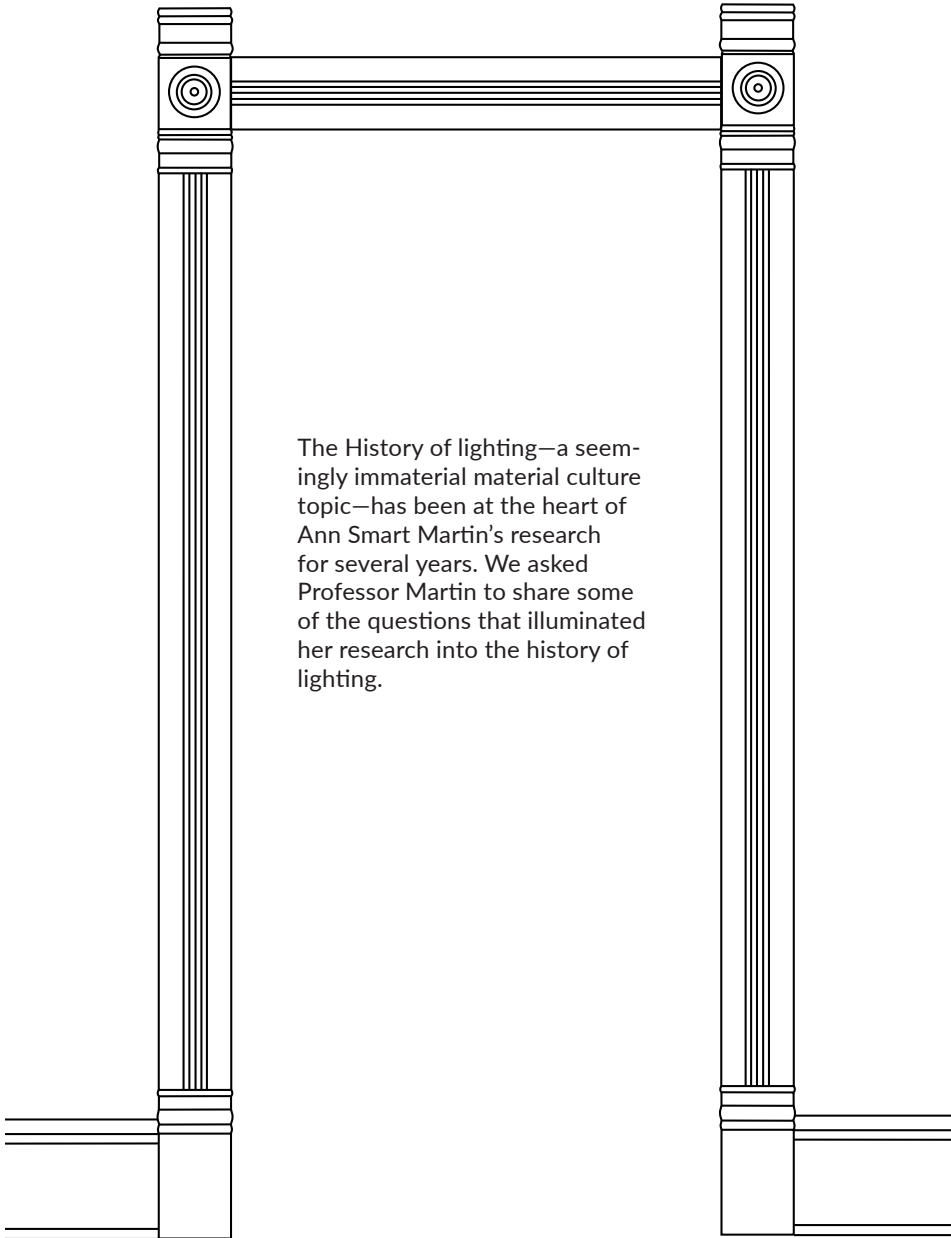
Pincushions, like needle cases, are ostensibly functional objects—but they can be used for more than sewing. This late nineteenth-century example was likely created by a Native American craftsperson working in an Eastern Woodlands design tradition. While we do not know who made it or bought it, this kind of work became an essential source of income for native people in the late nineteenth century, with Native American makers selling pincushions, purses, and decorative items to tourists. But, the design itself and the generations of cultural traditions it represents was not for sale. Objects like these are an important part of the CDMC’s “From Cultural Appropriation to Cultural Appreciation” curriculum, which aims to teach students to engage more responsibly with cultural sources. Students are encouraged to look at asymmetrical power dynamics’ role in design processes. How can material culture methods of close looking, comparison, and asking questions be tools for positive social change?

