



# Cabinets of Curiosities

*Patrick Mauriès*

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## **Cabinets of Curiosities** Patrick Mauriès

The cabinet of curiosities, that strange assemblage of marvels from the natural world with virtuoso man-made objects, seemed definitively consigned to realms where only scholars venture. Its 300-year history apparently came to an end with the eccentric collectors of the baroque age, when scientific thinking and rationalism took over. But in recent years the cabinet of curiosities has reappeared in exhibitions in Europe and America and in international colloquia on university campuses, while reemerging as a source of inspiration for interior decorators and contemporary artists. This spectacular and ingenious book traces the history of these "rooms of wonders," from their first appearance in the inventories and engravings commissioned by Renaissance nobles such as the Medici and the Hapsburgs, via those of the Dane Ole Worm and the Italian polymath Athanasius Kircher, to the cabinets of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scientists Elias Ashmole and Levinas Vincent.

Much was genuinely scientific: minerals, fossils, stuffed and preserved animals and plants. Some items were merely curious, or even grotesque -- freaks of nature, monstrous births, insects in amber. The artificial or man-made was equally prominent -- wax effigies, death masks, specimens of almost incredible ingenuity (such as carvings on cherry-stones), or mechanical automata that imitated living things. The fascination of curiosities lies in their combination: they represent a stage of human inquiry in which imagination had not been divorced from reason.

Patrick Mauriès reconstructs these rooms of wonders as they were in their heyday and illustrates many of the most exotic items they contained, as well as the few complete interiors that survive. He begins with the totality of the collection, the "theater of the world," the whole sum of human knowledge gathered together in one room. He then examines the cabinets that contained and categorized the objects. Next he opens them to reveal the extraordinary melange of curiosities, specimens, and works of art. He looks at the personalities of the collectors themselves, from great princes to humble scholars, and finally at the modern revival of the cabinet of curiosity.

## **Cabinets of Curiosities Details**

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# From Reader Review Cabinets of Curiosities for online ebook

## Frederic says

One of the better coffee-table books on the subject. Focuses mainly on historical rather than contemporary collectors and their assemblages, with both period illustrations and photos of some of the objects today, and nice brief discussions of some of the kinds of materials that would be included.

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## Gregg says

A gorgeous, fascinating book about the history of collecting items of nature in "cabinets" that sometimes were the size of large rooms.

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## Bhan13 says

adore

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## Mira says

a giant lush coffee table book about the history of 16th/17th century wunderkammeren---the cabinets of curiosities created by early explorers, naturalists, scientists, emperors and the cultural elite. Great images!

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## Shannon says

The age of exploration incited curiosity of natural specimens, mechanical innovations, and marvelous objects, breeding the desire to collect and classify the rare, the strange, or (merely) everything.

This was a time before science, art, and fantasy diverged into catalogs, museums and encyclopedia, when the aesthetic arrangement and juxtaposition of uncommon items were as integral to a collection as the pieces themselves.

Patrick Mauriès picks out the most fascinating objects, collectors, and displays, building to a surprising crescendo in Emperor Rudolph II and the psychology behind the obsession of collecting. Meticulously researched and curated, the author reveals himself a collector of exquisite words.

"What do we really know of the evolution of patterns, of the interdependence of impulses, of unexpected collusions, of the unpredictable drifts and currents which precipitate us into esoteric tastes that must be satisfied, into frenzied quests and the cult of curiosities? At the very most, we may append ourselves as the newest and latest addition to the anatomy of this 'passion', and the make-up of the collector: a melancholic tropism, permeating and uniting the other necessary characteristics: an enquiring mind; a penchant for

secrecy; a propensity for rationalization; a passion for the process of acquisition; a fascination for the transmutation of forms and hybrids; and an inexhaustible ability to question the boundaries between life and death, the nature of being and the evanescence of life."

This is a book both wonderful and wonder filled.

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### **Elysia says**

Cabinets of Curiosities was an excellent sourcebook for my last assessment for University, which involved creating my own collection of curiosities for my fine arts class. I've been fascinated with the topic for a long time, and decided that it was time for me to add a book about cabinets of curiosities to my art book collection.

Although I haven't read all the text yet, as I used it mainly for aesthetic research, I do intend to go back and read it soon.

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