

Transcript of Interview of Chelsie Walker by Tory Schendel Cox

**Interviewee:** Chelsie Walker

**Interviewer:** Tory Schendel Cox

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**Location (Interviewee):** New Harmony, Indiana, United States of America

**Location (Interviewer):** Evansville, Indiana, United States of America

**Transcriber:** Kathryn Jue

**Abstract:**

In response to COVID-19, the Evansville Museum of Arts, History and Science launched the mini-series, "Cultural Insights: Interviews in the Creative Sector," to highlight colleagues and professionals working in the same or similar field of museum professionals. Chelsie Walker, Gallery Director, Mason-Nordgauer Fine Arts Gallery shares her experiences here.

**Tory Schendel Cox 00:01**

Hi, my name is Tory Schendel Cox. I'm the Virginia G. Shroeder Curator of Art here at the Evansville Museum. But really here is at home today. And as you can see, in this video call, I have Chelsie Walker, who's a dear friend of mine, and is willing to take time out of her day to tell us a little bit about who she is, what she does, and something great about the professional world that she works in. So Chelsie, thank you for your time today.

**Chelsie Walker 00:23**

Thanks. I'm very happy to be here. You ready for me to just go for it?

**Tory Schendel Cox 00:27**

Oh, absolutely.

**Chelsie Walker 00:29**

All right. My name is Chelsie Walker. I am the gallery director at Mason-Nordgauer Fine Arts Gallery in New Harmony, Indiana. Currently, we are unfortunately closed for a couple of weeks due to everything that's going on in this crazy world. But in the meantime, we are volunteering to assist the Working Men's Institute in New Harmony with establishing provenance on a couple of their paintings in their permanent collection. They had a gentleman back in around the 1880s donate quite a few paintings from his personal collection that he acquired when he lived and

worked in Italy and traveled back and forth. And we are trying to establish where he got them from, if they're originals, if they're copies. And it's been a lot of fun just sort of going down those rabbit holes, figuring out different aspects of these paintings. We have so far established, at least two of them, we believe to be originals from the artists. One of which we believe was purchased from the Venice Biennale.

**Tory Schendel Cox 01:41**

Wow.

**Chelsie Walker 01:44**

When the gentleman was over there visiting on vacation, there's a proof that backs that up, there were prints of this particular painting sold while this painting was on display. And then after that there is no record, essentially, of this painting being on display anywhere else. And the man who donated all of these paintings was in the area at that same time. So everything sort of looks like it checks out that it is the original, which is amazing, and an amazing piece to have in their collection. And we have confirmed another piece to be a copy of an original by a gentleman named Guy Head who was one of the best Renaissance painter copiers in the UK at the time. And he's done two other copies of the same painting and they look all almost identical.

**Tory Schendel Cox 02:42**

Wow.

**Chelsie Walker 02:43**

Yeah.

**Tory Schendel Cox 02:43**

Oh man. What a great challenge to have an opportunity to reach out and help a local community partners as well.

**Chelsie Walker 02:50**

Yes, they are. Finally, we're down to three more paintings to finish everything up, two of which are proving exceedingly difficult to find any information on. Beverly Fisher is the woman who is heading up the whole research project and writing everything out and she's going to end up publishing all of our research as well, which is great. She's had struggles finding anything with these pieces. I've struggled finding anything with these pieces. But we are making headway little

by little. And hopefully before too long, we can finally find something that really sticks that we can finally figure out even to this point who painted them because both are unsigned.

**Tory Schendel Cox 03:39**

Wow.

**Chelsie Walker 03:39**

So. Yeah.

**Tory Schendel Cox 03:41**

Mmm, challenge. [Laughter] How many paintings are in this collection that you're researching?

**Chelsie Walker 03:49**

So in the total collection, they're 60 or 70 paintings.

**Tory Schendel Cox 03:55**

Mmm-hmm

**Chelsie Walker 03:55**

But we are focusing on I think about fifteen of them.

**Tory Schendel Cox 04:00**

Makes sense.

**Chelsie Walker 04:01**

I'm helping with five in particular that were exceedingly difficult to discover anything on. Bev has done an amazing amount of work with the resources she has through the WMI and a couple of other places. She has tracked down paintings that had gone missing from the archives. And they've gotten quite a few of them preserved at this point as well. So the collection starting to look good too.

**Tory Schendel Cox 04:34**

Mmm-hmm.

**Chelsie Walker 04:34**

But yeah, she brought us in when she had basically hit a dead end and she was just really wanting to finish this up, get everything going and really give the information to the people that the WMI wants to present. So we were super happy to be able to step in and offer our research assistants and it's been a lot of fun working with these people exploring new avenues that we didn't expect to go down. I never thought I would be looking through an old program for, like the Venice World's Fair and the Paris World's Fair and all that kind of stuff to try and find galleries. But here I am. And it's awesome.

**Tory Schendel Cox 05:17**

I mean, that's exciting. [Laughter].

**Chelsie Walker 05:20**

Yeah.

**Tory Schendel Cox 05:20**

I mean, curatorial goosebumps over here. [Laughter].

**Chelsie Walker 05:23**

It's, it's incredibly amazing. And anytime that I want to go over and look at these paintings, and make sure I'm looking for the right thing, and stuff like that, they're just a couple blocks down the street, which is awesome, too. And then anytime I go in there, it just establishes an even greater connection for me to the collection that they have over there. And I'm hoping, and Bev is hoping as well, that the information that we're collecting is going to do the same for everybody who visits.

**Tory Schendel Cox 05:52**

Absolutely.

**Chelsie Walker 05:53**

Yeah. So.

**Tory Schendel Cox 05:54**

Do you still want to reinterpret the artifacts with this information and update labels? Is that the goal?

