

Curious Specimens: Enlightenment Objects, Collections, Narratives

15-17 April 2010

A conference organized by Birkbeck, University of London; the Victoria & Albert Museum; the Yale Center for British Art; the Lewis Walpole Library. Supported by the Paul Mellon Centre.

This conference brings together academic and museum scholars to present and discuss new perspectives on eighteenth-century practices of collecting, using as its focus two exhibitions, *Horace Walpole and Strawberry Hill* (V&A, 6 March-4 July 2010) and *Mrs Delany and her Circle* (Sir John Soane's Museum, 19 February-1 May 2010). Horace Walpole (1717-1797) was a central figure in eighteenth-century social and cultural life and the most important collector of English historical artifacts and objects, including manuscripts, rare books, ceramics, portrait miniatures, prints, paintings, antiquities, armour and other curiosities, which he arranged in his Gothic villa at Strawberry Hill. Mary Delany (1700-1788) is best known for her cut-paper collages of botanically accurate flowers and floral embroidery designs, which connect the world of natural history with court culture and in particular the collections of the Duchess of Portland. This conference will address eighteenth-century preoccupations with the ordering of both the natural world and material culture, which required new ways of thinking about the classification of objects. Papers will examine issues of collecting, collectors and their circles; the creation of artisanal productions as forms of collecting; and intersections and tensions between antiquarian, aesthetic, and scientific cultures of collecting.

Programme

Thursday 15 April evening in Lincoln Inns Fields

5.00-6.30 **Keynote lecture at Royal College of Surgeons**

Welcome from the directors

Keynote: Pamela Smith (Columbia): 'Curious Modes of Production: Making Objects in the Early Modern World', chaired by **Amy Meyers (Yale)**

6.30-8.00 **Reception at Sir John Soane's Museum and viewing of *Mrs Delany* exhibition**

Friday 16 April at V&A

10.00 Registration

10.30-10.45 **Welcome from Directors/Organizers**

10.45-12.00 **PANEL 1: Walpole and Delaney, chaired by Amy Meyers**
Michael Snodin (V&A) (10-15 mins)
Alicia Weisberg Roberts (The Walters Art Museum) (10-15 mins)

12.00-1.30 **PANEL 2: Collectors, Predisciplinarity, Divisions of Knowledge I, chaired by Alicia Weisberg Roberts**

Elizabeth Eger (KCL): "Quills and other feathers: Elizabeth Montagu and the matter of friendship"

Janice Neri (Boise State University, Idaho): 'Paper Kingdoms: Mary Delany, the Duchess of Portland, and the Consequences of Collage'

1.30-2.30 **LUNCH**

2.30-4.15 **PANEL 3: Collectors, Predisciplinarity, Divisions of Knowledge II, chaired by Brian Allen (Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art)**

Stacey Sloboda (Southern Illinois University, Carbondale): 'Material Displays: Porcelain and Natural History in the Duchess of Portland's Museum'

Adriano Aymonino (Independent Scholar, London): 'A mirror of the Enlightenment: the collections of Elizabeth Seymour Percy, first Duchess of Northumberland'

Craig Hanson (Calvin College, Michigan): 'Collecting Virtue: The Patronage and Acquisitions of Dr Richard Mead in Early Georgian London'.

4.15-4.45 **TEA BREAK**

4.45-6.00 **PLENARY:**

Stephen Bann (University of Bristol), 'Curiosity future and past: Siting Horace Walpole', chaired by **Margaret Powell** (Lewis Walpole Library, Yale)

6.00 **Reception and viewing of *Strawberry Hill* exhibition**

7.30 **CLOSE**

Saturday 17 April at Strawberry Hill

- 10.00 **Welcome: Michael Snodin**
- 10.30-12.00 **Keynote: Malcolm Baker** (U. California Riverside): 'Walpole and Sculpture', **chaired by Greg Sullivan (Ashmolean Museum)**
- 12.00-1.30: **Panel: Aesthetic and/or Antiquarian Collecting, chaired by Tim Knox (Sir John Soane's Museum)**
Cynthia Roman (Lewis Walpole Library, Yale): 'Collecting Copies, Surrogates, and Misattributions'
Rosemary Sweet (Leicester): "'Contrary to my System and my Humour": Horace Walpole and Antiquarian Collecting in the 18th Century'
George Haggerty (U. California, Riverside): 'Eccentric Collectors: Walpole, Beckford, and the Erotics of Things'
- 1.30-2.30 **Lunch**
- 2.30-4.00 **Visits to Strawberry Hill (every 15 minutes, 1 h per visit)**
- 4.00-4.30 **Tea**
- 4.30-6.00 **Final Panel Discussion: Museums, Collecting, Predisciplinarity, chaired by Luisa Calè (Birkbeck, University of London)**
Confirmed on the panel: **Malcolm Baker, Tim Knox, Kim Sloan (British Museum), Michael Snodin**
- 6.00 **CLOSE**