ARCH 0305
GLASS FROM THE PAST: glimpses into the history, technology, and artistry of molten material culture

Brown University, Spring 2012
Meeting time: Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:00-10:20 AM
Location: Rhode Island Hall, Room 008 (basement level)

Instructor: Carolyn Swan
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Office hours: Tuesday 10:30am-12:00pm (or by appointment), Mezzanine of RI Hall
Class wiki page: http://proteus.brown.edu/glass2012/15695 (password: contact instructor)

Course description:
5000 years after it was first invented in Mesopotamia, glass is still all around us. 2000 years after the innovation of glassblowing, the tools and techniques remain largely unchanged. Glass is unquestionably a fundamental part of modern life, but what is the story of glass and what makes it special?

Approaching glass as both a material and a type of object, this class will trace the history of glass, from its first discovery in the third millennium BCE to its mass production in American and European factories of the 19th-20th centuries. We will consider the multiple functions and meanings of glass over time and across different cultures, and explore themes like technology, innovation, and craft.

In this course, archaeological and art historical evidence for glass will be combined with anthropological and ethnographic approaches to the technology and techniques of glass production. To that end, we will draw from the combined resources of Brown, RISD, and the wider artistic community of Providence. We will work closely with glass artifacts in
the Joukowsky Institute collection and take field trips to study the excellent glass collection of the RISD museum. We will attend the RISD glass department lecture series, have discussions with contemporary glass artisans, and visit the Steel Yard studios and the RISD “hot shop” to observe glassblowers in action.

**Goals and objectives:**

The overall purpose of this course is to: 1) investigate what makes glass a unique material and medium, 2) research the use of glass by different cultures, 3) examine the technology and techniques of glassmaking and glassworking to understand how these have changed over time, and 4) explore a variety of theoretical and analytical methods that are possible when considering objects of material culture.

To achieve these goals, you will learn the basic vocabulary and interpretive frameworks used to describe and compare the products and processes of glassworking, synthesizing the different types of evidence in order to build a detailed understanding of the nature and history of glass. These skills will be practiced through verbal and written communication in assignments and class discussions.

**Requirements:**

All students are expected to attend class regularly, participate in class discussions, and complete all readings and assignments by the deadlines outlined in this syllabus or on the course wiki.

**Grading:**

- Class attendance, preparation, and participation: 20%
- Three short written assignments: 30% (10% each)
- Research project: 35%
- Presentation: 15%
- RISD glass lecture series attendance: extra credit opportunities [TBA]

**Disability support:** Please see me during the first week of class to discuss any disabilities (including hidden disabilities) so that accommodation can be made.

**Course wiki:** The readings, a calendar of class events (e.g. the museum visit and exams, due dates for written assignments), and select PowerPoint slides will also be made available on the course wiki page. The wiki will always have the most up-to-date information, including revisions to the syllabus and assignments; please be sure to consult this site regularly!

**RISD lecture series:** The Glass Department at RISD hosts a Visiting Artist lecture series, a fantastic opportunity to hear important contemporary glass artists speak about and show their work; the schedule will posted on the course wiki when it becomes available. Attendance are not required, but is highly recommended, and students who attend will be eligible to receive extra credit points on their writing assignments [TBA].

**Required Readings:** All of the assigned readings (except those from the two books listed below) will be available for download as a PDF file from the course wiki page. Additional resources may be placed on reserved in the library at the Joukowsky Institute.
The following optional books are available for purchase at the Brown Bookstore, and the MacFarlane/Martin volume will be on reserve in the library.


**Short writing assignments:** Three short writing assignments are due during the first half of the semester in Weeks 5, 7, and 9 (they are due by 5pm on Thursday and should be emailed to the instructor). Please write 2-3 pages (12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced), in response to the following:

A fundamental goal of this class is to achieve an understanding of the intersection of glass history, technology, and artistry. As such, these papers are intended to be a space that allows you reflect on the use of glass and explore the links between these three characteristics at any given point in time. What changes occurred in how glass was used, perceived, and/or received? What cultural, technological, or other aspects of life could have impacted glass, or could have inspired/resulted in these sorts of changes?

