

**A CONTEMPORARY REINTERPRETATION OF "CABINETS OF CURIOSITIES"  
EXPLORED IN MoMA EXHIBITION**

*Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities*

July 30—November 10, 2008

The Paul J. Sachs Prints and Illustrated Books Galleries, second floor

**NEW YORK, July 30, 2008**—The Museum of Modern Art presents *Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities*, a contemporary reinterpretation of the centuries-old European "cabinet of curiosities" or *Wunderkammer*. These cabinets date back to Renaissance Europe, when private collectors began accumulating exotic, wondrous, fantastic, or bizarre objects via travels, scientific experiments and investigations, and other collecting methods. The organization and display of such collections were attempts to rationalize and categorize a vast bounty of information, and today's museums can be understood as an outgrowth of them. *Wunderkammer* follows this example, with groups of works organized by theme and taxonomy, and features nearly 130 prints, books, multiples, drawings, photographs, design objects, and sculptures by over 60 artists, from the nineteenth century to the present, and includes a cabinet uniquely constructed for the exhibition that contains numerous pieces from the Museum's collection. New acquisitions by Jake and Dinos Chapman, Trenton Doyle Hancock, Olafur Eliasson, and Nicolas Lampert, among others, are displayed for the first time at MoMA. On view from July 30 through November 11, 2008, the exhibition is organized by Sarah Suzuki, The Sue and Eugene Mercy, Jr., Assistant Curator of Prints and Illustrated Books, The Museum of Modern Art.

In addition to the newly acquired works, a wide selection of works from the Museum's collection that have never been shown before are also on view. Included are Louise Bourgeois's (American, b. 1911) 8 foot long woodcut and lithograph, *The Songs of the Blacks and the Blues* (1996); Joseph Cornell's (American, 1903-72) *Untitled* (1972), a construction of a glass eye in a spring within a glass vitrine; a print from Claes Oldenburg (American, b. 1929), *Screwarch Bridge, state II* (1980); and a lithograph of *White Teeth* (1963) by Jim Dine (American, born 1935), among others.

Odilon Redon (French, 1840-1916), closely allied with the Symbolist movement, rejected the visible universe in favor of one inspired by dreams and fantasy, trips to natural history museums, and attendance at medical lectures. Included in the exhibition are multiple works by Redon, notably *Spider* (1887), an example of his use of invented hybrid characters, figures drawn from that fantastic world of Redon's studies and imagination.

The Surrealists carried on a similar pursuit, famously declaring in their 1924 manifesto, "the marvelous is always beautiful," and often relied on chance and the unconscious to look

beyond the known. Work by Leonora Carrington (British, b. 1917), Dorothea Tanning (American, b. 1910), Wols (German, 1913-1951), Max Ernst (German, 1891-1976), and Hans Bellmer (German, 1902-1975) illustrate and explore these concepts. In *Une Semaine de Bonte* (1934), Ernst created a “collage novel,” created by combining imagery culled from nineteenth and early-twentieth century pulp novels, scientific journals, mail-order catalogues, and natural history magazines. To create his series of 34 collotypes *Histoire Naturelle* (1926), Ernst made rubbings over various surfaces—wood, crumpled paper, crusts of bread—then allowed the resulting textures to inspire him to invent strange landscapes, objects, or animals.

Ellen Gallagher (American, b. 1965) scratches and carves into thick paper to create an image of an undersea creature in *Watery Ecstatic* (2001). Gallagher has likened her process to scrimshaw, a nineteenth-century practice in which whalers and sailors carved intricate scenes into bones, teeth, or tusks of marine animals.

In the same section as Gallagher’s work, Not Vital (Swiss, b. 1948) creates a life-sized etching of lambs, with *Kiss* (1996). Vital frequently references natural or animal forms in surreal configurations. Most often, he turns to lambs or goats, common to his native village in rural Switzerland, and also to Agadez, Niger, where he maintains a home.

Trenton Doyle Hancock (American, b. 1975) explores the unusual and extraordinary in his series of etchings and aquatints, *The Ossified Theosophied* (2005), four of which are included in the exhibition. Through his own fantastical narrative, Hancock traces the activities of two opposing groups, the Mounds (who represent good) and the Vegans (who represent evil). In Hancock’s series, the character “Sesom” has dreams of bringing color into the Vegan’s black and white world.

Placed throughout the exhibition, Nicolas Lampert’s (American, b. 1969) animal-machine hybrids are somewhat menacing creatures that speak of a world engulfed in its own technology. The prints presented here for the first time at MoMA, *Locust Tank* (2006), *Praying Mantis Crane* (2006), and *Very Slow, Very Tired* (2006), juxtapose the biomorphic forms of the animal kingdom with the angular severity of man-made appliances. The monstrous figures unexpectedly reveal uncanny similarities between natural and artificial forms, provoking a critical look at the interaction between industrial and ecological realms.

Also on display for the first time, Olafur Eliasson’s (Icelandic, b. 1967) *Your House* (2006), an artist’s book published by The Library Council of The Museum of Modern Art, is an oversize, sculptural volume evoking a passage through a turn-of-the-twentieth-century European house in the Nordic Romantic style—the artist’s own house in Copenhagen, Denmark. The book’s 454 handbound leaves (or 908 pages) digitally reproduce a series of vertical cross-sections of the house on a scale of 85:1 (so that each leaf corresponds to 2.2 centimeters of the actual house). In addition, each leaf is individually laser-cut to create negative spaces in the paper, and these apertures, opening on the shifting forms of cut pages to come, cumulatively produce the sensorial

illusion of being inside the house. The result is an intensified sense of space, dimension, and materiality.

Near Eliasson's work in the final gallery of the exhibition is Alexander Brodsky (Russian, b. 1955) and Ilya Utkin's (Russian, b. 1955) *Town Bridge* (1984, painted 1990). In the face of a political structure that supported a utilitarian and unimaginative style of architecture, this duo, collaborators since first meeting in architecture school in Moscow in 1972, began entering international competitions that called for theoretical designs rather than practical ones. *Town Bridge* is one such fantastic proposal, an etching made in 1984 for a UNESCO competition on the theme of "Tomorrow's Habitat."

With Mark Dion (American, b. 1961), the *Wunderkammer* tradition is upheld in the twenty-first century, as Dion accumulates, classifies, and displays curious objects in cabinets of his own creation. Dion's *Cabinet* (2004), originally commissioned for MoMA's 2004 reopening, contains cleaned and classified relics recovered from beneath the Museum's Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden and the surrounding area, prior to the construction of the new building.

Within the cabinet constructed especially for the exhibition are *Unhappy Meal III* (2002), from Jake and Dinos Chapman (British, b. 1966 and 1962), an etching with watercolor additions, cut and folded into a box that mimics a child's fast food meal; Man Ray's (American, 1890-1976) *Gift* (c. 1958), a flatiron with a row of tacks; and two multiples of cloth and fur from Marcel Duchamp (American, 1887-1968), *Couple of Laundress' Aprons* (1959), among other objects.

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**Public Information:**

**The Museum of Modern Art**, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019

**Hours:** Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m.  
Closed Tuesdays, except December 19, December 26, and January 2.

**During July and August, the Museum is open to the public until 8:45 p.m. on Thursdays.**

The public may call 212/708-9400 for detailed Museum information.

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