

Joan Kjaer: Hello and welcome to WorldCanvass from International Programs at the University of Iowa. I'm Joan Kjaer, and we're coming to you from Merge in downtown Iowa City. Thank you for being here. This program is called Art and the Face of War, and we're focusing on the works of two influential artists: Spanish painter and printmaker Francisco de Goya and Russian writer Leo Tolstoy. Having heard a lot about the Disasters of War by Goya and War and Peace by Tolstoy earlier in the program, we're going to spend some time now talking about how museums, libraries and holders of fragile and priceless items work with conservators to protect them from the ravages of time. Once again, we have Joyce Tsai at the far end here, chief curator of the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art and associate professor of practice in the School of Art and Art History. Thank you Joyce.

Joyce Tsai: Thank you.

Joan Kjaer: Just next to me is Elizabeth Stone. May I call you Beth?

Elizabeth Stone: Yes.

Joan Kjaer: Assistant conservator at the UI libraries. Glad to have you both here, and I'm going to start with you Beth. First to ask you about your role as a conservator. What exactly is the work you do?

Elizabeth Stone: Sure. A conservator is a person who deals with the physical preservation of a cultural object. Typically a conservator will focus in a specialty, so a very specific medium. Mine is books. Other conservators deal with paintings, wood, metals, a lot of different objects and the graphic materials.

Joan Kjaer: Obviously you work at UI Libraries. There are a lot of books there. A lot of very special and precious items in the special collections. How do you assign priorities to works that need to have conservators' attention?

Elizabeth Stone: The priorities, they're done by a lot of different people at the institution. Within the libraries we work with curators from special collections, the Iowa Women's Archive, the John Martin Rare Book Room, which is in the Hardin Library, and also the University Archives. We sit down with them. We have a conversation about what gets used in classes. That's always a very high priority. If there have been researchers who have indicated that they have a collection that they're really interested in coming and seeing, or if things have ticked up recently. Also digitization projects are always high on the list as well, and that is something that we're always looking to make collections that are accessible for people who can't physically come to the library. A few years ago we had a large digitization project that took three years to complete. All of that work, it was a 150 scrapbooks, and that all came through the Conservation Department first.

Joan Kjaer: Joyce mentioned in the first segment that the binding on the collection of Disasters of War was one of the things that had suffered. The way the book was

held together. Tell us what it looks like when it's kind of in a mess and you know you need to do something.

Elizabeth Stone: Sure. The binding actually is in the exhibition in Special Collections right now, so you can go and check it out. When Joyce's predecessor, Kathy Edwards came and talked to Giselle Simón and I about the two volumes, we looked at both of those volumes. One was in a 20th century binding. It was already rebound, but it was pretty sound. A student could come in and leaf through that book. Everything was in place and the paper was in tact, so we decided unless it gets further damage that might be a good one to keep in place.

Elizabeth Stone: The other volume was bound in leather. We were unsure at that time if it was an original binding or not. That's often something that you... It can be difficult to tell. You can make a very good guess about it. Often with notes from the curators you can sort of trace back if that is an original binding. The problem with the specific binding is that the sewing had just kind of fallen apart. It had failed, and so a lot of the individual sheets were loose. Corners get damaged that way. Things get out of order, which is less of a concern for the Goya's prints. They're numbered, but it's a concern usually in our work. We decided that at that point it was a good idea to dis-bind the volume.

Joan Kjaer: Then I take it, you have put the volume back or you will after this exhibition?

Elizabeth Stone: That was a conversation with the curators and what they wanted to do. Typically in a library setting, it's very important to us to present that in a book form again, or preserve as much of its bookish-ness as possible. Joyce can speak to this little too.

Joyce Tsai: Yeah. Again, first of all, I just want to start off by saying that the work in this exhibition would not have been possible without the groundbreaking work that Kathy Edwards did as curator before me. She was the Chief Curator, and she also has a real depth of expertise as a printmaker and also she has a real depth of expertise in print. She was the one who really built out this relationship with conservation in the libraries. The unit that Beth works in has been really important in conserving several really important artworks, including works by Piranesi, Hayder. I mean foundational figures in the history of printmaking. We have two volumes... We have two Disasters of War bound volumes. They share the same prints.

