



Material Matters

An exhibition curated by students in the
Museum Studies Certificate Program

OHIO
UNIVERSITY

Chaddock + Morrow
College of Fine Arts
Kennedy Museum of Art

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Scan me for an audio tour!

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Foreword & Student Credits

Material Matters was shaped over the course of two semesters through the collaboration of 26 students, three professors, and four institutions. Our work culminated in the exhibit you see before you and in the content within this booklet.

The project began with a search for the primary object, a piece of work which would guide and influence our final Big Idea. This object became *Mourning/Warning: Flags* by Tia Blassingame, and our Big Idea followed: **Materials convey cultural information that helps preserve community history.**

Each student selected a secondary object that embodied the Big Idea. From corn husk dolls and quilts to ancient spear tips and scrapbooks, these objects guide us across time and place, revealing the community and cultures they represent.

Material Matters invites you to look closely and think critically about the objects around us. In doing so, we hope you will consider not only what these materials are made of, but the meaning they carry through generations and into the present moment.

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Mourning/Warning Flags

Tia Blassingame (b. 1971)

2018

Nylon, wooden pegs, cotton thread, rope

Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries

This series of flags displays the International Code of Signals, an alphabet used for communication between ships since the 1800s. The artist presents the flags as a tool to remember events of racial violence in America. Each flag connects a letter or number from the Code of Signals to a person and their experience.

At its core, this project is about ways of reading and access. It is a code for warning, but also a way of memorializing and mourning. Sorrow and fear are embedded in the work, but also power, as it may serve to educate and warn.

-Tia Blassingame, Artist, 2025

Hobby Horse

Unknown maker

c. 1920

Machine made, home repaired

Felt, metal, sawdust, horsehair, beads

Southeast Ohio History Center



The way this toy horse was made and then cherished as a gift reflects traditions of making and giving. Frederick Raymond Beasley had it made by a craftsman as a gift for his daughter, Marjorie Beasley Mathews. Its quality and stitching suggest it is a standard machine make of its time and home repaired. Its wear shows love, time, and memory.





Original mill location (Southeast Ohio History Center)

Gear

Ezra and Charles Stewart

c. 1820

Wood

Southeast Ohio History Center, Industry Collection

Appalachians used wood instead of metals during the Industrial Revolution due to availability and cost. This wooden gear was found in the Hocking River near its original mill location in Guysville, Ohio. Known as the Savannah Mill, it was one of more than 1,200 gristmills in the state where grains were ground into flour.



Two Books by Robert Massmann

Robert Massman (1924-2013)

1984

Paper, ink, cardboard

Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries,
North American Hand Papermakers Records

These books contain thoughts and stories of Dard Hunter collected by Robert Massmann. Hunter was an important figure in hand papermaking in America. The stories cover his time in the Spanish-American War, a conflict with speaker William Jennings Bryan, and his bookmaking methods. Made of his handmade paper, these books place Hunter's ideas within the environment that formed them.



Strange Papers: A Collection of the World's Rarest Handmade Papers

Fred Siegenthaler (1935-2023)

1987

Paper samples, book, box

Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries

This is a collection of one hundred papers artists made from strange materials. Handmade paper had a resurgence as an art form in the 1900s. Artists around the world experimented with making paper from atypical material. Fred Siegenthaler documented the ingenuity of his peers during this time.



Hornbook

Otto H. Miller

1939

Wood, parchment, translucent horn, brass tacks, black ink

Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries

The hornbook was an early study tool used during the 14th–19th centuries. It supported high literacy rates through phonics development, especially in New England. Lesson sheets usually included the alphabet and cultural values like prayers. This replica contains two archaic letters and three mentions of Christian faith. The horns of cattle, sheep, or goats were processed to be cut into translucent sheets. Because paper was rare and costly during this time, the sheets were made of vellum. Vellum is a parchment from the skin of the animal. The sheets were then attached to wood or another durable material. Finally, brass latten recycled from church utensils formed the complete hornbook.

