

**Ruth Candler** 00:14

Welcome to W&L After Class, the lifelong learning podcast. I'm your host, Ruth Candler. In every episode we'll have engaging conversations with W&L's expert faculty, bringing you again to the Colonnade even if you're hundreds of miles away — just like the conversations that happen every day after class here at W&L. You'll hear from your favorite faculty on fascinating topics and meet professors who can introduce you to new worlds and continue your journey of lifelong learning. Our guest today is Associate Professor of Art History Elliott King. Professor King joined W&L in 2012 and has taught courses such as The Business of Contemporary Art, Surrealism, Art of the 1960s, American Art to 1945 and many more. He focuses his research on surrealism and Salvador Dalí, a topic he has studied for over 20 years. His book "Dalí, Surrealism and Cinema" is the most complete survey of Dalí's work with film, with many scripts described for the first time in English. He has also curated major exhibitions on surrealist artists including Dalí, Frida Kahlo and René Magritte. Elliott, thank you so much for joining us today.

**Elliott King** 01:21

Thank you so much. Appreciate it.

**Ruth Candler** 01:23

I have to share with our listeners that we are not playing a nature soundtrack, but are actually sitting outside in a socially distanced way. And it's a gorgeous fall day here in Lexington. So we are, we're really happy to have you with us today. Before we dive into Salvador Dalí and the research you've done on his body of work, I'd like you to provide some context. We've all heard the term surrealism before. But I think if you polled everyone listening right now about what it means, they'd each have a different answer. So what is surrealism? And how is surrealist art different from other modern art?

**Elliott King** 02:02

So that's a great question to begin with. Most people think of surrealism, probably, as an art movement, which is actually a very small part of what surrealism was, or even is today. Surrealism began in around 1922, in Paris, and it was actually a literary movement. At the beginning, it was a group of poets. People like Andre Breton, Philippe Soupault, Louis Aragon, who were formerly Paris dadaists, but were looking for new ways of creating poetry. And Breton tells the story in 1922 that a couple years earlier, he had begun having a dream and these poetic words came into his head, and it was as he was falling asleep that he realized that perhaps the subconscious, the dream state, was a way of mining his own creativity.

And so he began exploring poetry through that psychoanalytic narrative. And he called that surrealism. He wrote the surrealist manifesto in 1924, where he described surrealism, defined it for the first time as pure psychic automatism. So it's a strange way of saying it, but thinking automatically, just letting your thoughts go, plumbing the subconscious, letting ideas run outside of any moral aesthetic concerns that might otherwise hinder those. So surrealist art develops a little bit later, actually. The movement, as I say, begins in the early '20s. By 1927, the group is still arguing whether or not there's even such a thing as surrealist art, because art seems to them maybe too predetermined to be as automatic as they'd like their poetry to be. But some artists come in. Andre Masson, Max Ernst, eventually the more dreamlike

surrealists, like René Magritte and Salvador Dalí, who have their own approaches to contacting the subconscious. And that gives you sort of the aesthetic of surrealism that ends up becoming the really popular manifestation.

So most people, when they think of surrealism now, they think of those more dreamlike surrealists, but that's really just a small part of what surrealism really was.

**Ruth Candler** 04:12

Well, as a cultural movement, surrealism dominated the first half of the 20th century. Can we still find influences of surrealism in our modern culture?

**Elliott King** 04:21

So surrealism is still very popular, even if it's in a very basic or generalized way. Back in 2016 the word surreal was Webster's word of the year. And they defined it as being dreamlike, strange, of an out-of-body experience. So people are very aware of it. I... Weekly, I read articles that describe something as being surreal, especially these days of everyone being in isolation, and the situations that we're all in are being called surreal, which is lamentable for the surrealist movement, really, but it's getting aligned to that way.

But the idea of what surrealism looks like, that dreamlike imagery, is certainly still very much with us. That kind of imagery was very influential in advertising, even in the '30s. Surrealism got coopted by capitalism very quickly in the 30s. The surrealists themselves were very left-wing. Some were... Some joined with the French Communist Party. But at the same time, there were others who were doing window displays. There were fashion designers who saw surrealist imagery and saw that it was popular and started doing fashion designs and all sorts of housewares and things with surrealism in mind. Surrealism is probably the first art movement, really, that reaches mass culture in the way that, you know, Cubism certainly didn't, you know, other movements before that you just didn't have that. But surrealism spread very quickly and was very popular early on. And I think that's still with us, actually.

**Ruth Candler** 05:52

Well, we'll talk about your scholarship on Salvador Dalí in just a minute. But first, would you identify a few other surrealist artists, especially those that we might have heard about? Like, was Picasso a surrealist?

**Elliott King** 06:03

So Picasso was a really interesting example, because he wasn't a surrealist, but the surrealists really liked him. In fact, when they were arguing whether or not there was such a thing as surrealist painting, the one thing that they could agree on is if there were surrealist painting in 1928, it would look like Picasso. Even though Picasso wasn't himself a surrealist, they... What they saw in Picasso was a very revolutionary style of painting. They said that his eye was painting in what Breton called a "savage state," that it was without any sort of rules, basically. And so they liked Picasso a lot.

But Picasso wasn't really interested in joining the surrealist group. The surrealists... Unlike other art movements, you know, like Impressionism, the surrealists were really a group of people. They were

kind of a club. They voted people in. They kicked people out. They all met at the cafe. It wasn't like anybody could be a surrealist — you really kind of had to be accepted as a surrealist. It was more like a reality TV show in some ways. And almost every major surrealist at some point gets kicked out of surrealism, actually.

But Picasso never even had an interest in joining the group. And so he never joined, but Breton loved his work. Breton actually helped facilitate the sale of one of Picasso's most famous paintings, "Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)," which is in the Museum of Modern Art now. And Breton facilitated the sale of that painting to the fashion designer Jacques Doucet. And so certainly Breton had a great admiration for Picasso, but Picasso really had other... bigger fish to fry at the time.

**Ruth Candler** 07:41

He didn't want to be in the club. That's fascinating.

**Elliott King** 07:44

He didn't want to be in the club.

**Ruth Candler** 07:45

Wow. So we talked about, or you mentioned earlier, a dreamlike state. And in my mind, it's one of those very strange dreams that you can't quite explain. Do you think this is why people are drawn to it?

**Elliott King** 08:00

I've thought a lot about, actually, why certain surrealist paintings like "The Persistence of Memory," Dalí's painting of the soft clocks in the Museum of Modern Art, you know, why those are such iconic paintings, and have been since they were first introduced to the United States, why people gravitate towards those. And I think it is that it's a comfortable mixture of being strange and familiar. That it's certainly off enough that it might invoke the experience of a dream.

But you can also tell that it's... So we call it in quotation marks "modern art." It looks like something's happening that isn't just a naturalistic image of whatever the thing is. You can tell something's been warped to it, but not to such a degree that you can't tell what it is anymore. And I think that people find a little bit of a comfort in that. That, like, they want to understand it. And that leads to interpretation, too. There are countless interpretations of why those soft clocks are melting. Dalí provided a few of his own, but over the years, many art historians, many visitors to MoMA are like, "Oh, I think that the soft clock means this. I think it's the passage of time, I think it's how time slows down. I think it's the modernization of the world." Everyone has their own sort of interpretation of these things.