H6 *Draft Notation*, Jen Bervin (b. 1972) American; published by Granary Books (est. 1986). New York, New York, United States, 2014. Unbound books and prints on Khadi, Lettra, and glassine paper. On loan from the Kohler Art Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries. N7433.4 .B47 D73 2014.

H7 *The Birch Chase, or, How Papermaking Can be Done in Any Home*, Ruth Linggen (b. 1958), American. Vermillion, South Dakota, United States, 1979. Nideggan paper, cloth binding. On loan from the Kohler Art Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries. TS1109 .L56.

H8 Pocket or thread case. United Kingdom, 1775–1799. Cotton. Gift of Dr. Ruth C. Morrissey, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection, P.D.GB.0813.

H9 H9 Pin cushion case, Possibly Iroquois/Seneca or Mohawk, Artist Name Once Known, 1890-1920. Glass beads, cotton, cotton velvet, sawdust, metal, raised beadwork. Gift of Dakota Mace, Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection, 2021.04.001.



The History of lighting—a seemingly immaterial material culture topic—has been at the heart of Ann Smart Martin’s research for several years. We asked Professor Martin to share some of the questions that illuminated her research into the history of lighting.

“ The history of lighting is way to think about objects, their environments, and our human senses of them. Today, lights—overhead, floor and table lamps, cell phone, car, computer, and the like—are so universal that we largely take them for granted. There was a time in the past, however, when lights and lighting were much more novel and even mysterious.

As a historian of early America, I became interested in interior lighting from looking at household objects made and used *before* illumination became so abundant and unremarkable. One initial pattern that became clear was the rise of gleaming and reflective objects in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Did these early artisans intentionally work to enhance this effect to make things come alive when the lights flickered or shimmered?

Thinking this way made me question more deeply how people across time and space have experienced light. What is the difference between light that is soft or harsh, smoky or clear, colorless or colorful, hot or seemingly cool? What changes in experience occur if the light in a space came from below (for example a hearth), waist-high (a table) or hung beside or above (wall or ceiling)? I thought too about how individual candles or lamps created *pools of light* suspended in darkness and how that changed the way people experienced space. While we don’t think much about it, light in fact matters.

I also have thought deeply about access to this material culture. Who had light and lights? In centuries past making and using light was an expensive endeavor. With this in mind, how did the fundamental act of either sitting in light or darkness sort out society into the haves and the have-nots?

Finally, I wonder how the increasing addition of light to homes over time—which effectively banished the evening darkness that would have been the norm earlier—changed daily schedules. Presumably people became able to sit down and enjoy each other’s company or to read a book, but interior lighting also made it possible to extend the workday in a more exploitative way. Has light, this intangible thing, been complicit in significant cultural changes in both good and bad ways? Is it still problematic in this age when we gaze upon the blue light of digital screens throughout much of the day and into the night? Should we be attentive to lighting lessons from the past? It is worth thinking about...”

—Ann Smart Martin, Stanley and Polly Stone (Chipstone) Professor Emerita, Art History University of Wisconsin—Madison.

**In this space you may experiment with the controls on the Hue light fixture on the stand in front of you. The light can become warmer or cooler, brighter or dimmer. Think about the fixture glowing on the table (L7) and the lights shining down upon you. Look both in and at the looking glass, as you adjust the light around you. What do you see? What changes? How do you feel?**



## 1&2

Prior to the advent of commercial electrical power networks and lighting systems in the late nineteenth century, inventors experimented with different forms of artificial light. German inventor Heinrich Geissler developed a system of gas filled discharge tubes that would illuminate in different colors when electricity passed through the electrodes. This system is seen above in these hand blown laboratory apparatuses from the late nineteenth century. Geissler tubes served as a technical framework for the later design of neon lighting and advertising in the early twentieth century.