1. Week 5: Reflect on the links between glass history, technology, and artistry from the Bronze Age to the Early Roman period.
2. Week 7: Reflect on the links between glass history, technology, and artistry from the Late Roman to the 17th century.
3. Week 9: Reflect on the links between glass history, technology, and artistry from the 18th-21st centuries.

**Final Papers/projects:** 10 page research paper (12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced) of a topic of your choice about any aspect of glass history, technology, or artistry (see some suggestions below) **OR** 5 pages of text to accompany a project (you must meet with the instructor to talk about ideas regarding videos, designing/making objects, curating exhibitions, etc.). Everyone should have a good idea about what they want to research by Spring Break; on the first day of class after break you are expected to submit a paper proposal to the professor.

- Pick a historical time period or glassworking technique to research and discuss in the context of other periods/practices.
- Interview RISD glass faculty or majors about their experiences working with the medium and how it has shaped their artistic vision and practice.
- Using the Joukowsky collection or the RISD museum exhibits, pick an object that is made of glass or otherwise incorporates glass. Describe the object and how it was made, used, perceived, received, etc. Research parallels, etc.
- Pick an object from the CMG guide and find parallel examples (i.e. other similar objects in museum catalogs).
- Design your own glass object and describe/contextualize it by writing about its place in the history of glass. What time period does it represent? What colors of glass are used and how are these colors achieved? What glassworking techniques are used to make it? What is the function of the piece?
- Watch glassblowers and write about how they work and how they make objects.
• Write an “archaeology of the hotshop.” Imagine the RISD hotshop was destroyed in an earthquake; what would be left? Would these pieces let us accurately reconstruct the process?
• Create a “glass tour” of Providence, highlighting the historical use of glass in the architectural design of the city and its urban spaces; create a map route and accompanying informational brochure, site labels, etc.
• Research issues of glass conservation and preservation.
• Chemically analyze small fragments of glass to determine their raw materials and production processes.

Library Resources: The Brown University library and RISD library both contain many useful books on glass history, technology, and artistry. Please be aware that your fellow students may also be looking to use the same books; email your classmates and me if you find that you need a book that has been checked out (because we probably have it!), or think about using the Borrow Direct or Interlibrary Loan systems.

Academic Honesty: For all assignments, please be sure to cite your sources of information (class lectures, articles, books, on-line material, etc.) in the form of footnotes, endnotes, or parenthetical notations. You are strongly advised to refer to the Chicago Manual of Style (or other similar style manual) for formatting your references and bibliographies. All work should be your own. Plagiarism will not be tolerated! If you are unclear as to what is considered plagiarism, please review Brown’s Academic Code: (http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Dean_of_the_College/curriculum/academic_code.php).

Useful Resources:

Dictionaries and definitions
• The online “Resource on Glass” by the Corning Museum of Glass: http://www.cmog.org/dynamic.aspx?id=264

Museums and associations with helpful websites
• The RISD Glass Department: http://www.risd.edu/Glass/
• The Corning Museum of Glass: http://www.cmog.org/
• The Toledo Museum of Art Glass Pavilion: http://www.toledomuseum.org/glass-pavilion
• Association for the History of Glass (England):  
  http://www.historyofglass.org.uk/
• Association Verre & Histoire (France):  
  http://www.verre-histoire.org/index2.html
• National American Glass Club, Ltd.:  
  http://www.glassclub.org/about.htm

Journals and newsletters

• Journal of Glass Studies (produced by the Corning Museum of Glass)  
  [1-SIZE NK5100 .J6]
• Glass Science and Technology [SciLi 1-SIZE TP845 .G68]
• Glass Physics and Chemistry [SciLi 1-SIZE TP845 .F581 and electronic]
• Glass Technology [SciLi 1-SIZE TP845 .G6]
• Glass and Ceramics [SciLi 1-SIZE TP845 .S72 and electronic]
• Glass Age [electronic]
• Glass News (Produced by the Association of Glass History):  
  http://www.historyofglass.org.uk/GlassNews.html
• Glass Shards (produced by the National American Glass Club):  
  http://www.glassclub.org/shardsrch.htm?entire%20issue&and

Course Schedule: (NOTE – the instructor reserves the right to update the assigned readings that are listed below or to move class topics around when necessary)

WEEK 1

Thursday (1/26): What makes glass special? Introducing the structure, content, and goals of the course.

