

American Design History: Research and Writing
Professor Bess Williamson
Wednesdays 9-12, Maclean 920

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class draws on local collections and archives to give students hands-on research experience with artifacts and documents of design practice in the 20th-21st centuries. We will track the rise of Modernism and Postmodernism in architecture, product design, and publishing/graphic design, and then turn to local design studios/galleries to document design practices embedded in contemporary environments and economies. Previous design or design history experience a plus but not required.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this class students will:

- Gain familiarity with materials of design history research
- Develop research plans and objectives for an independently researched project
- Write historical analyses based on primary and secondary research

Requirements:

Attendance & Participation: 20% Attendance is mandatory in this class, which includes being on time, attentive, and participating in class discussions and giving your classmates feedback on written and presented work. Your participation grade will reflect your level of preparedness for group discussions and engagement in feedback for fellow students. Weekly in-class writings will also count toward participation grade.

More than 2 unexcused absences may result in No Credit. Please contact me in advance if you anticipate missing classes or assignment deadlines.

Archives report (5%): each student will prepare an introduction to one of the sites we will visit. You will present this introduction to the class on-site right before our visit begins (5 mins or less); your introduction should inform your classmates on where we are, the basic information on the institution (when founded, what kinds of collections they hold today), and what kind of design history research you think we will do here.

Collected object research report (20%): This report has two parts: a listing of available research materials on one object from the Art Institute's Decorative Arts/Design collections, and a reflective paper that describes the object and what you have learned from researching it (including what research information may be lacking).

Conference Review (5%) – you will attend at least one session of the African American Designers symposium or Chicago Design: History and Narratives conference (info to come in class) in early November and write a short response to the presentations you saw.

Archives/Museums research project (50 points total): You will select an object or series of objects from one of the institutions we visit, based on research interests that you will update throughout the semester. This project will include an initial statement of interest (not graded), project proposal (5%), bibliography (10%), presentation/workshop (15%), and final paper (20%). Final paper will consist of 10-12 pages for undergraduates and 15-20 pages for graduate students.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Aug 29 – Introduction to class and “What is Design History Research?”
Kjetil Fallan, “Introduction” and “The Heritage from Art History” from *Design History: Understanding Theory and Method* (Oxford: Berg, 2010).
Visit to *John Singer Sargent and Chicago’s Gilded Age*: decorative arts and elite style in 19th century America

WEEK 2 Sept 5 – Researching Museum Collections
Assignment: Visit American Decorative Arts and select object for library research.
Read: Judith Barter and Monica Obniski, “Chicago: A Bridge to the Future”
Lecture/Discussion: Arts, Crafts, Modernism, and Anti-Modernism
Visit to Ryerson and Burnham Libraries

WEEK 3 Sept 12 – Origins of Modern Design in America
Frank Lloyd Wright, “The Art and Craft of the Machine”
Louis Sullivan, “The Tall Office Building Aesthetically Considered”
Alexandra Lange, “How to Be an Architecture Critic,” from *Writing About Architecture*
Research reports/share and discuss in galleries

WEEK 4 Sept 19 – Design and Production in Chicago Today
Steven Haulenbeek Studio and West Supply Foundry
Due: Collected Objects paper

WEEK 5 Sept 26 – The Loop Past & Present
Make No Small Plans, excerpt
Joanna Merwood-Salisbury, “Western Architecture: The Tall Building as Regional Type,” *Chicago 1890: The Skyscraper and the Modern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009)
In class: HABS/HARE research and visit to Sullivan and Sharpe
Due: Take-Home Citation quiz

WEEK 6 Oct 3 – Research Statements
Review readings by Kjetil Fallan (week 1) and Alexandra Lange (week 3); write responses to questions on Canvas assignment before individual meetings during class time (we will sign up in advance).

WEEK 7 Oct 10 – Printing and Ephemera: Chicago and Modernist Type

Ellen Mazur Thompson, "Making Ideas Visible," *Origins of Graphic Design in America, 1870-1920*. Yale University Press, 1997.

Ellen Lupton, "Letter" and "Text," *Thinking with Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors, & Students*. Chronicle Books, 2014.

Visit to Newberry Library – special collections and exhibition

WEEK 8 Oct 17 – World's Fairs in Archives/Special Collections

Schrenk, Lisa Diane. "The Future Begins." *Building a Century of Progress: The Architecture of Chicago's 1933-34 World's Fair* /. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Norman Bel Geddes, "House of Tomorrow," *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1931

In Class: Century of Progress (1933) & New York World's Fair (1939) at Ryerson/Burnham Libraries

WEEK 9 Oct 24 – Modern Design Education

Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, "The Contribution of the Arts to Social Reconstruction," and Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, "Moholy-Nagy: The Chicago Years" from *Moholy-Nagy: An Anthology*, ed. By Richard Kostelanetz

IIT Library & Crown Hall: The Bauhaus in America

WEEK 11 Oct 31 – Rethinking Design History

Davarian Baldwin, "Mapping the Black Metropolis," *Chicago's New Negroes*

Norman Teague & Fo Wilson

Due: Final project proposals

Nov 2?/TBA African American Designers symposium

WEEK 12 Nov 7 – Thinking through Chicago's Past & Present

Adam Green, *Selling the Race*

CCC exhibition: *African American Designers in Chicago: Art, Commerce and the Politics of Race*

*Nov 8-10 Chicago Design History conference

WEEK 13 Nov 14

Conference Reviews due (* due next week for presenters)

Presentations

Nov 21 Thanksgiving Break

Nov 28

Presentations

Dec 5 Crit Week

Dec 12 Visit to Volumes Gallery