

# *The Promiscuous Object: The Meaning of Material Culture*

**UHON 222-013 | M | 1:00-3:30 | SHC 22 | 40998**

Ruth Meredith

Why do we need things? This course will explore the various answers to this question as a way to examine our complex and fascinating relationships with the objects we collect, make, buy, use and discard. We will think about how we use objects as tools, signs of social status, markers for personal identity and symbolic means of transmitting knowledge and meaning and in the process, we will discover why objects can be considered promiscuous. The readings for this course will range from comedian George Carlin's essay "Stuff" through essays about collecting and the role of the museum in contemporary culture. Various 'hands-on' exercises such as constructing art from trash will add a creative dimension to class discussions.

## **Readings**

Sam Gosling *Snoop:What Your Stuff Says about You*

John Elsner and Roger Cardinal ed. *The Cultures of Collecting*

Akin "Passionate Possession" *Learning from Things*

Asma "Drama in the Diorama" *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads*

Bauxandall "Exhibiting Intention" *Exhibiting Cultures*

Csiksimihalyi "Why we need Things" *A History of Things*

Carlin "Stuff" *braindroppings*

Glassie "Material Culture" *Material Culture*

Hooper-Greenhill "The Irrational Cabinet" *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*

Stocking "Museums and Material Culture" *Objects and Others*

## **Requirements**

Regular class attendance, careful, reflective preparation of assignments, active contributions to class discussions and participation in class exercises, a reading journal, an presentation on a personal collection, a 4-5 page research paper on topic related to contemporary consumer culture, and a final group project based on some aspect of the material culture selected by the students. This course will be web enhanced.

## **About the Instructor**

Trained as an art historian, philosopher and painter/print maker, Ruth Meredith has been working as a teacher since 1991. An unrepentant bibliophile, she recently became interested in the graphic novel as a creative art medium. She collects books especially artist books like pop-ups and graphic novels.



200-Levels