

PEMCI 2009 Project Descriptions

Graduate Research Fellowship in Material Culture Studies

LaTanya Autry

Although many public spaces across America were lynching sites, for the most part, they have not undergone any form of official remembrance. Nearly all of these places have been rectified. Consequently, the violence has gone unmarked in the physical landscape. Additionally, the history of lynching violence has been, until recently, largely overlooked. However, the James Allen and John Littlefield collection of lynching photography first exhibited and published as *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* in 2000 has revived interest in this facet of American culture.

I will use the Graduate Research Fellowship in Material Culture Studies to continue my work on American lynching landscapes. Through analyses of photographs, city maps, demographical data, and historical markers, this interdisciplinary project will address how cultural landscapes have been shaped by acts of collective violence. The study will examine the physical structures of lynching memorials and consider how specific memorials fit within the local and national landscape. Additionally, this project will uncover the cultural logic behind the implementation of lynching memorials and will also consider sites that have not experienced any memorialization efforts. My presentation will include an overview of the history of American lynching and memorial culture, an in-depth look at the Duluth, Minnesota; Coatesville, Pennsylvania; and Waco, Texas lynchings, and the respective memorialization activities.

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Christina Cole

Christina's project focuses on the scientific analysis of dyes used on pre-1850s Eastern Woodlands quillwork using chromatography (HPLC, GC-MS, MS-MS), electrochemistry, and spectroscopy (NMR, IR, fluorescence) as appropriate to determine the principal dye colorant on the quillwork. By focusing on a time period prior to the North American introduction of synthetic aniline dyes (post 1856), she will limit colorants to only those naturally occurring; the limited number of natural dyes, together with existing historical and ethnobotanical references, may make it possible to identify the colorant present, and also to suggest probable sources for the particular dyestuff. The results of Christina's research will be interpreted in contexts relevant to Native and non-Native conservators, curators, historians, anthropologists, and contemporary quillworkers in order to address current questions concerning Native American quillwork dyes up to the mid-19th century.

Jennifer Fang

In preparation for the 1973 Chinese New Year, Ruby Tom of the San Francisco Bay Area took the Marc Chagall lithograph off her living room wall and replaced it with ancestral portraits and traditional offerings of fruit and wine. Miles away in Park Forest, Illinois, Weichien Chow had painted a Chinese dragon on the garage of his family's suburban home. Both incidents reveal that identity negotiation and the process of Americanization extend into the realm of material objects.

My dissertation examines the development of a Chinese American middle class outside of Chinatowns during the Cold War era. My public engagement project builds off my dissertation chapter, "Preserving Chinese Heritage, Creating Chinese American Identity." Eating Chinese food, wearing traditional Chinese clothing for special occasions, or furnishing a home with American and Chinese style accessories served as ways for first-generation immigrants to maintain connections to Chinese cultural practices. Such activities also exposed American-born generations to their ethnic heritage. I argue that commonplace Chinese objects like chopsticks and cheongsams became tools for creating a Chinese American consciousness. Similarly, objects associated with the American way of life like suburban homes and automobiles functioned as instruments for Chinese Americans to assert their place in mainstream America.

Virginia Garnett

Why would May Ward, a middle-class English woman, devote four voluminous scrapbooks to the renowned nineteenth-century Shakespearian actress Ellen Terry and her American lecture tours? What does an examination of these scrapbooks reveal about lecturing at the turn of the century? With the aid of NEH funding, I will pursue these and other questions, as I encourage literary scholars to embrace scrapbooks as valuable primary sources on par with common-place books and diaries. More specifically, I will explore the ways in which scrap-booking allowed Ward to simultaneously create an image of Ellen Terry as lecturer and herself as audience member. Upon completion of my research, I will organize a lecture for local scrap-bookers that will highlight the historical significance of the group's hobby through a brief discussion of Ward and Terry. I will then invite the participants to discuss their own scrapbooks to better understand the images they create of themselves, their friends, and their life events, thereby encouraging the audience members to reflect on how they depict themselves through objects and how they are understood by those who "read" such objects. Such a forum would also allow for discussion of other media used for similar purposes, such as diaries, blogs, and Facebook profiles.

Alison Klaum, *Pressing Flowers: Floral Representations in Nineteenth-Century Print Ephemera*

I plan to spend the summer researching floral imagery—both written and pictorial—in a variety of printed ephemera from the nineteenth century including visiting cards, sentimental flower poetry books, and scrapbooks. My project will consider how the personal and popular intertwine in constructions of culture, literature, and authorship through images of flowers. I am concerned not only with what flowers signify, but how they signify. How are authors representing themselves? How are they representing literature? And why are they choosing flowers of all things to do so? Since flowers were collected and pressed into scrapbooks and albums, my project carefully considers the construction of these texts—how flowers served as a cultural currency on and within the page. I will be looking at mass-produced sources written by popular nineteenth-century authors such as Kate Greenaway's *Language of Flowers* (1884) next to scrapbooks compiled by more obscure figures such as Mary Eliza Bachman (daughter-in-law of James Audubon) to demonstrate how these floral symbols function as important sites of meaning in which literature, learning, and respectability cohere.

Kate LaPrad

A main thoroughfare in the town of Dover, Delaware bears the Loockerman family name, but its patriarchs did not hold national political office during the tumultuous years leading to the American Revolution. They built two houses in Dover, but aren't mentioned in more than a handful of secondary sources. The family's progenitor - a Dutch sailor turned affluent colonial merchant - died one of the wealthiest men in North America, but its role in history is obscure. The family traced a wide trajectory across the British colonies, but it remains surprisingly silent in the history of Delaware.