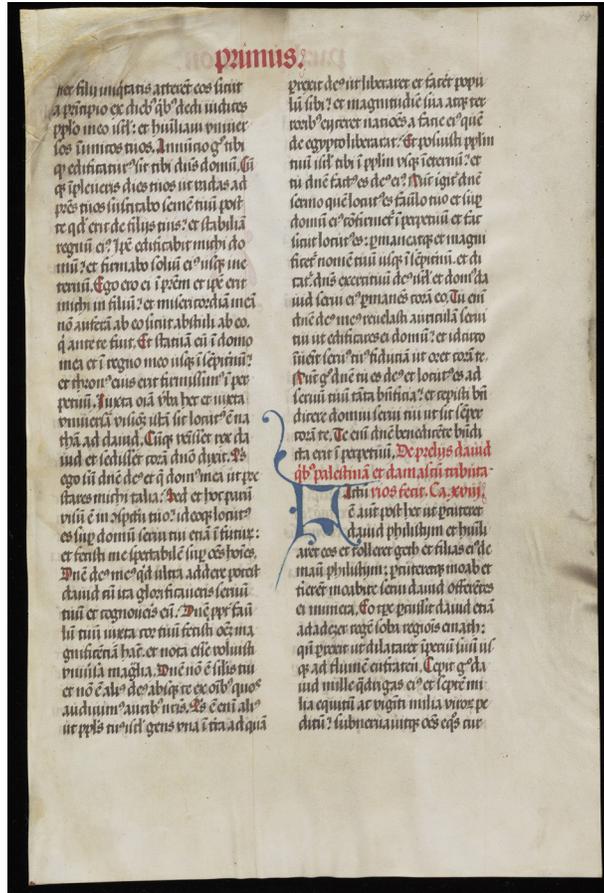
Farfel 401: Biblia Germanica

Unknown author
Printed by Anton Koberger, Nuremberg
1483
Moveable-type and woodblock print
Paper
Mahn Center for Archives and Special
Collections, Ohio University Libraries
Gilbert and Ursula Farfel Collection

Ege leaf 44: Vulgate Bible

Unknown author
Late 15th century
Calligraphy on hand-crafted vellum
Mahn Center for Archives and Special
Collections

Farfel-401 is a printed leaf, or page, from a publication of the authorized translation of the Bible in German. The image in this text is a woodblock print with a black outline, colored by hand. Printed Bibles introduced a cheap way for the common person to have access to an important religious text.



Printing the Bible allowed people to explore their faith outside of church service. This work links directly to the events leading up to the Protestant Reformation.

Ege-44 is an animal skin vellum leaf, or page, from a manuscript of the Latin translation of the Bible. The leaf would have been part of a book handwritten and designed by German Monks for a patron. This leaf dates after the invention of the printing press.

The time and materials to make manuscripts like this leaf made them expensive compared to printed books. This work shows the history of manuscript making did not end with the invention of the printing press. A limited few high class and religious leaders could read this work at the time of its creation.



Photos courtesy of Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections



Penny Rug

Unknown maker

c. 1861-1865

Linen and wool

Southeast Ohio History Center

During the Civil War, resourcefulness was a necessity. Women recycled wool from old uniforms and blankets to craft tablecloths and hearth rugs like this one. Pennies guided the maker in tracing and cutting circular templates. They used appliqué and the blanket stitch to sew these pieces together. Crafters have since added patterns such as shells, hearts, and stars to their designs.

One of the most interesting features of this penny rug is its many alterations. Originally, the appliqué was sewn onto a piece of striped, yellow-and-green linen, which was used as the original backing. Sewn on top is a colorful, geometric fabric to support the worn cloth. Another modification includes reinforcing loose stitching with pink and yellow wool thread. A sewing machine was later used to pin down the flaps of wool “scallop” shapes.

Clovis Points

Paleo-Indians

Age: 13,500-12,900 YA

From top to bottom, left to right:

Clovis Point SEOHC

Brush Creek Chert

Southeast Ohio History Center, Sprague Collection

Clovis Point Isolate Cast

Found in Fayette County, Illinois

Ohio University Anthropological Sciences Lab

Clovis Point Bostrom Site Cast

Mill Creek chert

Found in St. Clair County, Illinois

Ohio University Anthropological Sciences Lab

Clovis Point Haverhill, Ohio

Delaware chert

Found in Haverhill, Ohio

Collection of Steve Valentine

Clovis Point Colorado Cast

Agatized silicified wood

Found in Colorado

Collection of Steve Valentine

Coshocton, Upper Mercer chert

Found in Hamilton Twp, Lawrence Co, Ohio

Collection of Steve Valentine



These may seem like typical projectile points, but they are Clovis points. They are widely considered the first American invention. Studying them helps archaeologists understand early settlement in North America. Points like these have helped researchers learn that the Clovis people traveled long distances to hunt large animals like the woolly mammoth, and that they understood the land they moved through.

The name “Clovis” does not come from the people who made these points. It comes from Clovis, New Mexico, where the first examples were discovered in the 1930s. Archaeologists often name cultures this way when the original names are unknown. Many Clovis points were made from materials like chert. Chert is a fine-grained stone that breaks in a controlled way. It allowed the toolmakers to shape sharp edges and thin blades. By studying where different types of chert are found, researchers can track how far these people traveled and how groups may have shared materials across long distances.



