

# WUNDERKAMMER OLBRICHT

Astonishment, discovery, understanding

During the Renaissance and Baroque periods, princes, rulers, and scholars set up their Kunst- and Wunderkammer: collectors' rooms in which precious artworks (artificialia), rare phenomena of nature (naturalia), scientific instruments (scientifica), objects from strange worlds (exotica), and inexplicable items (mirabilia) were preserved. They served to demonstrate the wealth and power of the owner and reflected the standard of knowledge and view of the world at that time. Albeit restricted initially to a select circle, in the course of time they became accessible to a wider public. It is known, for example, that the Kunstkammer in Dresden admitted almost 800 visitors in 1648, which is a considerable number for the time. Not only nobles and diplomats travelled from far and wide to behold the Elector of Saxony's collection, but also artists, tradesmen, students, scholars, craftsmen, and even wedding parties. One of the most important Kunstkammer still exists today in Austria: Archduke Ferdinand II. from the Tyrol extended Castle Ambras above Innsbruck adding another complex of buildings to house his collections.

Berlin also had its Kunstkammer. Founded by the Elector Joachim II (ruled from 1535–1571), almost completely destroyed during the Thirty Years War, it was rebuilt by Elector Friedrich Wilhelm and eventually found its home under Friedrich III in the newly extended Stadtschloss (City Palace). Today the few remaining objects have been distributed around different museums that have become the successors to the chambers of arts and wonders, albeit in a thematically differentiated way.

Our Wunderkammer reanimates this tradition in Berlin once more. It provides an insight into the past and creates the very thing it was able to do some two to five centuries ago: to transport the visitor into a realm of sheer astonishment — whether by means of the legendary unicorn, ultimately exposed as the tusk of a narwhal, an amber mirror flooded with light fashioned from the 'Gold of the North', the coconut chalice that came into the possession of Alexander von Humboldt and which is adorned with images of Brazilian cannibals, preserved specimens of a Nile crocodile and a great blue turaco, or cabinets that only reveal their mysteries to the curious eye.

The quality of the objects, numbering in excess of 200 from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, is unique and makes this Wunderkammer one of the most important private collections of its kind.

The collection places an emphasis on vanitas ('consider the fact that you will die'), itself a thematic strand that permeates the Collectors Room. In the Baroque period,

⌋ ⌋ The hour-long tour with our audio guide offers you a detailed insight into the general principles behind a Wunderkammer (cabinet of curiosities), as well as into key, individual exhibits.

🎧 Audio guide for children (in German only)

death was already being staged with a mixture of devotion, interest, and humour — itself perhaps a form of overcoming the fear of finality?

The scope for interpretation here is as broad as it is inscrutable. This is manifested in particular by an anatomical model dating from the second half of the 17th century featuring the laid out body of a pregnant woman whose organs and the foetus can be removed. On the one hand this reflects the medical interest of its owner, on the other it prompts one to indulge in a playful handling of this Kunstkammer object. The notion of vanitas is conveyed in the form of a coffin; the wealth of the owner — as transitory as life itself — is represented by the choice of material for the small sculpture: ivory was considered the most precious substance of that era. Kunstkammer objects have the power to astonish, touch, fascinate, and draw the curious mind — captivated by a small, individual, encyclopaedic universe — into the Kunst- and Wunderkammer.

Quiet admiration of extraordinary art objects and natural phenomena is not the sole aim here. Sheer astonishment is at the forefront of a visit to Wunderkammers. Indeed, since the 16th century, it has been considered the first step towards gaining knowledge and insight.

Astonishment, discovery, understanding. The programme of Renaissance collections still obtains five hundred years later in our Wunderkammer.

The Kunstkammer Georg Laue, Munich, is responsible for the conception, the installation and supervision of the Wunderkammer Olbricht.

## In the corridor

- 35 Relief with descent of the cross, 17th century, ivory, with base made of blackened wood
- 36 Large magnificent trophy, Venice or Façon de Venise, around 1600  
Cup, Façon de Venise, Dutch, Antwerp, end of 16th century  
Small cylindrical beaker, German, end of 16th century–mid 17th century
- 37 *Still Life with Confectionery and Strawberries on Tin Plates and an ornate gilt tazza, a Wanli Kraak porcelain bowl, and a filled wineglass à la venisienne*, studio of Osias Beert the Elder (around 1570–1624), Flanders, 17th century, oil on wood  
*Bernard Amos and Jonathan Nobles*, Still lifes by Mat Collishaw, 2011, framed C-prints  
*Bread, a Carafe of Wine, an Upturned 'Roemer' and a Crayfish on a Plate*, Sebastian Stoskopff (1597–1657), around 1640, oil on canvas