Using two sets of Philadelphia chairs owned by the family as an entry point, I hope to place the Loockerman family in the cultural milieu of colonial and Revolutionary Dover by examining the architecture, decorative arts and written records the family left in museums and archives throughout the Mid-Atlantic.

Nenette Luarca-Shoaf, *The Mississippi River in Antebellum Visual Culture and Imagination*

My dissertation examines ways in which maps, landscape and city views, moving panoramas, paintings, and images in print culture represented the Mississippi River between 1830 and 1861, often for people who never visited it. Even as the river emerged during the antebellum period as a symbol of national unity, the proliferation of images depicting the Mississippi reveal the difficulties in characterizing such a vast, multifarious, and mobile entity.

Each chapter of this study closely analyzes a few key objects that speak to different aspects of an imagined Mississippi River. These widely-seen images, made available to mass audiences via developing print and transportation technologies, include the American Art-Union engravings of George Caleb Bingham's work, the Davy Crockett Almanacs, George Catlin's traveling Indian Gallery, moving panorama paintings, bird's-eye and oblique views of St. Louis and New Orleans, and maps of the river itself. By juxtaposing and analyzing examples from different visual media, the overall project reveals a fuller picture of the imagined Mississippi than previous studies of travel narratives and literature, and allows for a greater understanding of antebellum practices of spectatorship than considerations of urban views, painting, or cartography could alone.

My work this summer will focus on two works: a colossal moving panorama created to promote the archaeological investigations of Philadelphian Montroville Dickeson and a group of Upper Mississippi and Missouri River landscapes painted by George Catlin. I will explore how their representations of the past and continuing Native American presence in the region locate the Mississippi River Valley in time and history.

Cheryl-Lynn May, *Piecing Together the Past: The Fabric Collage and the Dressed Portrait Miniature, 1700 -1820*

In order to expand the existing historiography of eighteenth century American women's material culture, my master's thesis will address a neglected area of scholarship – 'dressed' portrait miniatures and 'dressed' prints. The tradition of embellishing portraits on paper with fabric can be traced to continental Europe. 'Dressed' prints were created by women using hand drawn or printed full-length portraits. These were then decorated with fabric to create a 'dressed' effect. These collage compositions, also referred to as tinsel prints, provide a significant context for understanding the work of the American portrait miniaturist Mary Way (New London, CT, 1769-1833). Like 'dressed' prints, Way's diminutive paper and silk miniatures were embellished with fabric to create three dimensional portraits. They are unlike anything any other miniaturist created during her time and as such, Way's work stands as an anomaly in art historical terms. Yet, as material culture, the intersection between the

tradition of 'dressed' prints and Way's 'dressed' miniatures allows considerable opportunities for understanding Way as an artist and the creative work of countless women who for three centuries were compelled to elaborate printed matter with fabric.

The goal of this project is to offer a better understanding of the creative impetus that brought a continental feminine material tradition to the colonies and how that tradition spurred a young New London, Connecticut woman to capture the visage of her clients in paper and fabric. In order to accomplish this goal, research will be conducted both in the states and abroad. Visits will be paid to each repository to photograph, document, and describe all known examples. This catalogue of data will provide the evidence for understanding the tradition of 'dressed' prints and the evolution of the art from continental Europe to America. Furthermore, this project will provide a context for understanding Way's body of work.

Amanda Norbutus

Amanda Norbutus' research this summer will focus upon examining outdoor public murals to understand the complexity of these painted surfaces and the coatings commonly used to protect them. This research will lead to the development and assessment of a removable protective coating for painted and architectural surfaces. The coating is likely to be used primarily to protect the colorful wall murals found in Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Dublin from outdoor elements, graffiti, pollution, and weathering. However, the scope of the project will also test the coating's applicability to other architectural surfaces, such as historical buildings and floors. The development of this coating will also focus upon selecting the appropriate solvent or water-based system that can safely and completely remove the coating after it has cured. The results of Amanda's research will provide a novel product that will enhance the appearance and increase the lifetime of the painted wall murals and other architectural surfaces.

Maria Shevzov, *The Fabric of Home: Material Life on a Georgia Cotton Plantation, 1838-1865*

This project will focus on the material culture of the Archibald Smith Plantation in Roswell, Georgia. Built in 1845, the 300 acre cotton plantation has extensive collections of personal and household objects and family documents and is currently operated as an historic house museum. In collaboration with the curator and educational staff at the Smith Plantation, I plan to create a public engagement program that will combine my research of the collection with an identified programming need of the site. The project will be expanded and culminate in the completion of a master's thesis in American Material Culture.

Laura Schmidt

My proposed thesis research will examine the material culture associated with children's nature experiences. I hope to compare children's self-initiated experiences, common in a nature-oriented home (such as the utopian community of Arden, Delaware might provide) and the imposed or designed nature experiences of children participating in Delaware nature center or summer camp activities, in the mid 20th century. I will determine what material culture remains (from both groups)—porches, piazzas, cabins, hearths, fire circles, tree houses, rafts, toys—and also consider ephemeral culture like rock sculptures, stick forts, fairy houses, the wildlife itself, songs, games, and traditional activities (like the Ardens' hop-rocking). Oral history will be explored as a primary source for my research.

Bess Williamson

This summer, I will investigate the history of the Disability Rights movement through the material landscape of Berkeley, California. Since the “Rolling Quads” – UC Berkeley’s first disabled student group – snuck out at night with bags of asphalt to pave over curbs in the 1960s, the campus and city of Berkeley have been on the cutting edge of accessible design in buildings and transportation. Through oral history interviews and research into the Bancroft Library’s Disability Rights and Independent Living Collection, I will chronicle this history and document its major sites in past and present states. I will bring this fascinating story about civil rights and the physical places we occupy to a popular audience through a written piece for a print or online periodical.