Trading Post

Florence Riggs (b. 1962)

2003

Wool tapestry, pre-dyed yarn

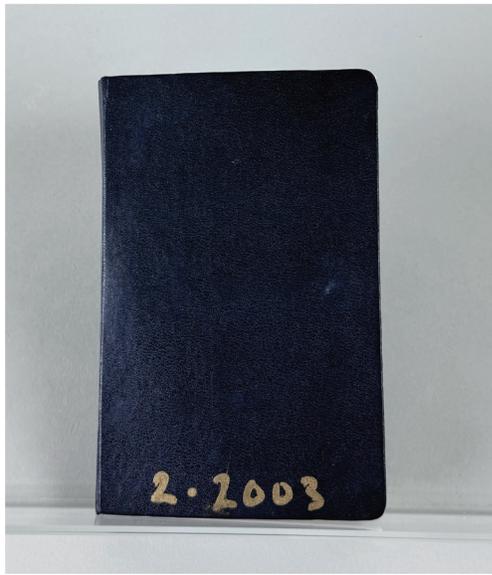
Kennedy Museum of Art, Edwin L. & Ruth E. Kennedy

Southwest Native American Art Collection

This work by Riggs shows values of Diné (Navajo) weaving including being a female-led art form, telling stories, and preserving cultural history. Trading posts are places where goods and ideas are exchanged across cultures. Indigenous and European groups often first interacted at them. This piece uses a traditional art form to highlight the importance of these places.



Kennedy Museum of Art, unfinished weaving



Athens Asylum Art Journal 2

Dr. Katherine Ziff (b. 1953)

2003

Polyurethane, elastic, thread, paper, glue, watercolor, crayon, pencil, pen, ink
Southeast Ohio History Center, Dr. Katherine Ziff Collection

Dr. Katherine Ziff created art journals to go along with her thesis research on early history of the Athens Asylum. Ziff uses watercolors to paint the building which now holds the Kennedy Museum of Art. Remember that you are surrounded by Athens history as you explore the beauty of the museum and its grounds.



Wall Tapestry

Unknown male patient, Athens Mental Health Center

c. 1930-1970

Rug-hooked

Synthetic and organic fibers, corduroy velvet

Southeast Ohio History Center

Art has been used as a treatment tool for mental illness since the 19th century. In the Athens Mental Health Center, the belief was that patients could find healing through orderly routines and exposure to the arts. This piece was created by a patient during his time in the hospital.



Corset

OTC Professional Appliances

c. 1945-1965

Nylon, polyester, steel

Southeast Ohio History Center

A piece such as this was created to support and shape the body. Combining newly invented synthetic fabrics with steel, it balanced flexibility with control. Is this what you imagine a corset to look like? Objects like this challenge assumptions, revealing how perceptions of constraint and empowerment often coexist.



