

The JAPS Library: A collection about art

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Abstract

Juan Antonio Pérez Simón has built one of the most extensive art collections in Mexico and it is well-known around the world. One of the least known facets of Juan Antonio Pérez Simón's collecting is that of a bibliophile, a facet that has led him to form one of the richest private libraries specializing in art in Mexico, known for its great expanse and diversity of themes, as well as for the importance of the works that comprise it. The Juan Antonio Pérez Simón (JAPS) Library is the custodian of Pérez Simón's book collection and strives to manage, research, and preserve the collection in order to strengthen and enrich it.

Juan Antonio Pérez Simón was born in Turanzas, Llanes, Asturias and, together with his family, emigrated to Mexico at a very young age. He studied public accounting at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). In the business sector he is known as a financier and a businessman. In the art world he is known and recognized for his art collection, particularly paintings and sculpture. He is involved in the culture of Mexico, Spain and other countries; he is a member of charity boards, councils, associations of friends of various museums, galleries, and artistic and cultural institutions in Mexico and around the world.

Throughout his life he has built an extensive art collection that includes works representative of classical and contemporary artists¹ — Van Dyck, Goya, Van Gogh, Picasso, Siqueiros, Alma Tadema, to name a few, are represented in his art collection, which has been exhibited in museums around the world.

His passion for art was the origin of his library. As a young man, as a way to learn about the works that attracted him and about art in general, he acquired art books, especially those in which his favourite works appeared. Similarly, before acquiring a work of art, Pérez Simón would check the documentation of the piece, gathering books and articles that spoke of it.² The custodians of the renowned Pérez Simón art collection strive to manage, research, and preserve the collection, in order to strengthen and enrich it.

It is in this sense that the JAPS Library (Juan Antonio Pérez Simón Library) performs an important role in supporting the art collection. Containing more than 50,000 titles primarily on the subject of art, the books also branch into other fields of knowledge such as literature, philosophy, science, and the history of Spain and Mexico all of which coexist with the art books and are useful for historical, social, political, religious and cultural contextualization of the Pérez Simón Collection. The library and art collection nourish each other, reinforcing and maintaining a constant link of information about the artists and the works belonging to the collection. Whenever the art collection expands there is a vast source of new topics for the library (Fig. 1).³

The library is constantly growing — books are acquired from bookstores and museums, at auctions, from antique dealers and second-hand booksellers, at book or art fairs and from publishers, in addition to those received as gifts from authors and people close to Pérez Simón.⁴ All of the bibliographic collection is classified and catalogued in accordance with professional norms and standards of contemporary librarianship.

The items belonging to the collection are identified by a bookplate whose figure is an owl. Juan Antonio chose this animal because it represents wisdom, intelligence, close observation and learning — he had a particular sympathy for this animal.

1. Juan Antonio Pérez Simón, *Síntesis de la conferencia Coleccionismo, motor de conservación y difusión del arte: mi experiencia* (unpublished document, Barcelona: 2013).

2. Pérez Simón, *Síntesis de la conferencia...*, 3.

3. JAPS Library.

4. Rodolfo Martínez Méndez, *Coleccionar recuerdos y sueños* (unpublished document, Mexico City: JAPS Library), 2.



Fig. 1. Biblioteca JAPS. Photo courtesy of Oliver Santana.

The collector's taste for beauty has permeated the bibliographic collection. The library, which began specializing in art, has been enriched with volumes representative of the history and arts of the book, among which the bindings stand out. In the collection are found bindings ranging from simple limp, lace-case bindings in parchment to current paperback bindings. Among the jewels of the bibliographic collection, the *Nuremberg Chronicle* and the artists' and object books made by Picasso, Chillida, Chagall, Man Ray, and Anish Kapoor stand out, located at time period extremes.

With the knowledge of the importance of the binding as an integral element of the intellectual work surrounding the whole, efforts have been made to preserve the books with their original bindings, preserving the material and historical evidence, as well as the manufacturing techniques of binders at different times.

The oldest bindings in the collection date from the sixteenth century. An important example from this time is the bindings of an Ethiopian manuscript bound in wooden boards and exposed linked-stitch sewing. The front board is distinguished from the back in that it is made up of two pieces of wood joined by a small seam, in accordance with the style of Ethiopia in the sixteenth century.⁵ The book includes the bag-like container made of leather in which it was transported; both the book and the container are conserved together ((Figs. 2c) and d).

