

Course Information:

Witness Tree Project Studio; Art, Memory, Community
Department of Furniture Design, in conjunction with HPSS S732-01
RISD Fall 2023
Studio Instructor: Meg Callahan - mcalla01@risd.edu
Seminar Instructor: Daniel Cavicchi - dcavicch@risd.edu
Studio TA: Penina Bernstein - pbernste@risd.edu
Location: PW 237A
Time: Monday 1:10pm - 6:10pm

Course Description:

Since 2009, Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and the National Park Service (NPS) have worked to develop a collaborative model for teaching and learning centered on witness trees: long-standing trees that have borne witness to the histories of the places where they have stood. The Project arranges for a fallen witness tree to be shipped from a national historic site to RISD, where, in a joint history seminar and design studio, students interpret the history the tree witnessed and make relevant objects from the tree's wood. In addition to classroom study, the Project variously involves field trips, guest lectures, workshops, demonstrations, and exhibitions of students' objects.

In this iteration of the Witness Tree Project, we will work with diverse tree species from the Saint-Gaudens National Historical Park in Cornish, New Hampshire. Saint-Gaudens was an influential American sculptor and arts advocate at the turn of the twentieth century, whose work—including 35 prominent public monuments, new U.S. coinage, the National Mall, and the founding of both the Art Students League and the Cornish Art Colony—provides provocative entry points for understanding art, collective memory, and community. Students will explore the various ways in which communities connect with place through material and craft, how making can serve to memorialize, and the connections that making and material sourcing practices have to the future history of place.

In the studio, we will develop a research based approach to making, in an effort to understand and draw connections between place, history and material. Students will respond to the themes presented at the site and in the seminar course through creative practice. We will utilize the wood from the site - a variety of species including Japanese Tree Lilac, Northern Red Oak, Black Willow and Honey Locust - to develop a deep understanding of the materiality of wood, and its potential for expression. As this is an interdisciplinary course, with students at different levels in regards to woodworking, basic woodworking techniques will be introduced. Many types of working are encouraged, not exclusive to traditional woodworking. In line with one of the core themes of this course, we will explore working as an artistic community in the studio, engaging in cooperative and communal learning, as well as working on individualized projects.

Learning Objectives:

- Cultivate a research based approach to design and art making
- Engage, reflect and respond to the seminar course material through a creative practice
- Gain understanding of basic woodworking techniques

- Develop a reverence for wood as a natural living material through working intimately and directly with a variety of species from the site
- Establish creative, innovative and contemplative methods of making in response to the context and material at hand

Course Structure

Class time will be spent on a balance of lectures, demonstrations, critiques, exercises, workshops and in class work on projects. There will be two field trips during the semester, which are noted in the course schedule.

We will generally start our class in PW237A, but will be splitting class time between that classroom space and the Furniture Design Dept. Woodshop. When we are in the woodshop, it is important to follow the woodshop safety 'uniform': closed-toed shoes, hair pulled back, no loose or dangling apparel or accessories, so please come to class as if you were going to the woodshop.

The course will use Canvas and Google Drive to house course information and to post assignments. We will rely on these platforms and (risd) email for course communications outside of class. Students will be expected to utilize these platforms and be responsible for being informed on assignment deadlines, key dates, etc.

Course Requirements and Expectations

Course Policies

This course will follow the Department of Furniture Design attendance and critique policy, which has been distributed separately and is available on the course Google Drive. Additionally, the course will adhere to the current school-wide policies regarding health and safety.

It is of crucial importance that students adhere to departmental and school policies for shops, studios, labs, classrooms, and other facilities. To create workspaces that are safe, pleasant, and usable for our class as well as the many other students we share with, students are expected to maintain both their personal spaces as well as communal areas in a neat and organized manner. Please remember that these are community spaces and your behavior affects everyone's experience. Safety and respectful behavior to each other and the facilities are paramount.

Students will be given limited access to the Furniture Design Department studio facilities, and must adhere to the shop policies when in use. FD studio policies and safety protocols may differ from your home major. When in FD, you must follow FD protocol, so that everyone sharing the space is on the same page and operating in understanding. As space is limited, you are encouraged to use the facilities in your home major.

Students are expected to attend every class. If you find that missing a class is unavoidable, please inform your instructor before class, and work with the faculty to get caught up on

course materials.

This course, as with many aspects of academic life at RISD, relies on creativity and personal experience as means for individuals to explore and gain understanding of the topical subjects of the course as well as their own identities and points of view. Mutual engagement with the unique, diverse, and varied perspectives, backgrounds, beliefs, identities, and outlooks of the class's collective body are essential for growth and learning. Students will be expected to honor the dignity, value, safety, and rights of one another in order to create an atmosphere that supports these ideals. The Department of Furniture Design views diversity as a strength that benefits the whole community. The faculty welcome input and critique as to how to enhance an inclusive learning environment and will work to correct areas of unintentional bias or inequity.

The webpage linked below provides detailed information on RISD's Academic Policies, including those addressing attendance, grading, conduct, intellectual property, and non-discrimination:

<http://policies.risd.edu/>

The link below provides information regarding Disability Support Services, which can assist in coordinating accommodations for students with cognitive, psychological and physical disabilities:

<http://info.risd.edu/disability-support-services-dss/>

Evaluation Criteria

Students will be expected to actively participate in class discussions and critiques. Weekly assignments and in-class exercises will be an important part of student evaluations, as well as process work. In addition to assignments, performance in the class will be evaluated on the following criteria: engagement in one-on-one and group discussions; ability to understand and express concepts both verbally and visually; effort and ability to engage fully in the subject matter; timeliness in completing projects; and attendance and punctuality.

For the purposes of determining grades, "A" level performance will be characterized by the following:

- the student was punctual and attended all classes
- the student challenged themselves and grew throughout the semester
- the student was an active member of the studio community who made genuine efforts to engage with and support the work of their peers
- the student completed all assignments and projects on time and with intentionality and thoughtfulness
- the student developed good design and building habits and has begun to find a process that is useful for their own development
- the student demonstrated a commitment to craftsmanship yielding work that is sensitive to the material at hand, and the intended material handling
- the student demonstrated their ability to apply critical thinking towards the parameters of designing and creating with wood and developed concepts that critically engaged with the content of the partnered seminar course

Materials, Resources and Estimated Costs

The wood provided from the park is free to the students for use. Instructor's approval is required for the release of the wood for student projects. There is not an unlimited amount of wood, nor a wide range of sizes, so students will work within the parameters of the material at hand, and students and faculty will work together to equitably distribute the material.

Throughout the semester, you will need a dedicated sketchbook/notebook. This will be used as a place to house notes, observations, sketches, etc. for the course. We will use this as a place to document and archive work, and to keep all information together.

For out of major students who do not have access to tools, the department will loan out a small tool kit for you to use during the semester. The policy for using the loaned tool kit will be discussed in class.

For some assignments you will be expected to make tests, models, samples and mock-ups with supplies that can be found at the RISD Store, the 3D Store and with scraps and leftovers and items already in your possession. You can expect to spend approximately \$50 - \$100 on supplies, but are not required to.

For more information on Saint Gaudens National Historical Park:

<https://www.nps.gov/saga/index.htm>

Course Schedule

The attached calendar provides an overview of each day's activities and other important events throughout the semester. The faculty will be continually reassessing this schedule and will make adjustments according to the needs of the class.