GIRLS: An Alphabet Book Inspired by Daughters

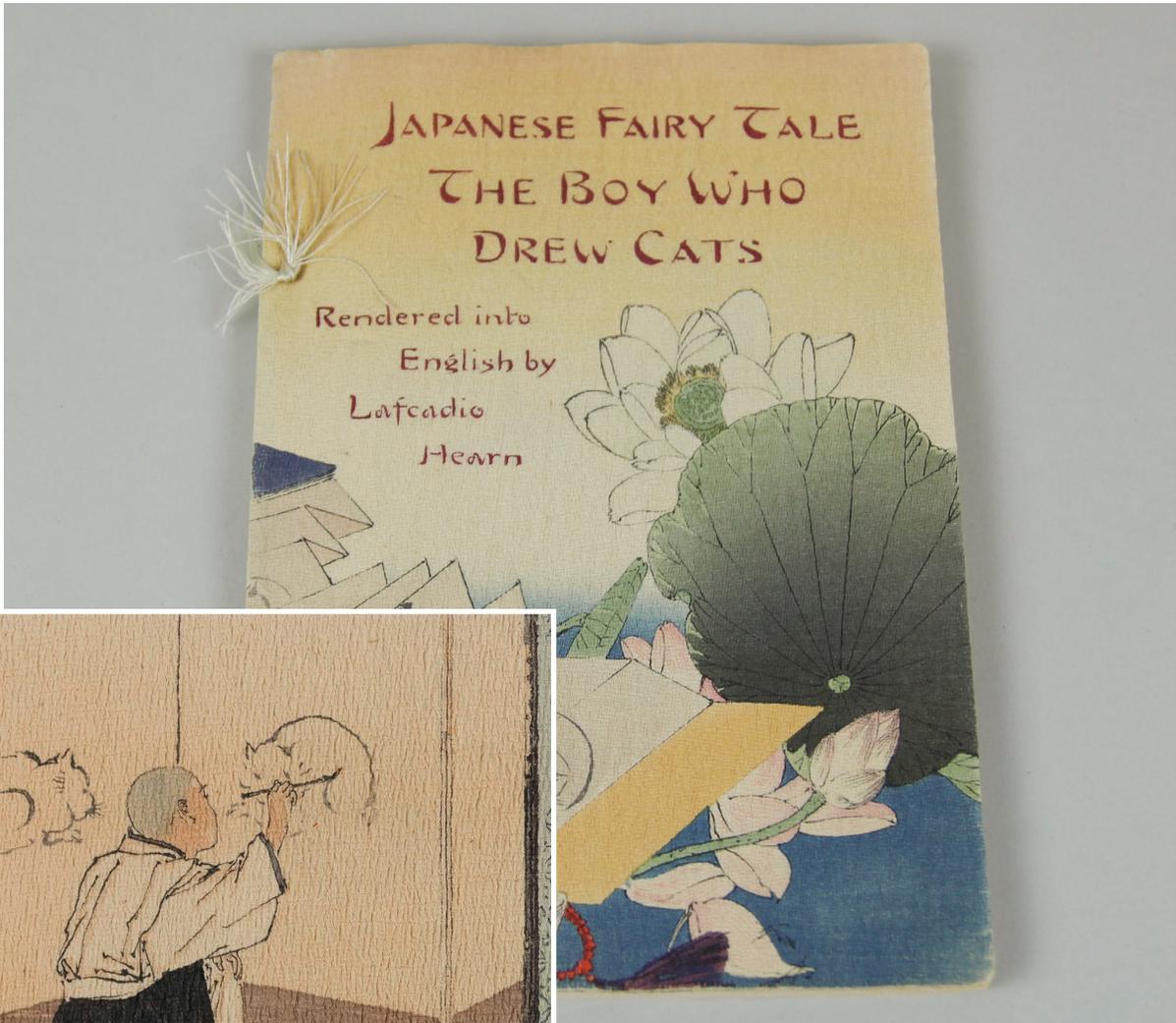
Cathy DeForest

2015

Repurposed girls' clothing, doll, watercolor paints, pastels, painted Tyvek, photography

Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections

Inside this book is artwork showing ways young girls express themselves. Each page has a different illustration for the letters of the English alphabet. The book binding is a girl's dress. Artist DeForest grew up with other girls and continues to be inspired by them. The activities represent many different backgrounds, making it a celebration of girls everywhere.



The Boy Who Drew Cats
Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904)
T. Hasegawa, publisher
1989

Double folded crêpe paper, silk thread binding, woodblock-print illustrations
Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries

This book is made of crêpe paper, which was used to connect traditional Japanese art to a changing world. It was published during the Meiji Restoration. This was a time when Japan was opening its borders. Japanese children learning English became important. This book series used fairy tales to connect with Japanese students and teach them English.



Corn Husk Doll

Unknown maker

Unknown date

Corn husk, corn silk

Southeast Ohio History Center

The corn husk doll is originally a Northeast Native American craft. It originated from a legend stating that the corn spirit longed to do something more for the people than her usual uses. So, she was granted the opportunity to spread brotherhood and cheerfulness through her doll form. The craft has been passed through many cultures. This includes early pioneer children and enslaved African American families. Corn husk was a highly accessible and common material. This doll was crafted often to teach children to create, as a connection to the corn spirit of the “three sisters”, as a charm of protection, as a toy, and sometimes decoration. In Native American culture, the doll is often seen without a face to keep her from becoming too self-absorbed. This tradition was not passed to other cultures, as the craft took its own meaning between cultures.

Feed Sack Doll

Meta van Nostran

1930

Cotton flour sack stuffed with cotton, painted with
water-based ink

Southeast Ohio History Center

Flour Sack Doll Template for Hans Dutch Boy

Greeneville Milling Co.

1930

Cotton flour sack printed with water-based ink

Southeast Ohio History Center

This doll and template show a process we now call 'upcycling,' turning waste material into something useful or beautiful. Flour sack dolls were popular toys during the 1930s Great Depression. They were made with material found in most homes – the cotton bags that flour was sold in. Manufacturing companies noticed their popularity and began printing doll templates directly onto the sacks.

Additionally, these dolls were used as learning tools for young girls. They taught sewing, which was a very important skill at the time. These dolls also taught social and emotional skills through interactive play.





