Collecting, Growing, and Exploring in Early Modernity (Paris, 11 Jun 24)

Paris, EPHE Sorbonne, salle J. Delamarre D059, Jun 11, 2024
Deadline: Jan 15, 2024

Maddalena Bellavitis, Università degli Studi di Padova

"Collecting, Growing, and Exploring in Early Modernity" – International interdisciplinary workshop, Paris, EPHE Sorbonne, salle J. Delamarre D059, June 11, 2024.

The last few decades have produced a number of studies devoted to the relationship between collecting and science, highlighting the relationship between a growing interest in botany and the fascination with the collection of naturalia, especially from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. These objects of natural origins aroused the admiration of enthusiasts and scientists alike. This passion for collecting reached various corners of society: the academic garden at Leiden University included an ambulacrum that housed dried plant specimens, fossils, and taxidermized animals (Egmond 2010); artists kept collections of rarities not only for use in the studio, but also to satisfy their personal curiosity (Rijks 2022); and Petronella de la Court's shell collection was represented in her prized dollhouse, and mentioned several times in Georg Eberhard Rumphius' seminal text D'Amboinsche Rariteitkamer (Powell-Warren 2023).

Indeed, the interest in collecting even spawned its own genre of still life painting. The interest in such wonders of nature and the desire to possess them often went beyond the "simple" collecting of specimens, dried samples or shells obtained through exchanges and purchases. In fact, they could often go so far as to push those who possessed gardens or parks to engage in botanical experiments that led to attempts to grow tropical flowers and fruits even if it was in unfavourable climates and hostile terrain, and even to promote scientific expeditions to study and collect specimens in distant and exotic lands.

More recent scholarship has raised – and addressed – several issues regarding collecting practices, the intersection between collecting and science, and even the participation of women in collecting. Among other ground-breaking works, the following spring to mind: Possessing Nature (Findlen 1994); Visible Empire. Colonial Botany and Visual Culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment (Bleichmar 2012); Objects in Motion in the Early Modern World (Bleichmar and Martin (eds.) 2015); Conchophilia (Bass et al. 2021); Rarities of these Lands (Swan 2021); and Women and the Art and Science of Collecting (Leis and Wells (eds.) 2021).

What remains un- or underexplored, however, is the extent to which—if at all—collecting and scientific experimentation and exploration were related in the early modern period.
Thus, this workshop aims to focus attention on the collections of naturalia, on the one hand, and on the attempts to grow exotic plants in Europe and the adventurous journeys that the search for

tropical plants and animals they encouraged, on the other.

The organizers of this workshop (Maddalena Bellavitis and Catherine Powell-Warren) invite interdisciplinary contributions addressing the topic from the perspective of each discipline, from art history to material culture, from botany to gastronomy, from travel literature to cartography. Proposals that feature a female figure as protagonist are particularly encouraged, as the importance of the female contribution to this topic, although demonstrated, remains under-researched and under-published.

Submission:
To be considered for participation, please provide a single pdf document including a one-page proposal in English for a 20-minute presentation of original, unpublished research and a short bio.
Applications may be sent to maddalena.bellavitis@gmail.com by January 15, 2024.
Participants will be notified at the beginning of February.

Reference:
CFP: Collecting, Growing, and Exploring in Early Modernity (Paris, 11 Jun 24). In: ArtHist.net, Dec 3, 2023 (accessed Nov 17, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/40759>.