

Jacey Crawford: This is Jacey Crawford with The Andersonian. I'm here with Professor Tai Lipan instructor of art, and Dr. David Murphy, professor of history. We're here to discuss the opening of the Jeeninga Museum of Near Eastern and Biblical archeology that will be taking place on November 15th. Dr. David Murphy is the director of the museum and Professor Tai Lipan is the co-director. Tell me a bit about this museum opening.

David Murphy: We are actually reopening, would be the best way to put it. The museum's been located in the basement of the School of Theology since its founding in 1963, and Tai had the great idea of relocating it in a space that would be more accessible and more visible, because it's such a great resource to the university. So we've had it closed since last March to visitors while we moved everything from the School of Theology over to the current location in the York Performance, the galleries at the York Performance Hall. And so what we're really doing next Friday is sort of re-introducing the museum in its new setting to the community and the university.

Jacey Crawford: So what are your roles in relation to the museum?

Tai Lipan: Well, we both are fairly new, so this is something we're both then figuring out together. We both kind of saw that this was an opportunity for us, like David mentioned, to make this move, and have been learning along the way all about the artifacts in the museum. Neither of us were responsible for the museum previously, so there was a big learning curve on just understanding what the collection was and how we wanted to refocus it. We've both been kind of tag teaming, random loads. I certainly was focused more on like the design aspect of the museum, but from there in terms of research and sort of focus, we kind of talked through all of that along the way.

David Murphy: Yeah, I would second all that. The beautiful look of the museum is totally Tai's design, and creativity, and imagination, and I just sort of helped think about some of the ways to organize the artifacts by theme, by place of origin, by chronology and historical period, or temporal guidelines. It's a really kind of an, it's all ancient. It's all Middle Eastern, but beyond that, it was really difficult to find unifying themes that we could group things by, and we were kind of struggled together through that, I think.

Jacey Crawford: So why did you make the decision to move the museum, and were there any other changes made during the move? Or did the exhibits stay the same?

Tai Lipan: Yeah, I can speak to, from my point of view, Dave and I had planned to meet even before we thought about actually physically moving the space about programming for the arts, and opportunities for viewing things that Anderson has to offer the public, and how to kind of consolidate and clarify programming, things that we could do to engage people and get them over to his area and my area. And so we realized that moving everything to one area would actually help us make programming that's more targeted. So I think part of that from my

perspective was we have a permanent collection of Warner Sallman's paintings upstairs from where the current museum will be, and so as a consequence, it's really easy for when I have visitors to come in to help kind of show them, oh, we also have this really amazing museum, and likewise for the museum guests. So now we can really do programming that leverages all the amazing things we have on campus, so that was one of the things I was interested in. And then go ahead.

David Murphy: Yeah, and I totally agree with all those things, and I thought that, I've been teaching here for almost 30 years, teaching history, and in the past I've been struck by how many times people, I asked them about the museum, "Have you seen these things that we have?" And they aren't usually very aware of it. And so when Tai broached the idea of what can we do to bring in new ideas about programming and utilization of the things that we have, she sort of came with the idea of well, what about this new site? And it just seemed it's going to be a lot more visible, look considerably more contemporary. It also allowed us to free the space in the basement of the School of Theology up, which has become a really beautiful lounge space, so it was really a win both for the building where it was, and I think for us it's going to be a much greater asset and resource to the university maybe than it had been.

Tai Lipan: And as to your second question, I think, I'm not sure what over, I'm curious to open it and see what people's perspectives that were more acquainted with the old museum would be, like how things look new, but I have heard from some people "Did we have that before?" It was there. And so part of what I think is really amazing about our collection is just that we have some really poignant things that speak to the area, the cultural overlap, and just really old things, and it's amazing to encounter a material possession or object of somebody to be able to make all of that come live to people.

Tai Lipan: And so I think one thing for me that I wanted to kind of refocus a bit was the old museum had a lot of replicas, and the kind of focus and understanding our perspective of why that was the case was to try to paint a broader picture of the narrative of the people surrounding the objects and the lives, so they would have objects that would be more specific to things that were maybe popularly recognized as being Egyptian or whatever those things to kind of paint that picture in the same case as an original artifact, which probably helped with that narrative, but our kind of shift in focus a little bit has been to relocate these to the staircase in York. And so the replicas are still there, and we hope to have, eventually, some content that will go with that and help people understand that relationship, but to be able to say that everything in actual museum now is an actual artifact. And so then there's no confusion on the viewer's part about what's going on, and I think it perhaps feels smaller in that regard or less flashy, but far more mysterious and magical in my mind. So I think it's a kind of a bridge of that. So I hope we can still insert that narrative feeling into this space, but in a new way that feels fresh and kind of true to the artifacts themselves.

