

<p>Institution: University of Cumbria</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 34 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory</p>
<p>Title of case study: Influencing popular culture and artistic tropes through research informed artistic practice: cabinets of curiosity.</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact <i>Theatrum Mundi: Armarium</i> is a highly significant collaborative art work by University of Cumbria Professor of Fine Art Robert Williams and renowned US artist Mark Dion, which has often been cited by scholars, curators and critics from the worlds of art, archaeology, literature and museology as an influential work that explores the nature of collections, collaborative art practice and museum oriented contemporary art work within what is often referred to as ‘institutional critique’.</p> <p>As an early example of a collection based piece of work in contemporary art, the work has also had significant impact on the resurgence of the use of cabinets of curiosity or wunderkammer as a prominent modern artistic theme, influencing artistic practice.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research <i>Theatrum Mundi: Armarium</i> was commissioned by Professor Lord Colin Renfrew of the MacDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, as a collaboration between Mark Dion and Robert Williams, following the 1999 project the Dion project the <i>Tate Thames Dig</i>, in which Williams participated. This new art work was commissioned as part of the 2001 <i>Sculpture in the Close</i> Jesus College Biennial, University of Cambridge, and has since become a signature piece, widely reproduced and engaged with critically.</p> <p>The project explored the relationship between the human condition and the wider world, drawing in the practice of both collaborators in utilising taxonomy and collections in artwork as a way to explore the artificial deconstruction and reconstruction of the world as a method of understanding. The process also specifically brought in the established alchemical theme within Williams’ practice, as a parallel approach to understanding, viewing and shaping the world. The research process involved identifying alchemists to embody in constructing the work, and establishing collection schema to complete the contents.</p> <p><i>Theatrum Mundi: Armarium</i> exists as a series of collections within an <i>armoire</i>, or closet, comprising of three cabinets which make physical the alchemical <i>scala</i>, or <i>ladders of being</i>, which defined the post-Aristotelian cosmologies of two alchemists, Ramon Lull (Dion) and Robert Fludd (Williams). Despite the fact that these men were separated in time by a century or so, they both used a similar model for their individual cosmologies. The ladder, or <i>scala</i>, is invoked as a model of evolution, development or progression: it can be read as a description of the steps that need to be taken in order to fulfil the Philosophick aim of becoming as God. Fludd’s (1619) <i>Scala</i>, from <i>Utrisque Cosmi</i>, reveals a familiar trope to modern eyes of an evolutionary schema which could be read as cultural, or even psychological in character, as they form taxonomic <i>schemae</i> within which objects, materials, natural and cultural, can be classified and organised. In Lull’s Ladder from <i>Del Nova Logica</i> (1512), we see a different evolutionary scheme, which is familiar as belonging perhaps to Nature, and in which we can more clearly recognise elements of Aristotle’s <i>Great Chain of Being</i> (<i>Scala Naturae</i>). Shelves were used to represent the alchemical ladders, and strategy for the form of the cabinet was developed by each partner separately, but with consultation through discussion and sharing of drawings. The central cabinet houses a human skeleton, referencing the Renaissance idea of the <i>Memento Mori</i>, a means to meditate on the certainty of death, and a silent admonition to the faithful to live authentically by way of preparation for judgment before God. The work seeks to explore these taxonomic and epistemological relationships across different cosmological schemes; Lull representing nature, and Fludd culture, and the way in which culturally determined ‘truths’ are constructed and mediated <i>via</i> objects within collections.</p> <p>The <i>Armarium</i> was stocked with a core collection by Williams; however, the work was designed to source borrowed material from institutions wherever it was exhibited. This was the case until it was finally acquired by the D. Daskalopolous Collection from the <i>Galerie In Situ</i>, Paris. In the first</p>

incarnation of the piece, we were able to borrow collections from institutions within Cambridge University: amongst others, the Whipple Museum of Technology, The Anthropological Museum, and the MacDonald Institute for Archaeological Research. The strategy was mirrored in both the French and German exhibitions during the tour of the cabinet (see section 3).

Robert Williams was Programme Leader of Fine Art at Cumbria Institute of the Arts in 2001, one of the legacy institutions which became part of the University of Cumbria at its formation in 2007, and is now Professor of Fine Art. Mark Dion is a renowned US artist.

3. References to the research

Theatrum Mundi: Armarium. Mixed media installation, Mark Dion and Robert Williams, 2001.

