

Working with materials, stuff and things – how to describe and analyse objects

(in preparation of object biographies)

When working with materials, you are engaging with primary material. To make sense of this, you need to follow certain steps in your engagement:

- A. Recognising and describing the object
- B. Analytical skills
- C. Critical thought

A. Recognising and describing the object

present the object in clear and concise manner in your own words, include the following points:

- ☐ What can you see / measure / experience?
 - Dimensions
 - ☐ height/length/thickness, diameter of rim/ base; max width/diameter if alternating; thickness of material;
 - key characteristics
 - ☐ Material, shape/form, colour, decoration (what can be seen and how is it applied), inscriptions;
 - Condition
 - ☐ • If relevant, you should record the degree of completeness (any breaks or chips post-depositional, or signs of wear).

B. Analytical skills

Interpret the object / thing beyond and in addition to the description already done

- ☐ how it might have been used?
 - Was it made for multiple uses
 - An ad hoc / throw away object
- ☐ Was it meant to be looked at, handled, destroyed?
 - if so how, why?
- ☐ Was it meant to be displayed publicly, within a certain context?
 - What is this context? (everyday, high level, ritualistic)
- ☐ Did the people at the time of production understand it in the same way as we think we do? How was it perceived and valued by the communities who made/used it?

C. Critical thought

Go over your observations and first conclusions and check them against further literature from disciplines the object could either be connected with, analysed against or the overall analysis would be directed towards.