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Collecting Nature (Collecting Histories)

Andrea Galdy

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Nature can be collected in many forms and shapes: live animals have been locked up in cages, displayed in zoos and menageries, and their hides and dried body parts were used as part of the set-up in galleries and studies. Plants from far-away countries have been cultivated in botanical gardens and in hothouses. Even the depiction of medicinal plants and of prized animals was regarded as an important part of the decorative scheme. Recent research has also shown that artificialia and naturalia were shown side by side in early modern Europe-sometimes in the company of scientifica-and that the exhibition set-up often included a complex arrangement of stables, kennels, art gallery and library. Villas and country houses displayed favourite horses, as well as paintings and antiquities. Botanical gardens and gardens of simples at monastic foundations and universities imposed order and intellectual scope to the cultivation of many new species imported to Europe during the age of exploration. Of particular interest to the mission of this working group is the fact that so many collections of naturalia were displayed in close proximity to other collecting categories, according to a similar choreography, as well as to the logistical set-up. Thus, the collections, outdoors as well as indoors, resemble one another in terms of labels adopted and discussions conducted on the merits of order and categorisation. The essays in the present volume, therefore, connect art, nature and science by tracing objects, as well as the practices, of collecting and display from the early kunst- und wunderkammern to the more scientific aspirations and publications of the eighteenth century. Indoor as well as outdoor locations of collecting will be considered as will the dissemination of objects and knowledge in the form of books during a period, which gradually led from an intrinsic, if untidy, connection between art and nature towards a new world of clear, if unhappy, divisions.

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