

# Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities

Seminar Room 5

Mondays, 8 January - 5 March 2018

(Half term 12 February)

10.30 – 13.00



## Course Leaders:

- **Dr Martha Fleming is past Deputy Director of the V&A Research Institute (VARI); Co-Investigator, Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities (VARI); and Senior Research Associate, Enlightenment Architectures (British Museum)**
- **Dr Elaine Tierney is Teaching and Training Coordinator (VARI)**
- **Alison Bennett is currently completing a Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) PhD with University College London and the British Museum**

Cabinets of Curiosity housed collections of extraordinary objects drawn from art and nature throughout the world. This course explores how and why a variety of collectors amassed antiquities, scientific specimens, religious relics, and examples of virtuoso craftsmanship. Focusing on the period from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the course will examine the ways in which such objects were acquired, categorised, and re-circulated by connoisseurs who used their encyclopedic collections to understand their rapidly changing world.

Straddling the divide between art and science, private collections were at the heart of developments including the origins of museums, as well as new disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology and zoology that have shaped modern scholarship. Over eight weeks, talks from expert speakers will address collections amassed in the Dutch Golden Age, Baroque Spain, the Northern Renaissance, and in England, by collectors as varied as Hans Sloane, the Duchess of Portland, and the Earl of Arundel.

Guided collection visits in the world-class collections of the V&A, the Natural History Museum and Science Museum will reveal how modes of collecting and ways of knowing were deeply intertwined.

This course is being run in association with VARI, the Andrew W. Mellon-funded Research Institute that is at the heart of V&A Research.

**Please see appended to this programme a list of suggested readings for each session.**

### **Week 1: 8 January**

- 14.00 Overview (Alison Bennett, Dr Martha Fleming, Dr Elaine Tierney)  
The course and its programme; the field of the history of collections and its scholarship; Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities project at the V&A Research Institute; the course leaders and their research areas; elements of cabinets of curiosity in South Kensington Museums and beyond.
- 15.30 Sir Hans Sloane: Collecting in the first era of globalisation: The emergence of intellectual disciplines from material culture and collections management (Dr Martha Fleming, Co-Investigator, Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities, V&A Research Institute and Senior Research Associate, Enlightenment Architectures, British Museum)
- 16:30 Optional Guided Tour with Dr Martha Fleming at the Natural History Museum (ten minute walk): of the Treasures Gallery and Historical Botanical Collections Room in the Darwin Centre, both of which include Sloane collections

### **Week 2: 15 January**

- 14.00 'The Collections, Cabinets and Country Houses of British Slave-Owners, 1750-1860' (Dr Hannah Young, Co-Lead, Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities, V&A Research Institute)
- 15.30 Guided Tour with Dr Hannah Young of the V&A Galleries in which Collection items having belonged to absentee British slave-owners are displayed.

### **Week 3: 22 January**

- 14.00 'The emerging culture of collecting in the Netherlands of the 17th Century' (Professor Eric Jorink, Professor of Enlightenment and Religion, University of Leiden; and Huygens Institute, Amsterdam)
- 15.30 Guided Tour with Professor Jorink, Europe 1600 – 1815 Galleries of the V&A

#### **Week 4: 29 January**

- 14.00 'The Cabinet of Curiosities in Word and Image: Five centuries of representation (and misrepresentation)' (Dr Arthur MacGregor, Emeritus Curator, Ashmolean Museum and Founding Editor, Journal of the History of Collections)
- 15.30 'The India Museum Revisited: the East India Company, its Servants and its Collections' (Dr Arthur MacGregor) NB This talk relates to Dr MacGregor's forthcoming *Company Curiosities: the Collections of the India Companies* (Reaktion, 2018)
- 16.30 Self-Guided Tour of V&A Gallery 56c: Britain and the Indies

#### **Week 5: 5 February**

- 14.00 'The Kunstkammer in the Stable Block' (Dr Dániel Margócsy, University Lecturer in Science, Technology and Medicine before 1800, University of Cambridge)
- 15.30 Guided Tour with Dr Margócsy of V&A and Science Museum (10-minute walk) collections relating horse-breeding, horse armour and caprisons, and kunstkammer collections.