Joyce Tsai: Because we have one that is already bound and can be presented in teaching settings as a book, with this project from my perspective as a curator and also as a person who teaches with the collection and also wants to mount exhibitions the future, the fact that the binding had failed on this edition gave us a wonderful opportunity to work with the library too and also work with professors on campus. As I mentioned, Luis Martin-Estudillo is actually publishing on and working on a project on Goya. I was able to draw upon this amazing wealth of expertise that's shared across the institution. When we were

looking at it and also considering not only did the conservators take apart the binding, but they also treated things. They cleaned things.

Joyce Tsai: You can talk about that in a sec, but ultimately the decision to let the prints remain loose. I mean they're not really loose. They're all put in mats. Mats, if you're not familiar with what mats are, it's a kind of hard backing it. It's like a hardboard, and then you have the print, and then you have a basically a paper frame. The reason why you would want to do that is that when you put it in that kind of housing, it's not only easy to exhibit, but if you're trying to make these things accessible, it protects the print. It makes it easier to show individual prints from this series. It also allows us to put the stuff on the walls. It's really it's a really super exciting opportunity. Not many museums have a full run of it, and not many museums have a full run of it and also can show with it.

Joyce Tsai: It's extraordinary, and all of that is because of the legacy that I feel like I'm building upon. These were also prints that were a part of a gift from the Elliotts who of course were the reason why the Museum of Art was initially built in 1969 and so there's a lot of things to celebrate with the preservation and the presentation of these works.

Joan Kjaer: Well, this is jumping ahead a little bit. I know the museum, the new museum, won't be standing for another two years. Would you expect that the Goya prints would be in some level of permanent display?

Joyce Tsai: Yeah, so I wouldn't say permanent because paper is vulnerable. It's light sensitive. If you put something, if you put a work on paper on permanent display, not great things will happen to it. We do have print drawers. For example, in the Special Collections, the presentation there, we opted to use these print drawers where we can put a selection, and we have a selection of eight prints in that printer drawer, where you can pull it out, look at it and then it's away from the light. There are a lot of opportunities for us to show the Disasters of War, but we don't just have the Disasters of War. We also have the Caprichos.

Joyce Tsai: We have a lot of Goyas in our collection, but even if they're not on the walls and even if they're not in the various galleries, because we're going to be swapping it out and I do anticipate that Goya is going to be a part of that and inaugural story, but even if these works are not actively on view, we have a classroom on the third floor in the new building that'll be opening in the middle of 2022 where we can continue the work of bringing these prints out and talking to students in classes not only in art and art history, but as tonight's program has shown, this is something of relevance for music, for literature, for politics, history, so on and so forth. This really can be a resource for departments across campus. It's really, all of it, is really exciting.

Joan Kjaer: I suspect this is very nice for you folks at the library to know that the museum will be just a few steps away so that the work you do in partnership can happen even more easily than it did when the museum was cross the river.

