

*Artificialia
& Naturalia
Mirabilia*



Artificialia & Naturalia & Mirabilia

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The word ‘museum’ covers a whole catalogue of possibilities, from the imposing to the intimate, from the expected to the extraordinary, founded in the traditional or the eccentric; just why do people visit museums? When I ask myself this question I know that what I am usually in pursuit of is wonder. Museums are marvelously ordered spaces that contain innumerable objects, displayed firstly for the act of looking and secondly for the conveying of information.

The Wunderkammer or cabinet of curiosities is a prime historical example of display and wonder within the origins of the museum. The Wunderkammer was around in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the word literally means ‘wonder-room’. They were popular among the rich and educated and were ostensibly a European phenomenon. These wonder-cabinets mark a period before there was a movement towards a rational separation of knowledge. For Descartes, writing in the seventeenth century, wonder was associated with the intellectual and the scientific; he, in fact, separates wonder from the marvelous and the magical (which have their roots in the Middle Ages) and calls it astonishment (l’etonnement), an addiction to marvels. Display within the Wunderkammer provided the viewer with a high density of objects designed to be seen holistically within the space. It was a form of spectacle that represented the world in terms of material objects, often referred to as a microcosm. Except that this was really a microcosm of ‘rare and strange things’ that excluded the ordinary and the commonplace. As Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park point out, perhaps they are more representative of ‘nature at peak intensity or creativity’.¹ There are conflicting opinions as to whether these wonder-cabinet displays represented schemes of thought, or a confusion of different things (two-headed calves, bleeding crucifixes, scientifically interesting stones and magnets) all jumbled together. Some say they were largely based on aesthetics and what was seen to be intriguing to the collector, rather than following a devised system. While historians like Barbara Maria Stafford think that the ‘current focus on the rational order shaping Enlightenment “museum culture” has served to obscure, however, the existence of meaningful Wunderkammer arrangements prior to the advent of scientifically sequenced works’.² The possibilities for meaning within these wonder-cabinets were partly in relation to the object itself – its mystique, but also in relation to the visitor and their projected thoughts.

The Wunderkammer was usually based on three categories of objects: naturalia (natural objects), artificialia (man-made objects, including natural ones altered by man), mirabilia (fantastic, unclassifiable objects). It is the latter that, in many ways, have given the wonder-cabinet a tainted reputation, because mirabilia also included the monstrous. The juxtaposition of objects displayed within the wonder-cabinets did vary, arranged by their owners, usually between the two poles of naturalia and artificialia. ‘In this prototype of the modern museum that predated the creation of taxonomy, such distinctions between nature and culture were entirely elided’.³ In this wide range of displayed objects mixed together, resided the promise of wonder,

ripe for making new connections and meanings. Without labels and explanatory text, it was a place for looking and discussion. These objects ‘chatted’ among themselves and with the spectator. Like shapeless pigment stains or confusing blots, their manifest incompleteness precluded incorporation into a seamless narrative’.⁴ The wonder-cabinet, through its display, provided an open-ended experience for the visitor and gave room for reflection. With the advent of Enlightenment thinking, the Wunderkammer gradually lost favour, having been squeezed out of the more ‘scientific’ picture that was emerging. Some feel that the possibility for wonder within a museum also waned. The introduction of rational structures for display, and the literal splitting-off of the disciplines into different architectural spaces, lessened the chance for over-lap across the fields of study. Naturalia and artificialia were beginning to be clearly separated. These divisions of knowledge within museology also contributed to the compartmentalisation of thought and learning.

With the rise of the nineteenth-century Victorian museum, the architectural space of the museum emerged from the domestic and into the public domain. Physical access was no longer restricted to the few, but open to the many. The institutional museum became the context for the object, displacing the original one (this could also be said of the Wunderkammer, except that there it was the collector who openly stood at the centre of his collection). Thus the museum itself became an object; it acquired an anonymous, authoritative voice. This new way of thinking about objects, brought on by the influence of Linnaean structures, has meant that everything was (seemingly) in “its place”.

Within the Victorian museum, there emerged a display system that was based on a sheer quantity of objects, designed to teach through category and series. The premise was to take in the concept of a species’ raw diversity in a glance.

The Walter Rothschild’s Zoological Museum in Tring is a prime example of this approach. Stephen Jay Gould describes Lord Rothschild’s museum as his favourite example of this approach, where you find ‘displayed zebras and antelopes in kneeling position, or even supine, so that one or two extra rows could be inserted to include all specimens in floor-to-ceiling displays’.⁵ One aspect of experiencing this type of museum is that it induces an over-load of the ‘visual field’, made more pronounced by the tightness of the viewing space between the cabinets; the eye has to be constantly on the move from one object to another.

This cabinet museum style of display is in marked contrast to visiting a contemporary museum of natural history. In the latter we tend to find, suggests Gould, ‘one or a few key specimens, surrounded by an odd mixture of extraneous glitz and useful explanation, all in an effort to teach (if the intent be maximally honorable) or simply to dazzle (nothing wrong in this either)’⁶. Here then are two distinct styles of display; for Gould, wonder clearly resides within the cabinet museum, because its approach manages to combine a tension between

two previous conflicting approaches: the Wunderkammer and the Enlightenment’s predilection for systematic display. I believe there is value in preserving some of the museums from the past, like the Rothschild’s, because they provide a unique opportunity to learn from previous generations’ approach to knowledge, and how they constructed meaning within the display. Gould feels that such cabinet-style displays can be inspirational and should not be lost, just because we now have the lure of the interactive exhibit. He warns that we should not always play to the majority, but leave room also for diversity.