## Room II

- 38 *Adam und Eva im Paradies mit verbotenen Früchten*, Circle of Jan d. J. Brueghel (1601–1678), 17th century, oil on copper  
Ivory Tankard with wise and foolish Maidens, Schwäbisch Hall, around 1650, Leonhard Kern, ivory, silver
- 39 *The same but silver*, Jake & Dinos Chapman, 2007, silver  
Pair of Small Deaths, Italian, around 1600, boxwood, bases with mirror glass  
⌋ ⌋ 25  
Coco de mer, Indo-Portuguese, 17th century, seychelles-nut (*Lodoicea seychellarum*) with carvings
- 40 Ivory Tankard with wise and foolish Maidens, Schwäbisch Hall, around 1650, Leonhard Kern, ivory, silver  
Four Contrefait Spheres, 18th and 19th century, wood and ivory turned  
Wonder Sphere, China, Canton, Qing dynasty, 18th century, turned and carved ivory  
⌋ ⌋ 26 🎧 16  
*Untitled (Sphere)*, Alastair Mackie, 2009, mouse skulls, glass, wood

- 41 *Till Death Do Us Part*, Lucy Sparrow, 2016, cabinet made up of felt poison bottles  
*Wischmop*, Benjamin Bergmann, 2015, cast-bronze
- 42 Lanna Cabinet, by Adam Eck, Eger, around 1640, from the collection of the Baron of Lanna, pinewood, ebonised pearwood veneer, relief intarsia: native woods partly stained, brass
- 43 Two baroque altars for private devotion made of coral, mother-of-pearl, and ivory, in Italy and South Germany  
⌋ ⌋ 27
- 44 Micro-carving of a walnut, Renaissance pendant, crab's eye holder and pomander, North Germany or Denmark, around 1650, walnut, carved, fire-gilt
- 45 This glass cabinet gives an insight into the variety of exotic materials in the Baroque era: Bezoar in its silver capsule, a mounted emu egg, a thin-walled rhinoceros-horn cup, several powder flasks made of water-buffalo horn, ray skin, turban snail, and tortoise carapace  
Kunstkammer tortoise, around 1620, shell of an Indian tortoise, silver, fire-gilt, tortoise shell
- 46 Nautilus cup used at court, goldsmith work, around 1670, black engravings around 1660, silver, partially fire-gilt, chased, engraved, worked in repoussé, polished nautilus shell (*nautilus pompilius*), partially carved, engraved and blackened  
Nut flacon used at court, around 1680, coquilla nut, turned and carved, wood  
Nut box with erotic representations, probably Dutch, around 1620, coquilla nut carved, polished and carved stag horn
- 47 *The Humboldt Chalice*, Dutch, 1648–1653, made for Johan Maurits van Nassau, owned by Alexander von Humboldt, coconut carved, silver, chased. The coconut is carved with scenes representing Brazilian cannibals.  
⌋ ⌋ 28
- 48 *Beytrag zur Naturgeschichte der Vögel* (or 'On the Natural History of Birds'), Joachim Johann Nepomuk Spalowsky, 1791–1792, 2nd, 3rd, 4th vol., with large hand-coloured plates
- 49 Death's head pocket watch, around 1790, Jean-Antoine Lépine, gold, enamel, rose-cut diamonds. Active in Paris in the late 18th century, Lépine was one of the most celebrated watchmakers. Louis XVI and Napoleon were among his

patrons. Around 1770, Lépine invented a new clock mechanism which allowed the production of radically smaller pocket watches than before.

Vanity gold works from Renaissance and Baroque:

The pendant in shape of a small coffin bears the inscription "ICH WERDE LEBENS / LANG MIT ZÄHREN / LLHZ / DEIN VIEL ZU LIEB / GEDECHNIS EHREN" ("I WILL HONOUR LIFE / LONG WITH TEARS / LLHZ / YOUR MEMORY FAR TOO DEAR") and was manufactured for Ludwig IV von Hessen-Darmstadt in memory of his father, deceased 1661, landgrave Georg II von Hessen-Darmstadt. It also shows the initials of the client ("LLHZ") and the deceased father ("G.II.L.Z.HF.Z.H").

⌋ ⌋ 222

50 Siren, Japanese, Edo period, around 1800, skin of a fish, modelling material, genuine teeth and claws

⌋ ⌋ 29

51 The "ruler's staff of King David", one of the wonders related in the Bible. A gift presented to the Prague court by Johann Graf Zrinyi (1565–1612), Aulic Councillor of the Holy Roman Empire. Large Vunikau club (*Vunikau Vulibuli Vonotabua*), Polynesia, Fiji Islands, second half 15th century, fire-gilt mount: royal workshops of Prague, dated 1608 with original case  
A massive Vunikau rooth club, Fiji Islands, around 1800

52 *Self-Portrait as Great Scout Leader*, Julie Heffernan, 1998, oil on canvas

53 *Dipsochelys*, Seychelles

54 Skull of a walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*)

55 *Gazelle (Pamphile)*, Gitte Schäfer, 2011, glass, turtleshell, metal

56 This glass cabinet is dedicated to precious art works made for a Renaissance and Baroque treasury of various exotic materials like turban snail, coconut, ostrich egg, rhinoceros horn, the spiny tail of a skate, and soapstone.

⌋ ⌋ 30

57 *Tapir*, 2016, Hugo Wilson, oil on panel

58 Mounted specimen of a Nile crocodile from a historical collection of natural curiosities, 19th century, 4.50 m

59 Preparation of a leopard with fluorescent eyes