

**Witness Tree Project FURN 2451**  
**Spring 2015: National Identity in Van Buren's America**  
**[In conjunction with HPSS S732]**

**Instructor: Dale Broholm**

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**Office Hours: By Appointment**

**Class: Monday 1:10-6:10 at Dept. of Furniture Design Woodshop, 1<sup>st</sup> Fl Met-Calf Building**

The Witness Tree Project is a curricular initiative involving Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and the National Park Service (NPS). Witness trees, as designated by the National Park Service, are long-standing trees that have “witnessed” key events, trends, and people in American history. The Project arranges for fallen witness trees to be shipped from a national historic site to RISD, where, in a joint history seminar and furniture studio, students interpret the history the tree witnessed and make relevant objects from the trees wood. In addition to classroom study, the Project variously involves field trips, guest lectures, exhibitions of students’ objects, and other events that highlight the significance of material culture, landscape, and design in learning about American history.

Due to the nature of this collaborative class the work load is similar to a major studio. Be prepared! Mondays will be very demanding; with both classes meeting all day and work outside the studio is not to be underestimated.

This is the sixth year of the Witness Tree Project. We will be working with a Mulberry tree from the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site (MAVA) located in Kinderhook, NY. In the past years of the Project we have worked with a tree from a former slave plantation in Towson, MD., trees from the Summer White House of Theodore Roosevelt on Long Island and an Elm from Frederick Law Olmsted’s home in MA. For more information on past projects, please go to [www.witnesstreeproject.org](http://www.witnesstreeproject.org)

## **Class Description**

As designer/makers we understand that research provides the maker with a deeper understanding of where ideas come from, and how to utilize them in our design process. This research-based studio class, in conjunction with its Liberal Arts component [HPSS S732], will use the readings, discussions, and research from the seminar to build a fully informed design vocabulary from which you will create objects. We will be working with material from a Mulberry tree removed from the Martin Van Buren Nation Historic Site.

RISD took possession of the tree upon its removal, processed the wood into lumber and dried it. With all projects in this course, the wood is free to the students for usage. Instructor's approval is required for the release of the wood for student use. Upon completion of the Project, all student work will be professionally photographed and through a jurying process work will be selected for public exhibition. In past years selected works have returned to the Sites for exhibition. Please note that any student work selected for exhibition must be available for the duration of the exhibition.

## **Course Requirements and Grading**

As in all studio courses you are expected to attend all classes. If you miss a studio class you are expected to make up the work and have it ready for the following week. Missing 3 classes (unexcused) means an automatic F. Studio hours are limited and there will be demand for machines and tools, which means effective use of your time in the studio will serve you well. You are not to use any Department machinery until you are check out by the instructor. You are bound by the Departmental Studio Rules and Guidelines and must follow them. Not doing so may result in your time in the studio being restricted.

Students are required to keep a sketch book/design journal and bring it to class weekly. This book should contain all handouts, careful notes from demos and be a register of your thoughts/ideas from both the seminar and studio components of the collaborative class. This sketch book will be referred to frequently and is considered part of your body of work. Always bring it to class!

Your grade will depend on your attendance, class participation, demonstration of technical knowledge and the completion of the 3 Studio assignments. Please understand that a "C" grade is given for average work, (you did the work done on time). "B" is for above average, and an "A" is for excelling in all areas of demand in the studio class. Since this is a collaborative class Dan and I will do the grading together.

## **Class Meeting Schedule**

- 2/16** Intro to Studio, Dept. Rules & Reg's. Safety Talk, Wood Technology, View Wood in Storage. Demo of Basic hand tools. Sketch book and Design Development talk. 1<sup>st</sup> Assignment given.
- 2/23** Hand & Power tool demonstrations. Various technical demonstrations.
- 3/2** Carving/shaping/sanding demo. Finishing demo. 1<sup>st</sup> assignment due with class review
- 3/9** Site visit to MAVA Kinderhook, NY. All day. 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment given
- 3/16** Review designs for 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment, continue design work or start on construction
- 3/23** Break
- 3/30** In class working time
- 4/6** Review 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment. 3<sup>rd</sup> Assignment given.
- 4/13** Initial design review, Class pin-up and critique
- 4/20** Final design development review.
- 4/27** In class working time.
- 5/4** In class working time.
- 5/11** Final Critique, Location TBA.

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**1<sup>st</sup> Assignment**

Contextualize and summarize a key point in Van Buren's First Inaugural Address in the form of a 2-3 page paper and in the form of an object.

**Class Critique: 3/2**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Assignment**

**Nation of Tinkers.** Van Buren's era was a time of industrialization, mechanization, exploration and exploitation. Citizens of the United States were called a "nation of tinkers". Create an object that reflects one of these ideas/products that helped shape or change this country during Van Buren's era.

**Class Critique: 4/6**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Assignment**

**Who Are We?** This country has been a nation united yet a nation divided since its inception, continuing on to present day. These topics of disunion range from ratification of the Constitution, State Rights, Indian removal and treaties, the Civil War and slavery, Women's suffrage, isolationism, Civil Rights, gun control and many, many more. Choose an issue of struggle/division that was contemporary to Van Buren's time and create a link (through an object) to an issue that challenges us in this country today.

**Final Critique: 5/11**