After the turn of the nineteenth century, a museum’s system for the display and labelling of its objects became the route by which the viewer’s experience was increasingly ‘mediated’. The inclusion of text has become important; the object has increasingly come to be an illustration for the text. Gradually, ‘the power of the mind supplanted the gullibility of the eye’.⁷

Philip Fisher says that wonder is both historical and personal, and describes it as a ‘movable line’. He likens it to a ‘horizon-effect of the known, the unknown, and the unknowable...It is a highly personal border of intelligibility; the place where at this moment in our history and development we are able to see a question’.⁸

Julie Downie

Endnotes

- 1 Lorraine Daston & Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150 – 1750*. New York: Zone Books, 1998, p 272.
- 2 Barbara Maria Stafford, *Artful Science*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994, p 218.
- 3 Lisa Corrin, *The Greenhouse Effect*, in Ralph Rugoff and Lisa Corrin (eds), *The Greenhouse Effect*. London: The Serpentine Gallery, 2000, p 44.
- 4 Stafford, p 238.
- 5 Stephen Jay Gould, *Dinosaur in a Haystack*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1996, p 243.
- 6 Gould, p 243
- 7 Stafford, p 266
- 8 Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998, p81.

julie downie







heyes johnson







faye norman

Preservation of Appearances

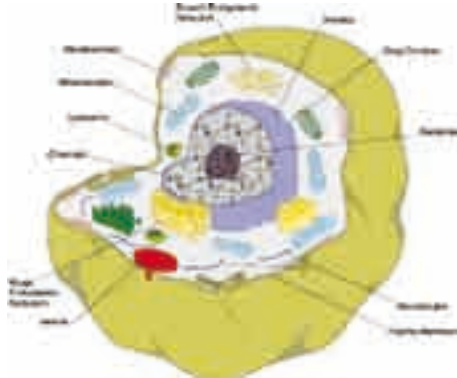
I often struggle these days with the fading of traditional methods of photography about what is real or right. The rapid progression of digital with its seemingly identical result has changed my perception of imagery, questioning both the authenticity and permanence of the image. The work for the exhibition has been about looking at flowers and the different ways in which we seek to preserve their beauty. Influenced by the great master painters and the symbolism they employed in their paintings, coupled with our longing in life to keep hold of the real - to this end I have used a mixture of artificial and natural flowers, toying with themes relating to desire, the senses, difference, permanence and mortality.







haruhiko sameshima



http://ancestrytest.com/Basic_Genetics/basic_genetics.html



G4

How do we breathe?

The respiratory system is made up of the lungs, trachea, bronchi, and diaphragm. The diaphragm contracts and relaxes to draw air into and out of the lungs.

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Glands

The endocrine system is made up of glands that secrete hormones into the bloodstream. The hormones then travel to target organs to regulate their function.

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List of Works

Julie Downie b.1959

Untitled (Antelope), Natural History Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen, 2001
350 x 500 mm Pigment Inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320gsm

Untitled (Millipede), Natural History Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen, 2001
490 x 340 mm Pigment Inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320gsm

Untitled (Amphibians), Mr Potter's Museum of Curiosities, Cornwall, 2001
460 x 280 mm Pigment Inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320gsm

Untitled (Fox & Duck), Mr Potter's Museum of Curiosities, Cornwall, 2001
290 x 185 mm Pigment Inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320gsm

Untitled (Squirrels), Mr Potter's Museum of Curiosities, Cornwall, 2001
190 x 125 mm Pigment Inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320gsm

Untitled (Thrush), The American Museum of Natural History, New York, 2001
230 x 352 mm Pigment Inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320gsm

Untitled (Squid), The American Museum of Natural History, New York, 2001
230 x 352 mm Pigment Inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320gsm

Untitled (Owl), The American Museum of Natural History, New York, 2001
230 x 352 mm Pigment Inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320gsm

Untitled (Sea Slug), The American Museum of Natural History, New York, 2001
140 x 220 mm Pigment Inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320gsm

Untitled (Polar Bear), Walter Rothschild Zoological Museum, Tring, 2000
180 x 290 mm Pigment Inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320gsm

Untitled (Birds), Walter Rothschild Zoological Museum, Tring, 2000
180 x 285 mm Pigment Inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320gsm

(page works iv - vi)

Heyes Johnson b.1972

Billy Galaxy (billygalaxy.com) 2009
737 x 552mm ink-jet print

Rays Ragtime (raysragtime.com) 2009
737 x 552mm ink-jet print

Toy Museum 2009
686 x 514mm ink-jet print

(page works vii - ix)

Faye Norman b.1959

Preservation Of Appearances

Untitled 2009
460 x 580mm Pigment Inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320gsm

(page works x - xii)

Haruhiko Sameshima b.1958

Images from Village After Revolution

Display, (human cell structure), 'Footsteps Through Time: 4 Million Years of Human Evolution', Hall of Human Reproduction, San Diego Museum of Man 2009
96 x 135mm Ink-jet print on archival paper

Display, (self-portrait as australopithecine), 'Footsteps Through Time: 4 Million Years of Human Evolution', Hominid Hall, San Diego Museum of Man 2009
227 x 303mm ink-jet print on archival paper

Display, (how hormones enter the blood), Human Biology, Blue Zone, Natural History Museum, London 1999
457 x 457mm selenium and gold toned silver print

The Comparative Anatomy & Paleontology Gallery, French National Museum of Natural History, Paris 1999
457 x 457mm selenium and gold toned silver print

The Agriculture Museum, Cairo 2006
220 x 330mm selenium and gold toned silver print

Display, (human reproductive system), The Agriculture Museum, Cairo 2006
457 x 457mm selenium and gold toned silver print

Display, (anatomical drawing), Shantytown, Hokitika 1995
457 x 457mm selenium and gold toned silver print

(page works xiii - xv)