

# Ep.98: SWPACA 2023

[00:00:00] **Dan Dissinger:** Hey everyone. Dan here at the Southwest Popular Culture Conference, and I'm here with. Ralph Sanders and I'm standing in front of some amazing art. Um, you'll see it on the website. I'm just gonna post a photograph, but, um, it just took me by surprise. So Ralph, please Yeah. Tell uh, the audience a little bit about yourself and what you're doing here and your work, a little bit about your work.

[00:00:21] **Dan Dissinger:** Sure.

[00:00:22] **Ralph Sanders:** Uh, my name is Ralph Sanders and I live here in Albuquerque. And, uh, I'm a member of the Society of Illustrators out of New York City, and I have a. Bachelor of Fine Arts from Texas Tech and Master of Fine Arts from East Tennessee State. Um, me and my wife live here in, in Albuquerque, last about a year and a half, and I was in California, Santa Cruz for last 12 before that, in Santa Fe.

[00:00:44] **Ralph Sanders:** Before that, I am working on a series of posters towards the Roswell. It's been crazy Crash Fest that they have each year. There's two events this year, one with the, uh, history Channel people in March another, the regular [00:01:00] fest, uh, anniversary fest again in um, July. So I'm having a lot of fun. I'm doing, uh, evil robots and flying saucers and the time before the crash and my concept of what aliens look like.

[00:01:16] **Dan Dissinger:** Yeah. So why don't you talk a little bit about the style because it's so, I've never seen anything like this before. I mean,

[00:01:23] **Ralph Sanders:** the illustration technique I work in is called scratch board, and that is a Masonite board that's covered in a white clay and then a black ink, and then you scratch away to expose the white creating the image.

[00:01:34] **Ralph Sanders:** It's kind of like a reverse drawing. Uh, it, it, it's a technique goes back to early turn of the century, newspaper illustrations, uh, before duotone and, uh, a photo of printing. Yeah. So, so it looks very bold and, and so it reproduces very

[00:01:51] **Dan Dissinger:** well. Yeah. It reminds me of some like, uh, Uh, some of like the, uh, band posters from like, almost like in the sixties and

[00:01:58] **Ralph Sanders:** seventies, like that stuff.

[00:01:59] **Ralph Sanders:** Yeah. Yes. The [00:02:00] earliest stuff. Yes. No, that I'm work, I work toward, I'm influenced by rock posters. I will say that.

[00:02:05] **Dan Dissinger:** Yeah, absolutely. What did it about you think, the, the imagery, the Roswell, like mystique and the robots and everything that kind of drew you into this? Well, I think

[00:02:15] **Ralph Sanders:** the, the Roswell event grounds it in an historical fact, in a place and a time, and I, I like that since.

[00:02:22] **Ralph Sanders:** You know, HG Wells established the War of the Worlds, and that was the kind of the first invasion of basically flying saucers or Mars taking over the earth. And, uh, uh, the Roswell event is, is created as a, as a specific event and a real, real act. So, so that sort of changes the whole context, not just the fantasy of it, that it actually happened, I think.

[00:02:49] **Ralph Sanders:** Oh,

[00:02:49] **Dan Dissinger:** excellent. Wow. And I guess like my other question is like, where do you see, well, what's next for you? I mean, I, I mean, I see this art, do you have other projects

[00:02:58] **Ralph Sanders:** that you feel like that you work [00:03:00] on right now? I, I did a graphic novel before I started this about seven years ago. I did Pilgrim's Progress by, by, uh, John Bunyan, uh, and got good, good.

[00:03:09] **Ralph Sanders:** Response to it through several academic conferences in Europe. So, uh, to be here at this academic conference on popular culture is great fun. An intelligent crowd well-read. And, um, uh, now to me, I've been doing Comic-Con over the last several years. Oh, wow. And, uh, the, the response from. As I increase with the UFO style and, and, and imagery gets better and better each year could be, I think because of the, like the movie.

[00:03:37] **Ralph Sanders:** Nope. And, uh, and, and all the, uh, star Wars stuff, every, everything feeds into the narrative in the popular culture. So, so I'm, I'm picking back on that a bit and, uh, but, but again, the audience is receptive. I'm trying to make a humorous image. And something not seen before. That's my goal.

[00:03:57] **Dan Dissinger:** It's always good to see something humorous at like an academic [00:04:00] conference or something that takes

[00:04:01] **Ralph Sanders:** Oh, absolutely.

[00:04:01] **Ralph Sanders:** Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. No highly intelligent group of people here. I'm really pleased to have the chance to talk to 'em.