#### **Half Term: 12 February**

Please note that there will be no class time this week.

The Course Directors advise that you should visit three interconnected galleries at the British Museum during half term week, which together cover the date range of our course and include several collections about which our tutors are speaking:

Enlightenment Gallery: Room 1

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/visiting/galleries/themes/room\\_1\\_enlightenment.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/visiting/galleries/themes/room_1_enlightenment.aspx)

Collecting the World: Room 2

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/visiting/galleries/themes/room\\_2\\_collecting\\_the\\_world.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/visiting/galleries/themes/room_2_collecting_the_world.aspx)

The Waddesdon Bequest: A Rothschild Renaissance: Room 2a

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/visiting/galleries/themes/room\\_2a\\_waddesdon\\_bequest.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/visiting/galleries/themes/room_2a_waddesdon_bequest.aspx)

### **Week 6: 19 February**

- 14.00 'Sites of Collecting in Early Modern Spain: The Escorial, Seville, Mexico and more' (Dr Jose Ramon Marcaida, Senior Research Associate, 'The age of ingenio: Cultures of creativity in early modern Spain (1550-1700),' University of Cambridge; and Lecturer, Department of Art History, University of St Andrews)
- 15.30 'Icons of Collecting in the Hispanic World and the Indianisation of Objects', (Dr Jose Ramon Marcaida)

### **Week 7: 26 February**

- 14.00 'A Rothschild Renaissance: from The Scholar in His Study to the Neo-Kunstkammer' (Dr Dora Thornton, Curator of Renaissance Europe and Curator of the Waddesdon Bequest, British Museum)
- 15.30 Guided Tour with Dr Thornton of the V&A Medieval and Renaissance Galleries, with particular focus on Splendour in Society (Room 62) and Renaissance Art and Ideas (Room 64) which contains a display of objects evocative of a scholar's study including elements of Piero de' Medici's study
- NB: You will be expected to have visited the Waddesden Bequest Gallery at the British Museum and consulted Dr Thornton's publications and video (see appendix).*

### **Week 8: 5 March**

- 14.00 'Inhabiting and Interrogating the Cabinet of Curiosities in the 21st Century' (Dr Jane Wildgoose, artist and Keeper of the Wildgoose Memorial Library)
- 15.30 Handling session led by Charlotte Johnson, Acting Curator of the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collections, V&A Museum.

*Programme subject to change without notice.*



# Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities

## Suggested readings

**Week 1: 8 January, Alison Bennett, Dr Martha Fleming, Dr Elaine Tierney**

- MacGregor, ed (1994) *Sir Hans Sloane: Collector, Scientist, Antiquary*;
- Delbourgo (2017) *Collecting the World: The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane*;
- Schaffer et al, eds (2009) *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820*.

**Week 2: 15 January, Dr Hannah Young**

- Young, 'Forgotten Women: Anna Eliza Elletson and Absentee Slave Ownership' in Donnington et al, eds (2016) *Britain's History and Memory of Transatlantic Slavery*;
- Legacies of British Slave-ownership, ESRC Project 2009-2015: University College London <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>;
- Dresser et al, eds (2013) *Slavery and the British Country House* <http://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/slavery-and-british-country-house/slavery-british-country-house-web.pdf/>;
- Delbourgo (2007) *Slavery in the Cabinet of Curiosities: Hans Sloane's Atlantic*; World <https://www.britishmuseum.org/PDF/Delbourgo%2oessay.pdf>
- Delbourgo (2011) *Divers Things: Collecting The World Under Water* <https://history.rutgers.edu/docman-docs/faculty-profiles/255-faculty-profile-delbourgo-divers-things-article/file>.

**Week 3: 22 January, Professor Eric Jorink**

- Jorink (2010) *Reading the Book of Nature in the Dutch Golden Age, 1575-1715*;
- Jorink et al, eds (2011) *Art and Science in the Early Modern Low Countries*;
- Huigen et al, eds (2010) *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks*;
- Bergvelt et al, eds (1992) *De Wereld binnen handbereik: Nederlandse kunst- en rariteitenverzamelingen, 1585-1735*.

