A Curious Group

A cabinet of curiosities

in celebration of ten years of the graduate group in archaeology, classics, and history of art at Bryn Mawr College
Foreword

The Graduate Group is, like so much else at Bryn Mawr College, a brilliant anomaly. It was already an anomaly in 1885 to found a women’s college that would award doctoral as well as undergraduate degrees; it remains an anomaly that in 2014 this proud representative of women’s education in the liberal arts should still be awarding doctorates to women and to men.

The brilliant anomaly of the Graduate Group itself consists in the notion—formulated ten years ago by Professor Emerita Dale Kinney—that we should embark on a novel experiment: actively to bring the disciplines of Archaeology, Classics, and History of Art into conversation with each other. Thus seminars would be taught and conversations fostered which brought together students of cultures both material and textual, oral and literate, prehistoric and contemporary and everywhere in between.

Ten years on, the brilliant and anomalous juxtapositions that have ensued have been a source of tremendous intellectual expansion, for students and faculty alike.

When I began planning the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Graduate Group, I wanted somehow to celebrate the intellectual fruitfulness of these juxtapositions in visual form. Carrie Robbins, whom I invited to curate this exhibition, had the inspired idea that they could be captured in the form of a Wunderkabinett, a cabinet of wonders. An eclectic array of objects garnered from our own collections would be displayed in a fashion at once time-honored and novel, clustered in cases and vitrines, with a heuristic that proposed some classifications while inviting the viewer to respond, even to contradict, with her own. This invitation to active participation, to intellectual discovery, and yes, to wonder, typifies the Graduate Group itself.

Our relationship with Special Collections—both the collections of art and artifacts, and of rare books and manuscripts—has been crucial to the Graduate Group from its foundation; our collaboration with colleagues in Special Collections, in the classroom and in administering our Curatorial Internships, constantly enriches and expands the scope of the Graduate Group. This exhibition is in some part a tribute to the richness of this collaboration.

We are also very grateful to Camilla MacKay, the head of Carpenter Library, and to the denizens of Carpenter for allowing us to take over the Kaiser Reading Room for the show. If there is a topography of the Graduate Group, Carpenter library is its metropolis, for that is where our graduate students most regularly meet, read, think, and share ideas. The unexpected and happy juxtaposition of ideas is what this exhibition, and the Graduate Group itself, are all about.

Finally, I am utterly indebted both to Carrie Robbins, the curator, and to the exhibition designer, Nathanael Roesch, for working so hard amid their many other obligations to bring this show to fruition. We hope that its viewers, especially our alumnae and alumni and our current students, will see represented here the brilliant anomaly that is the Graduate Group.

Catherine Conybeare
Professor of Classics
Director of the Graduate Group in Archaeology, Classics, and History of Art

April 4–June 1, 2014
BRYN MAWR COLLEGE
Rhys Carpenter Library
The Herman George Kaiser Reading Room

Carrie Robbins
curator
Nathanael Roesch
designer

This exhibition and publication were made possible through the generous support of the Graduate Group in Archaeology, Classics, and History of Art at Bryn Mawr College.

The organizers would like to thank Catherine Conybeare for her unfailing support, guidance, and camaraderie throughout all phases of the exhibition. Dick Wavenkirk and Pat Gonsbery lent invaluable encouragement and advice along the way.

From the Department of Special Collections, Eric Pursey, Brian Wallace, Marianne Weldon, and Marianne Smith enthusiastically contributed to this project in countless ways. Additional thanks to Camilla MacKay and Jeremy Blatchley of Carpenter Library, to Joseph Mann, Harold Maryea, and the rest of Facilities Services, and to William Buxer, Russell Castro, Nickie Coleman, Rebekah Reel, Nava Streeter, Steve Tucker, and especially Juelle Collins for their help in making this exhibition a reality.

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In Renaissance Europe, a cabinet of curiosities was a vast collection of all kinds of objects—artificial and natural, extraordinary and ordinary—displayed in an overwhelming and immersive manner meant to entertain and impress the guests of its wealthy owner. Emerging from a context of imperialist world exploration, such encyclopedic displays also aimed to organize the material world into discrete categories, so as to enable comparisons and to facilitate knowledge.