[00:04:08] **Dan Dissinger:** Oh yeah. It's always fun. Absolutely. Um, yeah. Thank you so much for your time. Thank you, you so much. Thank you for your time. This is amazing. And everyone definitely check it out.

[00:04:17] **Dan Dissinger:** Absolutely. Very cool to meet you. Yeah, very good. Everyone, Dan here again, um, at the Southwest Popular Culture Conference and just did amazing panel with, um, two amazing people, and I have one of them here. Claire Spalding from Pacific Northwest College of Art. Um, So I'm gonna let her tell you about her presentation because I was blown away by it.

[00:04:40] **Dan Dissinger:** And, um, but yeah, why don't you tell the audience a little bit about yourself and then kind of what she did and then yeah.

[00:04:46] **Claire Spaulding:** Great. Thanks Dan. So, I have been fascinated by pink flamingos. For long enough that the people in my life have asked me to stop talking about Pink Flamingos. So I decided that I needed to dive into the research and [00:05:00] figure out why I'm so fascinated.

[00:05:02] **Claire Spaulding:** So my presentation today was focusing on Pink flamingos and their aesthetic and material migration from the 20th century to today. And the way that the pink flamingo as we, you maybe have. Just thought about Don Featherstone's Lawn Ornament, pink Flamingo. Or maybe you're like a huge John Waters fan and you're thinking about Pink Flamingo and Divine, both examples that I use within my presentation, but.

[00:05:26] **Claire Spaulding:** The pink flamingo, that hot pink moment. It has become part of just our visual landscape within the us and so I look at the Pink Flamingo as an Americana hyperobject and also theorize about kitch and ecology at the same time. Cause it's sort of this beautiful triangle that happens.

[00:05:46] **Dan Dissinger:** Yeah, I had a que, like it was, when I was listening to your presentation, I started thinking this is an Americana image, but.

[00:05:54] **Dan Dissinger:** Is it, is it something that does traverse, like, uh, do you see, is this image of a pink [00:06:00] flamingo or even the kitch, like

plastic pink flamingo, does it traverse any sort of borders outside of the United States? Mm-hmm.

[00:06:08] **Claire Spaulding:** So pink flamingos exist outside the United States as living birds. Uh, and one of the reasons why I specifically.

[00:06:17] **Claire Spaulding:** Am grounded to Americana, uh, is because when the Pink Flamingo is beyond the us. So for example, um, Disney had a documentary called, I think Crossover Wings. Mm-hmm. Uh, and it was in Tanzania. Tanzania culture. The pink flamingo is the Phoenix and it's this moment of rebirth. Um, and it's part of their history.

[00:06:36] **Claire Spaulding:** You also have the flamingo that shows up within mythology and lore within Mexican culture and like Latin America. So I. Didn't want to have the research go that broad because I think in some ways when we import the flamingo to the US, we're. We're co-opting those histories. So it's like a commodity colonization moment that can happen.

[00:06:57] **Claire Spaulding:** Which is a separate book, uh, a separate [00:07:00] paper. Exactly. Um, but there, there are, so there are flamingos throughout the world. Um, but one of the things I've loved about the research is no matter who I've talked to, whether I've been traveling or I've been home, everyone has a story about a pink flamingo.

[00:07:12] **Claire Spaulding:** Yeah. And they love to share that. Yeah. Uh, and

[00:07:15] **Dan Dissinger:** yeah. Is this something too that goes across class lines? Cuz I feel like people. Look at that plastic pink flamingo and they have like a very stereotypical class distinction with it. But I feel like, do you feel like over time, like from like when it first came, as you said 1957 during our presentation and we were talking before we pressed record and how like odd that that happens like right around the time that you know, on the road is published but has a traverse class lines now and.

[00:07:47] **Dan Dissinger:** And, you know, why do you think it has?

[00:07:50] **Claire Spaulding:** I think that the pink Flamingo, it is across all of the class lines right now. Uh, and it is able to do that because of how many different materials [00:08:00] have been used in order to create the object. So the plastic usually is associated with kitch. The, um, I have air quotes going on, um, but the, the quote unquote, like low art that's associated with kitch, uh, but you also get.

[00:08:15] **Claire Spaulding:** Fabric that evokes pink flamingos and you get dress forms that evoke plumage and birds. Uh, you get Kate Spade brs with like jewel and crusted pink flamingo tones. And so flamingos are able to enter homes when they shift materials, and then that is when they shift class. Um, so if we think about. Like the most expensive thing, like we might see out in the world if we go to a department store, usually it is like a jewel stone or you know, glass or porcelain.