**How did electrical signs transform the built environment in the realms of advertising, architectural design, and mass transportation? Did the flexible nature of glass tubing enable artisans to shape light into a means of communication and artistic expression? In which ways did lighted tubing and neon inform the American cultural imagination? What social and economic forces transformed this technology from an experimental system into something that defined the sense of place in locations ranging from Times Square to Las Vegas?**



—Stefan Osdene, Independent scholar.

Follow this link to see what these lights can do.

- 11 Geissler Tubes. Heinrich Geissler (1814-1879), German. Germany. Late 19th century. Glass, wood, metal. University of Wisconsin-Madison, L.R. Ingersoll Physics Museum. On loan from the UW Physics Lecture Demonstration Collection. ☆
- 12 Geissler Tubes. Heinrich Geissler (1814-1879), German. Germany. Late 19th century. Glass, wood, metal. University of Wisconsin-Madison, L.R. Ingersoll Physics Museum. On loan from the UW Physics Lecture Demonstration Collection. ☆
- 13 Spiral candle holder. Early 18th century. Iron. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation. 1996.18.
- 14 Hanging oil lamp. Early 18th century. Iron. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation. 1996.19.
- 15 Standing oil lamp. 18th century. Iron. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation. 1996.24.

## 3, 4, & 5

Before the advent of electricity, many kinds of objects created, maintained, held, and projected light. Most of us recognize the design and function of early candlesticks. But other early devices, including these three early eighteenth-century objects, seem strange. Nevertheless, they offer important visual clues that demonstrate how making light was an intimate, bodily action. Moreover, candles and lamps required manipulation and attention to prevent mess or danger. These three objects were multifunctional. They supplied intimate lighting for reading and the like, they could be carried through darkness, or they could be placed or adjusted to best effect the ambient light in a room.

Resting on a sturdy iron base and featuring a twisting spiral, this candlestick made the user do some work. Specifically, a hand was needed to slide the tab that raised the candle to the top of the metal cage, and once there the flame must be tended. Since the wick did not extinguish, its burned bits must be trimmed so the flame could remain pure and not sputter, smoke, or stink.

From time immemorial, humans have used small containers, even as simple as shells, to hold a small amount of oil and a soaked wick that extended over the edge to form the flame. The oil lamp seen here comes from the same idea but has several surprising innovations. Made of iron, it features a U-shape of parallel arms and a perpendicular iron strap loop. Suspended on pins in holes on the side arms, the shallow oil-filled basket with wick would have been self-leveling if placed on an uneven surface or if the user moved around, a significant safety improvement upon earlier fixed lighting devices of this sort.

Artisans in a more specialized shop may have made the lamp on the right. Again, innovative design features continued to improve its functionality and safety. A smooth lid fits snugly and prevented spilling oil and an embedded second small spout protected the wick. A multi-functional attachment gave its user options: it could be hung on the loop, or the spike could be thrust into a channel or crevice.

—Jonathan Prown, Executive Director and Chief Curator, The Chipstone Foundation and Ann Smart Martin, Stanley and Polly Stone (Chipstone) Professor Emerita, Art History, University of Wisconsin—Madison

