

SPENCER MUSEUM OF ART

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

For immediate release

***Cabinets of Curiosity* explores roots of museums**

June 17—September 24, 2006

South Balcony Gallery

MEDIA CONTACT

Steve Goddard, Curator of Prints & Drawings, 785.864.0127, goddard@ku.edu

Kate Meyer, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Prints & Drawings, 785.864.0128, KMM0045@ku.edu

Bill Woodard, Director of Communications, 785.864.0142, dradoowb@ku.edu

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Lawrence, KS— Ever wonder how museums came to be? *Cabinets of Curiosity: Musing About Collections*, a summer exhibition at the Spencer Museum of Art, chronicles the historical aspects of collecting as they developed in sixteenth-century Europe, and as they can be gleaned from the current holdings of several University of Kansas repositories.

Cabinets of Curiosity reaches into and beyond the Spencer Museum of Art's collections to include objects from the Spencer Research Library, the Anthropological Research and Cultural Collections, and the Natural History Museum and Biodiversity Research Center. Joseph Keehn, Loo Family Intern in Education, and Madeline Rislow, Mellon Foundation Intern in Prints & Drawings organized the exhibition, under the curatorial supervision of Steve Goddard, senior curator of prints and drawings.

Based on ownership and dependent upon wealth, the act of collecting objects—especially objects from other cultures—can be interpreted as forms of colonialism and imperialism; yet museums offer opportunities to reflect upon humankind through those objects and creations it deems special, and to consider the complex relationships between humanity and the natural world. Collecting, preserving and presenting such material responsibly and respectfully remains a primary challenge for today's museums.

Inspired by Renaissance ideas—with an emphasis on natural objects and human-made creations known as *naturalia* and *artificialia*—sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European curiosity cabinets might best be described as microcosmic reflections of the world's wonders. Often known by the German phrase “*kunst- und wunderkammern*,” or rooms (*kammern*) of art (*kunst*) and wonder (*wunder*), early collections tended to be encyclopedic in scope and aspired to produce a “theatre of knowledge” in a single room. Whether housed in a room or in a single cabinet, the collections cultivated a sense of the marvelous, the exotic, and the wonderful and are still known as “cabinets of curiosity” today.

In the eighteenth century, collections of curiosities served as catalysts for the emergence of the modern museum. These later collections were marked by a shift away from notions of theatricality and universality and toward the more empirical modes of classification generally associated with modern science. Specimens from the natural world and artifacts representing cultural heritage often made their way into natural history and anthropology museums, whereas objects classified as art were displayed and stored in art museums.

Cabinets of Curiosity presents these formerly divided collections in the manner of the original *kunst- und wunderkammern*, bringing together *naturalia* and *artificialia* and including objects typically found in early cabinets, with highlights from the Spencer Museum of Art's founding collection, which was donated to KU in 1917 by Sallie Casey Thayer. The broad and eclectic array of items assembled here offers opportunities to explore the relationship between collecting and colonialism and to examine contemporary ideas of collection and display. While essentially historical in nature, *Cabinets of Curiosity* also invites us to reflect on the idea of the museum as we know it today and to consider its possible future permutations.

Programming for *Cabinets of Curiosity: Musing About Collections*

All events are FREE and open to the public unless otherwise noted (\$).

PAGE TO SCREEN: Summer Book Discussion & Film Series Thursdays in July / 6 & 7 PM / Central Court & SMA Auditorium

Page to Screen is a new program this summer, co-sponsored by the Lawrence Public Library, which combines film screenings and book discussions. In conjunction with *Cabinets of Curiosity*, the Spencer has assembled a series of films with storylines that feature the practice of collecting; the library has paired each film with the book that inspired it or a thematically similar book. A book discussion will precede each screening.

The Friends of the Lawrence Public Library have provided funding for twenty sets of books that may be borrowed from the Library by registered participants. To register, call Maria Butler at the Library, 785-843-3833, or email mbutler@lawrence.lib.ks.us.

***This program is free and open to anyone; registration is not necessary to participate in the discussions.**

- **July 6 / *About Schmidt*** by Louis Begley, 6 PM book discussion with Maria Butler, Lawrence Public Library / 7 PM film screening, *About Schmidt* (2002) starring Jack Nicholson
- **July 13 / *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*** by M. M. Manning, 6 PM book discussion with Kevin Wilmott, KU Department of Theatre and Film / 7 PM film screening, *Bamboozled* (2000), directed by Spike Lee
- **July 20 / *Everything is Illuminated*** by Jonathan Safran Foer, with the 2005 film *Everything is Illuminated* starring Elijah Wood / M.J. McClendon, KU Department of English
- **July 27 / *The Collector*** by John Fowles, with the 1965 film *The Collector* starring Terrance Stamp / Discussion leader, Tim Thurman, KU Department of English

OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE CLASSES

Sponsored by KU Continuing Education / Enrollment required: 785.864.KUCE (5823) or www.kuce.org or kuce@ku.edu

- July 5 / 2-4 PM / \$ / Instructor Madeline Rislow will discuss “The Italian Studiolo”
- July 12/ 2-4 PM / \$ / Instructor Joseph Keehn will discuss “Making Meaning of Collections”

FAMILY AND CHILDREN’S PROGRAMS

Family Day: July 30, 1-3 PM / SMA Central Court & Galleries / Learn about the exhibitions ***Summer in the Central Court*** and ***Cabinets of Curiosity*** and enjoy hands-on activities for the whole family / Be sure to visit the Natural History Museum for their Gallery Trail, offered in conjunction with ***Cabinets of Curiosity***

Children’s Art Appreciation classes / 10:30 AM & 1:30 PM / \$ / Pre-registration required / Contact Karen Gerety, education department, at 785.864.0137, kcgerety@ku.edu

- June 24 / *Curious Cabinets* / Learn about objects in *Cabinets of Curiosity* and create a shadow box.
- July 8 / *Curious Creations* / Learn about objects in *Cabinets of Curiosity* and create curious miniatures with Model Magic clay.

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Spencer Museum of Art

The University of Kansas
1301 Mississippi St
Lawrence 66045-7500
785.864.4710

Also find the Spencer...

- On the Web: www.spencerart.ku.edu
- E-mail: spencerart@ku.edu

Gallery hours

Tues., Wed., Fri., & Saturday 10 AM—5 PM

Thurs. 10 AM—9 PM

Sun. Noon—5 PM

Closed Monday

Museum Shop closes 30 minutes before the galleries close.

- Free parking in Lot 91 after 5 PM on weekdays and all day weekends, excepting home football games.
- Parking garage adjacent to Kansas Union is \$1 per hour weekdays, free on Saturdays and Sundays (but unavailable on home football games).