

Oliphant: Unpacking the Archive

An Exhibition

Main Gallery, Harrison/Small
University of Virginia Library
September 16, 2019 - May 30, 2020



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In June 2018, the Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist and fine artist Patrick Oliphant donated his extensive, well-preserved archive to the University of Virginia Library. This collection documents six decades of his career — and by extension, of American and global history. The UVA Library plans to mount a major exhibition to showcase the collection's deep and multidisciplinary value in narrative art for the university community and the general public. UVA faculty and local journalists and artists will participate as co-curators of the exhibition, which will be supplemented by a symposium, tentatively titled "Drawing a Bead: Political Caricature in the 21st Century" on the future of political caricature in a post-newsprint world, as well as community and scholarly programming in partnership with the Miller Center for Public Affairs and UVA's Center for Politics, arts programming in collaboration with UVA Arts, and a book chronicling Oliphant's life and work in collaboration with the UVA Press.

Part I: Exhibition Summary

Representative survey of the recently acquired Oliphant archive, presenting a variety of materials from across the collection. This is the first exhibition to feature archival material alongside the work itself, and is both a biographical survey of Oliphant's career and a survey of his artistic oeuvre. The exhibition argues that Oliphant's work across many genres comprises a singular artistic statement: speaking truth to power through brilliantly composed caricature. The exhibition presents a balance of items in the following main categories: political cartoons, sculpture, work on paper, archival artifacts. From the artistic process to reception and influence, the exhibition introduces audiences to the half-century span of Oliphant's career.

Exhibition Objective (what conceptual and institutional messages do you want to communicate?):

- Acquisition of this archive opens up numerous possibilities for teaching, research, and further exhibition.
- Oliphant is the most influential of his generation of political cartoonists
- Oliphant's work is significant from a number of disciplinary perspectives

Call to action (what do you want your audience to come away with/to care about/to want to do after viewing the exhibit):

- The recently acquired archive is a unique resource for understanding how Oliphant transcends the limits of other political cartoonists' work. The long arc of his career, his profound influence

on the field, and his daily practice of both deadline-driven paid work and fine art all demonstrate this.

- We want scholars to imagine ways to use the collection.
- We want audiences to understand that Oliphant's political caricature is multilayered and brilliant, and that Oliphant played a fundamental role in shaping the aesthetic of the genre in the last half-century—which may also represent the last great era of the genre before it is utterly changed by the rise of digital communication and the waning of the paper newspaper industry.
- We want audiences to consider Oliphant as an artist, whose oeuvre includes, but is not limited to, political cartoons.
- We want the art world to reconsider its often conservative bias against political cartoons as a genre and caricature as a mode of artistic expression.

Target Audiences (in order of significance):

1. UVA faculty and students
2. Patrick and Susan Oliphant—their desires are fundamental to the exhibition's success. This is unusual—we don't usually have this type of stakeholder.
3. UVA casual visitors: tourists, parents, community members

Competition and related regional exhibitions and events:

- Library of Congress: [permanent Herblock! gallery](#)
- Library of Congress: permanent history of caricature exhibition
- Newseum: [Seriously Funny: From the Desk of 'The Daily Show with Jon Stewart](#) (Opens June 21)
- Fralin: <https://uvafralinartmuseum.virginia.edu/exhibitions>
- Kluge-Ruhe: <https://kluge-ruhe.org/exhibition/upcoming/>

Audience expectations:

They will expect to see political cartoons and to learn about the “back story” of how political cartoons are made. They will likely hope to learn a bit about who Oliphant is as a person. They may expect to learn about the technology and distribution of political cartoons. They will expect to see something about Donald Trump. Most visitors won't likely expect anything to do with fine art or sculpture, and the show will surprise many visitors with its breadth.

Part II: Communication Strategy

How will we convince the target audiences to attend in the language and aesthetics of our publicity?

The language of “unpacking the archive” should tempt people with the idea of something being revealed for the first time--fresh, new, and comprehensive. The aesthetics should be BOLD with strong lines showing Oliphant’s work. His signature itself can be the core of the graphic exhibition identity, and will read well on banners from a distance.

Publicity should emphasize the beauty and humor of the work, and should make clear that visitors will have an intimate look at never yet seen archival materials that provide access to Oliphant’s previously unknown artistic process.

What is the overall message we are trying to convey (is it going to be a learning experience, entertaining, aesthetically pleasing, challenging, subversive, game-changer, etc.)?

A blockbuster retrospective of a major figure of artistic and political consequence..

How will we convey the overall message (through labels, didactics, graphics, audio/video, interactives)?

The gallery will have a much cleaner, more spare look than most of our exhibitions, with no wall cases. Upon entering the space, visitors will immediately grasp the range of genres. The gallery is arranged to suit the nature of the artworks, rather than, say, to represent the chronology of his career, as is often the case with a retrospective-style archival show.

Wall panels on the following topics:

- Oliphant as sculptor
- Oliphant’s process (studio photos)
- Frieze
- Note to visitors: works on paper will be swapped out so come back in the spring
- Daily cartoon drawings

What adjectives can be used to describe the way the exhibition should be perceived by viewers as they walk through the gallery? What shall be the overall tone of the exhibition’s graphics, language, and physical spaces?:

Clean, elegant, and funny. The challenge to the designer will be to capture both the significance of Oliphant’s work and its inherent humor.

Planned/desired technology and other design innovations in the gallery:

Part III: Design Elements

Overall Design Elements

1. Identity concept
2. Exhibition color palette, fonts, etc.

In-Gallery Design Products:

1. Gallery door panel (above entrance): Above door on outside of gallery will be Oliphant's signature (Designer: TBD; Fabricator: Ex Plus)
2. Gallery door graphics: Coming out from the wall around the outside door will be vinyl cling of his artwork, content tbd (Designer: TBD; Fabricator: Ex Plus)
3. Title graphic: Instead of an introductory wall, we imagine a large angled drawing table covered with the introductory text. A white or black gooseneck lamp will shine a spotlight on the text, drawing visitors to read it. It will be accompanied by a handout containing timeline (Fabricator: Ex Plus using exhibition identity graphics)
4. Graphics: Windows - No graphics in the windows--they will be a plain backdrop for sculpture
5. Graphics: Bay Window - Large photographs featuring views of Oliphant's studio space in Santa Fe (Fabricator: Ex Plus)
6. Graphics: permanent walls: vinyl frieze of "Marathon" figures running around the entire room above picture rail (Fabricator: Ex Plus)
7. Didactic graphics (sintra direct UV print)
 - a. Half Wall Panels between flat exhibition cases (49"w x 13"h)
 - b. Wall Graphics:
 - i.

Publicity Products:

1. Exterior University Avenue banner (Design: TBD; Fabrication and installation: Gropen)
2. H/S Building banner (Design: TBD; Fabrication: Gropen; Installation: UVA FacMan)
3. Press Kit: online text, images, etc. (Design: Holly)
4. Exhibition brochure: will introduce the exhibition and include a timeline of Oliphant's career; available in Gallery; design should be used as basis for exhibition catalog (Design TBD, prob Holly using Identity):
5. Rack Card: one-up brochure page for external-UVA distribution
6. Exhibition opening invitation
7. Exhibition poster 11x17"
8. Advertising
9. Online exhibition site
10. UVA Library website banner
11. Social Media graphics