[00:08:53] **Claire Spaulding:** And so that's like a higher quote unquote art material that is able to go into those higher class moments. [00:09:00] Um, and we also have the pink flamingo that shows up within various artworks too. Like you have, um, Alex Calder's. Flamingo in Chicago, that's a public monument. And then you have, uh, an entire, yeah, just so many, so many flamingos.

[00:09:16] **Claire Spaulding:** If you start Googling flamingos, it's a rabbit hole. Let me tell you,

[00:09:20] **Dan Dissinger:** it's funny cuz when you do in the presentation, you say the word flamingo over and over again and I'm like, this is the most I've ever heard the word said in a single sitting ever. And I'm like, but it's so interesting to have come to that sort of, um, Research space and because I know in my presentation I talked about like how I like went, you know, on this whole journey of like finding the opening line of like on the road and it's like, how did you come to this?

[00:09:49] **Dan Dissinger:** Because it only at this conference with this like, would this presentation like just be. Uh, it was just really great. I'm just really curious, how did you come to [00:10:00] this type of research?

[00:10:01] **Claire Spaulding:** Yeah, so I grew up in New England, which the Pink Flamingo being cast just outside of Boston. Uh, I grew up seeing them sometimes, but it wasn't until a trip to Florida as a Taurus, as like this little eight year old being like, oh my God.

[00:10:19] **Claire Spaulding:** And. That is my first experience with the Pink Flamingo. Then to find out that that's how most people experience this. Mm-hmm. Bird was really interesting, but I came to it as a research topic because. Years ago, uh, when I was looking at my undergraduate thesis work, I was researching sitcoms and laugh tracks and the lack of overarching narrative within Kevin Arnold in the Wonder Years.

[00:10:42] **Claire Spaulding:** Oh my God. And the way that, that like was such a moment within cinema. And so I was just like binge watching the Wonder years and trying to write about it and thinking about laugh tracks and empathy within American culture and what we learn from media [00:11:00] and suddenly, Kevin Arnold gets a job mowing the lawn.

[00:11:04] **Claire Spaulding:** Yeah. And I was like, that was my first job in my neighborhood. Yeah. I had to mow the lawn too. Yeah. And I started thinking about why do we mow the lawns? Like what is so important about them? And started investigating that for my thesis topic instead, which. Immediately leads to Pink Flamingos as a lawn ornament because lawns as we know them now, this like monoculture grass landscape within suburbia was invented in like the 1920s.

[00:11:31] **Claire Spaulding:** Oh. When grass seeded was developed in order to like persist no matter where in the US it was. Oh. Huh. Um, and, Yeah. The fact that the Pentagon rests on a site that the agriculture department developed golf course turf Ah-huh. Years ago is one of my favorite tidbits. Wow. To share with folks. Uh, but the flamingo was something I didn't have time in space to.

[00:11:59] **Claire Spaulding:** [00:12:00] Really in depthly research, um, when I was finishing my undergraduate, and now that I'm in grad school, I have time and space again to hang out with my thoughts, um, and with, you know, kitch and theory and make people listen to what I'm talking about in a classroom to give feedback. So the Flamingo has, has come back, let's been reborn once again, um, into my practice.

[00:12:22] **Claire Spaulding:** Wow. So,

[00:12:22] **Dan Dissinger:** um, Where do you see your project going? Mm-hmm. Um, I'm always curious when, when people have like, Such passion for what they're doing. Like I know there's like all sorts of things in your head, probably may, you know, like thinking like here, here, here and just, I mean, alone, the Wonder Years thing is like a whole other rabbit hole and just, I love sitcoms and, and just sitcoms in general.

[00:12:48] **Dan Dissinger:** Just so, such an American thing. And also it's like, Lost in like this, like ether now of, of television, but where, you know, some of the things you see your project [00:13:00] going, uh, you know. Mm-hmm.

[00:13:02] **Claire Spaulding:** So I definitely thought this was a paper and it's become a manuscript, so I'm working on. Drafting through and being able to give all those rabbit holes room.

[00:13:11] **Claire Spaulding:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So, for example, something that I didn't get to talk about in the presentation was how, uh, lawn ornament, pink flamingos being stolen is most often the story that I get told. Yeah. And why is it something that is always worth stealing is like an interesting merge of novelty goods from like the 1950s into today.

[00:13:33] **Claire Spaulding:** Like, there's friends of mine that have taken them photos of the flamingos. They have liberated as they called them, from front lawns and send them to me. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. I'm like, thank you. Uh, so with Pink Flamingos though, like that heading into like book research would be phenomenal, but I also am. In the Master's program in order to go into education.