And I think that it's paintings like that, that they... It's like dream symbols. People love this kind of thing, because it's sort of open up to a lot of interpretations. And most surrealists won't tell you what their artwork means. Because for them, allegedly, it's coming from the subconscious, and they don't know what it means. And the idea is that if they knew what it meant, they wouldn't bother to do it, because then it would be deliberate. They would be too cognizant. So for them to create something that's really automatic, coming from the subconscious, they don't have any better clue what it means than the audience would.

**Ruth Candler** 09:51

Well, so then do they listen to people's interpretations? Say that, you know, they... If they can't interpret it, are they curious as to what others think?

**Elliott King** 10:02

Well, I know in the case of Dalí, I mean, he always was very open to other people's interpretations of his work and said that, like, "Oh, well, that's a very interesting idea." That, you know, "It wasn't one that I thought of," he might say. He's like, "Oh, that's not an idea that I had thought of, but that's an interesting idea."

Um, there was only one case that I can recall off the top of my head where the... If you have an image of "The Persistence of Memory" sort of in your head, the soft clock is draped over sort of an amoeba-like figure, and someone interpreted that in an editorial as evidencing Dalí's interest in horseback riding, because it looks a little bit like a saddle. And Dalí did actually respond to that editorial and said, "You know, I've never actually been horseback riding. I really don't have any particular interest in horses. But that's..." Again, "A very interesting suggestion, but wasn't one that I would have really probably thought of myself." So maybe there is a line somewhere if you push it far enough.

**Ruth Candler** 10:57

Right. It sounds like he had very diplomatic answers. Well, I should admit to our listeners at this point that I do have an inside scoop. I work with Elliott's wonderful wife, Emily King, in the Office of Lifelong Learning. And she has provided several tidbits of information about you, Elliott.

**Elliott King** 11:14

Oh, dear.

**Ruth Candler** 11:14

She shared that you've been interested in Salvador Dalí since your junior year of college. And so now that you're an internationally recognized expert, how did you discover Dalí? And what drew you to him in the first place?

**Elliott King** 11:31

So, yeah, it's hard to imagine, it's been so long ago. But... So I was an undergraduate at the University of Denver. And I had started out as an international business major, actually, and wasn't really enjoying that. But when I thought about why I had gone into business, a lot of it was because I like to travel. And actually I liked to go to art museums.

And so I had a very sage studio art teacher from high school who recommended, "Well, why don't you just go into something that would make you go into art museums?" And I thought, "That's a brilliant idea. I hadn't thought of that." And so, with the encouragement of my advisor, I took my first art history class and really enjoyed it. I felt like I just sort of found my subject. I took a class on surrealism from a Max Ernst scholar who taught there named Emmy Warlick. And she taught a class, wonderful class, on

Dada and surrealism. A lot of the class that I teach now on surrealism, some of those assignments are modeled after things that I did as an undergrad. So that was certainly very influential.

But when it came time for me to write a thesis, you know, an honors thesis for art history, I had this idea that I'd like to write on Salvador Dalí. And there were a few things that were contributing to that. One was that I really enjoyed his writing, especially. Something that's actually very interesting for where we are now is that when Dalí moved from Europe to the United States in 1940, he came straight to Virginia.

**Ruth Candler** 13:01

Really?

**Elliott King** 13:02

Yeah, he came straight to Virginia. He was staying at Caresse Crosby's house in Bowling Green, Virginia, about... I want to say three hours from here in the rural plains of Virginia. And that's where he wrote his autobiography, "The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí." So he wrote it right here in Virginia. And one of the lines that I think of every year is that he said he had never seen such large spiders as he did in Virginia. And every time I see the spiders in Virginia, I think about, like, that's what Dalí was always commenting with those enormous spiders.

I had this idea that I really loved his writing. And actually, I think it's a little bit of an acquired taste, because not everybody does enjoy his writing. Some people find him very narcissistic, which he certainly is. He's... A lot of it is false. It's a false autobiography, really. So you have to really kind of parse through... If you're trying to understand the truth, it's very difficult, but he makes a lot of it up. And so you have to kind of go into him knowing that, but I really liked that for whatever reason. It just really clicked for me. And so I wanted to write on Dalí. And I also thought, in complete honesty, that there would probably be a lot of material out there. So it wouldn't be, like, the hardest thing to write on. And this is my honest undergraduate self speaking out because I was the director of homecoming. I was really busy.

**Ruth Candler** 14:16

Listen up, students.

**Elliott King** 14:16

Yeah, I was really busy. And I was like, "Where is there a topic that, you know, I'm sure I can go to the library and find a bunch of books?" And, of course, there are a lot of books on Salvador Dalí. But my advisor said, "Well, why don't you work on later Dalí?" So Dalí's work after 1940. And I was like, "Okay." And to my despair at the time, most of the books didn't cover Dalí after 1940. But he lives until 1989. And there's a lot of work that he did in the 1940s, '50s and '60s that, at this time — so I'm speaking about 1998 — that wasn't covered in the books. It was like he... I actually... You... One might have thought that he died in 1940. Because Dalí's works just weren't considered at all.

And there are a lot of reasons for that, that we can talk more about. But it got me realizing that there's a niche on an artist that I really like, and a huge body of work that hadn't been explored. And so that's

really what got me into working on Dalí, is that. I ended up doing my master's on Dalí. I ended up doing my Ph.D. on Dalí. And that's been a large part of my scholarship is looking at these years of production that for the longest time weren't really part of the serious consideration of his contributions to art history.

**Ruth Candler** 15:36

So what was it about this period that you were so fascinated with?

**Elliott King** 15:40

Well, I think it was really that it had been, I don't want to say had been overlooked, because that would suggest that it was accidental on the part of art history that people weren't interested in these years of Dalí's work, but it had really been certainly neglected, and really marginalized, pushed aside, dismissed maybe is the best word.

And some of the reasons for that: Salvador Dalí, when he moves to the United States, he's very famous by the time he moves here in 1940. He had been on the cover of Time Magazine, "The Persistence of Memory" was already a very, very famous painting in New York, in the United States overall. And he was already doing fashion designs with Elsa Schiaparelli. He was doing really big things. He was famous, basically. And as you get into priorities in modern art criticism, around 1939-1940, the tide begins to shift towards recognizing avant garde art as being very different from mass culture.

So there's museum-worthy work, and then there's work for the masses. And Dalí was in this really, shall we say, uncomfortable space between those two things that... He had pieces at the Museum of Modern Art, but at the same time, he was designing neckties. And the art critics were like, you can't do that. I mean, it's something that actually today I mean, Takashi Murakami, Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons, this is a thing today, with artists, but to do this in the 1950s was kind of career suicide, and...

**Ruth Candler** 17:09

Or cutting edge.

**Elliott King** 17:11

Or cutting edge. Exactly, exactly. It makes... It makes it very avant garde in a sort of subversive way. And so the fact that he said, "I'll design anything people want, I'll put surrealism out there toward... to the masses." That was something that a lot of modern art critics weren't comfortable with, and was something a lot of surrealists weren't comfortable with either. Dalí got dismissed from the surrealist group in 1939. He was only a surrealist for 10 years.

**Ruth Candler** 17:35

You have to be voted out of the club at some point, right?

