

‘ARTIALIZE’ NATURE, NATURALIZE ART’

WHEN PLANTS AND OTHER CREATURES BECOME LIVING BOOKS

AN INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM

Elisa Andretta (Historian, CNRS, LARHRA)

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Art and nature in the library of Diego Hurtado de Mendoza: the herbaria of the Escorial

The re-discovery of Diego Hurtado de Mendoza's herbaria in the Library of El Escorial allows us to offer a somewhat different look at the library of this aristocrat, diplomat, collector and poet from Granada. As his library passed into the hands of Felipe II when Mendoza died in 1575, the herbaria were incorporated into the whole cultural, political and artistic program of the Royal monastery-palace-mausoleum.

Our paper aims to propose a new look to these herbaria within the two cultural contexts in which they lived. Both based, not only in the Mendoza's library as a space of constructing knowledge about the natural world, but also playing different roles inside a library which had moved between Italy (Venice, Trent, Padua, Bologna, Rome) and Spain (Granada, Madrid, El Escorial) over four decisive decades for the future of the Catholic monarchy.

Marisa Anne Bass (Art Historian, Yale University)

Exoskeletons in the Closet: Art and Death in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam

“The preservation of the body” after death through tombs, monuments, and venerated bones seemed to Michel de Montaigne an unnaturally “extreme concern” of humankind. He was not alone. The practices of commemoration found many detractors in the early modern period, but perhaps nowhere with as much complexity as in the Dutch Republic. A distaste for the materiality of Catholic devotion met with a tandem fascination for collecting, displaying, and ‘artializing’ both natural and human bodies. Ranging from carved nautilus shells to anatomical tableaus and funerary monuments, this talk explores the tension between the desire to preserve and the perceived pitfalls of memorialization in the visual culture of seventeenth-century Amsterdam.

Yota Batsaki (Executive Director | Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University)

The Apocalyptic Herbarium: Anselm Kiefer's Secret of the Ferns (2007)

My presentation will focus on the use of the herbarium in Anselm Kiefer's *Secret of the Ferns* (2007), a monumental installation in the Margulies Collection (Miami, Florida). *Secret of the Ferns* is composed of 48 frames (190 x 140 cm) – many featuring dried ferns with charcoal inscriptions – that hang in two double rows facing each other, with two concrete bunkers in the middle. Coal spews out of one of the bunkers, a reference to ferns' transmutation into the fossil fuels that drive climate change. The installation is an example of contemporary art drawing on natural history collections to engage with current themes of environmental devastation and species extinction. The

herbarium is a particularly powerful aesthetic vehicle because it combines preservation and loss. As a foundational practice of early modern natural history, it addressed the data overload represented by the influx of myriad plant specimens into Europe by reducing organisms to a few elements (name, date, location, pressed fragment) that lent themselves to archiving and exchange, aided memory, and facilitated remote witnessing. But the process of preservation also entailed a loss of vital elements: color, texture, smell, habitat, local knowledge and uses, and the web of interrelationships to other species and humans. Kiefer's installation endeavors to restore some of these associations through references to the symbolism of ferns alongside their role in the fossil economy. It also draws on alchemy and the encyclopedic ambition of the cabinet of curiosities to remind us of the origins of the herbarium in a mix of esoteric and exoteric practices and interests. In the space of the installation, modes of presentation and cognition that diverged during what we have come to call the Scientific Revolution are brought back together in a productive tension.

Lea Dauwalder (Conservator in the Federal Office of Topography swisstopo, Switzerland)

The Herbarium of Felix Platter

This presentation examines one of the oldest still conserved herbaria in the world: The herbarium of the swiss doctor Felix Platter (1536-1614). Felix Platter produced 18 large books in which dried plants are presented opposite of woodcuts and drawings of plants. 8 of these books were found in 1930 in the attic of the botanic institute of the university in Bern, Switzerland. Today they belong to the Burgerbibliothek of Berne. The discovery of this treasure initiated the scientific research of historical, botanical and conservation aspects resulted in several publications, an online-database and the conservation treatment.

Pierre Saint-Amand (French Studies, Yale University)

Rousseau: Remains of Plants

I will examine the place of botany in Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. In this last work, Rousseau substitutes botany for *reverie*, the initial motivation of the text. What type of amusement is that activity? Reappearing in his old age, herborizing cedes it place to another occupation, the making of herbaria. They become for Rousseau engines of memory (not learning), they recall the present. In the end, the *Reveries* as book assimilates to Rousseau's great project of collection. Rousseau's correspondence with botanists confirms this interest in herbaria. Here too the scientific object gives way to objects of memory, as the botanist loses grip on life.

Anatole Tchikine (Curator of Rare Books, Dumbarton Oaks, Harvard University)

The individual and the type in early modern botanical illustration: the paradox of herbaria viva

If early modern botanical illustrators adhered to "truth-to-nature," as seminally postulated by Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison (2007), they represented types (such as species and genera) rather than individual specimens. This theory is consistent with the pictorial conventions that these artists employed, which, unlike contemporary still lifes, showed plants in an abstracted, mature and robust, state devoid of particularities and imperfections. This paper examines a number of

conspicuous exceptions to this rule, including the depictions of wilted herbs and shrubs in the album of drawings (1604) by the painter Filippo di Lorenzo Paladini, produced for the botanical garden of the University of Pisa; Johannes von Buchwald's *Specimen medico-practico-botanicum* (1721), illustrated with herbarium specimens, in the Dumbarton Oaks collection; and the technique of nature printing popularized by the German botanist Johann Hieronymus Kniphof (1704–63). It relates these examples to the parallel genre of *herbaria viva*, which has largely escaped the attention of historians.