

**Department of Anthropology**  
**ANTHRO 4418G: Historical Material Culture**  
**BRIEF COURSE OUTLINE**  
**Winter 2026**

*Date: July 4, 2025*

**Instructor and course information:**

Instructor: Dr. Trish Markert

Method of delivery: In-person

Credit value: 0.5

Antirequisites: None.

Prerequisites: Anthropology 2229F/G and registration in third or fourth year in any Anthropology module, or permission of the instructor.

Please ensure you have the correct requisites by checking [the Academic Calendar](#).

**Course Description:**

Material culture encompasses the relationships between people and their material world (e.g., objects, landscapes, written records, architecture). This course offers a hands-on approach to the theorization, identification, recordation, and analysis of material culture of the 19th and 20th centuries. We will begin by exploring conceptual frameworks for thinking through artifacts, built landscapes, and archives. What are materials and how do they shape our lives, and vice versa? How do people mobilize things to create meaning, make places, negotiate identities, remember and forget, or simply go about their daily lives – and how do archaeologists and other scholars make sense of the material remains of these processes decades or centuries later? With this theoretical foundation, we will examine diagnostic and methodological approaches to historical material culture. Students will learn to identify, catalog, analyze, and curate historic materials (e.g., glass, ceramic, small finds), as well as practice methods like photogrammetry for recording objects and architecture. Students will work with collections or landscapes to complete term projects, which include a public-facing exhibit design and a research essay.

Materials, of course, do not exist in a vacuum; they are intimately connected to the processes, movements, and narratives that shape our lives. Therefore, we will focus on several thematic issues throughout the term, which may include migration, colonialism, race/ethnicity, industry, heritage, and personhood. The materials we work with will sit at the intersection of one or more of these themes, and term projects will explore them in analytical depth.

A full course schedule including a week-by-week breakdown of topics and assigned readings will be available on the course's OWL Brightspace site before the first day of class.

**Course Materials:**

Required textbook:

Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Pluto Press, 2020. The textbook costs approximately \$24.00 (paperback version) on Amazon.ca. Students are welcome to purchase second-hand or earlier editions of this textbook.

Required readings (e.g., PDFs, websites, videos) will also be available through the Course Readings tool on the course site.

Additional costs:

We will take one trip to the Museum of Ontario Archaeology. Students are asked to bring \$8 for admission.

The class may also offer optional field trips outside of our regular class time, including weekends. These local field trips will provide the option of additional hands-on experience to students. They are unmarked and have no bearing on your final grade. Students will be expected to cover any costs related to travel and arrange their own transportation to and from sites.

### **Evaluation:**

Grades will be based on the following:

Book Assignment and Discussion	10%
<i>This short assignment will ask you to engage with the required book, The Brutish Museums, by producing a catalog and short analysis/review of the text.</i>	
Material Culture Show-and-Tell	20%
<i>This will be a 2-page essay and short presentation on a piece of material culture of your choice.</i>	
Weekly In-Class Lab, Assignment, or Reflection	30%
<i>Weekly short assignment, to be completed and turned in during class.</i>	
Final Research Paper	30%
<i>An 8-10 page research paper on a material culture topic of your choice that critically engages course themes.</i>	
Final Exhibit	10%
<i>Participation in a final class exhibit.</i>	

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