Traditional German bindings of the sixteenth century, blind tooled, white pig leather on wooden boards, protect the work of Flavius Josephus, printed in Strasbourg in 1578 by Theodosium Rihel. Also of note: half white leather binding on wooden boards with clasps at the front edge, seen in Claudio Eliano's book, *Opera quae extant graece latineque e regione*, printed in 1556 by the brothers Andream and Iacobum Gesnerum ((Figs. 2a) and b).

One type of binding in the collection that is appreciated primarily for its beauty is the Islamic bindings that cover the *Korans*. The covers are of an envelope shape, with a flap coming from the back board and falling over the front, usually with blind and gold tooling on the covers and endbands sewn in a complex chevron pattern ((Figs. 3a) and b).⁶

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries in Mexico, limp, laced-cased bindings in parchment are preserved in the collection. Very common in Novo-Hispanic libraries from the sixteenth to the first years of the nineteenth centuries, many exhibit brands from different convents and schools. The use of brands is a particular characteristic of colonial books in Mexico. The main objective was to prevent the theft of books from monasteries and collegiate libraries, although there are also brands found in personal collections ((Figs. 3c) and d).⁷

The artistic bindings of the eighteenth century, in full decorated leather, with gold tooling on the spine and, on some occasions, decorated with perimeter frames on the front boards tooled in gold, are represented in the collection by works such as the manuscript *Provisión de hidalguía ein favor de Blas Antonio de*

5. J. A. Szirmai, *The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000), 45-50.

6. Szirmai, *The Archeology...*, 41-61.

7. Idalia García, "Libros marcados con fuego", *Emblemata* 13, (2007): 273, 277.



Fig. 2. a) (top left) Eliano, Caludio. *Opera quae extant graece latineque e regione*. Zurich: Gesneros Fratres, 1556. b) (top right) Josefo, Flavio. *Des Hochberümten Jüdischen Geschichtschreibers historien und Bücher, Von alten Jüdischen Geschichten zwenzig samt eynem von seinem leben, Vom Jüdischen Krieg und der Statt Jerusalem und des gantzen Lands zerstörung siben, Von der Juden altem Zertokommen wider Apionem Grammaticum zwey, Von Meysterschafft der Vernunfft und der Machabeer Marter eyns*. Strasbourg: Theodosium Rihel, 1578. c) and d) (bottom) *Dawit*. Ethiopian manuscript of sixteenth century. Photos courtesy of Luis Enríquez, Argenis Rodríguez and Diego Vicenteño.

Allende y sus hermanos, vecinos del Consexo de Cangas de Onís. Dada en Valladolid a 29 de octubre de 1772 (Fig. 4a).

By the nineteenth century the industrial revolution had greatly expanded the global publishing industry. The introduction of binding cloth in various colours gave rise to publisher's bindings and offered the possibility of decorating the bindings with elaborate engravings in different colours with various embossing depths for an entire print run. This historical moment in the production of books is represented in the JAPS Library in the work *México a través de los siglos* (Fig. 4c), printed in Mexico and Spain at the end of the nineteenth century. Its binding is blind tooled with a gilded leather spine and has fabric printed in various colours with Mexican motifs taken from pre-Hispanic cultures. It is a monumental work in five volumes edited by Vicente Riva Palacios and a benchmark for publishing and book history in Mexico.

One further example of a publisher's binding, from the beginning of the twentieth century, is that of Bernardo Reyes, *El general Porfirio Díaz*, published in Mexico in 1901. It is a half leather and cloth binding, gold tooled with the profile of the general in relief as a medallion (Fig. 4b).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe, parallel to modern art movements, some bookbinders made aesthetic and technical choices to create a harmonic decoration — the cover boards, text block edges, endbands and endleaves were all considered aesthetically. Representatives of this modern movement, such as Paul Bonet and Pierre Lucien Martin, are present at the JAPS Library in the works *Les idylles* and *Poésie de mots inconnus*, respectively (Figs. 5d) and e). An art bookbinder from the same period, but with a more classic decorative style than the previous ones, Emilio Brugalla's binding of his own text



Fig. 3. a) and b) Islamic bookbinding. c) (bottom left) Lezamis, José de. *Vida del apóstol Santiago el Mayor, uno de los tres más amados y familiares de Jesu - Christo único y singular patrón de España con algunas antigüedades y excelencias de España, especialmente de Vizcaya Joseph de Lezamis*. México: María de Benavides, 1699. d) (bottom right) Catholic Church. *Officia sanctorum in breviario romano, ex mandato summorum pontificum novitèr apponenda tàm de praecepto, quam ad libitum recitanda et alia, quae generaliter in Hispania et aliis locis particularibus recitari possunt, prout in suis decretis continetur, juxta rubricas ejusdem breviarii romani*. Mexico: Herederos de Maria de Rivera, 1756. Photos courtesy of Luis Enríquez, Argenis Rodríguez and Diego Vicenteño.