**Chelsie Walker 05:59**

Oh, most definitely, yeah, Bev is completely cataloging all of the information that we're finding down to book sources, photos, everything like that. And they're going to go through the process of getting all of the pieces preserved at some point.

**Tory Schendel Cox 06:16**

Mmm-hmm

**Chelsie Walker 06:16**

And then they're going to redisplay everything, and it's going to have its history attached to it. And I think it's just going to be spectacular to see it all come together.

**Tory Schendel Cox 06:25**

Oh [unintelligible]

**Chelsie Walker 06:25**

This, this collection has sat around for so long without the proper due diligence done to it, to where people can really experience these paintings is more than just something beautiful that's hanging on the wall of a historic building.

**Tory Schendel Cox 06:42**

Mmm-hmm.

**Chelsie Walker 06:43**

And Bev is really doing her best to elevate that, and give people something that they connect to. And the fact that a couple of these might be originals is even better for them as well. It gives them more of a draw, it helps New Harmony as a whole bring people in, and it's just a really exciting project to be a part of.

**Tory Schendel Cox 07:05**

Oh, yeah, absolutely. Shedding some light on a dark time. Indeed.

**Chelsie Walker 07:10**

Most definitely. Yeah, so a little bit of brightness in the storm, this gives me a little extra time to put into this research and really dive in a lot deeper than I usually can when I'm working so much.

**Tory Schendel Cox 07:26**

Mmm-hmm.

**Chelsie Walker 07:26**

So I am hoping that by the end of this two week span, we can have at least one or two more of the paintings completely finished and ready to go. And then Bev can type it up and get it edited. And we're getting so close. And it's very exciting to see it all kind of come together.

**Tory Schendel Cox 07:44**

Wow. That's amazing.

**Chelsie Walker 07:45**

Yeah, Bev's, Bev's been working on this project for I think just about three years, we got pulled in about a year and a half ago. And so it's been a long road of a lot of work.

**Tory Schendel Cox 07:58**

That makes sense.

**Chelsie Walker 07:59**

Yeh.

**Tory Schendel Cox 08:00**

This is a lot of digging a lot of interesting information. And you have to find resources in the strangest ways. So.

**Chelsie Walker 08:07**

Oh, most definitely. [Laughter]. And it worked out that Bev knows a lot of her resources through WMI. And then I had my resources through UE and some of Dan's from USI. And so that combination really helped kickstart the end of the research needs for us. So we were able to put all of that together. And we got three or four paintings knocked out and figured out and recorded in just about three and a half, four months.

**Tory Schendel Cox 08:42**

That's amazing.

**Chelsie Walker 08:43**

Yeah.

**Tory Schendel Cox 08:44**

Wow.

**Chelsie Walker 08:44**

Yeah.

**Tory Schendel Cox 08:46**

Well, that's amazing partnership to to have the university to have me and then also an art gallery, too. So what

**Chelsie Walker 08:53**

Yeah.

**Tory Schendel Cox 08:54**

was it like for you as a gallery director working in more of a provenance curatorial role?How do you feel about that?

**Chelsie Walker 09:01**

I personally love it coming from somebody who was very research based in the fact that I have a history degree and an art degree, it's really the perfect way of melding those two together, I get to participate in my first love of working in an art gallery, and also keep my research levels up to snuff.

**Tory Schendel Cox 09:22**

Mmm-hmm.

**Chelsie Walker 09:22**

It's, it's amazing to see how much the community cares about this information. So like, it feels like I'm not just researching for me or researching for a paper or something like that. It's less it feels less academic and more community driven. Because everybody wants to know if these are originals. Everybody wants to know where they came from the story and so it feels like we're participating even further within the community and pulling everything together for them and not just for ourselves.

**Tory Schendel Cox 09:59**

That's amazing.

**Chelsie Walker 10:00**

Yeah.

**Tory Schendel Cox 10:00**

I can just feel your passion across the screen. [Laughter].

**Chelsie Walker 10:03**

Yeah, it's a really exciting project, it was not something that I expected to be a part of when I took this position. And I cannot imagine not being a part of it now. It's just incredible. And I mean, even in the relatively small role that I've had, because Bev did so much work before she even brought us on. I mean, she's super passionate about it, everybody at the WMI is just incredibly passionate about it. They want to know where everything's come from. The next step after this is to delve into their archives and see what other paintings they have and things like that. Right now, we're only working on the permanent collection display pieces. So there's so



much farther that this project can go. And it's amazing to work with other people who are just as passionate about this

**Tory Schendel Cox 10:58**

Mmm-hmm.

**Chelsie Walker 10:58**

in a town that is incredibly passionate about art in general. So it's just absolutely incredible to be a part of,

**Tory Schendel Cox 11:06**

I can only imagine, wow. Well, is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

**Chelsie Walker 11:12**

Um, I think that's about it. But definitely keep an eye out for when this project is finished. Hopefully, by this summer, we could have everything tightened up and they're gonna do sort of an unveiling show, that kind of thing. I'm super excited to see how that goes. But yeah, keep an eye out for that. We've been working really hard and we're excited to share all of the stuff that we found with everybody out there.

**Tory Schendel Cox 11:34**

Oh, absolutely. So definitely keep an eye on the Working Man Institute in New Harmony, Indiana.

**Chelsie Walker 11:41**

Yep.

**Tory Schendel Cox 11:41**

And this podcast by the Evansville Museum of Arts History and Science. And again, Chelsie, I thank you for your time, and we hope

**Chelsie Walker 11:47**

Thank you for having me.

**Tory Schendel Cox 11:48**

Oh, any time! [Laughter] Alright, bye for now.

**Chelsie Walker 11:52**

Bye!