His 350R (39395): “Arts/Artifacts in the Americas”  
Fall 2011, TTH 2-3:30, GAR 1.122  
Neil Kamil, Associate Professor  
Department of History  
Office Hours TH 3:45-4:45 in GAR 2.146  
kamil@mail.utexas.edu, 512-232-6110

Material culture is a term borrowed by a vast number of academic disciplines from the study of archaeology, anthropology and folklore. It refers to all categories of historical artifacts—things that range in status from artistic masterpieces to the lowly stool, from architectural monuments to hedgerows, from religious rituals to factories and industrial products. All this and much more are now studied avidly by a growing number of historians in the hope of revealing overlooked evidence of past lives that both compliment and reach beyond the historian's traditional “comfort zone” with the written text.

This course will survey the changing material culture of the western hemisphere from pre-Columbian times to the beginning of the industrial revolution, with occasional forays into later periods where appropriate. We will view artifacts from an Atlantic perspective on all levels of society while sampling a cross-section of written work from a number of disciplines and geographies in the Americas. We will keep a keen eye on our central problem of telling the connected stories of artisans, consumers and their societies within specific historical contexts that are simultaneously local, regional and global. We will also think about the history of beauty.

Requirements: We will meet for discussions twice each week. Enthusiastic participation in discussion counts for a high percentage of your final grade (30%), therefore unexcused absences will prove most detrimental in this course. Readings will not usually exceed three essays or chapters from the books below per session. This is a writing course so requirements include a weekly 2 pp paper from all students due every Thursday on what you perceive to be the main problems and questions posed by all the readings discussed that week (50%). There will be final papers and class presentations on an artifact of each student’s choice (20%). Please be aware that the assignment of grades has always been up to the discretion of the instructor. Students with disabilities may request academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259. This course carries the Writing Flag. Please take a moment to review the flag criteria, available at http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/teaching/flags.

Required Readings (UT Coop; the usual online sources, and/or on reserve at PCL):

Arjun Appadurai, ed., The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective  
Samuel Y. Edgerton, Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artisans in Colonial Mexico
Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Material Life in America, 1600-1860* (out of print but readily available used on amazon.com and reserve)
Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (also available as an *Electronic Resource* via the UT Library Catalog)

**Week one: “Evocative Objects” and Personal Histories**

Organizational day
Paper due

**Week two: Evocative objects in our lives**

Oral presentations of students’ personal histories
Oral presentations of students’ personal histories
Paper due

**Week three: Material Culture, Brief Introduction to Theory and Practice**

Paper due

**Week four: Mesoamerican Artisans and “mixed” cultures**

Discussion: *Theaters of Conversion*, Introduction, chapters 1-4
Discussion: *Theaters of Conversion*, chapters 7, 8, 9, 11.
Paper due

**Week five: European Contexts and Colonial Beginnings in early North America**

Paper due
Week six: Race and Slavery


Paper due

Week seven: Women and Gender


Paper due

Week eight: Space and Landscape


Paper due

Week nine: Cloth


Week ten: Clay
Paper due

Week eleven: Wood


Week twelve: Stone

Paper due
Discussion: No discussion

Week 13 to last class day

Presentation of students’ final projects
Final papers due last class day