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ABOUT THE EXHIBITION
Cabinets of Wonder: The Art of Collecting

CMA is pleased to announce our spring show Cabinets of Wonder: The Art of Collecting, an exhibition of works by established and emerging artists that encourages curiosity about the world.

Cabinets of Wonder or Curiosity Cabinets, from the German term Wunderkammer, are historically strange collections of natural objects, art, or bizarre artifacts that illustrated the collectors’ rare knowledge, prestige or power. They can also be considered museums for our imagination, containing the objects and stories that demonstrate our curiosity for collecting. A contemporary interpretation of the traditional Wunderkammer (Wonder Cabinets), this exhibition presents the work of contemporary artists who collect and re-display familiar objects from nature and every day life. In an era of high-tech mass production, these artists lend themselves to a labor-intensive, manual process that transforms the mundane into the marvelous.

Collecting is a human activity that always fascinates. Anything can be an object for collecting, from cooking spoons to paintings of cooking spoons. We collect things as a pastime, as a mission in life, or just because we can’t help it. Collecting shines a searchlight – directly or indirectly – on the relationship between the objects we desire, and their relationship to us, or to society. The exhibition Cabinet of Wonder: The Art of Collecting encourages viewers to consider their own habits of collecting whether is it clay bar figures or stamps.

Exhibiting Artists: Barton Lidice Benes, Mark Dion, Cui Fei, Vanessa German, Jean Shin, Jan Staller, and Penelope Umbrico

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
What is a collection? How does a collection tell a story?

Collecting is a human activity that always fascinates. Anything can be an object for collecting, from cooking spoons to paintings of cooking spoons. We collect things as a pastime, as a mission in life, or just because we can’t help it. Collecting shines a spotlight directly or indirectly on the relationship between the objects we desire, their relationship to us, or to society.
HISTORY
What are cabinets of wonder from the past and present?

DEFINITION: Interesting Collections
Cabinets of wonder, also known as cabinets of curiosities, are spaces to showcase collections of interesting objects. During the 15th century in Renaissance Europe, cabinets of wonder originated from the German word wunderkammer. Many of the early examples of cabinets of wonder were documented as paintings and drawings or exist as actual collections since this was a time before the invention of photography in 1790.

FUNCTION: Symbols of Power
Royalty and merchants used cabinets of wonder to showcase interesting and strange objects that reflected their rare knowledge, power, and status.

FORM: Walk-In Rooms to Modeled Cabinets
Originally, the word cabinet was used to describe a room instead of a piece of furniture. These rooms were encyclopedic collections of various fascinating objects from around the world such as items found in nature, antiques, and art. Over time, cabinets of wonder transitioned from being walk-in rooms to modeled cabinets. To store objects, these cabinets have different sized and shaped drawers and shelves.

FORM & FUNCTION TODAY: Our Surroundings and Art
We are surrounded by cabinets of wonder from public and private collections such as artworks in museums, to objects in backpacks, to photos on Internet pages like Facebook and Pinterest. The exhibition at CMA is a contemporary interpretation of the traditional cabinets of wonder. Contemporary artists collect and re-display familiar objects from nature and everyday life. In an era of high-tech mass production, these artists lend themselves to a labor-intensive, manual process that transforms the mundane into the marvelous.
PRE-VISIT: EXPLORING COLLECTIONS

What is a collection?

1) Selecting Objects for a Collection
   Natural vs. Human-Made Materials

**Activity:** Students will look at Frans Francken's *Kunstkammer*, 1636 (Fig. 1) and Marc Dion’s *Scala Natura*, 2008, (Fig. 2) and play “I Spy” (Pre-K – 1st) or create a visual venn diagram with images and labels (2nd – 10th) of natural and human-made objects in the collection.

**Objective:** Through looking at historical examples (cabinet as walk-in room) and contemporary artists’ examples of cabinets of wonder, students will learn to compare and contrast different types of materials and will make connections where natural and human-made materials overlap with each other.

