

SOURCE: Student Organization for Unique and Rare Collections Everywhere

Society of American Archivists Student Chapter

Agenda for April 8, 2025, 7 pm Meeting

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Attendees:

Hilde Creager

Kelan Amme

Molly Dotson

Nilda Lopez

Christian Ryder

Jillie Fisch

Marija Dalbello

Tallulah Pentecost

Molly Dotson, Graphics Arts Librarian at Firestone Library, Department of Special Collections at Princeton University

- Introduction: our first speaker is Molly Dotson, Graphic Arts Librarian of the Department of Special Collections at Firestone Library at Princeton University. The Graphics Arts Collection at Princeton holds 60,000 prints, drawings, photographs, paintings, sculpture, and printed ephemera along with an international book collection specializing in fine press, artists' books, and illustrated editions. Prior to working at Firestone, Molly was the Assistant Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts at the Yale Center for British Art.

Presentation

- Elmer Adler moved his personal collection of books, prints, art, etc. to 40 Mercer Street in 1940, forming what would be Princeton's Graphics Arts collection
 - Effort in combining graphic arts and book collecting
 - Currently holds between 60,000-80,000 items
 - Classroom activity has moved to the Firestone Library, but library does still hold one table previously owned by Elmer Adler

- Previously did not have experience in the arts outside of art history courses as an undergraduate
- Worked in a conservation lab as an undergraduate, found that she enjoyed working with library materials
 - Took a break before starting grad school, did a dual-degree program at Indiana University allowing her to focus on art history while also getting an MLIS
- First got an eight-month fellowship at the Yale Arts Library after graduating, then had a series of term positions at the institution working in archival processing, instruction, collections development
- Moved to the Yale Center for British Art's Books and Manuscripts collection afterwards, worked there for three years
 - Built experience with exhibitions
- Later moved to Princeton, having been previously aware of the position
 - Has been a part of collections acquisition efforts
- Has been involved in a variety of things in her position – often spends time with groups in the classroom
 - Also does work with research/reference services, digitization, storage
- Title is librarian but is part of a curatorial team

Additional Q+A

- What has been the most rewarding part of working in your position?
 - Enjoys the instruction – it's very rewarding to work with and hear from students and faculty, was a big part of the first couple years she's spent there
- What did you get out of your dual degree program? Was one more useful than the other?
 - Glad she did both, the tailored dual degree program was helpful and shaved off a few credit hours
 - Was a way to broaden her skillset – was brought in on an IMLS-funded program as the digital track was first starting, working with digitization and item-level metadata, was a student worker in the preservation library, also did collections inventory in the anthropological museum
 - Having both degrees allowed her to have a variety of experiences and broaden her skillset and become as versatile as possible when entering the job market. Wanted to stay involved in the arts
- Have there been any recent projects you've been excited about? There is an exciting article published last year on the Princeton Library news page about a unique machine called a Selene Photometric Stereo System. Could you talk more about this and what it has done to enhance the usability of your collections?

- Selene is a project that was championed by the late director Will Knoll (sp?)
- Is a setup where a camera takes an image of a flat object at a 45-degree angle from all four cardinal directions – was originally developed for taking images of the surface of the moon, helps to measure how light is bouncing off of things to figure out the surface of something and create a topographical map
 - Can be used for things such as wood plates, cuneiform, etc. to provide greater insight that isn't immediately apparent through photography or the naked eye
 - Can be very useful for finding erased annotations, indentations
- How does Princeton bring together their exhibitions?
 - There's one main library gallery space on the first floor of the Firestone Library that is publicly accessible, people can gain access at the main desk if they don't have a Princeton ID card
 - Exhibitions are on a four-year calendar and are planned far in advance – has not done her own exhibition yet but is working on a proposal for the future
 - Recently had a caricature exhibition, exhibition on an artist of book art/mail art
 - Committee evaluates proposals, there's a phase one and two of proposal before collecting the items, doing digitization, planning layout, etc.
 - The gallery being separate from the public reading room is useful as it can have different opening hours from the rest of the library

