

## Who Penned This? Unboxing Hybrids

REBECCA HANKINS AND PAULA ALLEN

### Abstract

What to do when you find a non-manuscript “boxed in” with the personal papers of a donor? In the hierarchy of hybrid archival collections—often a mix of manuscripts and fine arts holdings, the manuscript is, too often, prioritized. A “witness to the past, it provides evidence, explanation, and justification both for past actions and current decisions.” While commensurate in significance, the “companion” fine art collection is often underutilized, undervalued, and under-protected. Art curators within archival institutions must be standard bearers—willing to take a hybrid approach to navigate implicit and systemic biases in their effort to affect the proportionate treatment of fine arts holdings.

Penned or executed in various mediums, art speaks the unspoken; records history and movements; authenticates and corroborates; promotes dissidence and determination; informs and instructs, etc. Unboxing or “unpacking” the discourse around how institutions develop best practices that encapsulate their collections' full breadth and scope requires a “hybrid” or cross-disciplinary approach on every level, including processing acquisitions, cataloging, and arranging collections, stewardship, and collections management.

In *Who Penned This? Unboxing Hybrids* the panelists, an art curator and archivist, will discuss the complexities of working collaboratively to manage hybrid archival collections--manuscripts, fine art, photography, and other ephemera.

### About the authors:

**Rebecca Hankins** is the Wendler Endowed Professor in the Department of Global Languages and Cultures in the School of Arts and Sciences at Texas A&M University, College Station TX. She received her graduate (terminal) degree from Louisiana State University in library science and is a certified archivist. She was hired in 2003, received tenure in 2010, and was promoted to Full Professor in 2019. Her previous employment included 12 years as a senior archivist at The Amistad Research Center at Tulane University in New Orleans, the premier research repository on Africana historical documentation. In December 2016, U. S. President Barack Hussein Obama appointed her to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) of the National Archives and Records Commission from 2017-2020.

**Paula Allen** is the Curator of Art at the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University in New Orleans LA. Ms. Allen received her Master of Fine Arts terminal degree from Southern Illinois University. Before coming to Amistad, she served for 15 years as the non-profit director of a nationally acclaimed education program The Breakthrough Collaborative, and taught at several

local institutions, including Xavier University of Louisiana, Southern University at New Orleans, and Delgado Community College. As Visual Arts Curator at the Amistad Research Center, she assists in the research and development of exhibitions, the care and maintenance of collections, registration, and conservation efforts, and supports collections management and accessibility efforts. She has purview over a nationally acclaimed and historically significant fine art collection valued at over thirty million dollars.