Theatrum Mundi was shown as part of the following exhibitions:

- ***Sculpture in the Close*** – The Cambridge Biennale. *Theatrum Mundi: Armarium*. Major collaborative installation with Mark Dion - Jesus College Chapel, Jesus College, Cambridge University. Co-Exhibitors: Anish Kapoor (UK); Julian Opie (UK); Richard Wentworth (UK); Carl von Weiler (UK); Danny Lane (USA). Exhibition opened by Tim Marlowe. Catalogue A5 20pp, text by Rod Mengham, forward by Robert Mair, afterword by Professor Lord Colin Renfrew.

Delivery of a Lecture with Mark Dion at the MacDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge University, *the Archaeological Projects of Mark Dion*. Inaugural event for *Sculpture in the Close* 2001, organised by Professor Lord Colin Renfrew.
- ***Theatrum Mundi: Armarium***. Curated by Fabienne Leclerc. Installation at *Galerie In Situ*, Paris. October - December 2001
- ***Mark Dion: Collaborations. Theatrum Mundi: Armarium*** – Mark Dion & Robert Williams Editioned Print, 2001. Bob Braine; Nils Norman; J.Morgan Puett; Alexis Rockman; William Schefferine; Jason Simon; Josef Strau; Robert Williams; The Photography Club of Andover High School. January 31 – March 9 2003. University of Hartford. Hartford Art School – 125th Anniversary.

Davis, Zina (ed) (2003). ***Mark Dion: Collaborations***. Joseloff Gallery. Hartford University.
- ***Encyclomania (1)*** Curator: Andreas Baur. Villa Merkel, *Galerien de Stadt Esslingen am Neckar*, Germany. 1.12.2002 - 2.2.2003
- ***Encyclomania (2)*** Curator: Dr. Annelie Pohlen. *Bonner Kunstverein*, Germany. 12.2.2003 - 30.3.2003
- ***Encyclomania (3)*** Curator: Dr. Martin Engler. *Kunstverein Hannover*, Germany. 5.6.2003 - 17.8.2003

Baur, Andreas & Berg, Stephan (eds) (trans. Robinson, Michael). (2003): ***Encyclomania***. Verlag für Moderne Kunst, Nürnberg.
- ***The Luminous Interval: The D. Daskalopoulos Collection***. *Theatrum Mundi: Armarium* (2001) Mark Dion & Robert Williams. Curated by Nancy Spector & Katherine Bimson. *The Guggenheim Museum*, Bilbao, Spain. 12.4.2011 - 11.9.2011.

Spector, Nancy (ed). 2011. ***The Luminous Interval: The D. Daskalopoulos Collection***. Guggenheim Museum Publications: New York.
- ***3rd Athens Biennale 2011. Monodrome***. Curated by Nicholas Bourriaud, Xenia Kalpaksoglou, Poka-Yio. Diplareios School at *Plateia Theatrou*, the *Eleftherios Venizelos Museum* and the *Eleftherias Park Arts Centre* 22.10.2011-11.12.2011.
- ***The Macabre Treasury***. Mark Dion; Dana Sherwood; Robert Williams; *et al.* *Museum Het Domein*, Sittard, Netherlands. 20.1.2013 – 5.5.2013.

4. Details of the impact

Theatrum Mundi: Armarium is a highly successful collaborative work, and is cited by scholars and critics in making reference to wider cultural and art practice by both Professor Williams and Dion. It is frequently invoked and included in publications that explore, for example, the relationship between art and science, cosmology, epistemology and taxonomy. A limited edition print made by Dion and Williams for *Galerie In-Situ*, Paris, is also frequently reproduced within both art-world publications, and in academic analyses, and further helps to disseminate the impact of the piece in terms of critical discourse and audience reach. The list of international publications which feature discussion of the installation provides a commentary or analysis of the work. This critical positioning of the work within on-going cultural discourses focus on themes of the relationship between art and science, of collections and collecting, the construction of epistemologies, *wunderkammer* (historic and contemporary), collaborative art practice and museum oriented contemporary art work. The widespread dissemination of the work as an early example of a modern use of a cabinet of curiosity as an artistic vehicle has influenced the rediscovery of the *wunderkammer* as a form for contemporary artworks.

