

Barbara Marx, Karl-Siegbert Rehberg (Hg.): Sammeln als Institution. Von der fürstlichen Wunderkammer zum Mäzenatentum des Staates. München/Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2006, 398 Seiten; ISBN 978-3-422-06615-1, €68,00

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In the continuing accumulation of anthologies of essays on the history of collections the publication *Sammeln als Institution. Von der fürstlichen Wunderkammer zum Mäzenatentum des Staates* is the latest addition. This stream of publications started in the 1980's with significant titles like *The origins of Museum* (1985), *Macrocosmos in Microcosmo. Die Welt in der Stube* (1994) and *De wereld binnen hanbereik* (1992). The main goal of these first publications was to unearth new material about collections themselves, which eluded attention for so long. Over the last ten years the focus seems to have shifted slightly. The cabinets and museums are no longer the centre of attention, but the practice of collecting is now considered from broad encompassing themes. To name a few recent titles: in *Sammeln als Wissen* collections are discussed in the light of their cognitive purpose and their structuring of knowledge; *Collection, laboratory, theatre* focuses on the locality of different cultural practices and discusses collections in the context of other places of knowledge; and finally in *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* the mental state aroused by numerous items in the collections forms the pivot. [1]

Sammeln als Institution, as the title makes clear, focuses on collecting as a form of institution. It is the result of a symposium organized in 2004 at the Technische Universität Dresden, by the Sonderforschungsbereich 537 'Institutionalität und Geschichtlichkeit'. The terms 'institute' and 'institutionalization' can be applied very broadly. It aims to, as the organizers of the symposium explained in their call for papers, present collecting as an institutional form that transcends the individual drives of the founder, like status,

rank, and taste. They state 'each collection, perpetuating its owner, presents itself as a super individual and objectivizing arrangement of order'. This depersonalized approach of collecting is welcome, because the history of collections is by the nature of its subject still saturated by intentionalist approaches.

The terms and methods ask for more elaboration. Only two of the twenty-three articles really deal with 'institutionalization' as a theme itself. Volker Plagemann describes in broad historical lines the history of institutionalization and professionalization of collecting, starting with the looting of cultural heritage by the Ancient Romans and ending with the situation of present-day museums in Germany. He unfolds the process in which the acquisition of objects and the maintenance of collections became more and more a depersonalized abstract task from the state. An important turning point in this development was the French Revolution and Napoleonic France, where property was appropriated by the state and conservation and organization were for the first time seen as serious tasks of the state instead of an individual act of a monarch. Of course there are many exceptions to this grand narrative, but Plagemann's essay gives a good point of reference to relate the other studies to.

Another reflective perspective is offered in the lengthy introduction essay of Karl Siegbert Rehberg. He uses a more comprehensive approach of the theme 'institutionalization', not as subject but as method. He emphasizes that the institutional analysis of collections does not merely refer to the organizational changes from private to public, but that it involves an understanding of

the functioning of institutional mechanisms, the change of the institutional validity of collecting and its mediation with its social environment. It also concerns the mediation of symbolic forms and the representation of the collector as institutionalized person. Reading the rest of the articles, one might speculate how this institutionalist approach precisely differs from other known approaches, like research into social networks of collectors, the trade and value of collectables, the way collectors endeavored to represent themselves, and basic attempts to reconstruct a collection. The other essays circle around the theme, but often omit to make it explicit. The studies range from broad synthesizing surveys, for example Dirk Syndram's account of treasure rooms, to minute detail studies, like the reconstruction of two Italian portrait galleries of beautiful women. The essays are ordered in five sections: the first focuses on Italy from the 16th to the 18th century and the second on Dresden in the 17th and 18th century. The last three sections cover different subjects from successively the 18th, 19th and 20th century.

But another division can be made. Some articles follow the narrower course of Plagemann and describe the history of the institutionalization of a collection or the history of an institute's collection. A classic example of this is presented by Guiseppe Olmi with the famous collection of the naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi, who bequeathed his naturalia and library to the Senate of Bologna in 1603. Olmi follows its downfall, after the addition of the collection of Fredinando Cospi in 1672, and its somewhat reluctant incorporation in the collection of the Bolognese Istituto delle Scienze e delle Arti in the middle of the eighteenth century. Klaus Mauersbeger places the changing didactic value of the collection of the Technische Universität Dresden in a broad historical context. Renato Mazzolini gives an account of the origins of the Museo di Fisica e Storia Naturale in Florence. A special case is presented by Barbara Marx, who describes the transition of the private house of the versatile artist and collector

Giovanni Maria Nosseni (1544-1621) to an academy of arts. In 1619 the artist offered his house to the elector of Dresden, which, after many renovations and reorganizations, eventually ended up being part of the city's art academy.