2) Organizing a Collection
   Backpacks as Cabinets of Wonder

**Activity:** Students will look at Domenico Remps’s *A Cabinet of Curiosity*, 1675 (Fig. 3), Isidore Leroy de Barde’s *A Selection of Shells Arranged on a Shelf*, 1803 (Fig. 4) and Joseph Cornell’s *The Hotel Eden*, 1945 (Fig. 5) to create drawings of how to organize objects in their backpacks.

**Objective:** Through looking at historical representations of cabinets of wonder (as furniture with modeled shelves of different shapes and sizes) and drawing personal objects, students will learn that their backpacks can be a cabinet of wonder and that the objects inside can reflect their self-identity. Also, students will learn about the process of arranging, archiving, and curating objects as specimens and artifacts.

3) Investigating a Collection
   Characteristics of Objects in a Backpack

**Activity:** Students will create a visual data inventory table (with rows and columns for images and labels) for a collection of objects in their backpack that represent different characteristics such as location, material, color, pattern, texture, shape, and size (see Table 1 on p. 4).

**Objective:** Through creating an inventory, students will learn that they can identify, sort, and count different quantities, locations, materials, colors, patterns, textures, shapes, and sizes of objects.
POST-VISIT: MAKING COLLECTIONS
How does your collection tell a story?

1) Selecting Objects for a Collection
   Stories of Special Objects

**Activity:** Students will bring in a special object and share a story about why it is meaningful to them. Also, students can use their objects to inspire a story. These activities can be done by discussion and/or writing prompts.

**Objective:** Through selecting and sharing verbal and written narratives of a special object, students will learn that this object can reflect their self-identity such as their interests, personality, emotions, and culture.

2) Organizing a Collection
   Collaborative Cabinet of Wonder of Special Objects

**Activity:** Students will create a collaborative cabinet of wonder using their special objects that they bring in or from their backpack.

**Objectives:** Through creating and organizing special objects, students will learn that their own personal objects can be specimens or artifacts for their collections that reflect their self-identity and can come together to make a collection of their collective/group identity and class community.

3) Investigating a Collection
   Symbols and Meanings of Special Objects

**Activity:** Students will create a visual data inventory chart (with rows and columns for images and labels) of a collection of special objects that represent different symbols and meanings (see Table 2 on p. 4).

**Objective:** Through investigating collections of special objects, students will learn that they can identify and represent objects as symbols with meaning that reflect one’s identity. Students will also learn that collections have evolving histories, stories, and meanings.

**Resource:**
*What Kids Learn from Collecting* by Nita Gill
http://www.babycenter.com/0_what-kids-learn-from-collecting_66942.bc
### Table 1

**Visual Inventory Table**  
A Collection of Objects in My Backpack as a Cabinet of Wonder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Color/Pattern</th>
<th>Texture</th>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
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<td>2)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2

**Visual Inventory Table**  
A Collection of Special Objects in Our Class as a Cabinet of Wonder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
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<td>3)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Vocabulary
Systems and Processes of Collections
Selecting, Organizing, and Investigating Objects

1) Selecting Objects for a Collection

- **Compare and Contrast:** The process of finding similarities or differences between different objects, people, and places (ie. Let’s compare and contrast natural materials and human-made materials).

- **Natural:** Something that exists in nature and is not made or caused by a person (ie. Natural materials come from plants, animals, and the ground).

- **Human-Made:** An object made by a person rather than being made by nature (ie. Technology such as computers are human-made objects).

- **Self-Identity:** A person’s qualities and characteristics (ie. Your self-identity reflects your interests, personality, emotions, and culture).

2) Organizing a Collection

- **Arrange:** The way in which objects can be placed (ie. We saw cabinets where objects were neatly organized on shelves and cabinets where many different objects were clustered together).

