



Art Conservation *and iconic animation*

Tom and Jerry, the sly grey house cat and the clever brown mouse, first appeared in 1940 in a one-reel film short created by William Hanna and Joseph Barbara for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM). The iconic cartoon characters are perpetual adversaries, with Jerry invariably getting the upper hand. The cartoons won seven Academy awards and can still be found on the internet.

This year, a single matted set of animation cels (short for celluloid) created in 1950 for a 1951 *Tom and Jerry* cartoon called “Casanova Cat” became a treatment project for WUDPAC Fellow Daniella Briceño Villamil, an objects major with a special interest in time-based media and contemporary collections. The cel set depicts Tom setting out to woo Toodles, a new kitty in town who has inherited \$1 million. He is taking her two gifts: flowers and Jerry, who is on a leash with a bow around his neck.

The cel set Daniella is treating contains four parts: two transparent plastic sheets—one per character—outlined on the front and painted on the back; a watercolor scene painted for the background, and a window mat that frames the entire set. The mat carries an inscription and signature noting that this and one other *Tom and Jerry* cel set were given to “Sheila and Patty” in the late 1950s by Fred Quimby (1886-1965), a retired MGM animation producer then working for the *Associated Press*, where the sisters met him while visiting their aunt at work.

Daniella plans to stabilize all components of the set and restore its aesthetic integrity. Some issues, such as undulations in the window mat and the watercolor background and color variations in the paints of the plastic sheets, are related to age. A large purple mold stain on the background and rust marks around the edges are the result of past water damage. Through scientific analysis, Daniella will determine if the plastic sheets are cellulose acetate or cellulose nitrate and identify their paint medium so that she can devise a tailored strategy to carefully clean the components and adhere the flaking paint. Daniella will also reduce distortion in the paper items and attempt to remove or reduce the purple mold stain on the watercolor background.

When her treatment is complete, Daniella will return the cel set to the owner, Sheila of the inscription. She is proposing to create a clean facsimile of the current mold-stained watercolor background, expanding a conservation solution into the digital realm.



ARTC Spotlight—January 2023

The University of Delaware’s Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators who are well versed in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifact and archive collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top: A close-up view of Winterthur/ University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Daniella Briceño Villamil dry cleaning around the inscription with a cosmetic sponge. Above: Daniella using micro-tools to remove the tape carriers from the verso of the watercolor background. Right: Daniella working with the animation cels for Tom the cat (right) and Jerry the mouse (left). (Images: E. Krape for UD.)