

The Curator's Toolkit:

Up Close and Personal with The Rosenbach's Collections

Course Syllabus



William Morris, *The Well at the World's End* Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1896.
Rosenbach call no. FP .K29 896m.

Course Description

Do you love discovering fascinating stories from history? Have you ever wanted to get up close and personal with museum and library collection objects, including rare books, manuscripts, paintings, furniture, precious metals, and ceramics? If so, then this course is for you.

The Curator's Toolkit will equip you with knowledge and skills for handling, studying, preserving, and learning from fine art, antiques, rare books, and manuscripts at The Rosenbach and beyond, and give you hands-on, behind-the-scenes access to world-renowned museum and library collections. You will even write an object label for a real Rosenbach museum exhibition. In this course, the historic Rosenbach house becomes your laboratory for the study and enjoyment of art, artifacts, and historic texts.

Course Schedule

The Curator's Toolkit will meet onsite in the Denworth Room at The Rosenbach from 6:00 – 8:30 p.m. every other Tuesday night, from September 14 through December 14, 2021. (There are small variations to this pattern; consult the soon-to-be-published course schedule and online information for details.) Most course sessions will be divided into two sections. The first hour of most sessions will consist of presentations and lectures focused on the session's theme, as well as seminar-style discussions of readings covering issues in artifact study. Following a brief break, the second hour of most class sessions will consist of a hands-on Artifact Lab, in which class participants will study Rosenbach collections objects under the guidance of Rosenbach Collections Department staff.

The course schedule also includes two Research & Writing Workshops, when students and instructors will collaborate on understanding the research tools at The Rosenbach to assist in label writing for the class curation activity.

One weekend day during the run of the course has been designated as open reading room hours and instructor office hours. During this period, students can visit The Rosenbach to work on their projects, if they so wish. Students are, of course, also welcome and encouraged to make other research appointments during regular reading room hours. Visit the website for details.

Class Curation Activity

Students in *The Curator's Toolkit* will have the opportunity to choose an object of special interest to them from The Rosenbach's collection, and, using the skills they acquire in the course, write a museum object label about the piece for inclusion in the Rosenbach digital exhibition "*I Am an American!": The Authorship and Activism of Alice Dunbar-Nelson* (www.alicedunbarnelson.com). Students will work with the course instructors to choose an artifact of focus that fits within the themes of the online exhibition, conduct their own research about the piece, and then write the label for online publication. This project will likely involve some extra time spent at The Rosenbach, outside of class hours, if students wish to complete an object label for publication. (This is entirely optional!)

Grading

There are no grades! This course is just for fun.

Recommended Texts

Three books are recommended for the course. Digital copies of articles, podcast episodes, and TED Talks will occasionally be assigned; see schedule for details.

PLEASE NOTE: The Rosenbach has partnered with the books' publishers to offer discounts on the volumes for students in this course. Information regarding the discounts is below.

The recommended books are:

Rosemary T. Krill, *Early American Decorative Arts, 1620-1860: A Handbook for Interpreters* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History).

[Order the book using the code **RLFANDF30** from the website <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9780759119468/Early-American-Decorative-Arts-1620-1860-A-Handbook-for-Interpreters-Revised-and-Enhanced> to receive a 30% discount on the e-book of the latest edition.]

Steven Lubar, *Inside the Lost Museum: Curating, Past and Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[This book is available at a 25% discount when ordered directly from Harvard University Press: <https://www.hup.harvard.edu/exhibits/HX7634>. The code will go live during the week of August 8.]

Nazera Sadiq Wright, *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

[Order this book from the University of Illinois Press using the discount code **ROSENGH19** to receive a 20% discount. You must order the book from this website to activate the code: <https://www.press.uillinois.edu/books/catalog/54fkh7kt9780252040573.html>.]

One copy of each of these books will be placed on deposit in the Rosenbach reading room and made available for student consultation during regular reading room hours.

Readings Policy: The instructors are aware that the realities of life may make it difficult to complete each and every reading and other videos/podcasts for every session. Readings are *recommended*, not *assigned*, and we ask students to complete enough of them to be able to participate in class discussions. The instructors and students may occasionally collaborate to assign smaller teams to focus their efforts on different subsets of readings.

(You will notice that readings drop off toward the end of the class; it is expected that students will want more time to work on the class curation activity near the conclusion of the course.)

Inclusion at The Rosenbach

The Rosenbach is committed to stewarding diverse histories and creating inclusive interpretations, striving toward the best in library and museum practice. *The Curator's Toolkit* class curation activity builds on work undertaken in the “*I Am an American!*” exhibition to diversify our museum interpretation, and the course curriculum will explore inclusive approaches to artifact study and interpretation. To learn more about The Rosenbach's Commitment to Equity, visit <https://rosenbach.org/commitment/>.

Attendance

Students are encouraged to attend all or as many of the class sessions as possible, but instructors realize that individual schedules may prevent perfect attendance. If you need to miss a session, please contact the instructors who are leading the session you will miss for guidance.