- **Archive:** To place or store something in a place where its history can be recorded (ie. When people start a collection, they are archiving objects where each object tells a different story).

- **Curate:** The process of selecting, organizing, and displaying objects in a collection or exhibit (ie. You can curate the objects on the shelves in different ways, which can have different meanings).

- **Specimen:** An individual animal, plant, piece of a mineral, etc. used for scientific study or display (ie. A scientist might investigate a specimen under a microscope to learn more about it).

- **Artifact:** An object made by a human being that is usually of cultural or historical interest and importance (ie. Archaeologists may dig up artifacts that reflect past cultures).

- **Collective/Group Identity:** The shared sense of belonging to a community of people (ie. Our class is group that has a collective identity).
3) Investigating a Collection

- **Identify**: To make sense of what something is (ie. Let’s identify what we think are the oldest or newest object in the cabinet).

- **Sort**: To place objects or people into organized groups according to type (ie. You can sort the objects by shape, color, and size).

- **Count**: To figure out the total number of something (ie. Let’s count how many objects are on each shelf of the cabinet).

- **Quantity**: The amount or number of a material (ie. When I first started collecting rocks from my travels, I only had a few rocks. But after a few years, I had collected many rocks from different places).

- **Location**: A place or position (ie. When we leave school for our trip, we will travel to a new location, which will be a museum).

- **Material**: The substance or substances out of which something is made out of (ie. In the art studio, there are different materials that we can use in different ways to make our projects).

- **Color**: A property that we can see with our eyes when an object reflects light (ie. We are surrounded by different types of colors such as light/dark and bright/dull).

- **Pattern**: A design of different shapes and/or colors that repeats (ie. The American flag has a pattern of red and white stripes where the colors take turns/alternate).

- **Texture**: What a material feels and looks like describes its texture (ie. Objects can have different textures such as rough, smooth, bumpy, hard, soft, etc. Also, objects can have more than one type of texture).

- **Shape**: The outline and form of an object, person, or place (ie. There are different types of shapes in our classroom such as a rounded circular clock and long rectangular desks).

- **Size**: The dimensions of how big something is (ie. There are lots of different objects of different sizes in the cabinets such as small/large, narrow/wide, short/long, etc.).

- **Symbol**: A picture that has a meaning and tells a story (ie. Ancient Egyptians had an alphabet made up of symbols called hieroglyphics).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTS+</th>
<th>ARTS+ Overview</th>
<th>Key CCSS in ARTS+ Curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Language Arts (ELA)</strong></td>
<td>Art-making is an interdisciplinary approach to student learning, developing literacy skills and drawing connections to one's own experiences through verbal and written narratives.</td>
<td>Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy in History/Social Studies (RH)</strong></td>
<td>Through interpreting history and culture, students will be able to visually represent their own understanding of past, present, and future events.</td>
<td>Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs) with other information on print and digital texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy in Science and Technical Subjects (RST)</strong></td>
<td>Students use quantitative data analysis to communicate evidence and reasoning using visual graphics.</td>
<td>Integrate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text with a version of that information expressed visually (e.g., in a diagram, model, graph, or table).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mathematics (MATH)</strong></td>
<td>Art-making is a way to make connections by identifying and analyzing systems, strategies, and processes. Students learn to problem solve by exploring real-world challenges and problems.</td>
<td>Understand relationships between problem scenarios and mathematical representation. Make connections by identifying shapes, symbols, and patterns.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Fig. 1) Frans Francken, *Kunstkammer*, 1636
(Fig. 2) Frans Francken, *Kunstkammer*, detail, 1636
(Fig. 3) Marc Dion, *Scala Natura*, 2008
(Fig. 3) Domenico Remps, A Cabinet of Curiosity, 1675
(Fig. 4) Isidore Leroy de Barde, *A Selection of Shells Arranged on a Shelf*, 1803
(Fig. 5) Joseph Cornell, The Hotel Eden, 1945