**Elliott King** 17:37

Right. And he was. He was kicked out in '39. And after that, is... He declares himself the only real surrealist, which is, there's a real battle between Dalí and the rest of the surrealist group of who gets to call themselves a surrealist, what does it mean to be a surrealist? So that whole narrative I just thought was so interesting. I think that he... That he would be outside of surrealism but attacking surrealism

from that space, that he was very anti-abstract art at a time when abstract art was really the predominant American movement. And then just how art history had kind of written him off even though he was so influential for later artists. He knew Andy Warhol. He certainly had a profound influence on Jeff Koons later on. So there have been artists who have kind of picked up on some of that celebrity status that Dalí cultivated during this time, but it was very controversial when he was doing it.

**Ruth Candler** 18:34

So you talked about how your research focused on Dalí's later, postwar productions. What are some works from this period that we might recognize?

**Elliott King** 18:44

Well, some of the paintings that might be the most popularly recognizable... "The Sacrament of the Last Supper" at the National Gallery might be one of those pieces. And that's an interesting narrative just in itself, because that's a painting that is very popular amongst the public, but it's always hung in a very weird place at the National Gallery, because it has a... It has a rule that went with a donation from the person who owned it, named Chester Dale. And he specified that it always had to be on view, and never be lent. And so...

**Ruth Candler** 19:21

What does that mean?

**Elliott King** 19:23

So that means... It's something that really should never happen in terms of a gift, because it means that the painting always has to be shown. And it can never leave the National Gallery. So if there's a big exhibition, and there have been many — I've curated exhibitions that I've asked for that painting, and they have to say no, because it's in the rules of the National Gallery that Chester Dale said this painting can never lend. It always has to be on view.

And that's kind of a curatorial conundrum. Because, you know, where do you put it? And maybe it doesn't go exactly where you might want it to be and it becomes a little bit of a pain in the neck, pretty quickly after 60 years. And so it's been in stairwells, it's been in... it's been next to the elevators. It's, right? Last time I saw it, it was near the gift shop. It shows up in just weird places. You have to kind of track down the painting. But it's a very famous painting. It's... It kind of shows the attitude towards these later Dalí pieces. It's like, "Well, let's put it near this... the elevator shaft."

**Ruth Candler** 20:24

Oh, my gosh.

**Elliott King** 20:25

You have to find "The Sacrament of the Last Supper." Other paintings from this period that might be well known... Well, I don't know so much in the United States, but the "Christ of St. John of the Cross" from 1951 is a very famous painting at the Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow, and it was voted Scotland's favorite painting a number of years in a row. People love the "Christ of St. John of the Cross."

And that brings up something that I think is, I think, important to think about with these, a lot of these later pieces, is that after Dalí comes to the United States, he writes in his autobiography, at the end of the autobiography, that he's embraced Catholicism. And that's something else that also affects his reputation within modern art, that he's unabashed that he's going to do Catholic painting, which, of course, in 1500 would have been the norm. But in 1950, is actually quite unusual, to do religious-style works. And people think they're kind of kitschy, or that people feel like they're... They don't quite understand. Is he being sincere? Or is he being sarcastic? You know, what are these pieces really about? He ends up combining them with images of nuclear physics. And so you have, like, exploding Madonnas and nuclear Christs.

And, again, these are actually the pieces I really love. I think they aren't probably for everybody. But I love this combination of science and religion that, you know, he called this nuclear mysticism, of the 1950s. And I think it's so interesting how he tries to rationalize faith with science, and he, I feel like he tries really hard. Like, he's reading scientific journals, he's reading theology, he's doing it in a very odd way, or at least it materializes in a really strange way, with these exploding images that are, you know, a Madonna bursting into corpuscles or something. But I love this stuff, because I feel like there's so much more to it than just the strangeness that you might intuit just looking at the piece on its own.

**Ruth Candler** 22:30

Virtually everyone knows something about Salvador Dalí, or at least his iconic moustache, or perhaps his painting, what we talked about earlier, "The Persistence of Memory," which I call the melting clocks, but I like how you phrased it, the soft clocks.

**Elliott King** 22:45

That's actually, um, if you don't mind me interrupting, it's, um, they're not melting clocks, actually, because melting would suggest that they were hot, and they were melting. Dalí was actually quite specific that they were naturally soft like a cheese. And so it wasn't that they were melt— It wasn't a hard clock that ended up melting. It was a naturally soft clock. So yes, he's very specific, actually, about them being soft clocks.

**Ruth Candler** 23:13

I remember seeing a clip of his appearance way back when on "The Ed Sullivan Show" where he shot paint against a canvas and called it art. To some that might raise questions about the seriousness of his art. Is this a misconception?

**Elliott King** 23:29

Dalí really liked to toe the line between high art and entertainment. He really saw himself as, certainly as a serious artist, but also as an entertainer, and he described himself as a clown. He said, you know, "I'll be a sublime clown." And he said, "Charlie Chaplin is a sublime clown, but he doesn't know how to paint. Whereas I know how to paint and I can be a clown. So that makes me even better than Charlie Chaplin."

So, you know, I think that he was very aware when he was doing these stunts that there was a comedic element to them. And certainly the mustache is just very funny. I mean, it becomes an iconic part of his look, but there's certainly a humor to it that he's very aware of. But he doesn't really play into it, he actually kind of plays the straight man to his own antics a lot of the time. And so he doesn't treat it as humorous. He treats it as very serious whenever he's doing anything. So as an art historian, it's actually quite hard to know where that line is. And I think he likes that. I think he likes that it's hard to know if he's joking or not, that he may not know himself if he's joking or not.

With that particular Ed Sullivan clip, there's some interesting commentary going on there about modern art at that time. And so you might compare that to, say, Jackson Pollock, who's laying his canvas out on the ground with his stick and his can of paint and throwing the can... the paint out onto the canvas. And of course people were saying, "Well, that's art." In 1949 Pollock was in LIFE magazine as the greatest painter in the United States. And so, Dalí hated that kind of painting. He wrote a book, mid-1950s, that... where he compared Pollock's painting to "the indigestion following fish soup." He said Picasso was awful, he said that Picasso... you couldn't get worse than Picasso. Pollock looks like indigestion. Basically, modern art in general was a lot of antics and bad painting.

And so he sort of saw himself... He called himself the savior of modern art — that "I'm going to paint serious Madonnas. I'm going to follow the tradition of painting coming from Diego Velázquez and Vermeer." And, you know, there's a lot of kind of over the top discussion about this, but he really positions himself outside of that mode of abstraction. And I think that when he's shooting those paint balls at the canvas, and then making an angel out of them, that's a commentary. That's a commentary, like, "Look how... look what is being considered art, and look what I could do with that, maybe even better." But he's kind of shining a light on Abstract Expressionism in a very satirical way. So I think that that's actually a big part of his message in the 1950s is that Abstract Expressionism had really kind of gotten it wrong. For that reason, he likes Pop Art quite a bit. He's friends with Warhol, as I mentioned. There's competition between Dalí and Warhol, but he feels like Pop Art is so much better than Abstract Expressionism, because at least a soup can looks like a soup can.

So he has very strong opinions on this kind of thing. A soft watch looks like a soft watch and a soup can looks like a soup can, and so we can say that's tremendously better, according to Dalí, than a big splatter painting.

**Ruth Candler** 26:45

So Dalí lived a long, prosperous and generally quite amazing life, and much of it was in the public eye. He died in 1989. Have you met anyone who knew him personally?