[00:13:53] **Claire Spaulding:** Yeah. And higher ed. Yeah. So if one day I could have a syllabus that analyzes lawn ornamentation for its [00:14:00] social, racial, economic, ecological history within the us I would be a very, very happy

[00:14:06] **Dan Dissinger:** adjunct. That sounds amazing. I, I, if anyone's out there is listening. That is, that is a class that everyone should take, hopefully becomes a class, because that sounds really amazing.

[00:14:18] **Dan Dissinger:** Well, Claire, thank you so much for talking. Thank you so much for your presentation. Really was, uh, an honor to be on the panel with you. It was really, um, really enlightening. I, I really enjoyed it and thank you. Thank you

[00:14:30] **Claire Spaulding:** so much, Dan. It was great talking more about it. Yeah, absolutely.

[00:14:33] **Dan Dissinger:** All right, I'm here with David Tortolini here at the Southwest Popular Culture Conference.

[00:14:37] **Dan Dissinger:** And, um, yeah, why don't you tell the audience a little bit about who you are, what you're doing here, and Yeah, yeah,

[00:14:43] **David Tortolini:** totally. Um, I am a first year doctoral student at Purdue University in the American Studies Department, and my field of focus is on food and post-colonialism. Actually, anti-colonialism is the way I refer it.

[00:14:57] **Dan Dissinger:** Oh wow, that's really awesome. I have a colleague at USC that [00:15:00] actually does a food and culture writing class like, so talk more about that. How do you. What is it that you're looking at and how are you doing it? Okay,

[00:15:07] **David Tortolini:** cool. Yeah, so I look at how flavor is part of the colonial discourse. Oh, that we have this one dimensional view of flavor through like the oral factory senses, but my main arguments is actually that flavors is actually multi-dimensional.

[00:15:21] **David Tortolini:** There's memory. There's feeling, there's emotion involved in it. Wow. So I'm trying to find a way to decolonize our An I like to refer as anti colonized flavor, and I also look at it through digital spaces that when we talk about flavor online, it's like solidifying the colonial discourse essentially.

[00:15:39] **Dan Dissinger:** Oh wow.

[00:15:40] **Dan Dissinger:** Can you expand on that? I would love to. How do you, because it's so interesting to think how like we've gone from a place where like flavor is like, Oral, like you talk to someone about what you're eating or you know, your flavors and writing and now digital, like do you feel like digital creates like, like flattens it more or does it I feel like more e Yeah, it's a

[00:15:58] **David Tortolini:** lot of it solidifies [00:16:00] it.

[00:16:00] **David Tortolini:** Mm. And more like it creates this thing that's can be more reputable and it has to be like a perfect index. Because when I work through coffee, so when you say a coffee tastes like lemon, it's always gonna be the lemon from the western. Viewpoint, it's not gonna be, uh, lemon from, um, like Argentina or Lemon from like, um, Italy or even like Rwanda.

[00:16:21] **David Tortolini:** It's always gonna be a lemon based on the Western.

[00:16:25] **Dan Dissinger:** Discourses. Yeah. My, my wife, she, her family's from Cyprus. So like when Lemons, she said, lemons here. She's like, no. She's like, the Cy Lemons are so much different. She's like, you can literally just eat them. And I'd never think of that. Like even as you're saying that, I'm like, your mind does that thing where like it indexes just like, oh, that Western very Euro says like lemon.

[00:16:47] **Dan Dissinger:** That I know. And then, No.

[00:16:49] **David Tortolini:** Totally. Totally. And like with flavors in Coffee, the World Coffee Lexicon came out with the Flavor Dictionary in like the early nineties for coffee. So you just see [00:17:00] these ways that day have boiled down coffee flavors. Hmm. The one, some flavors you're gonna laugh is skunk and paper.

[00:17:06] **David Tortolini:** Huh. But then you also have the. Um, non-descriptive terms like stone fruit or even um, peach. And it's like, okay, I understand where peach stone fruit, you can, I understand like doughs can be higher class. Mm, but why call something, uh, tangible item such as skunk or paper or even gasoline, and how do they create a replicable measurement for it?

[00:17:31] **David Tortolini:** Oh wow.

[00:17:31] **Dan Dissinger:** That's so. Being from New York, I, uh, my native in New York and now I live in LA and you have all these like high end cafes and they like, they boast all these things about coffee. Do you feel like that? Coffee culture is becoming more and more in a way, like colonized in that way of the cafe culture.

[00:17:53] **Dan Dissinger:** No,

[00:17:53] **David Tortolini:** it is, it is. Um, actually that's a great point because especially coffee association, the SCA have [00:18:00] a control of the specialty coffee market and like people want SCA badges. They want SCA memberships. And when you. Go to coffee shops around the world. The SCA has this thing called their flavor wheel, like they use a coffee lexicon and created a chart that's easily identifiable.

