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Thomas Stathes: Historic Media Research and Conservation



(<http://cunyba.gc.cuny.edu/blog/thomas-stathes-historic-media-research-and-conservation/thomas-stathes/>) Thomas Stathes

Historic Media Research and Conservation

B.A. June 2013 cum Laude

Home College: Queens

Mentor: Prof. Robert Kapsis, Sociology, Queens

Thomas Stathes is an internationally recognized collector, archivist and historian of early animated and silent films. Like most young children, he had a strong affinity for animated cartoons. His intense fascination with the art form moved him to begin researching the history behind it at an early age—even

before starting preschool.

“I’ve had an almost lifelong fascination with film, especially animated and silent-era films. As a history buff, my interests in film are dynamic and pertain not only to the films themselves but also the times, climates, societies and production environments out of which all forms of media have been produced. My major focus on early animated films during childhood presented a problem; this was a field where there had been little or no major archiving efforts and thus works from this period remained difficult or impossible to study. I’ve made it my work to not only research this aspect of film history for my own enjoyment, but more importantly to locate early animated films and artifacts (1900–1928) and make them available to researchers and the general public. To date, two undertakings of which I’m most proud are the Bray Animation Project, an online research resource launched in 2011 and dedicated to a leading early animation studio, and a silent-era animation program I curated and provided for Turner Classic Movies in 2012. I’m also incredibly proud to have located many films that were considered ‘lost,’ including part of a silent feature film starring Diana Serra Cary. Cary is one of the last surviving actresses of the silent era, then known as the world-famous child star Baby Peggy in the early 1920s.”

In 2011, Fox News Latino reported on Stathes: “The world’s largest collection of early [silent] animated films isn’t in a museum or library; it’s stored in the closet of a 21-year-old Cuban-American college student...” He regularly supplies early animation to fans and scholars through his Cartoons On Film website, as well as through his “Cartoon Carnival,” 16mm film screenings held around the NYC area.

Stathes started college at Queensborough Community taking courses in Digital Art and Design and Visual and Performing Arts. He came to CUNY BA to build on his intelligence and skills and earn a degree directly related to his work and interests. “The program allowed me to take various courses related to film and history, as well

as plenty of elective courses in different subjects, in a process and sequence that would have been difficult or impossible in a standard degree. The CUNY BA experience has been the only time when I felt my academic studies could be tailored to my unique intellectual interests, and for that I am highly grateful.”

Stathes has been a guest lecturer and substitute teacher at the School of Visual Arts, an intern at the Museum of the Moving Image, a consultant for The Library of Congress, and a volunteer for the Queens Historical Society. He completed his degree with undergraduate and graduate courses at Queens College. His post-degree plans are varied. He plans to continue his film history work and translate it into one or more professional practices or careers, including self-employment, in distributing historic films, teaching and working in archival and museum settings.

[photo credit: Joel Esquite]

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