

Making a World with One Hundred Things

Date : January 25, 2013



Guatemalan coin purse (Archaeology and Anthropology)

Pop-Up Exhibition

Bard Graduate Center

38 West 86th Street, New York City

January 15 – 25, 2013

Exhibition Website: <http://bgcdml.net/making-a-world-with-a-hundred-things/>



Bookmark: Queen Seon Duk (Books and Manuscripts)

Museum categories profoundly affect scholarly knowledge claims in an A to Z of disciplines, from anthropology to zoology. In the fall semester 2012 I taught a new seminar at the Bard Graduate Center, “Tangible Things: Observing, Collecting, Sorting” in which we examined the formation and uses of nearly fifty methodical collections. In addition, the seminar built its own comprehensive collection in the very same areas of enquiry.

Every week, for ten weeks, the nine students in the seminar and I each brought an item to class. Each thing related to the topic of study that week. The nine topics are *Books and Manuscripts; Medicine; Botany; Mathematics, Physics, and Astronomy; Geology and Zoology; Archaeology and Anthropology; History; Commerce and Law*, and *Art*. The tenth week was for ambiguous things, and things hard to classify. All are very modest, preferably found or purchased for not more than \$5.

The exhibition website shows a grid of images of all one hundred things in the exhibition, from Common Milkweed seeds (*Botany*) to a chunk of rock brought back from Mount Everest (*Geology and Zoology*). Not all are literal or predictable: a store bag from Anthropologie is in the *Archaeology and Anthropology* section, and an eyeliner brush in *Art*. Clicking on any image in the grid leads to a larger image, a label, and a link to the collection (or category) of which it is a member, with a short text about that category, and links to the other nine things within it. The tenth category, *Sort Them!*, enhances an awareness of the multiplicity of possible sorting choices for many of the things in the nine defined categories. *Sort Them!* comprises things that are hard to place, or orphaned in some

way, such as a closed padlock for which the owner has forgotten the combination.



Common Milkweed seedpod, *Asclepius syriaca* (Botany)

Henry David Thoreau asked in *Walden* (1854): “Why do precisely these objects which we behold make a world?” This exhibition explores how material things play roles in the constitution not of *the* world as we might seek to know it, as of *worlds*; for, as Thoreau observed with philosophical precision, the objects that we behold make not *the* world, but *a* world. In this exhibition, the “Tangible Things” seminar presents one such world.

The students in the seminar were Hadley Jensen, Suk Young Kang, Sarah Pickman, Sophie Pitman, Nicole Pulichene, Laura Speers, Edward Styles, Katherine Tycz, Meredyth Winter.

Ivan Gaskell