Fig. 4. a) (left) Provisión de hidalguía a favor de Blas Antonio de Allende y sus hermanos, vecinos del Consexo de Cangas de Onís. Dada en Valladolid a 29 de octubre de 1772. Manuscript. b) (centre) Reyes, Bernardo. *El General Porfirio Díaz*. México: J. Balleescá y Compañía, sucesores, 1903. c) (right) Riva Palacio, Vicente (dir.). *México a través de los siglos historia general y completa del desenvolvimiento social, político, religioso, militar, artístico, científico y literario de México desde la antigüedad más remota hasta la época actual*. Mexico: Balleescá; Barcelona: Espasa, 1884. Photos courtesy of Luis Enríquez, Argenis Rodríguez and Diego Vicenteño.



Fig. 5. a) and b) (top left and centre) Gramaticus, Johannes. [Comprehensorium, vel vocabularies ex aliis collectus Johannes]. Valencia: Lambert Palmart, 1475. c) (top right) Olive, Pedro María de. *Diccionario de sinónimos de la lengua castellana*. París: Librería de Rosas y Bouret. d) (bottom left) Teócrito. *Les idylls*. Paris: Tériade: Éditios Verve, 1945. e) (bottom centre) Iliasz, Iliia Zdanevich. *Poésie de mots inconnus*. Paris: Le Degré, 1949. f) (bottom right) Brugalla, Emilio. *Tres ensayos sobre el arte de la encuadernación*. Barcelona: José Porter, 1945. Photos courtesy of Luis Enríquez, Argenis Rodríguez and Diego Vicenteño.

(Fig. 5f), *Tres ensayos sobre el arte de la encuadernación*, holds a special place in the collection. Brugalla's bindings are as beautiful as they are curious. The incunabulum printed in Valencia in 1475, *Comhehensorium, vel vocabularius ex aliis collectus* is an excellent example. The binding, from 1948, is a full brown leather binding with gold tooling on the front cover and spine, following the Moroccan models of the sixteenth century, while the front pastedown is made of orange leather with a Mudejar design ((Figs. 5a) and b).

A similar case is the *Diccionario de sinónimos de la lengua castellana*, printed in Paris in the nineteenth century. The leather binding is decorated entirely in onlays of different leather colours, created by the bookbinder Luis Enríquez in the early twenty-first century (Fig. 5c).

In 2003, the international collective Tomorrow's Past (formed by bookbinders who make modern preservation bindings for antiquarian books),⁸ proposed to bind old books in modern bindings that are typical of the current time in which they are bound. This idea espouses the main principle of the bookbinder Edgar Mansfiel, who said 'Surely it is better to create tomorrow's past than to repeat today's.'⁹ Although the Brugalla and Enríquez bindings predate Tomorrow's Past, they could well be representatives of the principles of this group.

A piece that stands out for its historical value as well as its binding from centuries after the printing of the text is *Historia verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España escrita por el capitán Bernal Díaz del Castillo, uno de los conquistadores*, a copy of the first edition of the work printed in Spain in 1632. Its heraldic binding is full leather, with a gold perimeter frame and good tooling on the spine (Fig. 6). The foot of the spine reads 'Saltillo' in gold and the stamped coat of arms on the front cover belonged to the Marquis of Saltillo (Miguel Lasso de la Vega López Tejada, who lived from 1893 to 1957), so it follows that the binding was commissioned by the Marquis well into the twentieth century.¹⁰

The JAPS Library, due to its specialization in art, also has works written or illustrated by fine artists with bindings that complement the editorial design. Some of these books were designed by the artists themselves and are signed by them. As an example of these, there is the work of Federico García Lorca, *Romancero Gitano* (Fig. 7c), whose lithographs are created by Rafael Alberti. The

8. Jen Lindsay, "Modern bindings on antiquarian books", *Out of binding*, http://www.outofbinding.com/tp_introduction.htm

9. Lindsay, 'Modern bindings...'

10. Francisco Olmos, Carpallo Bautista, Bustamente Sampedro, "Estudio de las marcas de propiedad de la nobleza laica francesa entre los siglos VII y XIX en la biblioteca de la Casa de Velázquez de Madrid", *Mélagnges de la Casa de Velázquez* 52-1 (2022), <https://journals.openedition.org/mcv/16880>



Fig. 6. Díaz del Castillo, Bernal. *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*. Madrid: Imprenta del Reyno, 1632. Photos courtesy of Luis Enríquez, Argenis Rodríguez and Diego Vicenteño.

binding is industrial printed cloth with brown motifs and the title is tooled in black on the spine. The endbands are made with the same material as the covering.