Marx also gives a detailed description of the original collection of Nosseni, which can be considered as a second subtheme of *Sammeln als Wissen*. Many articles have the reconstruction of collections as their target, which are always welcome starting points to enlighten on the history of collections. Already mentioned is the example of the study of two Italian portrait series of beautiful women in Villa Medicea in Artimino and in the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua by Michael Wenzel. Susanne Jaeger's study describes the content and presentation of the collection of count Alexander Stroganov (1733-1811) in the light of the collector as a representative of enlightened Russian nobility. In his lavish palace in St. Petersburg he maintained an encyclopaedic collection of minerals, paintings, sculptures, antiquities and prints, also including a physical cabinet. One of the most interesting reconstruction attempts is presented by Tristan Weddingen. On the basis of a lost inventory, he offers an image of the first hanging of the Dresdner picture gallery in 1747. Convincingly he argues that it must not be seen as a baroque 'decorative puzzle', but as a visual discourse, subtly stressing the importance of the Bolognese school and prelude to the art of connoisseurship: a copy of Tizian's famous 'Tribute Money' by the painter Flaminio Torri was hung next to the original, so visitors could practice distinguishing fake from real.

Three articles in this volume revolve around specific actors and their social networks. Virgiene Spénlé maps the activities of Carl Heinrich van Heineken (1707-1791), director of the Gemäldegalerie and the Kupferstichkabinett in Dresden, and discusses the discrepancies between his position as an art dealer and his ambitions to become part of nobility. Patrick Michel enlightens on the trade between French art dealers and small

German courts by focusing on the commercial affairs of the merchant Jérôme de Vigneux (1727-1794). Manuela Vergoossen gives an interesting account of the tactics operated by Wilhelm von Bode. She compares his new style of exhibiting, where objects of divers disciplines were blended as pastiches together in subjective harmonic assemblages, with the way the famous museum director ‚placed‘ people in his network to accomplish his goals. One of his instruments was the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museums-Verein in which he assembled the richest art collectors in the German Empire. He advised them, but also made sure that some of the works of art ended up in his museum. For Bode, this was a practical way to avoid interference of the museum administration and the Kaiser. The Verein was Bode’s invention and his instrument, while Bode himself was an institute, according to Vergoossen.

Apart from these three subthemes (institutionalizations, reconstructions and actors and their networks) there are some separate case studies. Two fascinating studies, by Ulf Bischof and Paul Kaiser, unravel the wretched fate of private collectors in the GDR. Two contributions study the status of the collector and collections by reading German and French literature and another illustrates the shift in the reception of Rembrandt in the nineteenth century. The last article, ‚Die letzte Wunderkammer‘ by Mario Kramer, investigates Andy Warhol’s Time Capsules, the more than six hundred boxes which the artist filled with objects of his everyday life and subsequently sealed and stored only to be opened after his death. It would have been interesting to contrast this invisible form of representation of a modern artist with the visible form of representation practiced by early modern monarchs in their Kunst- und Wunderkammern, but actually a mere description of an exhibition in the Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art is presented here. In many articles it is left to the reader to figure out how the subject and approach in the article relates to the general theme of the volume. Maybe a more balanced assembly could have set a good example for a new way of

approaching the history of collecting. For now, *Sammeln als Institution* is a rich collection of interesting, but diverging studies.

Note:

[1] Anke te Heesen, E.C. Spary (Hg), *Sammeln als Wissen. Das Sammeln und seine wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Bedeutung*, Göttingen 2001; Helmar Schramm, Ludger Schwarte, Jan Lazardzig (Hg), *Kunstammer, Laboratorium, Bühne: Schauplätze des Wissens im 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 2003; R.J.W. Evans, Alexander Marr (Hg), *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, Aldershot 2006.

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