

>> In the 17th century, the Dutch Republic was a land teeming with scholars and books, yet because so few of the books in circulation from this time have survived, conservators have looked to artworks to find evidence of them. Books have an important place in Godfrey Kneller's *A Scholar in His Study*, and they offer insights into the display of books and bookbinding practices of the time. Natasa Krsmanovic, the conservator at the W.D. Jordan Rare Books and Special Collections Library here at Queen's tells us more.

>> When an object like a 17th-century book enters a museum, it has artifactual value, and so that's what I find so compelling about these kinds of portraits. It's interesting to see how the book-as-object is depicted, and often artists are so meticulous in terms of the details that they want to capture within a painting that we can do a lot of evidence-based looking to try and find aspects of techniques or details used in the book-binding trade within these items. One of the things that we might notice in the painting are actually how the books are stored on the shelf, for example. We think of the spine out as commonplace now in terms of the way that we store these materials, but actually within the painting, you can see that the fore-edge is what's facing out towards the audience. This was a very common way of displaying 16th- and 17th-century books. You can also see that the books that are displayed on the shelves have clasps whereas the book that's displayed in the foreground has these what are either leather or alum-tawed or maybe vellum tongs that come out, which would have been used as kind of ties for the book, so it's really interesting to see how maybe working copies of books are depicted. So, a book that has a leather cover and gold decorative tooling would line, you know, the walls of your study, but these were probably books that you wouldn't be breaking the spines of and laying flat and working with, and so they were beautifully ornate, and so they would be placed kind of on display, whereas the books that you're kind of seeing in the foreground, you can see how they're draping, they're limp, and so the book boards aren't hard. They're actually quite soft, and that's more indicative of potentially like a soft leather, a soft vellum, a soft paper cover. It's really hard to find examples of books that have these kind of soft paper covers because books have such a longstanding history of being re-bound, and so we don't have a lot of historic evidence in terms of some of these early binding structures, because they just either haven't survived, or the tradition of re-binding was so prolific that we don't have very many examples.