# SECTION I

## ILLUMINATING HISTORIES

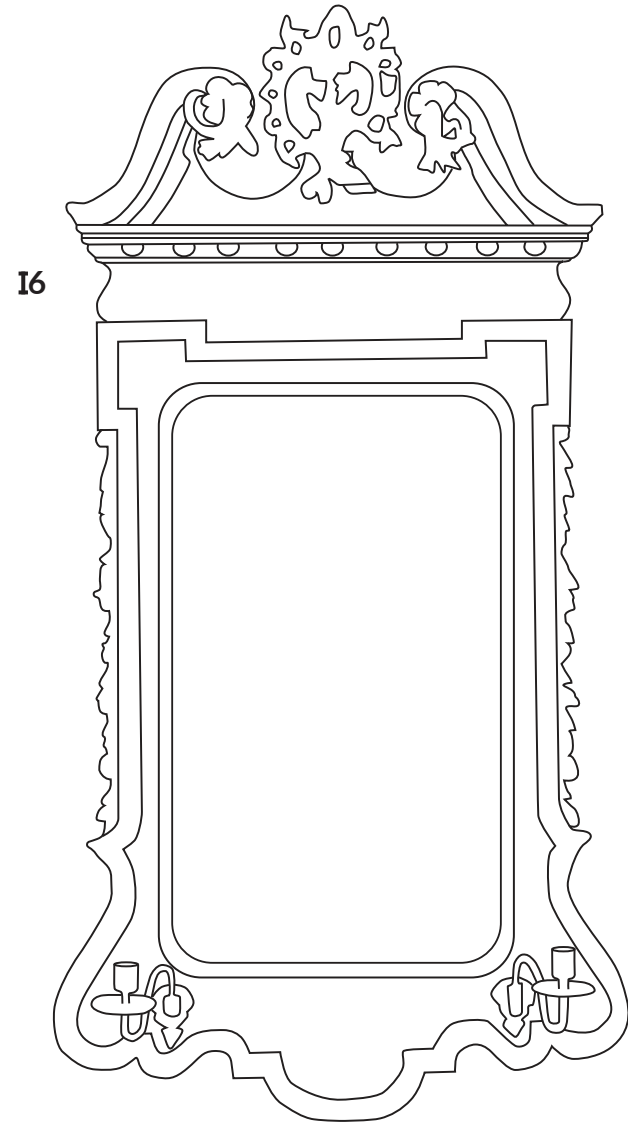
### 6

Though we often think of mirrors as the means through which to examine ourselves, objects like this looking glass reveal the ways that furnishings transform their surrounding spaces. Composed of materials (mercury-coated glass, gilding, polished walnut veneer, and brass) crafted and manipulated to reflect and refract the flickering light emitted from the paired candlesticks, this looking glass guides the viewer to reflect upon life before electric lights became commonplace. **How was this object experienced in a dimly lit room? Do we appreciate the object's materiality differently outside of its historic context?**

**And, how does this object reflect the status and taste of its owners?** The expensive materials and expert craftsmanship remind the viewer that the wealthy and lower classes had differing access to lit spaces, and objects like this demonstrate the ways that augmented artificial lighting in homes recast the later evening in an aura of prestige.

—Travis Olson, PhD Candidate, Art History, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Adjust the light and sketch what you see reflected.