- Elizabeth Stone: Yes, much easier. It's funny. That physical space isn't really far on a map, but planning to get over there to assess works of art, even moving stuff between buildings, it takes a little time and care. Having that proximity will be very useful. As a matter of fact, Joyce and I have already talked a little bit about the types of things going forward. The libraries just acquired the Sackner Archive, which is very exciting. I think that there's going to be a lot of collaboration on that collection in the future for both institutions.
- Joyce Tsai: We bring really different sets of expertise and different perspectives to bear on objects in our care. There are things in the library collection that are more art-like than you would expect. We think of the library being a repository for books, but the Sackner collection has these really beautiful prints, amazing objects. The Fluxus collection, the Dada collection. I mean, in 2018 I mounted the Dada Futures exhibition with Tim Shipe and Jennifer Buckley and Stephen Voyce. That too was a collaborative project. We featured the things that were coming out of the Data and Fluxus collections, including a wooden box with a piece of latex over it, and you're supposed to stick your finger into it.
- Joyce Tsai: Now, if that was in an art museum collection, yeah, you're not going to stick your finger into it. Because this is an object that lives in special collections in a library, there are considerations of "use" that book conservators have to think about that actually paper conservators have a slightly different approach to it. I feel like I've learned a whole lot about the ways in which objects are used, preserved, and what preservation means in the two different contexts in a circulating collection and a non circulating colored context.
- Joan Kjaer: What would be an example of some of the perhaps repair work you'd have to do on I don't know if there is any of this involved in the Disasters of War collection, whether any of the papers were torn or had become dirty or whatever? With any of the paper-based works you've worked on, what are some of the fragilities?
- Elizabeth Stone: A lot of the basic cleaning is actually done with basically special brushes and special erasers, sponge like objects. That was definitely done. Dry cleaning to those objects to get rid of any surface dirt. There's we call it mending, which is a thin sheet of tissue and sort of... It's kind of like a bandaid. You're applying a wheat starch-based paste in order to fix any tears and that paper. There was a little bit of that to the Disasters series, although that series was really the sheets themselves, the plates themselves, they were beautiful and needed very little cleaning. They had very little damage to them.
- Elizabeth Stone: What was surprising in the work that we, the treatment that we, completed for the Disasters, we don't perform a lot of dis-binding in the library collection. When we do get to define something, there's a lot of documentation. There's a lot of documentation in all the work that we do, but there's a lot of sort of mapping how it was sewn and then mapping things like were there other papers applied to it before. We start to piece together sort of the history of this item, and we can use our notes from dis-binding it along with the notes that the

museum already had and confirm things that they knew or suspected. There was, for instance, one plate that was bound out of order. When we took it apart we noted that, and that was indeed the case.

Elizabeth Stone: Then there was also another paper that was inserted in this to complete the set that was a slightly different paper, slightly different size, and slightly different weight, which might sound really boring to everyone listening, but that was a really exciting find for me. Then in order for these... When a print is made, it is a single sheet, and the ink is applied to a piece of metal and printed onto that. In a book, you have signatures, which are several papers folded together. You sew it through the middle sort of folded edge. When you have a single sheet, a bunch of single sheets, you have to make a way to produce that folded edge. We, when I was looking at those, we call them guards, we're looking at those papers, we discovered there was several layers. We discovered there were sewing stations that were extra. We're trying to figure out like, "What does that mean? Does this mean that this is a second binding? Does it mean that maybe they miscalculated and then they cut new holes?" We're not exactly sure what happened.

Elizabeth Stone: Another sort of a fun find for a book binder when dis-binding this was the material that was to used strengthen the spine. Usually that is a type of paper or a very specific thin cloth. What was in the Disasters was a very decorative, very thick, kind of like what would be used a fabric on very nice curtains, and it was thick and beautiful and the colors were were great. That was kind of unusual, and that's also something I'm not sure what that means, but those are some of the fun things that happen. When you get into a project like that for sort of book nerds.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. It's very interesting. What do we know about how the Elliotts came across these two sets of... Do we know when they bought them and-

Joyce Tsai: I don't recall off the top of my head when they bought them, but they were avid collectors of prints, and they also collected Goya very extensively. Not just any Goyas but like exquisite Goyas. As you pointed out, I mean they're not only very little wrong with the set that we are showing, but it's actually printed on extremely high quality paper. It's referred to as a deluxe edition. I think that's really quite significant.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Do we know what year?

Joyce Tsai: Yeah. This is from the first edition-

Joan Kjaer: The first edition, so it's 1863.

Joyce Tsai: ... which is from 1863. 1863 it was... The plates were held within the family, and Goya's son sold the plates to the Academy. The Royal Academy is where Goya served as the director in Madrid. When these plates were bought, they were

actually initially missing two plates. It became complete a few years or... It had to become complete, but it was published in '63 by the Royal Academy. There's a couple of things to think about too, just in terms of the timing of the publication though.

