

Susan Colaricci Sauls Interview

Interviewee: Susan Colaricci Sauls

Interviewer(s): Tori Schendel Cox

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Abstract: Interview with Susan Colaricci Sauls, Director, University Art Collections, USI Foundation, University of Southern Indiana. 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.

Tori Schendel Cox 00:00

Hi, my name is Tori Schendel Cox and I'm the Virginia G. Schroeder curator of art the Evansville Museum. And today we have Susan Saul's on our show. So Susan, thank you for your time and I'm going to take it over, or I'm sorry, I give it to you.

Susan Colaricci Sauls 00:12

Alrighty, well, you've asked who I am. And as you said, I'm Susan Colaricci Saul's, I'm Director of University art collections in southern Indiana- University of Southern Indiana. I've worked for the University since 2005, and came in as their art collection registrar until about 2018. And then I became a director of the whole shebang, I guess you can say, and what I do, I know I simplify it for kids saying, I'm like a librarian for artwork. But basically what I do is direct the management curatorial and education functions of the art collection at USI. So pretty much everything that ends at a museum in some capacity I do for our collection. And I also manage the John M. Lawrence Library, which holds our medieval manuscripts and more of our global cultural heritage collection.

Tori Schendel Cox 01:11

Wow.

Susan Colaricci Sauls 01:12

Okay, so, what I'm working on right now I have a really interesting project I'm working on with the art history intern. Her name is Olivia Warland. We are working on an exhibition of prints we received from Michael August. They are Francisco Goya prints. So what we're doing is she is working on researching, we're planning an exhibition for spring of 2021. But while we were working on them, and doing our research, this is kind of my side thing. I love a good backstory on artwork. And the particular series we're working on, they there was about seven printings of them. So I'm trying to figure out which printing we have, there was a University in California. And sadly, all my notes for this project are in my office on campus. So I'm working from my memory. There's a University in California that did an exhibition with examples from all of the seven printings. So I'm going to be getting in touch with them to see if there's any characteristics or any way that we can look at the pieces we have, and determine which printing they're from. We're fairly certain they were not the original printing. Those are probably

locked up at the Prado somewhere. But we're, I'm excited to find out that part. That's kind of my side thing. But my student Olivia is doing such a great job with her research. She is combing the internet, and I, I believe there's some interlibrary loans involved and she's doing a lot of activities that are really going to hone her art history skills. So we're looking forward to that. And I do a lot of work with students. That's kind of the the educational portion of my job. So I'm working with another student. Her name is Bridget Everly. And we are and you smile because I know she worked with you all didn't she?

Tori Schendel Cox 03:18

Yup!

Susan Colaricci Sauls 03:18

She and I believe Olivia Warland did as well. Did? I believe she was there. Probably a couple of semesters ago. But Bridget is working on a tour of the University's art collection that we have all throughout campus. So what she's been doing is she made up a script, she is very tedious, but it was kind of fun, except when it was raining, she walked around campus and designed the tour and the layout and how we're going to work out doing an audio tour along with a small booklet. So it's gonna be something you can come on campus, login, click on a button. I'm simplifying this, but I think we all know how technology works. And then you can listen to her give you a tour of the public art on campus. So it's artwork that you can access just by coming on campus, you want to get your steps in, we're going to have a segment where you can just walk around the outside and see the sculpture that we have on campus. And I have to brag our landscaping is just one of the most beautiful campuses you'll find. So you know, it's a great way to get your steps and hopefully we'll have that released by a summer with everything that's going on. We're still working on our projects, but things are moving a little slower. Goodness, I think that's about it. Some of the- well actually things I'm working on if people are interested in you know, how can you manage a collection remotely and I'm sure you deal with this as well. What I'm working on is our collections database. So I'm refining a lot of the data that we did a big dump download. And as you know, sometimes computers will talk to each other. Sometimes they don't, things are truncated, whatever, for whatever reason, something goes into the wrong field. So I'm doing an audit of our collection. And once our database we work with Past Perfect, which I know you guys are familiar with. So once Past Perfect is up and going, we'll be able to create more virtual exhibitions, students will be curating those, that's one of our goals. We will also be able to share our database on a wider basis with the public if they'd like to see work with our collection. If they want to see all the Goyas maybe we haven't put on display, or they want to see our collection a Steven Pace. We are the largest holder of Steven Paces artwork outside of the estate, we have well over 250 pieces. We are the holder of Ken McCutchen's art collection. I think many people know him as a local historian, and the first radio personality on WIKY radio, we have a great deal of his artwork. We have a lot of collections that we'll be able to share once Past Perfect is up and going. So that's what I'm doing as I sit here, look outside and see what a beautiful sunny day we have I'm auditing our artwork in the database. So I think that's really all I'm working on right now. At least while I'm working from my house.