[00:18:17] **David Tortolini:** So when I go to Argentina, where my mom's from, I've been in specialty shops, literally, uh, I think I was in one January 3rd or something like that. I was just there and. I went to shop and I had the SCA flavor reel and they were pointing at the flavor reel when I was drinking a coffee saying, Hey, can you see this almond flavor?

[00:18:37] **David Tortolini:** And also my argument is when you have flavors with higher class, like associated with specialty high-end coffees, yeah. And it's also creates these social norms of class value within your flavors.

[00:18:48] **Dan Dissinger:** Oh

[00:18:48] wow.

[00:18:48] **Dan Dissinger:** So how do you see, and this is a big question, like how do you work to like decolonize that? How does that

[00:18:54] **David Tortolini:** happen?

[00:18:54] **David Tortolini:** How do you work? That is a good question. That's hopefully something my research can really flesh out. Mm-hmm. But [00:19:00] my hypothesis right now is that when we are working with coffee and we're trying to decolonize it using indicators that are actually more easily identifiable. Mm. I used the example of a cold.

[00:19:12] **David Tortolini:** Drink on a hot summer day. Mm-hmm. You know what that is? Instantly you can think of something. Yeah. Some people will drink of like a Coca-Cola or lemonade, but that can be an indexing term for a whole range of flavors. Hmm. You can say, Hey, I'm drinking lemonade, and they're actually some coffee roasts who use musical notes Oh wow.

[00:19:29] **David Tortolini:** To associate it with flavor and others use things. Um, in my presentation, I talked about mother tongue out of um, I believe Oakland mm-hmm. Who described one of their coffees as Mexican wedding cookie. Oh wow. And it made it more regional specific, but it also had this non ultra specific indexing term for it.

[00:19:49] **David Tortolini:** Oh

[00:19:49] **Dan Dissinger:** wow. That's so interesting. Oh my God. So where do you see, as your research is building? Um, does your research go outside of coffee or coffee like the main

[00:19:59] **David Tortolini:** can [00:20:00] and it hopefully will. Yeah. Just, I really like the coffee industry. Yeah. Have fun with it. Hmm. And I'm also a doctoral student, so I know I have to find that one little perfect box that I.

[00:20:10] **David Tortolini:** Can have the most fun with, cause I would love to like, explore wine and chocolate. Yeah. And even, um, soda. I, I would love to explore all that. But I know like we're coffee. It's a great interjection point. Yeah.

[00:20:25] **Dan Dissinger:** And being here in the Southwest Popular Co. Like how's your experience

[00:20:28] **David Tortolini:** been here? I love this conference.

[00:20:30] **David Tortolini:** I was actually here in 2020, like literally the week before the country shut down. Oh wow. And I had a blast. I met some of my closest friends that I still talk to almost daily. That's amazing. And here, It feels like family. Hmm. Like you see people that you haven't seen in a few years and it's just like confrontations are the same natural rhythm when everything went on pause three years ago.

[00:20:54] **David Tortolini:** Hmm. Or like, I'm meeting amazing new people. Mm-hmm. It's just, I love this [00:21:00] conference so much and like it's a testament when you have some people here for over 30 years of attendance.

[00:21:05] **Dan Dissinger:** Right. Yeah. I know. I've done, uh, what the first time I did is they did the Grateful Dead Scholar Caucus and they do it all the time and they're together and I'm like, I've never seen anything like this at an academic conference.

[00:21:16] **David Tortolini:** Exactly. Like, it's almost like, like I said, it has like this element of like a fam family reunion of sorts and. What's also cool is that they let in scholarship from non. Normal fields in pop culture like this. Yeah. We have a giant space for food studies, but we have a lot of food study panels here and it's cool to see all the amazing pop culture research and food studies.

[00:21:38] **David Tortolini:** Yeah. In one condensed area that's not a pure food studies conference, and that's amazing to see.

[00:21:43] **Dan Dissinger:** That's amazing. Well, thank you so much for talking with me. Yeah, totally. I hopefully we could do this again next year. Yeah. Or also like, you know, further down the line on a fuller episode, I would love to hear more about your research and everything you're doing.

[00:21:54] **Dan Dissinger:** Totally, yeah. I would love to come

[00:21:55] **David Tortolini:** on for like a full episode. Absolutely.

[00:21:57] **Dan Dissinger:** Excellent. Thank you. Thank you so much. Yeah, of course.[00:22:00]