Weethee Samplers

Lorana Weethee

1811

Embroidery floss, cotton

Southeast Ohio History Center

The Weethee family was one of the pioneers of Athens, Ohio. Jonathan Weethee founded Weethee Academy in 1861. The academy incorporated his own family's Christian gospel in its educational environment. The home had windows and doors designed to be large enough for an adult to be pulled through. Weethee's religious beliefs held that if you were indoors during the rapture, the building would keep you from being taken to heaven. Jonathan Weethee lost some of his credibility after the world failed to come to an end. The Weethee Academy closed sometime between 1875 and 1879. It then burned down sometime in the early 1900s. The sampler was made by Lorana Weethee, one of Jonathan Weethee's children. It would have been made as part of the curriculum provided to the girls attending the school.



The Anna Lindley Embroidered Alphabet Sampler

Ohio, Anna Lindley
Cotton thread on linen
c. 1806

Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries

The Hannah M. Rickey Embroidered Alphabet Sampler

Ohio, Hannah M. Rickey
Cotton thread on linen
c. 1820s

Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries

Samplers were an educational tool for women and girls to learn academic skills. They were also used to display one's technical abilities to potential suitors. Compared to men of the era, women's lives were not well documented. Samplers like this one allow us to gain a rare glimpse into their experiences.