**Elliott King** 26:57

I have. And I've been fortunate in that respect, because I guess... I discovered Dalí in '98. And so there aren't honestly that many people left anymore who... certainly who were close to Dalí, or who knew him. Um, you know, some people who come to mind, I spent a lot of time in France with Robert Descharnes, who was Dalí's secretary. Secretary is not really the best word for that. Because he was... he was a collaborator. He was a photographer, a business manager in the 1980s, and had a 50-year

relationship with Dalí. And I learned a lot from Robert. And he had wonderful stories about his time with Dalí.

And that's what I just love is when you talk to somebody who knew him, who will talk about things that aren't in the books, you know, they... The art historians will talk about the visuals or the storyline. But when you get memories like, "Oh, I remember when we were at the St. Regis Hotel, and Dalí came down the stairs and there was a... He wanted to... He wanted to walk." This isn't a Descharnes story, but it's the kind of thing that happens, that he wanted to create fried eggs that he would walk down the streets of Manhattan as, like, a poodle. This is actually a story from another person who knew Dalí very, very well, who's Louis Markoya. And he helped Dalí make these fried eggs that... They were like little hovercrafts, and they walked them through New York. And I mean, nobody has pictures of this. I don't think, I mean, they... This isn't something that would even be in the book. But it's interesting. It's interesting to hear somebody remember that.

So Louis has been a wonderful resource for me. He's told me great stories about Dalí that are very personal, and things that I reflect on when I'm trying to understand what he is doing. Robert, I mentioned. Amanda Lear, who was very close to Dalí in the 1960s. I've been able to speak with her a couple times and I interviewed her for my book in 2007, and she's great. And she's a performer who's very... Still pretty big in Europe. But she was very close to Dalí in the 1960s. Joan Vehi, he was probably the last one that I talked to. He just passed away this year. He was Dalí's carpenter, and I met him a couple years ago in Spain. And we talked about the Spanish coastline and things that he had done, his projects with Dalí, and I love that personal aspect. I mean, when you're working on an artist from the modern period, you know, it's hard to find people who might have those connections with somebody who's as famous as Salvador Dalí.

But, you know, there are people around still and they're such valuable resources for stories and just beyond that, just getting to know the artist beyond the paintings that you've seen in the museum — that these are actually people. And it's hard to imagine them as people sometimes but they were.

**Ruth Candler** 29:39

You mentioned a handful of people that you have met that also knew Dalí. Did getting to know his personal acquaintances change your perceptions of him, or help you teach his work?

**Elliott King** 29:53

I don't know if they radically changed the way that I thought about Dalí, but they certainly deepened it. Because it's just very helpful to talk with somebody who had that firsthand experience with Dalí instead of reading about it from somebody else. And, again, stories will come up, or just minor little anecdotes that just really flesh out who he was.

I mean, I spent a lot of time, particularly in graduate school, trying to understand what it was about, and it's a... you can only know so much, right? And you can't really know what his intentions were. You can read about what he said his work would be about, but a lot of it has to be, "Well, how is it received? How is it in context?" You can take that pretty far, but there is a limit to how well you can really know

Dalí. But, um, but I do think that speaking to people did just give me a feeling of Dalí as a person, and I guess that's, for me, valuable.

When I was in Spain a couple years ago, we asked around... We were trying to find Dalí's family house. And there's a museum there that was Dalí's house. And everybody knows where that is because it has giant eggs on top of it. Everyone. Everyone knows where the Dalí house is in Cadaqués, but we were trying to find his father's house and his family house. And people didn't really know when we would ask around. And then we asked somebody, and they're like, "Oh, I think it's over here." And they showed us. They're like, "Do you want to meet the people?" And I was like, "Oh, no, that's okay." And they're like, "No, that's fine, it's fine." And they went and knocked on the door. And this older woman answered, and they explained it like, "Oh, they're trying to find this house," and she's like, "Oh, come on in." And her husband was sitting there in his underwear and T-shirt like wondering why these Americans have just showed up into his house. But this was the Dalí family house. And the woman who had let us in used to be Dalí's sister's housekeeper. So it's Anna Maria's — Anna Maria was his sister — Anna Maria's housekeeper. And she's like, "Oh, so this is the window where Dalí painted Anna Maria. This is the little pond where Dalí would go swimming with Federico Garcia Lorca. And also it was just like, "Wow, this is real," right? I mean, this isn't just a painting or an image of things. You go to Cadaqués and it's the real place, you know, you see ants on the ground, you're like, "Well, they're here."

**Ruth Candler** 32:10

They're really here!

**Elliott King** 32:11

"This is the place!" And so when you actually walk into a place like that house and meet the people who can introduce you to that, all of a sudden, you really have a tangible feeling of... I mean, an artist who I've studied, you know, abstractly, but suddenly it takes much more profound significance.

**Ruth Candler** 32:29

Of course, you not only research Dalí, you also teach about him, and it must be so gratifying to see students begin to understand and get excited about work that excites you. And you also teach a wide variety of other art courses as well. And you co-taught the Spring Term class The Business of Contemporary Art, a course known to have a waitlist. What does this course involve? And why do you think it proved so popular?

**Elliott King** 32:58

Well, the Spring Term course, it was conceived by a business professor, actually, an accounting professor who is no longer at the university. She's gone on to different things. But she imagined the course being a business course that involves an art history component. And so she invited me to be that art history component of, "Okay, well this will be a course about the taxation of art, you know, how is art bought? How is it sold? What are the financial repercussions of having a multimillion-dollar artwork, things like that." And she felt like, you know, maybe it would be helpful if the students had some actual background in art history, as opposed to just looking at these as dollars and cents, right.

And so, um, she invited me to participate and, boy, the first time we taught it I think we had 40 people on the waitlist. It was huge. And the last time we taught it, as well, I taught it with a finance professor most recently, and again, it was... It's a very popular class. What's great about it is that it has both business students and art history students in it. And they both bring their own perspectives to some of these questions and subjects. Because in art history, we don't tend to talk about how much things are worth. That's kind of a nontopic, even though some of these pieces are really valuable. And it's a little bit of the elephant in the room sometimes, when... I mean, if I talk about Jeff Koons, okay, well, what is special about Jeff Koons? Well, we can talk about his work in terms of popular culture, the way that he maybe is in a legacy of Marcel Duchamp of taking everyday items and making them into artworks. But a big part of Jeff Koons's reputation is the fact that he fairly recently had a sculpture sell for \$91 million at Christie's.

**Ruth Candler** 34:48

\$91 million.

**Elliott King** 34:49

\$91.1 million. He is the most expensive living artist. He's 65. He can make one of those again. It's not like he's an artist who's passed away, and then their production is limited. And people hear these things, they see the headlines of the pieces that sell at Christie's and Sotheby's and Philips and different auction houses, and the prices the Basquiats are going, and different artists. And like, who's buying this? And why are they buying it? And I mean, that's an insane amount of money. I started doing the calculations, thinking like, how much actually is \$91.1 million? That's a lot of money!

**Ruth Candler** 34:58

It's a lot of money, yeah.

**Elliott King** 35:22

It's a lot of money. And... But somebody bought a metal rabbit for that price. And those are the kinds of things that students are actually really going kind of curious about, like, so who are these people? You know, are they collectors? Why do— I mean, obviously, they're collectors. But why do they buy them? What are some of their motivations? What do they do with them, then? Do they keep them in their house and just show them to people? Do they put them into museum collections? Do they lend them to exhibitions? Does this impact cultural institutions more generally? Are museums more likely to show certain artists because the public knows that their work is more valuable, but maybe that's at the expense of, say, marginalized voices? Women, artists of color who may be less popular, but maybe don't bring the admission tickets in?