Nilda Lopez, Head of Reader Services at the Morgan Library and Museum

- Introduction: our next speaker is Nilda Lopez, Head of Reader Services at the Morgan Library and Museum. She supervises the team that supports access to Morgan's rare and reference collections at the Sherman Fairchild Reading Room. Prior to her current position, Nilda was a Reference Librarian and Library Technician at the Smithsonian Institution, a Curatorial Assistant at the Montclair Art Museum, and the Taino Music Program Assistant at the National Museum of the American Indian. In 2015, She completed a Master's Degree of Museums and Galleries from Marist College and the Italian International Institute of Lorenzo de' Medici's collaborative program. Please welcome Nilda Lopez.

Presentation

- Recently started in the role in September 2024
- Morgan Library's collection is over 300,000 objects within eight curatorial departments covering all human history, eight department has three curators
- Majority of the items have been digitized online

- Lindau Gospels – first item purchased by Morgan in 1901
 - Both sides of the manuscript are completely bejeweled
- Crusader Bible – first item with the involvement of Belle da Costa Greene, one of the most famous librarians who helped build the collections as a curator
- Reading room is a way to make materials available to patrons – are not rare collections but reference collections, ensuring access to these pieces in the future
 - Curators use the space, along with groups to educate
 - In February, 99 researchers came through the reading room
- Originally got a degree in children's services before getting her second master's in museum studies after working at the New York Public Library
- Volunteered at the Smithsonian working in their education department before getting a job at the Montclair Art Museum
- Was able to work in all subject areas due to her previous library experience as she transitioned towards work with art – enjoyed 'playing both fields,' connecting to her undergraduate degree in medieval studies which is part of what motivated
- Advice – feel free to explore, don't be pigeonholed, work to protect art and history will be appreciated

Additional Q+A

- What is the process for a researcher to access materials in the reading room? Why would a request to handle rare materials be declined?
 - The process would be going onto the website which is hosted through CORSAIR and backed by Voyager – you can look through the items to find the items in digitized format before starting the application in the reading room page and providing your accreditation and information
 - Because materials are fragile and rare, the process is particular – curators mostly say yes, but there has to be conversation between units
 - A request may be declined if the item is about to go on exhibition or is particularly rare; the value of seeing the item in person vs. the digital facsimile (if it exists) is also considered
- What role does the CORSAIR Online Collection Catalog play in facilitating access to research materials?
- What is the relationship between the Morgan Library and Museum space? Does the curatorial team rely on the research services team for support in creating exhibitions?
 - Things are currently changing – there is currently an annual assessment of how things work
 - Her current role isn't curatorial, but because she has experience with it she does her best to support that work when possible – is often a point of connection between different departments

- o Previous job was doing research, buying collection items, doing interlibrary loan
 - o Because of the volume of materials, the focus is ensuring that materials are kept safe
- What was the year in Italy like? Exposure to different environments, etc.
 - o Was in a curatorial class with two other students, taught by a curator from Germany – had a curatorial, registrar, and education segment that was split between the three students
 - o Got an A in the class, but got the feedback “you’re very American-focused” which made her reconsider how she presents things – if a viewer doesn’t have the same perspective, how will they view an exhibition or an experience
- How is a collection handled when every item is rare?
 - o Example - Literary and historical manuscripts has thousands of items, and every item is handled and evaluated as a piece of archival material
 - o Directions are provided to the users on how to handle items (using gloves vs. bare hands)
 - o Learning the way to handle every object – if it was yours, how would you want it handled?
 - o A major part of their work as librarians/museum specialists is teaching people how to handle items properly so they can be preserved for the future
- In the reading room, how are materials accessed that are pulled from the shelves?
 - o There are hidden staircases with levers and locks, doors are re-locked after leaving