Tori Schendel Cox 06:28

Yeah. So out of curiosity, how many exhibitions do you create a year?

Susan Colaricci Sauls 06:34

I create typically, I do two in our McCutchan exhibition space, which is different than our gallery. It's a smaller area, and it's outside the presidential suite of offices where our higher, VPS are all located. So there's two there, I create two- one exhibition in the John Lawrence library. And typically when I curate exhibitions, I bring in students and they do a lot of the work. Some of my more advanced students will create an entire show, others will do portions with me. So I definitely have three on occasion I'm invited into the McCutchan Art Center. Most recently, the exhibit I did in McCutchan Art Center, PACE galleries is the Steven Pace Process Exhibition, which was a huge endeavor took well over a year in the planning. I worked with an alum, Roxy Burton, we put that together. She's working in California as a Registrar for an international art shipper. So she came back, talked about her experience of grad school curatorial studies, what she's doing how what she learned that USI applies to what she's doing now. And she was she was just a great person to work with. I really enjoyed it.

Tori Schendel Cox 07:57

Wow. And that has been a rewarding experience to be able to reflect with your students like that.

Susan Colaricci Sauls 08:03

It is she she's one of my students that I'm like, yeah, one day, I could probably work for her, because she's just so ambitious. And a lot of our students are so ambitious and excited about the curatorial field. And I'm sure you know, from your experience, while we do a lot of classroom learning, the best experiences to learn what we do is an apprenticeship fellowship, interning at museums. I always say any day you can handle an artifact, it's a good day, just because, you know, you get that vibe and that feel from the history of the object. It really it kind of feeds you and, creates that curiosity we all have about learning from our past and and how we can apply it, you know, like the Goya thing the the expedition we're having trying to figure out what time period were these created, because they were you know, from glorious life on to I believe the last printing was 1937. So you know, you see which, which these were, what era these were printed in. And maybe there was a resurgence of that field or that technique or something about Goya happened that made them want to print these again.

Tori Schendel Cox 09:11

Wow. That's a really important thing to discuss when it comes to the physical object itself, because they are the vehicle of the storytelling and it's connecting- People on that emotional level with a tangible object. That's why these are so important.

Susan Colaricci Sauls 09:19

Yeah. Oh yeah.

Tori Schendel Cox 09:26

I mean, it's the human experience.

Susan Colaricci Sauls 09:27

I find it connects people. When I do an exhibition on the label. I know there's some folks that are just purist and will read every word we write. But there's some that just kind of casually go by. And I'm making these little artifacts which are kind of like cocktail facts and like, you know, I want to put something in their head about this artifact that they could maybe toss out at a cocktail party or throw out

when they're playing Trivial Pursuit and everyone's like, 'wow, you're really smart.' You know, I like to, to try and do that. Especially exhibitions on a University campus. I feel like we should be relating to each person that passes by on a way that they learn or way that they can relate to an object. So that's (inaudible) in a nutshell.

Tori Schendel Cox 10:12

That's amazing. That's a lot.

Susan Colaricci Sauls 10:13

Everyone can. People are always saying, you know, I don't like museums, I'm like, you haven't found the right way to learn about the artifact, because there's always a little something quirky that people, you know, find interesting. I know, I always tell the story, we have this one portrait of this woman, she looks so refined and so proper. And we found out she was somebody's mistress. And she was really she was a circus acrobat. Not that there's anything wrong with being a circus acrobat. But you know, you just look at that portrait, and you think she's some society lady, and then you read the fine print, you know, she was a circus acrobat who met this man. And then all become-all of a sudden became this, you know, proper woman in society, but no one really knew her backstory. So there's always a little something you can find.

Tori Schendel Cox 10:59

And that's what makes this job so much fun, because I like to get into the nitty gritty of the aspects of-

Susan Colaricci Sauls 11:04

Oh yeah!

Tori Schendel Cox 11:04

The art, and have those quirky stories you like you said, because I think it makes it more relatable across-

Susan Colaricci Sauls 11:10

Oh yeah.

Tori Schendel Cox 11:10

The room. And I like that I'm gonna I'm gonna coin that if that's all right. A cocktail tidbit.

Susan Colaricci Sauls 11:15

Yeah, yeah, yeah, we always have artifacts or tech tips, I was the tech tips I like to use on artwork that maybe takes a- is not as obvious about how it was made, you know, like some of the glass techniques or some of the ceramic techniques that I think people use. I think if we explain the technique to people, I think it means more when they look at that piece, and try and get as much information. Granted, the artists, you know, their birth and death dates are important too. But it's nice to have that little background tip that that connects somebody to an artifact.