You know, there are actually a lot of repercussions for the market and the economics behind art purchasing. And so that's really what the class is about. I think that the business students are interested in, "Well, gosh, why are people investing in art?" Because normally, art is not a good investment. So why are people looking at it as an investment? And, you know, what could I know about this as a field. Art historians are like, "What in the world is this whole money thing about?" when they haven't really talked much about it in their art history classes. So I think it adds something on both sides.

The class itself, as I've taught it, has a wonderful field trip that goes to New York. We try to rope in both Philadelphia and New York. But we visit galleries, we have some alumni now who are at auction houses, who are at art fairs, who, you know, some of them have done this course. And now they're in the art world in New York. And so what a great connection for students who are interested, like, "How do I get jobs in galleries? How can I learn more about the museum world?" to actually have alumni with whom they can connect. And so, um, so when we go up there, we try to have a little reception so that they can meet other W&L folks who are interested in art, interested in business, meet some collectors who have been very generous with letting us into their homes to see pieces that they have. We have alumni and friends of the university who have phenomenal world-class collections. And they've been very generous of letting the students come in, ask questions, see some of those pieces. And again, what a great opportunity to not just go to the Met, as wonderful as that is, and see these things, but actually, like, so, ask a collector, "So what do you like about this piece?" You know, "Why did you decide to buy this? What was the story behind this? What were the dealers that you worked with?" You know, "Did you have to negotiate something?" Like real questions for people.

And so that's been a really great class, it's... I've learned a lot. Each time I teach it, you know, we meet some of the same people. But some, you know, of course change, and their perspectives on that are really interesting. It'll be interesting when I teach it again, because the pandemic has had a huge impact on the art market. And so a lot of the things that used to be true about the art market actually are no longer true. So the importance of certain art fairs — a lot of the art fairs have been canceled now. So we don't have those art fairs that are just part of the storyline of how things are bought and sold. Who's doing the buying, why they're doing the buying, how museums are navigating — a lot of the museums have been closed. You know, a lot of exhibitions have been pushed down. Lots of staff members at... MoMA was forced to let go most of its education department, I think all of their education department for MoMA. Yeah. So I mean, the museums are really struggling right now. And you think about how many people are employed by that. I mean, art is a multibillion-dollar industry. And a lot of people are connected to that. And so it's... it seems like maybe kind of a superficial thing, like, "Oh, people are just buying paintings." But so many people are involved in that in one way or another. And as I say, when we think about what The Business of Contemporary Art... I'll teach that again in two years, and I have no idea what that class will look like in two years. If I taught it now, it would look really different.

One other thing about The Business of Contemporary Art class that is very important is that one of the assignments that we've had is a museum pitch. And so we have the Museums at W&L, which actively collect artworks, and we had a... an alumnus, John Poynter, who was very generous with the university, and he and his wife, Nancy, purchased a number of pieces, particularly hard-edge abstraction pieces that are now part of the university's collection. And Dr. Poynter loved this class of The Business of Contemporary Art. And when we first set it up, he was amenable to hearing the students' recommendations for artworks that he would consider purchasing for W&L's collection.

And so this became an assignment where the students would go out and contact galleries in New York, think about — working with Museums at W&L — what artists are needed in our collection. So maybe women artists, artists of color, artworks that could be useful didactically. So not just because they're expensive or interesting, but the pieces we can really use. That was the push of it was that, you know,

what are some things we could really use at W&L, and the students would look for artworks and do presentations and send this off to Dr. Poynter. And he took it in advisement.

He, you know, he was very independent in terms of the way that he bought things. But he was really interested in what the students liked. And he might say, well... The first year I taught it, the students wanted a Gene Davis painting. You know, Gene Davis was part of the Washington, D.C., Color School. And they found a Gene Davis painting and, you know, I sent this off, this packet of presentations off to Dr. Poynter and his wife. And, you know, a couple months went by, and I didn't really know what happened. And then he emailed me and said, "So I found some different Gene Davises. Which one do you think the university would like?" And, I mean, these are not inexpensive artworks by any measure. But we have a Gene Davis now in Wilson Hall, because of Dr. Poynter and because of this class. And a number of artworks have entered the collection through that fund.

Dr. Poynter very sadly passed away recently. His wife, Nancy, is continuing this tradition. And so there is a Poynter Fund that when we teach this class will be there for purchasing artworks. And so the students do have a say, in the direction and the way that our university collection is building.

**Ruth Candler** 42:14

What an experience for the students.

**Elliott King** 42:16

It's really great. And one of the really important things about it is that it's real. Because if I just told the students, "Okay, imagine you have X number of thousands of dollars to purchase an artwork..." You know, then it's like, "Well, I don't know, maybe I'll buy this Picasso." I don't know but they... It's kind of, it's... it's an invention. But when you say, like, "Okay, so here is this amount," you know, "We have a budget, what would you really do?" And you need to go out there, you need to contact galleries, and try to find... You're like, "What are the..." because we might buy it. You know, it's... And the galleries will take you much more seriously. If you call them and say, like, "Hi, I'm a student working on this," like, is there anything in it for them? But if you say, like, "My university is actively acquiring, and we're doing an assignment that..." you know, "We're going to be presenting an acquisition pitch..." Our students were able to go into the back rooms of galleries in Chelsea and look at some of the pieces, and talk with the dealers. I mean, it was real, and, again, that's such a great personal experience. So that's... I think that's why the class is popular. That's why. They get real-world experience from them.

**Ruth Candler** 43:28

So important. All right, so I have to go back and ask: What happened to that piece of art? Do you know? The \$91 million piece of art?

**Elliott King** 43:39

Oh, who bought it and all that? I don't know who bought it. Um, we got to see it. Yeah, we took the girls to New York and we went to Christie's because it's fun. Usually you can go into auction houses. So, you know, Christie's and Sotheby's, you don't have to be, like, a buyer. I mean, they have the pieces on view. It's like... it's like the best museum in the world, because if they're having a sale, you can just go and look at things.

**Ruth Candler** 44:04

Do you need a ticket or anything?

**Elliott King** 44:05

No, not to go look.

**Ruth Candler** 44:06

So you just go walk through the door.

**Elliott King** 44:08

Usually. Usually you just walk through the door. And then you just walk around, and the great thing about the auction houses is that a lot of these pieces are going to go into private collections. So you may never see them again. This is maybe the one moment where they've surfaced. You get to see the piece and then it goes back into private collection and it's gone.

So it's a funny thing to go in there, because it... I think it's most intimidating to walk through the door. But once you're in, it's just like walking through a gallery, walking through a museum. People are just looking at things. If you are serious about a work, you know, it... They will... They'll even sometimes take it off the wall for you. Like, people will come in and, like, take the painting right off the wall, you know, let you look at the back, because people... If you're buying a Monet, you want to see what the whole thing looks like. You know, not every... They can tell if some random person is coming in and just like, "I want to see that Monet," but, um, but they will let you look at the, kind of, piece, you know, if you think you might want to actually purchase it. So it's a place to go shopping, actually. It's beautiful works, but it's also a place that people shop.