As a site of knowledge production, the cabinet of curiosities becomes an apt metaphor for the aims of the Graduate Group. The cabinet, like a seminar or exhibition, frames its subject according to select criteria. But its shelves or structuring principles are also on display, offering themselves to our scrutiny. This exhibition uses nine intentionally arbitrary categories to organize a selection of objects that could be grouped differently by each visitor. The display cases are ordered, but the objects contained within them also resist this ordering. Some organizing principles, such as shared materials, might seem self-evident, but their use often reveals more variety than unity among the objects grouped accordingly. Others, such as the theme of violence, are perhaps less readily apparent and are meant to demonstrate the interpretative aspect of categorization. Still others, such as “Cat.,” are deliberately playful, reminding us of the way that categorical abbreviations can cut short the opportunity to understand something differently.

Much as Carpenter Library architecturally reframes the space of the library as an archaeological site, this exhibition unearths the display mode of the cabinet of curiosities to prompt interaction with objects otherwise hidden away in the storage cabinets of Bryn Mawr College’s Art and Artifact Collections. Each visitor is encouraged to compare objects not only within a given cabinet, but also between them, producing meanings through individual association and multidisciplinary comparison. Moreover, just as in a seminar, it is hoped that these individual readings will be exchanged and developed in the gathering space of this Reading Room in the library that is home to our curious Graduate Group.

Carrie Robbins
Ph.D. ’13, History of Art
Organization of Cabinet(s)*

This exhibition is formed of nine intentionally arbitrary categories of objects, defined and illustrated on the facing page. The map below uses color to indicate the category to which a given cabinet corresponds. These categories serve as one way to group the objects, however the insufficiency of any category to contain its objects entirely is also meant to be revealed. The meanings of these objects exceed and resist the effort of containment, and in some cases an object has escaped its cabinet and fled to another. Each visitor is invited to make her own curious connections across categories and to imagine other arrangements.

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*cat* \(\text{kat}\) 1 n a domesticated, carnivorous quadruped, kept to destroy mice and as a house pet. 2 abbr CATEGORY a classification of things according to a shared property; its use being different with different authors.

*china* \(\text{Chīnə}\) 1 n a fine white or translucent vitrified ceramic material originally manufactured in China, renamed porcelain when brought to Europe in the 16th century. CHINAWARE 2 n a country so-called in Asia: CHINA 3 of furniture a manifestation of a Western worldview that objectifies its Eastern “other” as exotic items meant to be looked at, protected, and tidily contained: CHINA CABINET

*display* \(\text{diplay}\) 1 v to unfold to view, exhibit, show 2 n a selection and arrangement meant to indicate importance 3 n a case in which items are displayed for inspection: DISPLAY CASE

*fauna* \(\text{fənə}\) 1 n a collective term for the animal life of any particular region or epoch 2 n used to distinguish animals from non-animals

*metal* \(\text{mətəl}\) 1 n a hard, shiny, malleable material 2 adj made or consisting of metal: METAL, METALLIC 3 homophone a person’s character; the stuff of which one is made: METTLE

*reproduction* \(\text{rəprədəkʃən}\) 1 n the action or process of bringing into existence again 2 n a copy, an exact equivalent, esp. a copy of a picture or other work of art by means of engraving, photography, or similar process 3 n the designation of an item as a replica 4 n a good produced in large quantities: MASS REPRODUCTION

*violence* \(\text{vīləns}\) 1 n the infliction of harm or injury upon someone or something 2 n a treatment causing bodily injury or interference with personal freedom

*wood* \(\text{wŏd}\) 1 n the fibrous material that forms the substance of roots, trunks, and branches of trees or shrubs 2 adj made of wood: WOODEN 3 n a block used for engraving or printing 4 biblical material of an idol, icon 5 phrase escaped from a difficult situation: OUT OF THE WOODS
The following list is meant to serve as a guide through the exhibition, helping each viewer to begin the process of identifying the objects on display. The number and color of the pins nearest an object in the case corresponds to an entry in this list. The color also designates a theme or category to which the object belongs. Of course, this theme is not the only category to which an object might belong, and it is sometimes playfully indicated by a second adjacent colored pin. The viewer is invited to explore additional opportunities for cross-categorization, as well as entirely new themes that could be used to organize these objects.