Learner Outcomes

By the end of the course, you will possess a metaphorical toolbox to help you continue artifact study on your own. You'll know how to look at historic objects, safely handle them, research them, write about them, and dig into collections at The Rosenbach to continue exploring on your own. You will have a deeper sense of how museums and libraries function as sites of cultural memory and be ready to continue actively engaging with The Rosenbach and other institutions.

Tuition and Class Size

Because of space constraints and the logistical management of Artifact Labs, class size is limited to 12 students. Tuition rates are outlined below.

General public: \$400

Delancey Society and Rosenbach members: 10% discount

Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, & Inclusion full scholarships may be available for the course. Contact Dr. Alexander L. Ames (alames@rosenbach.org) for details.

Photography Disclaimer

Rosenbach staff will be taking photographs of class activities throughout the run of *The Curator's Toolkit* to promote future offerings of the course. If you are uncomfortable with your image being used in Rosenbach digital communications and Rosenbach social media, please alert the instructors. Otherwise, participation in the course sessions indicates permission to use your likeness in the efforts of Rosenbach employees and course instructors to promote this and future iterations of the course.

Instructors

The Curator's Toolkit will be taught by the staff of The Rosenbach's Collections Department, who oversee the daily work of taking care of The Rosenbach's books, manuscripts, and museum objects. Dr. Alexander Ames will serve as Instructor of Record, managing the logistics of each class session, leading discussion seminars, and serving as students' chief point of contact during the run of the course. Other Collections staff will offer lectures and lead Artifact Labs during various class sessions. Instructional staff include:

Judith M. Guston, Curator & Director of Collections

Elizabeth E. Fuller, Librarian

Jobi Zink, Registrar

Dr. Alexander L. Ames, Collections Engagement Manager (Instructor of Record)

Judith M. Guston is Curator & Director of Collections at The Rosenbach. She graduated from Smith College with an A.B. in Classical languages and literatures and from Yale University with an M.A. in Classics. Guston later earned a masters in American material culture from the Winterthur Program of the University of Delaware, for which her research focused on material expressions of Jewish identity in early America. At The Rosenbach, Judy works with a wide range of collections, from the museum's single, historic Japanese manuscript to its significant American historical collections. She has also worked extensively with the Judaica collections in exhibitions, programs, and through conservation projects and significant acquisitions. When not working, Judy enjoys travel, particularly to visit family in the southwest United States, where she is an avid hiker. At home, she keeps busy with ongoing improvements to her historic Center City Philadelphia home.

Elizabeth E. Fuller is the Librarian of The Rosenbach. She holds an A.B. in history and historic preservation from Goucher College and an A.M. from the University of Chicago Graduate Library School. In a career at The Rosenbach that has spanned more than three decades, Fuller

has held a wide variety of responsibilities, ranging from cataloging manuscripts to heading Rosenbach security and managing the library's active reader services program. She has curated and co-curated numerous exhibitions at The Rosenbach, including, most recently, *The Rights of Woman: Gender in Robert Burns's Enlightenment* (2020); *Ulysses and the Marble Halls of Memory* (2019), and *Alice in Phillyland* (2015-2016). Active in the regional and national professional communities, Fuller is a member of the OPAC Working Group of the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSCL) and on the Advisory Board of the Marianne Moore Digital Archive Notebooks Project.

Jobi Zink (she/her) has over 20 years of professional experience in the field of collections stewardship. In addition to managing the incoming and outgoing loan program at the Rosenbach and the intake process of new acquisitions, Ms. Zink maintains the collections management system for objects and routinely conducts inventories of the collections. She manages The Rosenbach's research queries and image requests. Ms. Zink has held leadership positions on the board of the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums (MAAM) and the Registrar's Committee of MAAM (RC-MAAM), and has served as a grant reviewer for the IMLS Museums for America program. Before joining the Rosenbach in 2014, Ms. Zink was the Senior Collections Manager and Registrar at the Jewish Museum of Maryland where she worked for 15 years. Ms. Zink earned her M.A. in Art History with distinction from American University and her B.A. in Art History from Emory University. She has also taken Museum Studies coursework at George Washington University.

Dr. Alexander Lawrence Ames is Collections Engagement Manager at The Rosenbach. He holds an M.A. in public history from St. Cloud State University (St. Cloud, Minnesota), as well as an M.A. in American material culture, an M.A. in history, and a Ph.D. in history of American civilization and museum studies from the University of Delaware. His book, *The Word in the Wilderness: Popular Piety and the Manuscript Arts in Early Pennsylvania*, was published by the Pennsylvania State University Press in 2020. Ames has also published on bookbinding history, with an essay in volume 6 of *Suave Mechanicals: Essays on the History of Bookbinding* titled "The Faith that Binds: Swiss-Anabaptist Devotional Bookbindings in Early America," coauthored with book conservators Chela Metzger of the UCLA Libraries and Erin Hammeke of Duke University Libraries. He also hosts *Cloister Talk: The Pennsylvania German Material Texts Podcast*.

Course Schedule

The course schedule is in the final stages of development. A full schedule of readings and activities for each class session will be posted soon. Stay tuned!