**Ruth Candler** 45:15

I have to say that I love the title of your current class Women, Art and Empowerment. Why do we need a class to talk specifically about women in art? Wouldn't they be included in a normal survey of art history class?

**Elliott King** 45:29

Well, you would like to hope so. But unfortunately, it's not really the case. And that's a developing struggle within the discipline of art history and something that I and my colleagues are really invested in working on with our curriculum.

Um, we actually were very fortunate this week, in fact, that the Guerrilla Girls, the artists' collective, came and gave a presentation to the student body, what's it... two nights ago. And then yesterday, Frida Kahlo from the Guerrilla Girls actually Skype... Zoomed into my women's empowerment seminar. And so they... The students are able to speak with one of the Guerrilla Girls about some of these issues. And I actually raised this question, you know, is it a problem to have a class on women in art? Does that marginalize women inappropriately? Because it's something that I think about, you know, should we have a class that specifically is about this subject? And she said, "Well, as long as they're not in the story, you need to do that."

And they're not in the story. And it's, frankly, very weird that in art history, they haven't been in the story. To give just a few examples of what that situation actually looks like, it wasn't as though women artists were not there. I mean, women have created art literally since antiquity. And for a long time, they were acknowledged as artists. Even Vasari, writing in the 16th century, acknowledged a handful of women artists when he was writing about artists who were working in Renaissance Italy. One of the first art history textbooks was by a woman, Helen Gardner, in 1926. And she included women like Georgia O'Keeffe. She included some women artists, not a ton, but some. And then a strange thing happens right in the 1960s. In 1962, H. W. Janson publishes a textbook on the history of art that becomes the textbook for art history classes for the next 30 years. I mean, Janson's art history is still in print. And there are about 300 illustrations in that first edition of Janson's art history. And he cut all the women.

**Ruth Candler** 47:42

All the women?

**Elliott King** 47:43

There are zero women in the first edition of Janson's art history. Gombrich wrote a... published an art history textbook round about the same time. Also zero women.

So it's right around 1960 the women are just taken out. And it's shocking. When you start actually looking and you're like, you know, "Well, gosh, why aren't we talking about more women artists?" And these different arguments, which are very valid, have come up of like, well, what opportunities do they have, you know, maybe traditionally, do they have access to the academies in the same way? And those are all very true concerns. Were they able to study from the nude? This is... An art historian named Linda Nochlin talks about that, that women in the academies were disadvantaged because in the 19th century, they couldn't study from a nude form because of social constructions. And so that's an absolutely legitimate thing. But within the discipline, there were books about women artists that stopped getting published in the middle of the 20th century.

And so for the last 50 years, all of these women, some of whom were really big. Sofonisba Anguissola was a court painter. I mean, she was like Titian, in a lot of ways. But you know, you're much more likely to hear about Titian than Anguissola. You're much more likely to hear about Courbet than Rosa Bonheur, but Rosa Bonheur won major prizes at the Paris Salon. And so it's just a... it's a question of who art history has focused on, and why.

And so this class, Women, Art, and Empowerment, looks at some of these artists, and particularly how they represent the female body. Because I was trying to make it not just about women and artists. I wanted to do kind of a slant. And I thought that images of how women depict women was maybe an interesting way of thinking about it a little bit more with a spin than just saying, "Well, here are some different women artists," you know, "Aren't they great? Isn't it disappointing that they haven't been there?" It's more like, "Well, what are they doing? Perhaps it's different from what their male counterparts were doing at the same time."

**Ruth Candler** 47:59

Is there a difference?

**Elliott King** 49:49

Sometimes. I mean, it's... It raises interesting questions a lot of the time. I mean, it's one of my favorite classes to teach because I learn so much about it. I take a lot of my own art history education for granted. I went through the path of European modern art. That's what I learned and what I have my Ph.D. in. And I learned about a lot of male artists. And truthfully, I really hadn't thought a lot about that disparity so much.

But teaching this class I realized, like, gosh, well, who do I teach? I looked at my own final exam for the Intro to Art History class. And when I first started teaching the class, about 3% of the artists on my final exam were women. And I was like, gosh, that's... that's bad. That... I... that's on me, too. That's not just like art history as a discipline, that's like, I've made a subconscious choice of what narrative I've decided to tell. And so now I'm up to about 15%, which isn't great. But, you know, it's cognizant, and I think that that's the big difference. That's why there's a class about this, is that it's upon us to think about who are we teaching, who are we not teaching and what impression of the discipline is being encouraged by them?

**Ruth Candler** 51:07

Elliott, you've curated and assisted with a number of exhibitions around the world, which sounds so interesting. In 2010, you guest-curated an exhibit, "Dalí: the Late Work," at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, that drew over 260,000 visitors. The New York Times called it a "terrific, even shattering" show. Your 2013 exhibition, "Frida and Diego: Passion, Politics and Painting," also at the High Museum, had nearly 354,000 visitors. What does it mean when one curates an art exhibition? And how does one go from teaching to curating?

**Elliott King** 51:44

So, normally, curating is done in-house within a museum, and we're speaking here about large exhibitions at museums like the High Museum. The opportunity that I had was as a guest curator, and so they brought me in as a specialist in these subjects related to Salvador Dalí, Frida Kahlo, I've done another show, recently, on René Magritte.

So because of my surrealism expertise, the museum asked me to be the scholarly voice for putting these kinds of shows together. They begin really with an idea and an argument. So it's not so different from writing a paper or presenting a class, because you're trying to teach something. I think that the best exhibitions have an argument to them. And so you're trying to tell something, you're trying to tell a story, you're trying to make a case for something, and maybe not every visitor who goes through gets that. But that's the... That's one level where the exhibition is working. So what the curator does, in my experience, is come up with the theme of the show.

So with "Dalí: the Late Work," it was actually based on my dissertation and my study of postwar Salvador Dalí, and the arguments that I've made around that. So I had a lot of material behind me in terms of what I'd like to present. And then you have to figure out, well, what are the pieces that you'd really like to have. So that's your wish list. And you construct letters that are sent out under the label of

the museum to private collections, other museums, etc., to ask to borrow those artworks. And it's not at all an easy thing to convince people to lend you their artwork when it's a multimillion-dollar piece, and particularly when that's a very famous artist, because sometimes if you're borrowing, let's say, a Frida Kahlo from a museum, and they only have one Frida Kahlo, and it's a tourist attraction in itself, so they don't really want to lend it to somebody else, because people will come to their museum and wish that the Frida were on display.

So you have to do a lot of negotiation, and you have to convince them that this is a worthy thing for them to lend their painting towards, that you're doing something for the scholarship, you're doing something for the subject that's going to matter. About 50% to 60% of the loan requests are turned down. So often, you're unsuccessful. But then you get things that you're kind of surprised, sometimes, you get. You kind of shoot for the stars, sometimes you get some really wonderful pieces. And so you request the pieces.

Once you find out what your actual checklist is, then you think, well, what are... how are these going to work in terms of the space, you know, what are the arguments that I'm going to make, what kinds of juxtapositions am I going to make? You'll work with designers for the wall color, lighting, what kind of wall texts are going to be on the... next to the artworks but also in the room, so that people who are reading these wall texts, they can get a sense of the story you're trying to tell, so you write those. It's really a full-time job.