**Checklist of the Exhibition**

- **George Baxter**
  - **Painting**
    - 1856, Great Britain
    - "A Girl with a Mirror"

- **Nude Child and Cat**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Girl with a Cat"

- **Cat**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Boy with a Cat"

- **Color Woodblock Print**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Ceramic Art**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Clay Sculpture**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Leather Sculpture**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Wood Sculpture**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Metal Sculpture**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Glass Sculpture**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Textile Sculpture**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Fiber Sculpture**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Mixed Media Sculpture**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Digital Sculpture**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Interactive Sculpture**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Video Sculpture**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

- **Performance Sculpture**
  - **Painting**
    - 1915, Great Britain
    - "Cat and Mouse"

Wallace Ursyniewicz, Greenland Carved, inlaid, appliqued wood, ivory, metal. 2000.69, Gift of Frederica de Laguna.

Tupling Monkeys c. 1799, North America Ivory 1996.70, Gift of Frederica de Laguna.

Howard Sanford Model Unmask (Open Skin Boat) Alaska Wood, seal, and curricular intestine 2016.101, Gift of Helen Burwell Chapin.

Okihama, Bird and Iris on a Wooden Stand Japan Ivory, wood 2005.551, Gift of Elizabeth Gray Vining.

Three Rabbits Taking Dumplings to the Rabbit in the Moon Japan Ivory, wood 2005.801, Gift of Elizabeth Gray Vining.

Pen Quill in Shape of Monument Tete Monole United States Chert 1904.137, Gift of Mrs. Harry G. Houdini.

Bone (?) with Eelbed Skip Bone as ivory (?) 2003.88, Gift of Elizabeth Gray Vining.

Horn Spoon Fragment Alaska Bone 1940.1, Gift of Mrs. Harry G. Houdini.

Awl Europe Bone 1971.58, Gift of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

Pipe Case Late 19th C, Japan Bone as ivory (?) 1970.32, Gift of Miss Harriet Brochino.

Quart Mexico Marble 1913.81, Gift of George Vase and Ann Holmes Vase

METAL

Flameng and Tommy Vanuakma

Kuurina Islands, Japan

Male Figure

2005.84.1, Gift of R. Michael Brien.

Female Figure

2005.84.2, Gift of R. Michael Brien.

Mask of Agamemnon

20th C, after 16th C BCE original), Mycenaean, Greece. Metal, electrum. 95.129, Gift of Donald A. Bailey.

Sculpture of a Mouse on a Daunak Metal 2005.643, Gift of Elizabeth Gray Vining.

André Karilette

Etuvmao Bronze Mirror or Effigy with Male Nude Male Handle, Front View 1940–45, United States Bronze silver plate 2003.371, Gift of Helen Ziskind.

Levino Wrist Hair Welsh Metal 2006.64, Gift of Mrs. Harry G. Houdini.

John Carriat

The Mirror of Life Mid–late 19th C, United States Chert, embossing 1972.389, Gift of Mr. Frank.

Mycenaean Dagger 20th C (after 16th C BCE original), Mycenaean, Greece. Metal, electrum. 99.46, Gift of Helen Burwell Chapin.

Mirror and Mirror Cover 400–350 BCE, Greece or Italy Metal 1972.93, Gift of Donna Cassady Spitter.

Mirror and Mirror Cover 20th C, Greece or Italy Metal 1972.92, Gift of Donna Cassady Spitter.


Game of the Epic Saga of Jesus of Arc 1894, France Lithograph 2004.46.

Seekh & Jouiller

Masque Kiriat, Detail


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Archae Figure

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