Harn Museum of Art Exhibition Combines Art and Science with Contemporary Works Focusing on the Wunderkammer.

GAINESVILLE, Fla., Dec. 1, 2014—The Harn Museum of Art at the University of Florida is displaying works by thirteen artists who have created art based on 16th-17th century cabinets of curiosities. Repurposing the Wunderkammer is on view from Aug. 19, 2014 to July 26, 2015.

The term wunderkammer or cabinet of curiosity references a type of collection that emerged in the 16th century as a precursor to museums and museum collections. These collections were not specialized like contemporary museums and collected all manner of objects including pieces, artifacts, and specimens relating to natural history, geology, archaeology, religious or historical relics, antiquities and art. Artists Kim Abeles, Jason Benedict, Mark Dion, Katerie Gladdys, Art Guys, Dana Levy, Tea Makipaa, Sean Miller, Eugene Parnell, Ben Patterson, Softday, Sergio Vega and Andrew Yang have each developed work inspired by the early wunderkammern and offer contemporary responses to these old collections.

The exhibition explores the concept of the wunderkammer as a shared historical “common ground” where the arts and sciences once coexisted and as a “conceptual space” where new connections between art, science, and the natural world might occur. In collaboration with the Florida Museum of Natural History, located next door to the Harn Museum of Art, the artists developed projects that, in many instances, included actual specimens, artifacts, scientific instruments, and illustrations from the Florida Museum of Natural History’s collection and the natural world in Florida.

The idea for this exhibition stemmed from a project proposed by Sean Miller and supported by a Creative Campus Catalyst Fund Grant written by Miller and Dr. Stuart McDaniel in the University of Florida Department of Biology. “Repurposing the Wunderkammer” included a college course, taught by Miller, that met at the Florida Museum of Natural History and the UF School of Art and Art History. It also included a public lecture series of internationally exhibiting visiting artists and scholars including Kim Abeles, Mark Dion, Eugene Parnell, Ben Patterson, and Sergio Vega. The year-long project culminates in this exhibition at the Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art.

Repurposing the Wunderkammer was conceived by Sean Miller and Co-curated by Miller and Kerry Oliver Smith and made possible by the 150th Anniversary Cultural Plaza endowment and a Creative campus Catalyst Fund Grant. The exhibition is located in the Harn Museum’s contemporary gallery within the larger exhibition Art, Technology and the Natural World.

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