And then once all of that is installed, then it goes into the marketing of the piece and, you know, speaking with the press, going around and talking with newspapers, radio, television, etc., to promote the exhibition. There are a lot of pieces involved. These exhibitions are really challenging to pull off. But it's so wonderful to be in an exhibition that you've curated and see people walking through it and talking about the pieces and actually seeing the real thing. I mean, you've seen the images on a PowerPoint, but to actually have the actual painting or sculpture show up, and it's like, "Well, here it is, right on the wall, and this is a thing that we've put together," is just a super rewarding experience.

**Ruth Candler** 55:31

I bet. So once it's done, do you take time to stand in that space alone or reflect upon it?

**Elliott King** 55:37

I do. I mean, I'll certainly spend time in the space alone. But I... What I love to do is spend time in the space with other people. I love to just walk through and hear what other people are saying as they walk through.

And, you know, I'm 6-foot-4 with bright glasses. And so I'm not the most inconspicuous of people, if people know what I look like. But, um, if I can at all go unnoticed, I love to hear how are people responding to things and you know, and telling stories, like, "Oh, I didn't know that Dalí was kicked out of surrealism in 1939." And there's, I mean, you hear that and you're like, "Wow, they learned something." And that's great. And people of all ages too. I love seeing kids go through these exhibitions, and, you know, talk to their parents about some of these artworks. It's so neat to see that happening. And then years later I've had students, particularly from Atlanta, who are like, "Oh, I saw

that Frida Kahlo show." For students at W&L it was like, "Oh, I remember that Salvador Dalí show." And I mean, that's 10 years ago now, but they still remember it. And that's very rewarding.

**Ruth Candler** 56:36

When you think about the practice of curating art exhibits, how does that inform your teaching?

**Elliott King** 56:42

Well, certainly, you know, what the actual object looks like, which is maybe something you take for granted, but people often wonder, or maybe they don't even think, "How big is this?" Sometimes when you're showing an artwork on the screen it's like, "So how big is this, actually?" Because that's making a really huge difference if it's a painting that's only 8 1/2 by 11, or a painting that's 17 feet long. That makes a huge difference. But they're all the same size on the screen.

**Ruth Candler** 57:07

I never thought about that before.

**Elliott King** 57:09

Yeah. And so if somebody asked me, like, "So how big is that actual painting?" and you're like, "Well, it's about..." and to actually just be able to picture it. Right? Like, "Oh, I've seen it," or I actually can imagine what it looks like. And I'm like, "I've never really thought about it before." So that tangible awareness of the work, I think, is really important.

And I think that, you know, again, it's not so different from teaching in a lot of ways because you're making arguments. You are... you're doing research, you're doing teaching, you're reaching a much broader public than a lot of academic publications might. I mean, as you said, we had 260,000 people go to "Dalí: the Late Work." And I don't know how many people bought my first Dalí and cinema book, but I have like five copies myself. And so I'm pretty sure it's not 260,000. I know that I'm just reaching a lot more people, and it has a lot more of an effect. And again, that's really exciting for me.

**Ruth Candler** 57:28

Have you been able to see or touch any of your favorite pieces of art during this process?

**Elliott King** 58:08

It's really not a good idea to touch them.

**Ruth Candler** 58:11

Figuratively.

**Elliott King** 58:14

It's funny because a lot of... I've known people who really like to touch artworks. And I'll just say for our podcast audience: don't do that. It's a really bad idea. If you're like, "Oh, I went in and I touched the Van Gogh," it's like, "No! Don't do that!"

**Ruth Candler** 58:29

If everybody touches it, then it won't be there for long.

**Elliott King** 58:32

Yeah, exactly, the oils on your skin are really bad. Um, and so yes, I have not touched them. In fact, I remember installing the Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera show and one of the owners of one of the Frida pieces wanted to... I suggested moving the piece to a different wall. And he said, "Well, should we move it?" I was like, "Well, I'm not going to move it. You have... We have art handlers who do that." And he was like, "Oh, well, I'll move it." And he just took it right off the wall and carried it across. And it's his painting, so he can do that, but there's no way I'm going to carry around a Frida Kahlo. There's... That's crazy.

I have seen some paintings that I was so excited to see. There's a 1952 religious painting by Dalí called "Assumpta Corpuscularia Lapislazulina." It's a long title. Yep. It had been lost since the 1950s. And it ended up being in a private collection in Spain, and through an auction house we were actually able to get it for my Dalí show in Atlanta. And so that painting hadn't shown for like 50 years. And I'd only ever seen pictures of it in black and white. And so when that actually came, that was really exciting. Because it's a painting I knew really well. I'd written about it. But I never actually saw it in color. And so when you have some of these Dalís that are really marginal, that haven't shown and you only know a little bit... That one really stands out because that one, when it came out, just blew me away.

**Ruth Candler** 59:52

Do you have a favorite?

**Elliott King** 59:53

It changes. It changes. I used to love the assumption painting, actually. And I still do. I'm really focused right now on "The Persistence of Memory," because that's sort of my current research project. And I... It's hard to say that that's my favorite Dalí painting, because it's the cliché Dalí painting in so many ways. But I feel like I've learned a lot about it. And I've been really invested in researching different angles about it. And so right now it's sort of my research focus on things. So it hops around, I have to say, but I haven't gotten tired of Dalí, so that's good.

**Ruth Candler** 1:00:27

That's good news. Before we wrap up, I'd like to ask you about your life when you're not on campus or curating an exhibit. Just some real quick questions. You and Emily have the most adorable twin girls, and during this period of the virus and social distancing, I've missed having them come into our office.

**Elliott King** 1:00:44

They've missed you too.

**Ruth Candler** 1:00:44

Aww. What do the four of you like to do for fun?

**Elliott King** 1:00:49

Well, of course, we're at home a lot of the time these days. Um, the girls have recently gotten really into butterfly collecting, which for me is really exciting because I used to collect butterflies when I was little. And they catch them and let them go. But it's so neat for me to see their excitement at catching some of the beautiful butterflies we have in Virginia. And we have routinely big swallowtails and monarchs and things which are very different from the butterflies I grew up with in Colorado. And so I love seeing that excitement. And that's... I'm getting a lot of reward out of that right now, actually. They really like helping with cooking, which makes things take a lot longer, but they really enjoy that, which is very sweet and yeah, we're just really trying to kind of get through things but spend more time and valuable time together.

**Ruth Candler** 1:01:35

That's been the silver lining of the pandemic, I think.

**Elliott King** 1:01:38

Exactly. It was nice that I was able to spend a lot of time... I was on a one-year sabbatical, very gratefully, last year. And that was a big blessing was being able to spend more time with the girls. Because usually I'm at work, of course. So yeah, that's been wonderful.

**Ruth Candler** 1:01:52

What's the best trip you've ever taken and why?

**Elliott King** 1:01:56

I have taken a lot of trips. I realized that before the pandemic hit. Last year, I took about 22 trips.

**Ruth Candler** 1:02:04

Wow.

**Elliott King** 1:02:05

I don't always travel this much, but I do travel a lot. And I used to... Well, I did my graduate school in England. And so I used to travel a lot then too. And I'm not saying this just because of the Traveller program, but I loved our trip to Egypt last year. We... Emily and I accompanied a trip to Egypt last November. And I had always wanted to go to Egypt since I was little. And I really just didn't think that was a dream that would be realized. And that was just a wonderful trip. One because I just, again, didn't imagine how it would ever be feasible. But it was just wonderful. The hotels were excellent. We were with a group of W&L alumni and friends who were just great travel companions. And the organization by our folks on the ground there... They took us to the monuments when there were fewer crowds. And so you'd walk through temples that were empty. It was amazing. And then five minutes later, a huge group of a hundred people would show up as we were leaving.