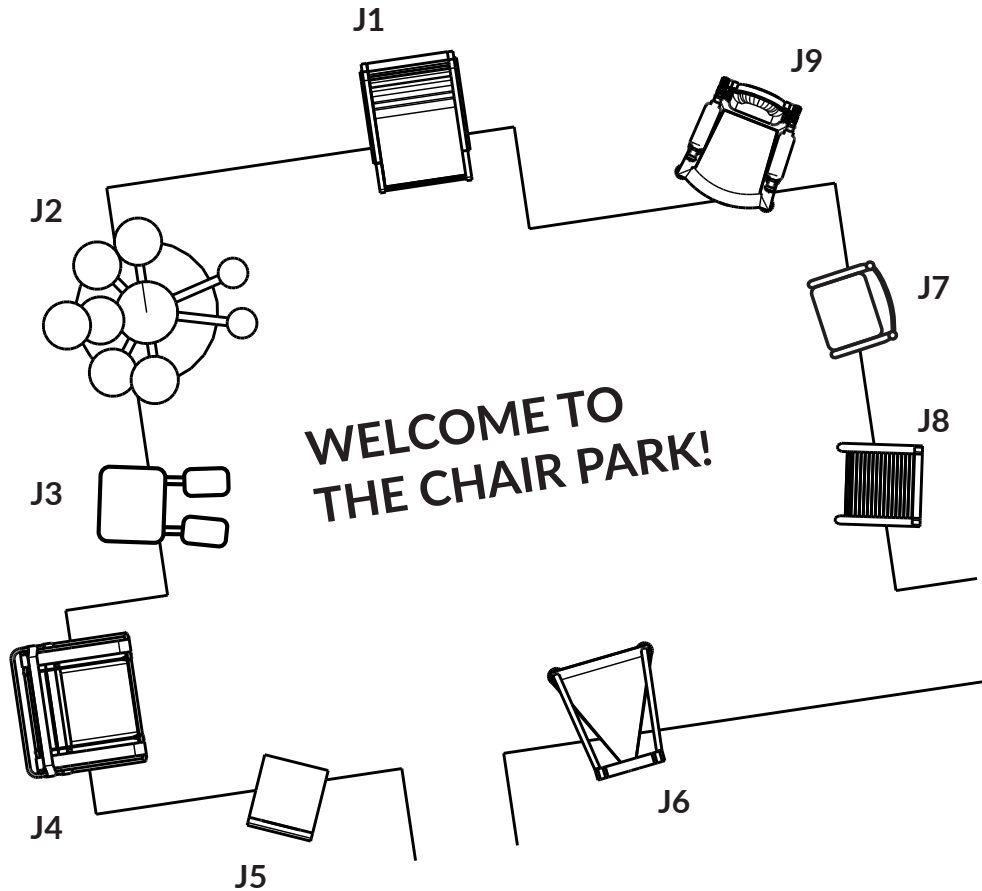
I6

- I6 Looking glass. England or America, 1760–1780. Walnut veneer, pine. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation. 1961.6.
- I7 Go Portable Light, Part of the Hue Bridge System. Philips. 2022. Prop.



# SECTION J

## THE CHAIR PARK



Have a seat in chairs borrowed from the Chipstone Foundation and Professor Emerita Terry Boyd. Chairs take the weight off your feet. Pretty simple. **Do they do anything else?** “Hold form constant, look for change” is one of Ann Smart Martin’s favorite guidelines for object analysis. **If these items all do the same thing, why do they look so different?**

### 1-9

Here are nine chairs. Some are modern reproductions of historic objects while others are examples of contemporary and twentieth-century design. **Please feel free to touch or sit in any of them that you are able to as you think about the following questions.**

Assuming the makers intended this furniture to be accepted as appropriate by others in their societies, **what can carefully considering the basic properties of these objects teach us about the people connected to them?**

**How were these chairs made?** What materials and construction techniques were used to put them together? What does that tell us about the resources and technologies available to the people who made, owned, and used them? What does that tell us about the aesthetic preferences they held?

To what extent is each of these seats meant to be practically useful or visually attractive? **How might those ideals vary among the people associated with each of these chairs?**

**In what sorts of ways does each chair allow or compel, a user to hold their body when occupying it?** What can that tell us about the makers’ and users’ ideas about what sorts of postures are physically comfortable, and how important, or unimportant, was physical comfort to them in comparison to other considerations? What sorts of impressions would others likely form of the people who owned and sat in them? **Don’t forget to snap a picture, make a sketch, record your reflections, and ask: how do these different chairs make me feel?**

—James E. Bryan, Professor of Art History, University of Wisconsin–Stout.

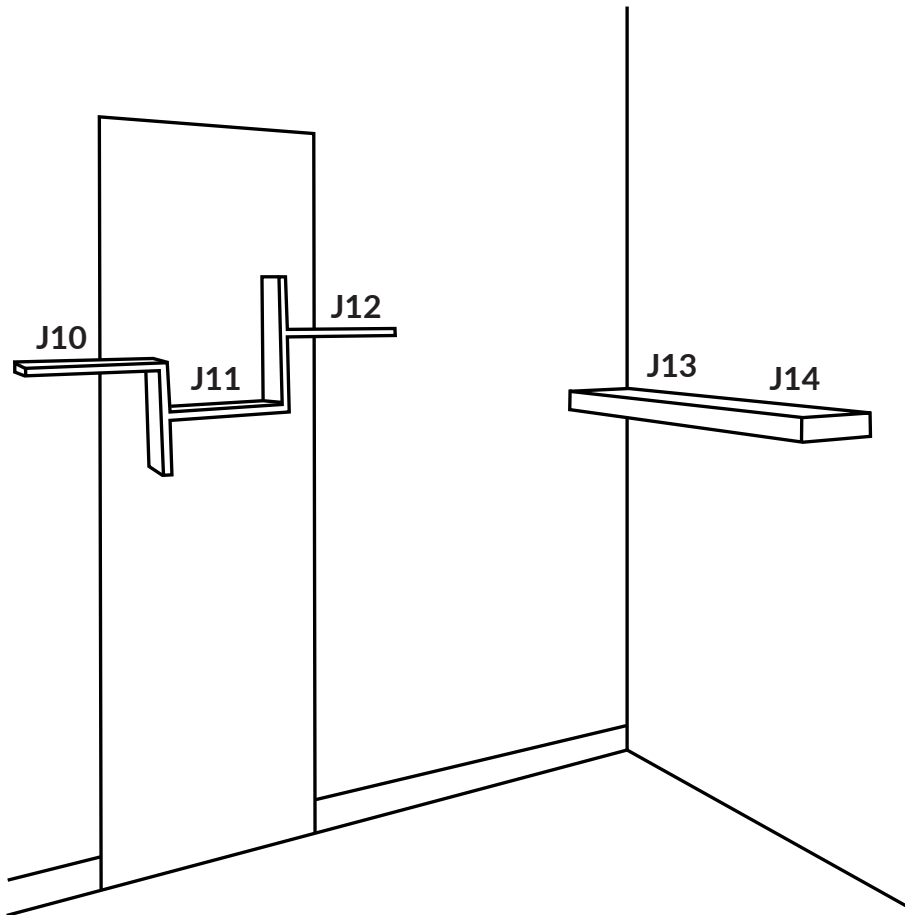
Let’s begin with a definition of CHAIR; a seat, especially for one person, usually having four legs for support and a rest for the back.

