

LSU Shreveport assistant professor Dr. Sam Cannon is more Clark Kent than Superman, but he's a superhero to comic artists in Chile.

On Thursday, Dr. Cannon presented a collection of Chilean comics and graphic novels to the James Smith Noel Collection at LSUS. ProChile, an organization affiliated with the government of Chile, donated the books to thank Cannon for his work with Chilean comic artists.

Dr. Cannon holds the Bruce and Steve Simon Endowed Professorship in Language and Literature. He teaches Spanish and offers courses on Latin American comics and cinema.

The donated books reflect Chile's tumultuous history under dictator Augusto Pinochet and the cultural renaissance that bloomed after voters rejected Pinochet in 1990. Comics went underground during the Pinochet regime but are flourishing now as new artists work side-by-side with veteran creators.

"You can't just order comics from Chile," Dr. Cannon said. "I have to get someone to bring me comics, or I have to go get them when I'm there."

Dr. Alex Mikaberidze, the Noel Collection curator, says the books are an invaluable resource. He hopes to expand the collection of comics and graphic novels with works from other countries.

"These graphic novelas are really works of art," Dr. Mikaberidze said. "Having them offers art students a chance to dissect these works."

Latin American comics focus more on social issues than superheroes, Dr. Cannon said.

A friend gave him a graphic novel from Chile while Dr. Cannon was studying how comics portray violence and justice. The book intrigued him, and he ended up focusing his doctoral thesis on Latin American comics.

Dr. Cannon says funding from the Bruce and Steve Simon Endowed Professorship in Language and Literature helped him become the world's foremost expert on Chilean comics.

"The endowment has helped with travel to Chile and housing," he said. "It's also helped support events for the comics industry."

He visited Chile in 2015 to interview comic artists. He organized Spanish-language panel discussions for Chilean artists at the San Diego Comic-Con International in 2016 and again this year. He plans to make a documentary about how the comic artists went underground during the repressive Pinochet regime.

In the three decades since Pinochet lost power, Chile has seen dramatic changes. Younger comic artists are working side-by-side with veteran creators as the country debates civil rights issues, including LGBTQ and gender equality.

“I think what is happening in Chile is unique,” Dr. Cannon said. “Comics are almost at the same level as other literary forms in that country.”