- David Murphy: And even the utilization of the replicas, I mean, they're not cheap replicas.
- Tai Lipan: Yeah, they're great.
- David Murphy: They're really evocative, and most of them are the life size of the actual object and really useful teaching aids and instructional aids, as well, as kind of eye-catching artifacts for the casual visitor to the space. Even if they don't go into the museum space, they're going to see a lot of what was in the collection before and some of its most really, ironically enough, some of its most dramatic looking pieces, even though some of those happened to be replicas, as you said.
- Jacey Crawford: What's your favorite item in the museum?
- Tai Lipan: I knew you were going to ask that. And how long you got? I don't know. You go first, David.
- David Murphy: Well, I mean, can I just say I love them all? No,
- Tai Lipan: [inaudible] it's true.
- David Murphy: The Roman coins are probably, just because of my own historical interests, I love to see, know we have a coin. Actually not just the Roman. I should say the Middle Eastern coins. Most of them are Roman. There's also an Alexandrian coin with Alexander's the Great likeness on it, so fourth century BC, and then coins of Diocletian, Caesar, well Julius Caesar, and his grandnephew Octavian or Augustus Caesar, and lots of others. I mean those are not the most unusual artifacts that we have, but to me that the most historically evocative. They bring the time most vitally back for me, so I really liked those a lot, even though there are many others that I like, as well.
- Tai Lipan: I'm going to go with this Syro-Hittite chariot, because it's really cool. Those Hittites were known for being really great with horses. They had this whole kind of, I don't know how to say. This is probably a either a reproduction of one of those chariots or a child's toy, and I really think that it's amazing to just think of this little tiny object that sort of reflection of this bigger idea or concept that we have of the Hittites and the way that they we're in battles with people and the chariots that they use, but also how it was just potentially an everyday object of a child's and a toy, and I think that that's kind of an interesting parallel culturally that they were kind of just naturally coming about. So I think that's really cool. But there's too many really.
- David Murphy: There are. I mean, the Roman glass is beautiful.
- Tai Lipan: Oh, it's beautiful.

David Murphy: We have so many like iridescent and other kinds of of glass finish pieces that used to hold cosmetics and lots of other everyday objects. And that's one of the things I really like about the museum, too, is most of these objects, lamps, bowls, vases, or cups, and vessels of various kinds, they really reflect the material cultural of everyday life of the time in a way that is very easy, I think, for casual visitors to relate to, you know?

Jacey Crawford: So tell me a bit about this reopening, the actual event. I understand it will be almost a party kind of.

David Murphy: It will be for us.

Tai Lipan: So much of a party. Yeah. There's going to be food. We're going to hang out. We're going to look at the museum, and chat, and talk about it, and then we're going to have kind of at 6:30-ish, so it starts at 6:00, and then at 6:30 we'll have some remarks from hopefully David Neidert will be able to speak, and then David and I will speak as well. Just a little, short, really casual kind of letting people know about the process and our focus and goals for the museum, and then we're going to eat more, and we're going to party more.

David Murphy: Yeah.

Tai Lipan: So really-

David Murphy: Very informal, really. We debated should we invite a scholarly speaker, and that's really not what we wanted. We're just, as Tai said, my predecessor directing it, David Neidert, who for decades oversaw the museum and probably knows it better than anybody else, we've invited David to speak and he's going to share some time with us. And then Tai and I will just talk a little bit about this process and our hopes and dreams for what is going to come in the future, because we're not done.

Tai Lipan: Right.

David Murphy: I mean, we are sort of done. We're done with the worst of it, but there's a lot more that, especially Tai's vision of what the space will ultimately present to the visitor, but things take time. We have to work within kind of a constrained budget. We've had fabulous support from Marie Morris, the provost of the university, from Joel Schrock, our Dean, who have really been way more than generous in terms of giving us time and money, because it took a fair amount to get this done. So we're really grateful for that, too, and we want to highlight that at the reopening, as well, the role that a lot of other people played in helping us get this off the ground and see it through to this point.

Jacey Crawford: All right, well, thank you both very much for joining me today. And we'll be looking forward to the Jeeninga Museum reopening on November 15th.

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David Murphy: All right.

Tai Lipan: Thank you.

David Murphy: Thank you very much for having us.