Another example of this type is Paul Eluard's collection of poems, *Le Dur Durer's Desur*, illustrated with reproductions of drawings by Marc Chagall (Fig. 7d). The work shows a laced-over-laced binding with a clamshell box that holds a relief of an image taken from Chagall's work in the book.

Also in this category is a book written and illustrated by Paul Gauguin, *Noa Noa*. The work consists of two elements, a folder with thirteen engravings and the textblock bound in decorated leather and paper. Both are kept in a container covered in full leather decorated with a paper reproduction of the cover.

In addition to the groups of books already discussed, the collection includes books that stand out for the attractiveness of an element of their binding, such as endleaves made of decorated paper or silk moiré, decorated onlays of leather, endbands worked in various colours on multiple cores, bookblock edges decorated with the techniques of marbling, gilding, chiselling, painting or the so-called 'hidden edges,' in which the painting can only be seen when the leaves are forced to fan out.

Similarly, there are books that, due to their structures, techniques, and artistic intent, are classified as artists' books. Among the variety of this type of conceptual books in the collection is *Mr. and Mrs. Woodman* by Man Ray, published in 1970 (Fig. 7b). The work is made up of three pieces: an album-type book in which each page is occupied by one of the 27 silver-gelatin photographs, bound in full Moroccan leather, the front cover blind tooled, with edges of silver and the endleaves made of decorated paper; two original wooden mannequins, characters from the 27 photographs, sit in a case lined with Moroccan leather, with a very suggestive engraving signed by the author. This book inspires the interaction of the reader, the mannequins, and the photographs in the album – it is a work full of sensuality and symbolic eroticism.

Lastly, we can mention works by independent publishers who release just a few copies of each title and, on occasion, are offered for pre-sale to finance the



Fig. 7. a) (top left) Lope de Vega, Félix. *La Gatomaquia*. Mexico: La diéresis, 2013. b) (right) Ray, Man. *Mr. and Mrs. Woodman*. The Hague: Unida, 1970. c) (centre left) García Lorca, Federico. *Romancero gitano*. Madrid: Filigrana, 1977. d) (bottom) Eluard, Paul. *Le dur desire de durer*. Paris: Arnold-Bordas, 1946. Photos courtesy of Luis Enríquez, Argenis Rodríguez and Diego Vicenteño.

production of a work. These books are often bound by hand, in conceptual bindings designed specifically for the work. Such is the case of *Gatomaquia* (Fig. 7a), a poem by Félix López Velarde, printed by the artisan publishing house La Diéresis. The 2013 edition, bound by hand, and the 2016 edition, machine bound, are both decorated with the image of a cat.

In addition to the extensive diversity of works of great beauty (such as those highlighted), which represent a small group within the bibliographic collections in general, the collection of the JAPS Library is primarily made up of thousands of books that are at first glance, works of daily use. These are books of common or ordinary bindings, in hard cover or in paperback, which support research in the arts of the book, the book trade and market and in readers at specific times and places.

Conclusion

The collection of the JAPS Library, specializing in the subject of art, also includes works important to the arts of the book represented by books that, due to their beauty and artistic value, show aesthetic and structural trends according to the time and place of production of the work. Likewise, there are books by artists and independent publishers that today are part of artistic production and world documentary memory.

The common bindings abundant in the collection represent a source of information for the arts of the book and its trade. Likewise, there are other collections such as those dedicated and annotated by Pérez Simón, which give information

about the bibliophile himself: his subjects of interest and preferred authors, and the ideas that have influenced his thinking.

This work shows a small part of the type and quality of bindings that can be found in the collection and invites a deeper and more detailed study of the collection to better understand the diversity and richness of the JAPS Library.

My special thanks to Juan Antonio Pérez Simón, María José Pérez Simón Carrera, Oscar de León Montemayor, Rodolfo Martínez, Evelin González, Argenis Rodríguez, Diego Vicenteño and Luis Enríquez for their valuable support.

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