Joyce Tsai: There was an initial first edition, there were 500, and then there was four, no three, subsequent printings. Last one took place in 1937. 1937 is a really significant year in Spanish history and the history of the Second World War. Also the Spanish Civil War. This was it was published, Disasters of War, there was a special run that was published in the midst of the siege of Madrid. This was published in the midst of the bombings, the Luftwaffe bombings, of Spanish cities. This was published the same year that Picasso painted Guernica.

Joyce Tsai: The fact that objects are reintroduced to a kind of cultural landscape, the timing of it, the kind of motivations of it, also reveal the ways in which institutions that are tasked with holding on to the reposit these objects, that these objects are not quiet, that their kind of latent powers are activated in very specific historical moments. I think it's looking at these works now in our moment I think has been really important. The other thing is like we are able to view these works because we have these institutions that preserve, care for, interpret, and present. I think we're very lucky to have that in our community.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah, I think so too. Just going to Special Collections for just a moment. The range of works you have go how far?

Elizabeth Stone: Oh, I should know this bit of trivia. We have a large... We have a pretty wide selection of medieval manuscripts, but we definitely have things that are older than that. We also have a lot of material from the 20th century. I'm trying to think of what we're working on right now in the lab, which can range from there I mentioned earlier there was these 150 scrapbooks that we did for an NEH project, and there's one in the lab right now. It's the Keith-Albee Vaudeville Theater Collection. That's a 20th century scrapbook, which is a very different treatment process and feeling than some of the medieval manuscripts we get. We also have some unusual format, so things like palm leaf books. Those are really fun to take a look at.

Joan Kjaer: If a class of students were to come in and the professor wants to show them, say medieval manuscript or one of the little small prayer books or something, can students actually touch them, or are the materials are handled by the professionals?

Elizabeth Stone: This is one of the things that Joyce pointed out, which is use is a big criteria when we're thinking about treating things in the lab. That's because in Special Collections, which is a closed stack, which means you have to request it. A librarian will bring that material out to you, but you can touch it. You can sit there with the book or the single sheet or the object, and you can leaf through that book with your fingers, which was a pretty amazing experience.

Joan Kjaer: That's astounding.

Elizabeth Stone: Yeah.

Joyce Tsai: It's really astounding. I mean, just the ways in which you can really interact with the object and hold it. I mean it's these are objects that oftentimes are intended to be held. In the museum, we have a different set of standards, and some of those standards have to do with just the preservation and care, and I mean to be crass, insurance. You can't subject the kind of artworks in our collection to that kind of wear and tear, but this is also why the preservation department is so crucial for a library.

Joyce Tsai: I also, I want to underscore however that we do make our collections accessible and usable. It's just that I've got to handle it. You can look at it and you're welcome to come in, and you can also, if you are teaching or if you're researching, if you want to see anything in our collection, we're just really an email away. We have an amazing team who will work to make that material available for you to study and to look at. We do curated presentations of artworks for classes, again, across disciplines. We do that already now in the space that we have on the third floor of the IMU, the Stanley Visual Classroom, but we'll be able to do that all the better in the new building.

Joan Kjaer: Wow. Well thank you so much for telling us about this process, and it's very, very beautiful work which you've done so far. Thank you. Obviously we've been talking to Joyce Tsai and Beth Stone, and I thank you for being here with us. I thank all of you for listening this afternoon, and I hope that if you have the opportunity, you'll join us on October 9th when we'll have another program in this room. Same time. That program will focus on research. Research into space, cancer recovery, and precision weather forecasts. I think it'll be a really interesting conversation. WorldCanvass programming is available on iTunes, the Public Radio Exchange, and the International Programs website. I'm Joan Kjaer and for UI International Programs, thank you for joining us.

Joyce Tsai: Thank you.

Elizabeth Stone: Thank you.