But let’s dig deeper. The definition includes the action word, “support”. It is a magic word: a chair is useless without a sitter, chairs and people are an integrally connected pair. The chair is shaped by people and the chair in turn provides what the sitter needs or wants. We have all experienced chairs that are immediately comfortable or instantly awful. As you try each chair what is your immediate response, great, okay, awful?

Western culture responded to the desire for support by creating seemingly infinite variations of chairs, made either by individual craftspeople or by complex machines. We also attach a variety of abstract meanings to chairs as Jim Bryan discusses above.

**Now ask each chair the questions Jim provides. Is one chair the best for you, why? Could you live happily without chairs?**

—Virginia Terry Boyd,  
Professor Emerita, Design Studies,  
University of Wisconsin–Madison



## 10-14

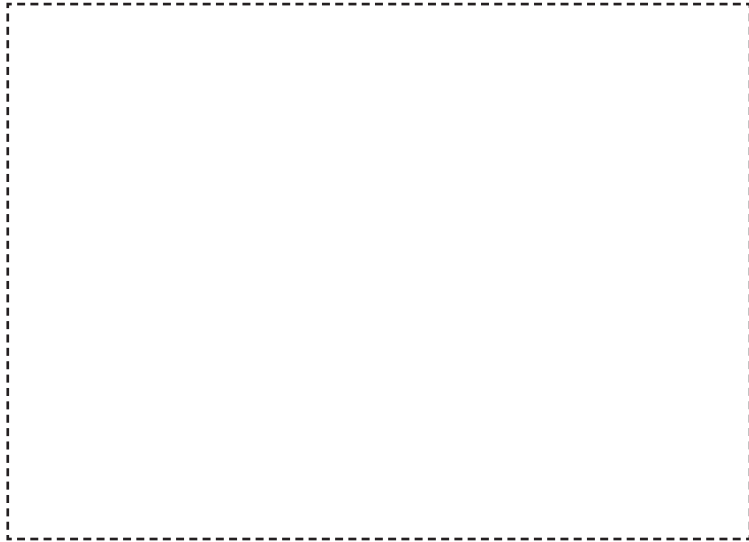
Edwin H. Land (1909–1991) was a prolific inventor who created the Polaroid Land camera, revolutionizing the way photographs were created and sold. Josiah Wedgwood (1730– 1795) was a groundbreaking potter who industrialized the pottery industry, leading a revolution in the way dishes and other ceramic items were created and sold. One thing that ties these two visionary individuals together is the way they were able to integrate

their products into both high and low culture at the same time. One strength of material culture analysis is its ability to bridge time, space, and physical disparities. Keeping that in mind, here are some questions to think about. **How did the Polaroid camera and Wedgwood pottery cater to the elite? How did the Polaroid camera and Wedgwood pottery cater to the masses? How did these designs transform everyday life? What do they invite you to do?**