Tori Schendel Cox 11:51

Absolutely. And roughly how many pieces are in your collection?

Susan Colaricci Sauls 11:56

Wow, we're around 3,500 to 4,000. We just completed a large inventory, we had a group internship, which is always exciting. I have three great students. And they spent last summer going head to toe on campus finding every piece and we did a complete inventory. So we're working through that data. There are some artifacts that you know, they always- the category founding collection, FIC's, we've found some of those. And then there are some that we no longer confined and we're not sure so we do a little extra detective work. And we have found a lot of pieces that way. You know, when I started in 2005, I was handed this massive list, you know like here's the collection, but we don't we're not really sure what parts of campus it is on. Because as you know, our campus has just grown-

Tori Schendel Cox 12:51

Yeah.

Susan Colaricci Sauls 12:51

So, so much that it's just a matter of finding everything. So over time, we have found everything on that list. And then as our collection grows, we're hitting about 3,500 to 4,000.

Tori Schendel Cox 13:06

And that's a healthy collection for sure.

Susan Colaricci Sauls 13:09

Yes, yes, it is.

Tori Schendel Cox 13:12

Well, is there anything else you'd like to share with our viewers today?

Susan Colaricci Sauls 13:15

Well, I I have thought about talking about Arch Madness too. amusingartifact.com. I believe they're a .com. Let me double check. I've got my note here. I know. Well I'm yeah, I'm using artifacts.org. So it's using artifacts.org. And right now we're in the Elite Eight. And there is a huge battle between our previous champion, which is your object. Yeah. And oh, but you're going up against let me see I've made my notes here. Because the brackets are getting hot. You need- people that are missing the basketball, they need to come over and look at this. You guys are battling marijuana and the Bible from the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church. So though you're that document and the dueling pistols are really hot right now. And there's another there's an on campus battle between archaeology lab at USI and USI archives. So the archaeology lab has the Ag- Aztech snake sculpture from Common Era 1400 and the amputation surgical kit from archives which is really hot, who doesn't love you know, an amputation surgical kit? Using (inaudible) bullets from about eight, late 1800s. So, those are the two big battles going on right now from what I understand. So we need everyone to get out and vote at amusingartifact.org. Let's see, Elite Eight ends on the 29th and then we go go into Final Four. And then we go into the final game and the winner will be announced April 13.

Tori Schendel Cox 15:08

Mhm. Now for our viewers who don't know who what Arch Madness is Susan, do you mind explaining what that

Susan Colaricci Sauls 15:13

Oh sure, art Arch Madness follows the same line as March Madness for basketball. So what we've done is organizations from around Evansville and it's USI art collection USI archeology lab, Evansville Museum of Art History and Science. My heart's always soft for you guys. John James Audubon Museum, Newburgh Museum, up archives and work payments Institute. We each submitted two artifacts, there was a random draw, and we were all placed in brackets and battle. And right now, it was people vote, people are determining what's the coolest artifact and we'll end up with our final champion. I'm, I have to brag I was a former champion. I think I was 2018 with the demon incantation bowl.

Tori Schendel Cox 16:04

Yeah.

Susan Colaricci Sauls 16:04

So yay, that's a really cool artifact. But yeah, the dueling pistols you guys might be Tibet champs we don't know you guys are playing hard. So yeah, come to amusingartifacts.org and vote. And you can vote as many times as you want. If you want to stuff the box for one in particular, right now my heart's with the golden, the golden. Is it the troop? The leather, red leather boots. Those are cute. Everyone loves a cute boot. So they are, oh, goodness, I don't have my note on them. But they're like the golden troop. They're from the Working Men's (inaudible) Harmony. They're, they might be the Cinderella story. (inadible) Are all getting counted. So go out and vote.

Tori Schendel Cox 16:52

Absolutely. And we're looking forward to see who wins it's friendly competition. And it's just a

Susan Colaricci Sauls 16:56

Oh yes.

Tori Schendel Cox 16:56

Fun way for nonprofits and collections to get together and show what they've got.

Susan Colaricci Sauls 17:02

Oh, yeah. Yeah, it's exciting. We take it seriously on campus.

Tori Schendel Cox 17:06

I bet. And the museum definitely takes it seriously too our Curator of History, Tom Lonnberg is very competitive, and he loves-

Susan Colaricci Sauls 17:15

Yes. he is! Yes he is. And Tom is such a great asset to the museum. His exhibits are incredible. Just incredible.

Tori Schendel Cox 17:25

Yes no, absolutely. Well Susan. we definitely appreciate your time and thank you for sharing insights into who you are and what you do and what a little bit more of our community interacts. But this is a Evansville Museum recording and thank you for your time.

Susan Colaricci Sauls 17:39

Sure. See ya. Bye