WEEK 2

Tuesday (1/31): Structure and properties of glass: what is it? How is it formed? How can it be altered or manipulated?

Read for class:

• Look over the following from the CMG’s website: “The Glassy State—In Brief” (http://www.cmog.org/dynamic.aspx?id=5640) and “Types of Glass” (http://www.cmog.org/dynamic.aspx?id=5658)
**Thursday (2/2):** Sources of evidence: what do we know about ancient glass and glass production, and how do we know it? Looking at actual glass artifacts from the Joukowsky Institute’s collection.

Read for class:


**WEEK 3**

**Tuesday (2/7):** The discovery of glass and the earliest glassmaking; Mesopotamia and Ancient Egyptian glass (3rd millennium-2nd millennium BCE)

Read for class:

- Pliny the Elder. *Natural History* Book 36 (“The Natural History of Stones”).

**Thursday (2/9):** Persian, Greek, and Hellenistic glass (5th-1st centuries BCE)

Read for class:

WEEK 4

**Tuesday (2/14): Roman glass (1st century BCE – 3rd century CE)**

Read for class:


**Thursday (2/16): RISD Museum visit (galleries and storage)**

Before class, be sure to look through the following catalogs on RESERVE [go to OCRA: http://dl.lib.brown.edu/reserves/] at the Rock to get an idea of the forms, styles, and decoration of Roman glass:


WEEK 5

**Tuesday (2/21): NO CLASS (Presidents’ Day long weekend)**

**Thursday (2/23): NO CLASS**

**PAPER 1 DUE by 5pm (emailed to instructor)**

WEEK 6

**Tuesday (2/28): Late Roman, Byzantine, and Sasanian glass (3rd-8th centuries CE)**

Read for class:


Thursday (3/1): Islamic glass (7th-14th centuries CE)

Read for class:

WEEK 7

Tuesday (3/6): Medieval Europe (12th-14th centuries CE)

Read for class:

Thursday (3/8): Renaissance and Early Modern Europe (14th-17th centuries CE)

Read for class:

PAPER 2 DUE by 5pm (emailed to instructor)

WEEK 8

Tuesday (3/13): Early American Glass

Read for class:

Thursday (3/15): Glass worldwide (18th-19th centuries)

Read for class:
• Download and listen to the podcast “Botanical Wonders” about Blaschka from CMG (http://www.cmog.org/dynamic.aspx?id=280)

WEEK 9

Tuesday (3/20): Industrialization

Read for class:

Thursday (3/22): Modern glass (1890-1960)

Read for class:

PAPER 3 DUE by 5pm (emailed to instructor)
WEEK 10

SPRING BREAK (3/24-4/1)

WEEK 11

Tuesday (4/3): Experimental archaeology – how glass was made in the past
Read for class:


Thursday (4/5): Scientific analysis – how glass has changed through time
Read for class:


WEEK 12

Tuesday (4/10): Anthropological analysis – aspects of craft production and industry
Read for class:


Thursday (4/12): RISD Museum visit: contemporary artists, glass in art and design
Read for class:

WEEK 13

Tuesday (4/17): RISD glass hot shop: glassblowing
Read for class:
• TBA

Thursday (4/19): RISD glass hot shop or Steel Yard studio: casting and molding
Read for class:
• TBA

Friday (4/20) – Monday (4/23): RISD glass department Senior Exhibition
• 6pm each evening, on view: Woods-Gerry House at 62 Prospect Street

WEEK 14

Tuesday (4/24): RISD glass studio or Steel Yard studio: coldworking
Read for class:
• TBA

Thursday (4/26): Final project presentations

WEEKS 15 & 16

Tuesday (5/1): Final project presentations

Thursday (5/3): Final project presentations

FINAL PROJECT DUE by 5/15 (emailed to instructor by 5pm)