Dragon Caves, Big
Sergio Frutos
2017

Ink on paper
240 x 150 x 4 cm

Framed 268 x 178 cm

Unique
Signed

SF-P 17-32



About the project: Natural History

A cabinet of curiosities —or Wunderkammer— stored and exhibited a wide variety of objects and artifacts, with a particular leaning towards the rare, eclectic and esoteric. Through the selection of objects, they told a particular story about the world and its history.

Appearing in Renaissance Europe, the 'cabinet of curiosities' is an early ancestor of the modern science or natural history museums.[1] They also played a fundamental role in the development of modern science, even if they weren't always that 'scientific' — it was not uncommon to find dried dragon blood or mythical animal skeletons in their collections. The popularity of the cabinet of curiosities waned during the nineteenth century, as it was replaced by official institutions and private collections.

The cabinets commonly featured antiques, objects of natural history (such as stuffed animals, dried insects, shells, skeletons, shells, herbarium, fossils[2]) and even works of art. In cabinets of curiosities, collections were often organized into about four categories:

Artificialia, which groups the objects created or modified by human (antiques, works of art);

Naturalia, which includes creatures and natural objects (with a particular interest in monsters);

Exotica, which includes exotic plants and animals; and

Scientifica, which brings together scientific instruments.

Natural History is a collection of paintings that resemble the first science museums and follow this schema to configure a mix of history facts, personal experiences and found objects, depicted by the symbolic interaction of the paintings, in a personal and particular Cabinet of Curiosities.

The origin of those Wunderkammern is linked to the Illustration and the rationalistic approach to reality that emerges with the renaissance and accompanied the industrial and technological revolution that configured our modern world, but are also related to the expansion of young capitalism, colonization and depredation by the western powers.[3]

The expropriation and assimilation in museums is a perverse mechanism where the handling and care of those treasures disconnects them from the violent colonial looting from which they come from, and from the dispossessed, the who have been expropriated from their land, culture, future and past.[4]

The early Cabinets of Curiosities inspired me to create my own collection of rare, personally interesting objects in the series Natural History, in an intent to bypass the official, colonial[5] core of the original collections. Those were found objects, personal belongings with a particular story, and images found in natural science museums archives.

1. Anne Wallentine, “How Cabinets of Curiosities Laid the Foundation for Modern Museums,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, 2024. ↩
2. Mark Thurner and Juan Pimentel, “New World Objects of Knowledge: A Cabinet of Curiosities” (*University of London Press*, 2021), 301.↩
3. Deirdre Pretorius, “Dead Living Things: A Cabinet of Curiosities in the Postcolony,” *De Arte* 57, no. 2 (2022): 33–60, ↩
4. Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*. London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2019.
5. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988. ↩ ↩