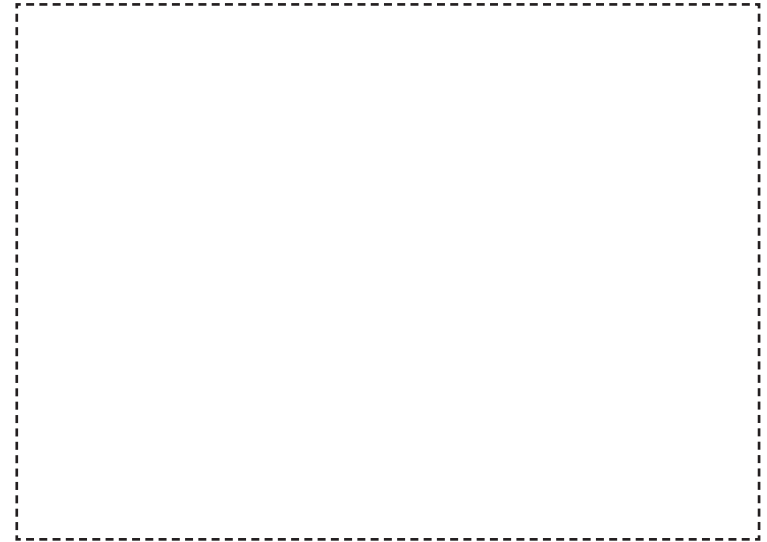
—Mark Nelson, Professor Emeritus, Design Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

- J1 Campeche chair. Randall O'Donnell. United States, ca. 2017. Mixed woods, leather. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation.
- J2 Globe Garden Chair, Peter Opsvik (b. 1939), Norwegian. Norway, 1985. Oak, leather. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation. 2017.2.
- J3 Balans Variable Chair, designed by Peter Opsvik (b. 1939) and Hans Christian Mengshoel, Stokke, Skopje Norway (original manufacturer Hag, Oslo Norway), 2000 (created in 1979). Laminated wood, Polyurethane foam, Polyester fabric. From the Collection of Virginia Terry Boyd.
- J4 Wassily chair. Marcel Breuer (1902–1981), Hungarian. Designed 1925. Metal, leather. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation.
- J5 Side chair. Mike Jarvi. United States, ca. 2016. Elm. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation.
- J6 Armchair (Elderkin Chair), Peter Follansbee. Massachusetts, United States, 2001. Ash, oak, cherry. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation. 2001.83. ☆
- J7 Side Chair, designed by Kai Lyngfeldt Larsen. Soren Willadsen, Denmark. 1960s. Hardwood, Leather, Cotton batting. From the Collection of Virginia Terry Boyd.
- J8 Armchair (Nearpass chair), Randall O'Donnell. Nashville, Indiana, United States, 2009. Ash. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation. 2009.2.
- J9 Armchair. Harrison Higgins, Inc. (founded 1974). Richmond, Virginia, United States, 2000. Walnut, leather, wool. On Loan from the Chipstone Foundation.
- J10 Instax Mini 9. Fujifilm (founded 1934). Greenwood, South Carolina, United States, 2017. Plastic, metal prop.
- J11 Polaroid 600 Supercolor 635 CL. Polaroid (founded 1937). Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States, 1981. Plastic, metal prop.
- J12 Instax Mini 9. Fujifilm (founded 1934). Greenwood, South Carolina, United States, 2017. Plastic, metal prop.
- J13 Teacup and saucer. Wedgwood (founded 1759). Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, United Kingdom, ca. 1976. Creamware prop.
- J14 Covered Box, Wedgwood (Founded 1759), prop.

What do you see?



Add your own chair.



