

WHY ANTIQUARIES MATTER

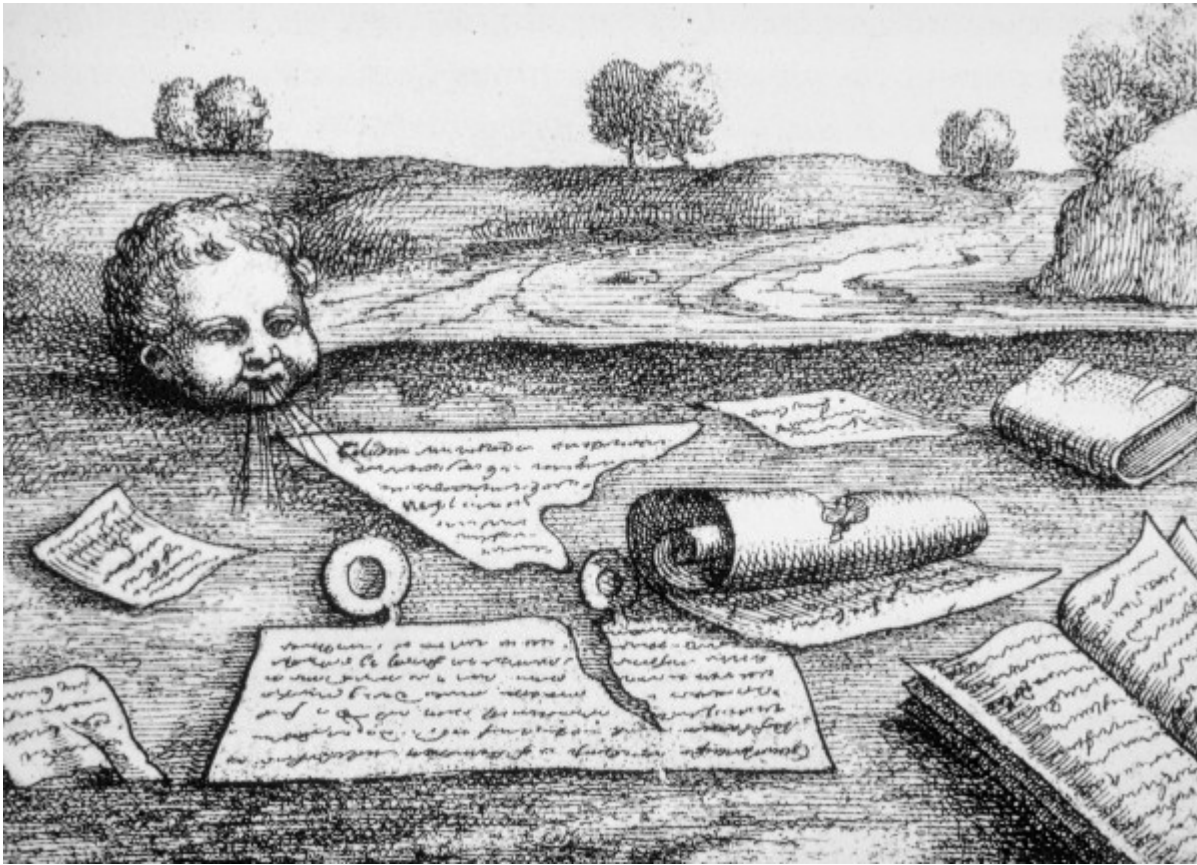
There's a great article by Peter Miller in the current Chronicle of Higher Education on How Objects Speak – [\[Link\]](#)

Objects loom large as other gods seem to fail. The enormous global success of Neil MacGregor's History of the World in 100 Objects, which started as a radio program, no less, spinning dramatic tales of love and loss from individual pieces in the British Museum collection, marked a coming of age of what we might call "object lessons." We now have the Smithsonian's history of America through 101 objects, a recent book on the history of religion in five and a half objects, and even a reduction of biography, in this case Jane Austen's, to "A Life in Small Things." And at Yale University, a beginning survey of the history of art is now being taught as a history of objects and their global interactions—and taught by no less than the head of the department.

It's tempting to attribute the turn in our relationship to things to their imminent demise: The digital, far from killing the material world, seems only to have intensified our attachment to it. But the human

interplay with stuff is very, very old. We have not only tools but specially crafted ones, from more than a million years ago. Would those who had seen a hominid patiently knap a stone to make a hand ax, while carefully positioning a fossil in its exact center, not have associated him with the making of this extraordinary creation long after his death? Were not those who stood before the walls of Troy stripping armor from the dead seeking a souvenir, a materialized means of remembering? In a way, the more intimate the attachment to the person, the more the person remains in the object. Anyone who has ever cleared out a dead parent's closet can remember the vivid sharpness of memory that some ordinary thing, entirely unexpectedly, elicits.

With all the attention to materials and their meanings, we may be back to a world where antiquaries matter.



This is something that can be read in anticipation of our forthcoming seminar on the antiquarian roots of contemporary design thinking. [\[Link\]](#)