

Dissertation Adviser's Introduction for Teresa Morales

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Teresa Morales fell in love—deeply, passionately in love—with a paneled room from the French Regence period (approximately 1715-1723) owned by the J. Paul Getty Museum. She first encountered the Regence Room at the Getty Museum in Malibu, pursuing her beloved to Brentwood where the room had been re-installed in the new Getty Museum on a hill overlooking Los Angeles. She has even visited the original site of the panels, now the upper rooms of a Paris business.

Traditional research designs strive for dispassion, for objectivity and distance, a critical perspective. Thus, one of Teresa's challenges in developing her dissertation proposal was to identify research methods that would support her desire to explore the Brentwood re-installation of the Regence Room while also telling intersecting stories of the room's history and provenance.

Love affairs rarely run smoothly; likewise dissertations. While maintaining her passion for the object of her affection, Teresa struggled to assemble a range of research tools that would enable her to gather information and to express what she had learned about the room in a complex, richly artful way. Her strategies included documentary research, interviews, gallery observations, and methods adapted from material culture studies as well as art history. She chose to create an original play as a way of interpreting the multiple stories of the room.

Genuine passion is rarely linear, narrowly organized, nor expressed in standardized formats. Teresa has created a unique, richly complex dissertation that shares her passion with the reader and argues for greater attention to material culture, especially period rooms, in art museum education.