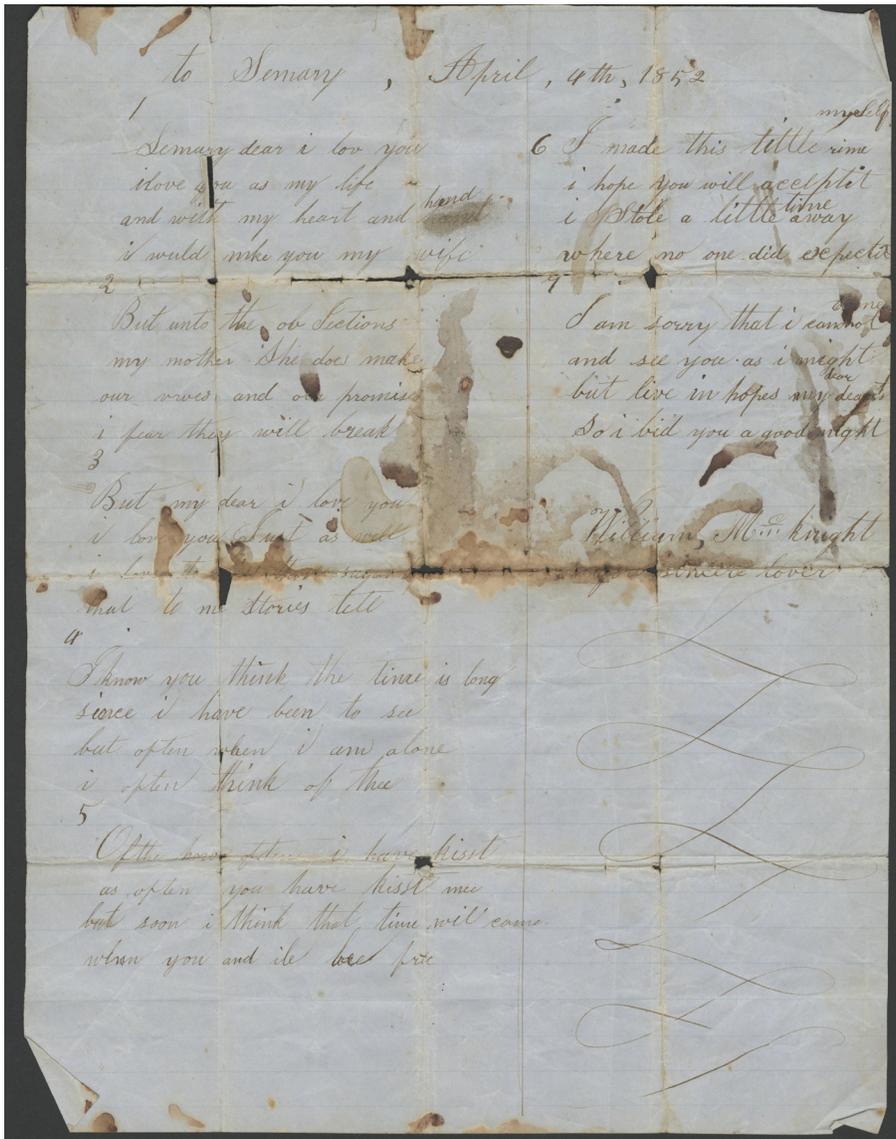


Photo courtesy of Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections

Poem by William McKnight for Samaria McKnight

William McKnight

April 4, 1852

Ink on paper

Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries

This worn page shows how a simple piece of paper can hold deep meaning. William McKnight wrote this poem to his wife, Samaria, as one of the first in a long series of letters he wrote to her each day. His words express love, worry, and hope for their future together. When he left home for war, he kept this page folded in his pocket. Many soldiers carried letters like this as keepsakes, using them as reminders of loved ones and the lives they hoped to return to. The paper became creased, worn, and marked with faint blood stains, linking it directly to the violence of war and his final days. Following his untimely death, the poem was found in his pocket. Today, it offers a powerful glimpse into love, loss, and memory in the nineteenth century.

Trench Art Car

United States

Creator- E.T.O.

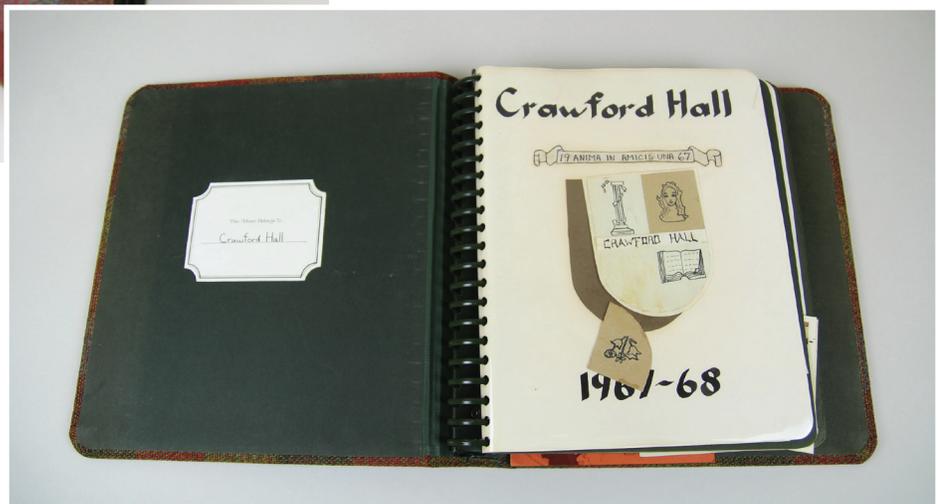
Brass shell casings, WWII era

ca. 1945–1995

Southeast Ohio History Center

The maker of this piece gave materials a new meaning in the form of a car. These materials might have otherwise gone to waste. Throughout history soldiers created art out of the leftovers of war for many reasons, often to cope with hardships or simply to pass the time. The sample ammunition shown gives perspective on the original state of the material.





Crawford Hall Scrapbook

Mary Hausch (b. 1949)

1967-68

Plaid fabric-bound book

Construction paper, newspaper clippings, illustrations, photographs

Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries

Crawford Hall was an Ohio University dorm built in 1967. It housed 272 female students. Mary Hausch was a journalism student who graduated in 1970. She was one of the first students to live there. Mary used various materials to make this scrapbook to give us a glimpse into the lives of her and her friends at OHIO in the 1960s.



Scan to listen to Mary Hausch's insights about the creation of the scrapbook, Crawford Hall in the 1960s, and her life at Ohio University.