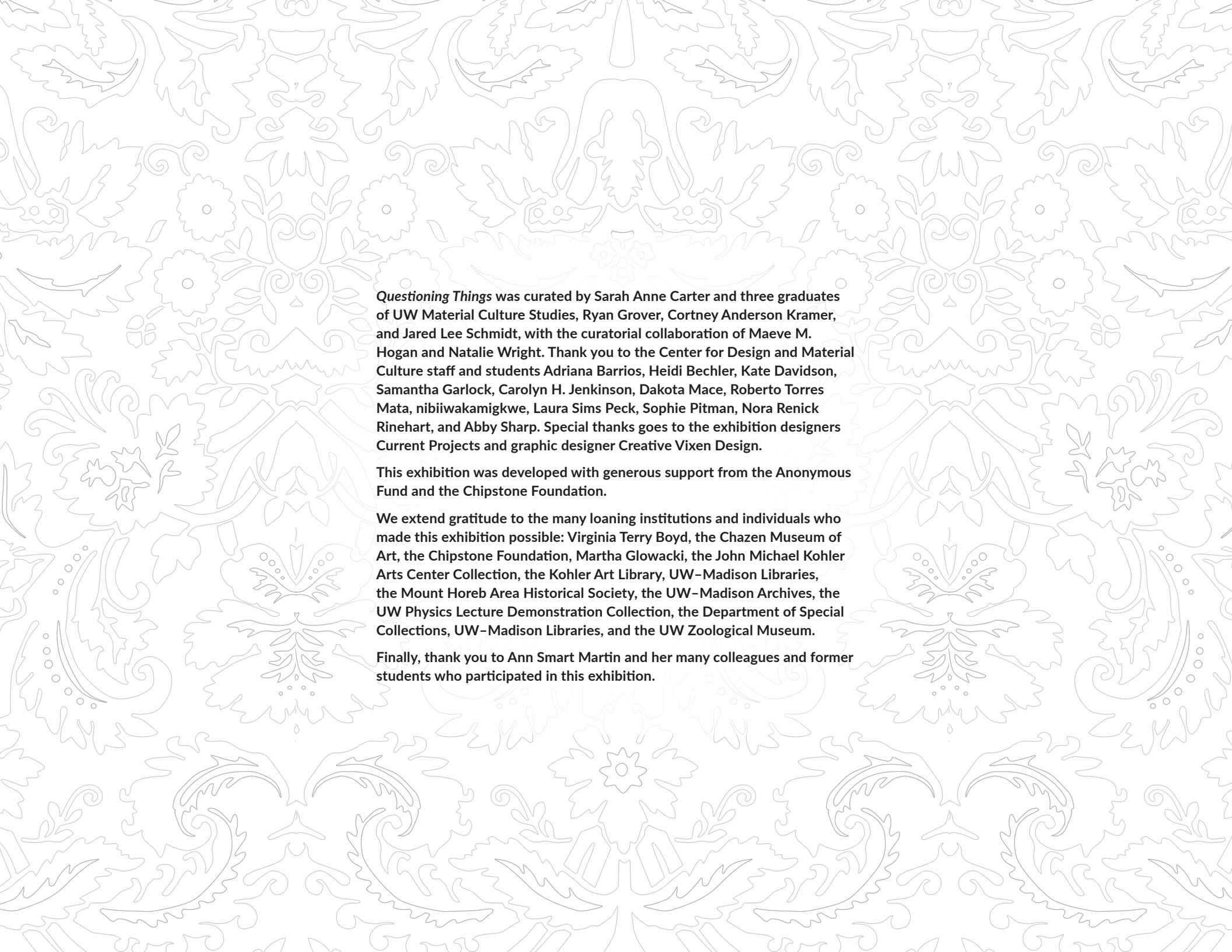
Sketch your favorite chair.



Create a story for this chair. Who might have made or used it?

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*Questioning Things* takes time and space. Use these blank pages to doodle, to sketch, to think, and to record your reflections, questions, and ideas.



**Questioning Things** was curated by Sarah Anne Carter and three graduates of UW Material Culture Studies, Ryan Grover, Courtney Anderson Kramer, and Jared Lee Schmidt, with the curatorial collaboration of Maeve M. Hogan and Natalie Wright. Thank you to the Center for Design and Material Culture staff and students Adriana Barrios, Heidi Bechler, Kate Davidson, Samantha Garlock, Carolyn H. Jenkinson, Dakota Mace, Roberto Torres Mata, nibiiwakamigkwe, Laura Sims Peck, Sophie Pitman, Nora Renick Rinehart, and Abby Sharp. Special thanks goes to the exhibition designers Current Projects and graphic designer Creative Vixen Design.

This exhibition was developed with generous support from the Anonymous Fund and the Chipstone Foundation.

We extend gratitude to the many loaning institutions and individuals who made this exhibition possible: Virginia Terry Boyd, the Chazen Museum of Art, the Chipstone Foundation, Martha Glowacki, the John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, the Kohler Art Library, UW-Madison Libraries, the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society, the UW-Madison Archives, the UW Physics Lecture Demonstration Collection, the Department of Special Collections, UW-Madison Libraries, and the UW Zoological Museum.

Finally, thank you to Ann Smart Martin and her many colleagues and former students who participated in this exhibition.