**Week 4: 29 January, Dr Arthur MacGregor**

- Impey and MacGregor, eds (1985) *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet Of Curiosities In Sixteenth And Seventeenth Century Europe*;
- MacGregor (2008) *Curiosity and Enlightenment: Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Century*;
- MacGregor, ed (2014) *The Cobbe Cabinet of Curiosities: An Anglo-Irish Countryhouse Museum*;

- MacGregor, ed (1983) *Tradescaent's Rarities: Essays on the Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum, 1683*;
- MacGregor, ed (1990) *The Late King's Goods: Collections, Possessions, And Patronage Of Charles I In The Light Of The Commonwealth Sale Inventories*;
- MacGregor et al, eds (2012) *From Books to Bezoars: Sir Hans Sloane and his Collections*;
- MacGregor, ed (1994) *Sir Hans Sloane: Collector, Scientist, Antiquary*.

#### **Week 5: 5 February, Dr Dániel Margócsy**

- Margócsy (2014) *Commercial Visions: Science, Trade, and Visual Culture in the Dutch Golden Age*;
- Margócsy (2013) The Fuzzy Metrics of Money: The Finances of Travel and the Reception of Curiosities in Early Modern Europe <https://www.brown.edu/academics/renaissance-early-modern-studies/sites/brown.edu.academics.renaissance-early-modern-studies/files/uploads/FinancesTravelCuriosityMargocsy.pdf>

#### **Half Term: 12 February**

#### **Week 6: 19 February, Dr Jose Ramon Marcaida**

- Marcaida (2014) *Arte y ciencia en el Barroco español. Historia natural, coleccionismo y cultural visual*;
- Marcaida, 'Rubens and the bird of paradise. Painting natural knowledge in the early seventeenth century' (2013) *Renaissance Studies* 28/1;
- Marcaida and Pimentel, 'Dead Natures or Still Lives? Science, Art and Collecting in the Spanish Baroque' in Bleichmar et al, eds (2011) *Collecting Across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World*.

#### **Week 7: 26 February, Dr Dora Thornton**

- NB: consulting these publications is mandatory for this session
- Thornton (2015) *A Rothschild Renaissance: Treasures from the Waddesdon Bequest*;
- Thornton and Shirley, eds (2017) *A Rothschild Renaissance: A New Look*;
- Thornton (1998) *The Scholar in His Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy*.
- It is also advisable to have visited the Waddesdon Bequest Gallery at the British Museum (see half-term week 12 February 2018).
- Video viewing:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEcQscUDnmQ>

**Week 8: 5 March,** Dr Jane Wildgoose, Charlotte Johnson

- <http://www.janewildgoose.co.uk/index.html>
- Promiscuous Assemblage, Friendship, & The Order Of Things: A Site-Specific Installation Accompanying The Exhibition Mrs. Delaney And Her Circle, Yale Center For British Art, New Haven, 2009-2010 and Sir John Soane's Museum, London, 2010  
<https://britishart.yale.edu/exhibitions/promiscuous-assemblage-friendship-order-things;>
- Beyond All Price, Waddesden Manor, 2015 [https://waddesdon.org.uk/whats-on/jane-wildgoose-beyond-price/.](https://waddesdon.org.uk/whats-on/jane-wildgoose-beyond-price/)

# Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities

## Further Reading



- Bredekamp (1993) *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine: The Kunstkammer and the Evolution of Nature, Art and Technology*, trans. Allison Brown
- Corrin and Wilson (1994) *Mining the Museum*
- Elsner et al, eds (1994) *The Cultures of Collecting*
- Findlen (1994) *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy*
- Foucault (1966) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*
- Pomian (1990) *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800* trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Portier
- Schwartz, ed (1994) *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*
- Schaffer, 'Golden Means: Assay Instruments and the Geography of Precision in the Guinea Trade' in Licoppe, et al, eds (2002) *Instruments, Travel and Science: Itineraries of Precision from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*
- Smith et al, eds (2007) *Making Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: Practices, Objects and Texts, 1400-1800*
- 'In Kind: Species of Exchange in Early Modern Science' (2013) *Annals of Science* 70