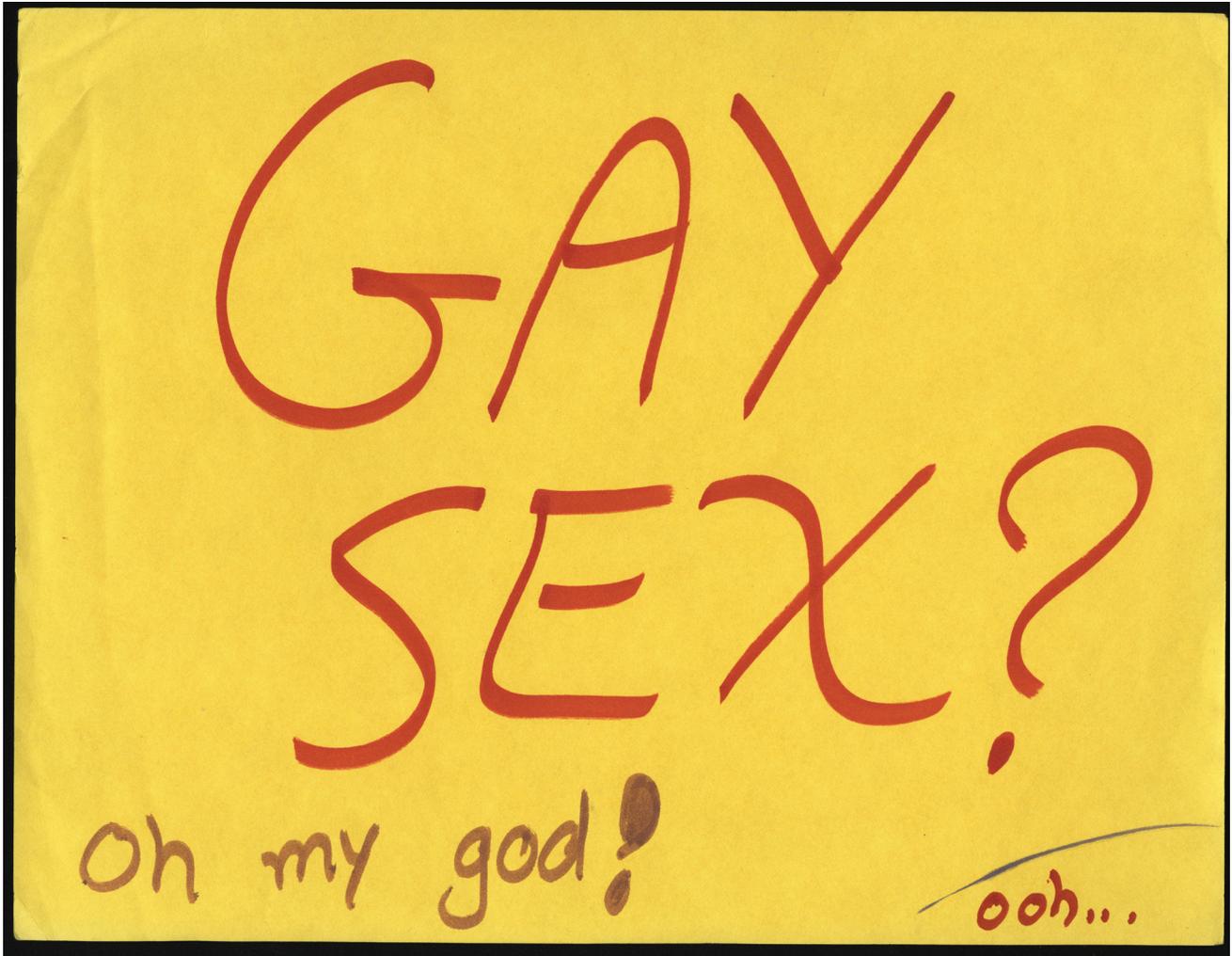


Photo courtesy of Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections

Gay Sex? Poster

Ohio University Student Group Swarm of Dykes, unknown maker

c. 1997-2003

Construction paper, colored marker

Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries

Ohio University LGBTQ/Pride Center Collection

Made of cheaply available construction paper and magic marker, this blunt poster shows the idea of the Swarm of Dykes student club to be loud and proud in the face of those who would be upset with their lives. The poster refuses to appear soft. Its style and material are both rough.



Large Applied Quilt with Palm Leaf Design

Ruth Ella Moore

c. 1876

Cotton textile, needlework

Southeast Ohio History Center

This applied quilt is believed to be a wedding quilt made by Ruth Ella Moore Brown (1857–1934). She married James Brown (1828–1912) in 1876, one year after his first wife's death.

At that time, Athens was shaped by coal mining and brickmaking. Many women's roles centered on the home and church, and quilting was both practical and expressive.

Textile arts show what materials were available and how skills were shared. This quilt reflects rural Appalachian women, who used quilting to tell stories and pass down traditions. The palm leaf pattern relates to Palm Sunday and can also stand for peace and joy, offering insight into the family's beliefs.

The handmade quality is also important. While factory textiles were growing in cities, rural communities often made their own. Texture and wear suggest the labor behind the quilt and how limited materials shaped design choices.





Praise Basted In: A Friendship Quilt for Aunt Sallie

Janet Kaufman (b. 1945)

Janus Press, Claire Van Vliet (b. 1933)