So everything was just so precisely timed, like you really couldn't have planned it better. And so that was just a wonderful trip. I... That's something that we're definitely gonna savor for a very long time. And I came back and did an online degree in Egyptology, because I was wanting to know more about Egypt. I was so excited about this. And so I got a degree, I did an online class in Egyptology, because I

wanted to know more about Egyptian gods. Actually, I think our girls are going to go as Egyptian gods for Halloween this year.

**Ruth Candler** 1:03:35

Ah!

**Elliott King** 1:03:36

And so they know a lot about Egyptian deities. So, yeah, it's spread through the family.

**Ruth Candler** 1:03:41

All right. So I didn't know that you were going to answer with Egypt. But Egypt has been a lifelong interest of yours. And I'm going to have to put you on the spot and ask you to share what your nickname was growing up.

**Elliott King** 1:03:54

Oh, la la. So I was born in 1977. And the Treasures of Tutankhamun show was circulating around the world. And so when I was born, as I understand the story, on my bassinet at the hospital, it said boy King, because my last name is King, and so the boy King or girl Candler, whatever it might be. And so because it was boy King, my grandmother said, "Oh, it's like King Tut, we should call him Tut." And so up until sort of elementary school, I went as Tut King. And so, yeah, there's a really... and then consequently, Egypt was like all over my childhood. I mean, we... I think it's actually probably my first introduction to art history, truthfully, because I learned about all of these artifacts. I saw all of these drawings and paintings and things. Yeah, there was a lot of Egypt growing up.

**Ruth Candler** 1:04:44

Thank you for being a good sport.

**Elliott King** 1:04:45

Sure, sure. Only people who've known me a really long time call me that.

**Ruth Candler** 1:04:50

I promise never to call you but I...

**Elliott King** 1:04:52

No, that's fine. There are people out there but they're fewer and fewer.

**Ruth Candler** 1:04:56

So we ask this of most of our guests. What's your favorite restaurant in Lexington, and what's your go-to order?

**Elliott King** 1:05:04

Um, I really like the Southern Inn. I think, go-to order... everything is better after a Sin Manhattan. But I like their fried chicken a lot. Yeah, that's probably my go-to order at Southern Inn.

**Ruth Candler** 1:05:17

I was gonna say fried chicken or meatloaf, because that seems to be the two.

**Elliott King** 1:05:21

Yeah, I'm a big... There is a lot of great restaurants in town, but I do particularly like the Southern Inn.

**Ruth Candler** 1:05:26

So imagine that you and Dalí are out for a drink. What would you order? And what do you think he would order?

**Elliott King** 1:05:33

So Dalí didn't drink. So he would have ordered a Catalan Vichy water, like a bottled water. That's what he tended to order, or he might have gotten a hot water. He had a little jar of honey that he would pour into the hot water. Alice Cooper tells the story of seeing Dalí, like, pour this honey. And then he pulled out a pair of scissors and cut the string of honey as it was going through, and Alice Cooper was like, "This guy's weird." When you get that reaction from Alice Cooper, you know that it's weird.

**Ruth Candler** 1:06:02

Yeah!

**Elliott King** 1:06:02

So he would have had hot water or Vichy Catalan water, I reckon. I would probably have some Castillo Perelada pink cava, because that's the kind of cava that he would serve to guests at Portlligat, where he lived. So it's kind of a pink champagne. One thing I'll just add very quickly, which is very funny, is that when I first moved to Lexington, the house cava at the Southern Inn was Castillo Perelada. And that is so weird, because it's not at all a well-known brand. It's a Catalan cava. But I got here and it's like, "This is the same brand of champagne that Dalí used to serve." And so I feel like that must be a sign of something.

**Ruth Candler** 1:06:42

You were meant to be here.

**Elliott King** 1:06:43

That's a sign of something, I tell you.

**Ruth Candler** 1:06:44

So what would you ask him?

**Elliott King** 1:06:47

You know, I would honestly ask him, probably, about politics, because Dalí's politics are really wrought. And it's something that has been a major issue for his reputation. Because after he goes back to Spain in 1947, he is very close with the Franco government. And a lot of the... I talked about his stance against modern art. But, you know, a major, major issue was that he was complacent to a Franco

dictatorship. In fact, he sort of sided up to it. And he tried to become an official court painter to Franco. I mean, which is shocking, for, you know, modern artists to do something like that.

And so I've always felt like it wasn't really genuine, like, I've always felt that it was sort of self-serving, which doesn't make it better, necessarily, but I think that it's very easy for people to say like, "Oh, well, Dalí was a fascist." That's an argument that comes up a lot. And I honestly don't think that's true. I think that he was very self-serving. I don't think he cared that much, which is, again, its own problem, but — and it's a real position of privilege that he could exist in Spain and paint what he wanted without being harassed — but that's kind of where he was at that time.

So I'd like to know more about, like, what's going on? Like, why are you doing this? Why are you saying these things? Are you just saying these things on the radio to get people upset, you know, does it actually help you within Spain, to have this connection? Which in some ways it did at the time. But it's something that I've struggled with for years and years, and I don't think I'll ever have an answer because it gets into those intentions that we'll never really know.

**Ruth Candler** 1:08:28

Last, but not least, for all your former students out there who are wondering and may not have had the courage to ask you: Where do you get your eyeglasses?

**Elliott King** 1:08:37

Oh, good. I was worried about where that question could go. Um, my eyeglasses... So I do have a collection of eyeglasses that I've had for a number of years. The ones that I'm wearing now are black square frames. I've had these since, actually, 2004. So I've had them a long time.

I got these in Venice at the Dalí centenary exhibition. So there's a little shop called Ottica Urbani off the Piazza San Marco. And I really liked their big square frames. And so I ordered several pairs over the years from this little shop in Venice. When I was in Rome a few years ago, I was walking by the Colosseum and I saw another pair of glasses in the window that I really liked. And so basically when I'm traveling around, I really like walking by optical shops and seeing if there's anything... and then I bring them back and I give them to Dr. Helen Fure. That's my plug. I give them to Dr. Helen Fure, who very kindly puts my lenses into them. And yeah, so I end up with quite a collection of extravagant frames.

**Ruth Candler** 1:09:42

I have to say, that's the first time I've ever heard of an optical shop being also a souvenir shop, so...

**Elliott King** 1:09:48

Oh, yeah. They make great souvenirs, actually.

**Ruth Candler** 1:09:51

Oh, Elliott, this has been so much fun and among the leaf blowers and chainsaws and dogs barking, it's, uh...

**Elliott King** 1:09:59

You can tell we're at a safe distance because there's a lot going on around here. Thank you for your patience. I appreciate it.

**Ruth Candler** 1:10:05

And thank you as always to you for listening. We hope you've discovered something new. To read more about today's podcast and check out other ways to continue your lifelong learning with W&L, you can head to our website, [wlu.edu/lifelong](http://wlu.edu/lifelong). You'll also find W&L's faculty reading list, "Sheltering in Place with a Few Good Books," and information on how to join our new W&L book club. We hope you'll join us back here soon. Thanks again, and until then let's remain together not unmindful of the future.