Of particular note is the analysis found within Professor Lord Colin Renfrew's influential book, *Figuring It Out* (2003) which investigated the relationship between archaeologists and artists as practitioners and cultural researchers. The inclusion of the work within Umberto Eco's visual essay in his book *The Infinity of Lists* (2009) is significant, not only because of the epistemological nature of that work, but also because it is 'activated' by the engagement of the viewer as part of the process of interpretation. After touring venues in the UK, France, and Germany, *Theatrum Mundi: Armarium* was selected and included in the seminal exhibition *The Luminous Interval*, at the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, in 2011. The wider reach of the Guggenheim Bilbao exhibition is shown in the attendance figure of 532,287 visitors during the period, with 1250 Spanish and 2000 English hard back catalogues produced. This was a large scale survey exhibition of artwork from the D.Daskalopoulos Collection, curated by Nancy Spector of the New York *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum*, which sought to offer a new critical context for the most significant examples of international installation art from contemporary practitioners. This ground-breaking exhibition was followed closely by the inclusion of the piece in the 2011 Athens Biennale, curated by Nicholas Bourriaud, Xenia Kalpaktsoglou and Poka-Yio, which articulated further issues in the exploration of value, commodity, knowledge and power in the context of relational aesthetics and socially engaged practice. A highly visible piece, *Theatrum Mundi: Armarium* has an important international reach, the most recent incarnation is within the 2013 exhibition *The Macabre Treasury* at *Museum Het Domein*, Sittard, Holland.

The position of *Theatrum Mundi* as an important modern incarnation of a *wunderkammer* is seen in its inclusion in the Patrick Mauriés volume, *Cabinets of Curiosity* (Thames & Hudson, 2002). This book has extensive reach, with an initial printing run of over 16,000 copies in four languages, and a number of additional print runs almost doubling this number, including a Japanese edition.

Interest and engagement with the piece is shown by its inclusion on a variety of websites, from those interested in critical analyses, reviews and influences within the contemporary art community, and which reflect interdisciplinary discourses, to those concerned with more academic and scholarly issues, which seek to locate the work thematically within the discourse tropes (such as art historical or practitioner education contexts), and to blogs and sharing sites of the general public and developing artists, showing engagement with the alchemical, collecting or cabinet of curiosity and *memento mori* themes.

The importance of the work in understanding historical and psychological issues around engagement with and perception of the world through collection and categorisation is also shown through the selection of the piece by the Guggenheim for production of accompanying educational resources. The teacher's guide includes questions and activities related to the work, and are part of a series aimed at enriching history and social science curricula, as well as arts education. *Theatrum mundi* was one of only three installations from the *Luminous Interval* exhibition used as an educational resource, which remains on the Guggenheim Bilbao website alongside an image

of the work.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- Online resource for school parties at the Guggenheim, Bilbao, within the theme *Things: Cabinet of Curiosities*. <http://www.guggenheim-bilbao.es/en/guia-educadores/things-cabinet-of-curiosities/>
- Jesus College website description of the work: <http://www.jesus.cam.ac.uk/college-life/art-sculpture/sculpture-in-close/2001-2/artists/mark-dion-robert-williams/>

Contacts to corroborate the choice of the work for the *Luminous Interval* exhibition at the Guggenheim, including impact of the work on art practice and educationally:

- Associate Curator at the *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum* (Assistant Curator for the *Luminous Interval*)
- Associate Director of Curatorial and Research at the *Guggenheim*, Bilbao.

Book references, excerpts available on request:

- Aloj, Giovanni (2012) *Art & Animals*. I.B.Tauris.
- Eco, Umberto (2009) *The Infinity of Lists*. Macleahose.
- Renfrew, Colin (2003) *Figuring It Out: The Parallel Visions of Artists and Archaeologists*. Thames & Hudson.
- Mauriés, Patrick (2002) *Cabinets of Curiosity*. Thames & Hudson.

Web Links, blogs showing work as key image of cabinets of curiosity:

- <http://makeyoursceen.co.uk/post/3365448422>
- <http://missmementomori.com/2011/11/19/cabinet-of-curoisities-2/>
- <http://larocaille.altervista.org/blog/2011/02/11/i-love/>
- <http://dontgiveuptheship12.blogspot.co.uk/2012/12/final-project.html>

Web link, cabinets of curiosities images board of Italian Museum and art gallery:

<http://pinterest.com/PinAgnelli/wunderkammer-cabinet-of-wonder-and-curiosities/>