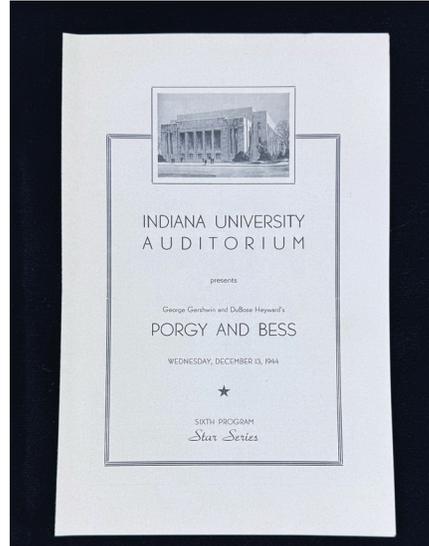
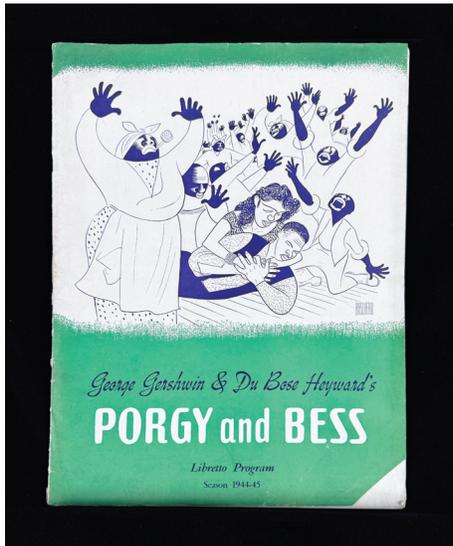
1995

Letterpress, embroidery thread, silk flowers, various papers, cotton quilting fabrics,

Waverly upholstery fabric, board

Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries

This artist's book is made from cloth and paper. It features nine squares created by Sallie's friends and family members. Every person also included a greeting card. The left page of each spread shows the card, while the right displays Sallie's response. The materials help convey personal feelings.



The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess

Libretto, Playbill, and Original Cast Album
 George Gershwin, Decca Records
 1944 (Libretto and Playbill); c. 1970s (Album)
 Printed paper, vinyl record
 Southeast Ohio History Center

Porgy and Bess, based on DuBose Heyward's novel *Porgy*, is considered the "first great American opera" with its all-black cast. It tells the story of the disabled street beggar, Porgy. He attempts to save Bess from her abusive partner, Crown, and her drug dealer, Sportin' Life. Themes of abuse, prejudice, and addiction are represented in the material.



Christmas Eve Part I and II, The Preparation

Anne Clark Culbert (1940-2007)

20th century

Porcelain on wood base

Kennedy Museum of Art

These works by Athens artist Anne Culbert depict a family's preparations for their Christmas celebration. This includes decorating the tree, bringing out presents, and setting the table. The figure of the Virgin Mary waits at the door, signifying the spiritual significance of the holiday. The diorama format creates an intimate, personal feeling.

Material Scavenger Hunt Key

A Brass –

Brass is a metal created by mixing copper and zinc, two elements on the periodic table. Brass is versatile, but is most often used for the plumbing that carries water into your home. Brass can be seen in the **Trench Art Car**.

B Chert –

Chert is a sedimentary rock. In prehistoric times, it was used to create stone tools. Today, the durable material is used as construction material and road paving. Chert can be seen in the **Clovis Points**.

C Cornhusk –

Cornhusks are the protective outer green leaves of a maize ear, often dried for culinary and crafting uses. Cornhusk can be seen in the **Corn Husk Doll**.

D Cotton embroidery –

Cotton embroidery refers to the art of decorating fabric using cotton-based threads. It is ideal for both hand and machine needlework, such as surface embroidery, cross-stitch, and quilting. Cotton embroidery can be seen in the **Weethee Samplers**.

E Silk –

Silk is a natural protein fiber, some forms of which can be woven into textiles. The protein fiber of silk is composed mainly of fibroin. It is most commonly produced by certain insect larvae to form cocoons. Silk can be seen in the **Corset**.

F Penny –

The U.S. penny is a 19 mm, copper-plated zinc coin representing 1/100 of a dollar, featuring Abraham Lincoln. In November 2025, production ceased due to high manufacturing costs. Pennies were used to design the **Penny Rug**.

G Wood –

Formed as trees grow, wood is categorized into hard and softwoods, offering varied properties like strength, density, and grain patterns for construction, furniture, and fuel. Wood can be seen in the **Gear**.

H Wool –

Wool is a natural, sustainable, and biodegradable fiber obtained primarily from sheep, as well as goats, rabbits, and camelids. Known for its excellent insulation, durability, and moisture-wicking properties, wool is used for clothing, blankets, and textiles. Wool can be seen in **Trading Post**.

I Yarn –

Yarn is a long, continuous, twisted strand of fibers used for knitting, crocheting, weaving, and embroidery. Yarn can be seen in the **Wall Tapestry**.

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Make Your Own Paper Feed Sack Doll
Color, cut out, glue together, and love your own upcycled Doll!

