

## **The Exploration and Digitization of the Molinari Medals Collection**

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I worked on a project digitizing the Bowdoin Museum of Art collection of renaissance (to 19<sup>th</sup> century) portrait medals donated by the Molinari family in 1966-1967. Numbering over 1500 objects, it is considered one of the major public collections of portrait medals in the country. We worked to make the collection available online and more accessible to the public and future scholars. I transferred all the information available from our 1976 catalogue by Andrea Norris and Ingrid Weber into a centralized spreadsheet in order to upload it to the Bowdoin Museum of Art online database, with the intention of updating new scholarship in the future. I and my research partner Amber Orosco '19, also looked in detail at the medals in the collection itself.

Our research included taking an overview of the breadth of the medal collections. I focused on the history of the origin of portrait medals, how they were inspired by the humanist passion of collecting ancient Roman coins and admiration for the portraiture on these coins. This study of coins subsequently led to creation of portrait medals in 1438 as an attempt to revive the traditions of antiquity. I next researched the numerous medals of the Medici family and how the Medici issuance and collection of medals throughout history sheds light on the family history.

Our research gave us much opportunity to study and handle the medals in person at the Museum of Art storage room. This allowed us to experience the intended tactile experience medalists desired of holders and also analyze the technical details of the specific medals- assessing wear, surface alterations, die state or cast stage, metallic content and other qualifiers to help understand the history of these specific medals and gain insight into the purpose of these medals. For example, medals with extensive wear in certain patterns can give clues into whether the medal has been handled as a pocket piece (wear globally including the edges) or carefully stored in trays by a collector (evidenced by subtle signs of friction on the highest points).

We also traveled to New York with our museum co-director Anne Goodyear to visit the Frick Collection and the American Numismatic Society. At the Frick, we visited the medal exhibit "The Pursuit of Immortality" and met with curator Aimee Ng who shared her experience designing the exhibit. We also met Dr. Stephen K. Scher, one of the foremost experts on portrait medals today. At the American Numismatic Society we met with curator Dr. Peter van Alfen and learned about digitization projects ongoing at the ANS which placed the Bowdoin Museum of Art's digitization project in a broader context.

My research enhanced my understanding of portrait medals and the significant Molinari collection at Bowdoin. I will continue this project during the coming school year, with the aim of culminating in a student-curated exhibit next year.

**Faculty Mentor: Susan Wegner**

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References: <http://community.bowdoin.edu/news/2017/01/celebrating-bowdoins-molinari-medals-and-plaquettes/>

<http://community.bowdoin.edu/news/2017/07/researching-the-molinari-collection-ben-wu-18-and-amber-orosco-19/>